
How Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation Translate Social Purpose into Inclusive Economic Development across Organizations, Communities and Institutional Ecosystems

Souleymane Ouédraogo

University of Ouagadougou - Burkina Faso

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationships among social entrepreneurship, social innovation and inclusive economic development through a structured synthesis of research addressing social mission, hybrid organizations, entrepreneurial capabilities, institutional ecosystems, grassroots innovation, employment, empowerment, financial inclusion and sustainable development. The literature shows that social entrepreneurship can contribute to inclusion when economic viability is combined with an explicit social mission supported by appropriate governance, stakeholder engagement and institutional conditions. Social innovation extends this perspective by emphasizing collaborative processes, locally embedded knowledge, community participation and institutional transformation. The reviewed contributions also indicate that inclusion cannot be reduced to business growth, technological diffusion or income generation. It encompasses employment quality, capabilities, participation, agency, access to finance, gender empowerment, territorial opportunities and sustainable-development outcomes. Particular attention is therefore given to the conditions under which socially oriented organizations and innovations generate measurable benefits for disadvantaged populations. The paper argues that organizational intentions should be distinguished from demonstrated developmental outcomes and that the assessment of social entrepreneurship and social innovation requires multidimensional indicators. Overall, inclusive economic development appears to depend on the interaction between entrepreneurial capacity, social-purpose orientation, participation, institutional support and the equitable distribution of opportunities and benefits across individuals, communities and territories.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship; Social innovation; Inclusive development; Social inclusion; Sustainable development

JEL classification: L31; O35; O15; I38; R11

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship has become an important field for examining how entrepreneurial activity can respond simultaneously to economic requirements and social needs. Its distinguishing feature lies in the integration of social-value creation into organizational objectives rather than the simple addition of philanthropic activities to conventional commercial models. Stevens et al.

(2015) show that economic viability can coexist with explicit commitments to social value, while Santos et al. (2015) demonstrate that hybrid business models require alignment among beneficiaries, customers, governance arrangements and resource allocation. Haigh et al. (2015) similarly emphasize that hybrid organizations cross conventional boundaries between commercial and social-purpose activities, creating organizational opportunities but also tensions between competing expectations. These contributions indicate that a social mission alone is insufficient to establish a developmental contribution. The institutional and organizational mechanisms through which the mission is implemented remain central. Muñoz and Kimmitt (2019) further suggest that social purpose may reinforce legitimacy and stakeholder commitment, whereas Saebi et al. (2019) underline the need to identify measurable mechanisms through which social enterprises influence societal outcomes. Social entrepreneurship should therefore be understood as an organizational process in which economic sustainability, social objectives and institutional arrangements jointly determine the capacity to address exclusion and generate durable social value.

Social innovation broadens this approach by shifting attention from individual organizations toward collective processes through which social relationships, institutions and economic opportunities may be transformed. Phillips et al. (2015) distinguish social innovation from social entrepreneurship by showing that socially significant innovation may emerge from businesses, public organizations, nonprofit institutions or communities. Pel et al. (2020) emphasize changes in ways of doing, organizing, knowing and framing social relationships, while Van der Have and Rubalcaba (2016) connect social innovation with entrepreneurship, territorial development and wider processes of social change. This perspective is particularly relevant to inclusive economic development because exclusion extends beyond insufficient income and encompasses unequal access to resources, weak participation and limited influence over decisions. Research on grassroots and frugal innovation further reinforces this interpretation. Hart et al. (2015) show that disadvantaged communities can produce locally embedded innovations, while Hossain (2016) highlights the importance of local knowledge and resource constraints in generating grassroots solutions. At the same time, Rosca et al. (2018) caution that affordability alone cannot guarantee inclusive outcomes. Against this background, this paper examines how social entrepreneurship and social innovation contribute to employment, empowerment, financial inclusion, territorial development and sustainable-development outcomes, while identifying the institutional and organizational conditions shaping these contributions.

1. Social Entrepreneurship: Social Mission, Entrepreneurial Capabilities and Institutional Ecosystems

1.1. Social Mission, Hybrid Organizations and Social Value Creation

Stevens et al. (2015) show that social enterprises can combine economic viability with explicit commitments to social-value creation rather than treating commercial and societal objectives as inherently incompatible. Their contribution implies that inclusive economic development can emerge through organizations in which revenue-generating activities directly sustain benefits for vulnerable or underserved populations. Santos et al. (2015) reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that hybrid business models require deliberate alignment between beneficiaries, customers, governance arrangements and resource allocation. Muñoz and Kimmitt (2019) further show that a social mission can contribute to competitive advantage when it strengthens legitimacy, stakeholder commitment and organizational differentiation. Dwivedi and Werawardena (2018) add that genuine social entrepreneurship should be distinguished from conventional commercial activity supplemented by philanthropy because social-value creation

must remain central to entrepreneurial behavior and innovation. Taken together, these contributions imply that inclusion depends on how deeply social objectives are embedded within organizational design rather than on mission statements alone. Social enterprises are more likely to contribute to inclusive development when commercial activities, governance mechanisms and innovation capabilities are configured so that economic sustainability reinforces, rather than gradually displaces, the creation of social value.

Haigh et al. (2015) conceptualize hybrid organizations as forms that cross conventional boundaries between commercial enterprises and social-purpose organizations, thereby demonstrating that market revenues can be mobilized directly around social and environmental needs. This organizational hybridity nevertheless creates tensions because firms must respond simultaneously to financial, societal and ecological expectations. Haigh, Kennedy and Walker (2015) extend this argument by showing that legal form influences access to finance, partnerships, legitimacy and the capacity to protect social purpose as organizations evolve. Cornelissen et al. (2021) add that hybrid identity must be continually constructed through organizational narratives and practices rather than assumed to remain stable after founding. Santos et al. (2015) similarly demonstrate that different relationships between commercial activities and beneficiaries require different organizational configurations. Together, these contributions imply that the institutional architecture of social enterprise is central to maintaining inclusiveness during organizational growth. Legal arrangements, governance structures and organizational identity need to protect social commitments while allowing access to resources necessary for expansion. Without such safeguards, professionalization or commercial growth may gradually reorient attention away from beneficiaries, whereas well-designed hybrid structures can preserve social purpose while strengthening organizational continuity.

Chandra (2017) frames social entrepreneurship as emancipatory activity capable of expanding agency and reducing institutional constraints that limit the participation of marginalized individuals and communities. This perspective implies that inclusive development should be assessed not only through income or employment creation but also through changes in people's capacity to participate meaningfully in economic and social processes. Saebi et al. (2019) reinforce the need for such outcome-oriented assessment by cautioning that the existence of a social mission does not itself demonstrate positive societal impact. Researchers must identify the mechanisms through which social enterprises affect poverty, capabilities, resource access or employment. Cornelissen et al. (2021) add that maintaining a hybrid identity centered on beneficiaries becomes especially important as organizations expand and face pressures toward commercialization. Muñoz and Kimmitt (2019) further show that social purpose can remain economically valuable when it generates legitimacy and stakeholder commitment. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that inclusive social entrepreneurship requires both measurable social outcomes and organizational mechanisms capable of protecting them over time. Economic growth becomes developmentally meaningful when it expands agency and access for excluded groups rather than merely increasing the scale or revenues of socially branded enterprises.

1.2. Entrepreneurial Opportunities, Capabilities, Performance and Scaling

Félix González et al. (2017) show that socially significant entrepreneurial opportunities can emerge through both opportunity discovery and opportunity creation, particularly where markets or public institutions fail to address unmet needs. Their contribution implies that exclusion does not automatically generate entrepreneurial solutions; entrepreneurs require information, contextual understanding and innovative capacity to transform social problems into viable organizational responses. Dutta (2019) reinforces this point by demonstrating that the visibility and geographic concentration of social problems influence whether they attract entrepreneurial



attention, while residential segregation may leave severe deprivation insufficiently recognized. To et al. (2020) add that entrepreneurial self-efficacy, prior experience and perceived autonomy shape individuals' capacity to pursue socially oriented opportunities. Douglas and Prentice (2019) further show that social entrepreneurship can emerge from different combinations of social motivation, commercial motivation and innovation rather than from altruism alone. Taken together, these contributions imply that inclusive entrepreneurship depends on the interaction between social needs, entrepreneurial capabilities and territorial conditions. Public policy should therefore move beyond financial support alone and strengthen opportunity recognition, skills, confidence and local knowledge, particularly in communities where exclusion remains less visible to conventional entrepreneurial networks.

Bacq and Eddleston (2018) demonstrate that scaling social impact depends on stakeholder engagement, earned-income capability and government support, while a stewardship culture helps organizations use these resources consistently with their social mission. This implies that organizational growth should be distinguished from expansion in the number or quality of benefits delivered to target populations. Bauwens et al. (2020) reinforce this distinction by identifying scale-up, scale-out and scale-deep as different pathways through which social initiatives can broaden their influence. Replication, networking and changes in local practices may therefore generate substantial territorial effects without requiring continuous organizational enlargement. Bhattarai et al. (2019) add that market orientation and market-disruptiveness capabilities can help social enterprises create alternative arrangements serving populations excluded by conventional markets. Gupta et al. (2020) further emphasize that social entrepreneurship operates through interactions among entrepreneurial processes, organizational capabilities and institutional contexts. Together, these contributions imply that inclusive development should assess scaling through the reach, depth and institutional effects of social initiatives rather than through revenues or organizational size alone. Social enterprises require market competence and stakeholder resources, but these capabilities become developmentally relevant when they expand access to opportunities, services and participation among underserved groups.

Rawhouser et al. (2019) show that social-impact measurement remains highly fragmented, with organizations and researchers using different indicators, definitions and methods to evaluate outcomes. Their findings imply that claims of inclusive development require explicit evidence concerning who benefits and what dimensions of welfare actually change. Bacq and Eddleston (2018) reinforce this requirement by distinguishing growth in organizational resources from genuine scaling of social impact, suggesting that increasing revenues or geographical presence provides limited evidence unless benefits expand correspondingly. Gupta et al. (2020) add that social-value creation should be examined within a multilevel framework incorporating individuals, organizations and institutional environments rather than attributed solely to entrepreneurial intentions. Bhattarai et al. (2019) further demonstrate that socially oriented firms may improve inclusion by modifying market arrangements that restrict access for disadvantaged populations. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that the developmental contribution of social entrepreneurship should be demonstrated through measurable changes in employment, income, capabilities, empowerment or access to services. Clear impact indicators are therefore necessary to distinguish organizations that merely possess a social mission from those that produce sustained and identifiable improvements in economic inclusion.

1.3. Institutions, Human Capital and Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystems

Stephan et al. (2015) show that social entrepreneurship emerges not simply from institutional voids but from the interaction between unresolved social needs and supportive formal and informal arrangements. Their findings imply that weak public provision can create opportunities

for socially oriented ventures, yet institutional deficiencies alone are insufficient when entrepreneurs lack legitimacy, resources or enabling norms. Hoogendoorn (2016) reinforces this macro-level perspective by demonstrating substantial cross-national variation in social entrepreneurship and linking this variation to broader economic and institutional conditions. Littlewood and Holt (2018) add that social enterprises in emerging economies operate within specific configurations of unemployment, inequality, infrastructure limitations and weak public provision, requiring strategies adapted to local circumstances. Sahasranamam and Nandakumar (2020) further show that individual human and social capital generate stronger entrepreneurial effects when formal institutions permit these resources to be mobilized effectively. Taken together, these contributions imply that inclusive entrepreneurship cannot be promoted through individual capacity-building alone. Education, networks and entrepreneurial motivation become more productive when legal, financial and institutional arrangements allow socially oriented ventures to convert capabilities into durable organizational responses. Policy should therefore combine support for potential entrepreneurs with institutional reforms that strengthen legitimacy, access to resources and the broader conditions required for social enterprises to operate sustainably.

Roundy (2017) demonstrates that social enterprises are embedded within entrepreneurial ecosystems composed of investors, governments, intermediaries, communities, support organizations and other ventures. This implies that the emergence and expansion of socially oriented organizations depend on complementary resources distributed across multiple actors rather than on the capabilities of founders alone. Bozhikin et al. (2019) reinforce this ecosystem perspective by identifying financing, knowledge, legitimacy and networking as functions provided jointly by governments and non-state organizations. Pathak and Muralidharan (2016) add that informal institutions such as interpersonal trust and collectivist relationships can facilitate resource mobilization and collective action, although tightly bounded networks may also exclude outsiders. Estrin et al. (2016) further show that education and experience contribute differently to social entrepreneurship because socially oriented ventures require capabilities for identifying social needs, mobilizing stakeholders and managing simultaneous economic and societal objectives. Together, these contributions imply that inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems must combine individual competencies with accessible networks and institutional support. Strong social ties can facilitate cooperation, but ecosystems become genuinely inclusive only when financing, knowledge and legitimacy are available beyond established groups. Public initiatives should therefore connect skills development with open networks and intermediary organizations capable of broadening access to entrepreneurial resources.

Bhatt et al. (2019) show that social entrepreneurs operating in resource-poor environments can engage in institutional work by attempting to modify rules, relationships and expectations that constrain social-value creation. Their contribution implies that social enterprises can influence inclusion not only by delivering services but also by changing the institutional structures that reproduce disadvantage. Stephan et al. (2015) complement this perspective by showing that institutional environments simultaneously generate unmet needs and determine whether entrepreneurial responses receive sufficient support. Littlewood and Holt (2018) further demonstrate that the developmental contribution of social enterprise depends on adaptation to local political, economic and social conditions rather than on the mechanical transfer of organizational models across contexts. Roundy (2017) adds that interaction with ecosystem actors provides the finance, legitimacy, knowledge and market access required for broader impact. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that social entrepreneurship should be understood as both institutionally embedded and potentially institution-changing. Inclusive development becomes more substantial when social enterprises can address immediate needs while also challenging the arrangements that restrict access to opportunities. Policy should therefore support

ventures as participants in wider processes of institutional and territorial change rather than treating them solely as substitutes for missing public or private services.

2. Social Innovation: Transformative, Inclusive and Collaborative Processes

2.1. Transformative Social Innovation, Institutional Change and Multi-Actor Collaboration

Pel et al. (2020) conceptualize transformative social innovation through changes in ways of doing, organizing, knowing and framing social relationships, implying that inclusion may require modification of institutional arrangements rather than simple access to existing structures. Phillips et al. (2015) reinforce this broader interpretation by distinguishing social innovation from social entrepreneurship: socially significant innovation can emerge through firms, public institutions, nonprofit organizations or communities and is therefore not confined to entrepreneurial ventures. Van der Have and Rubalcaba (2016) further show that social innovation is connected to entrepreneurship, territorial development and social change, with its distinctiveness resting more on responses to societal needs and relationships than on technological novelty. Ayob et al. (2016) add that different traditions of social innovation emphasize either aggregate welfare improvements or deeper changes in collective action and social relations. Taken together, these contributions imply that transformative social innovation should be assessed according to the extent to which it alters access to resources, participation and institutional relationships. Improvements in efficiency or service delivery may be socially beneficial, but stronger forms of inclusion arise when disadvantaged groups acquire greater capacity to shape the economic and social arrangements affecting them.

Do Adro and Fernandes (2020) show that social-innovation scholarship has progressively moved from relatively linear models toward systemic perspectives involving governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations and communities. This shift implies that durable social innovation depends on interaction among multiple actors rather than on isolated projects. Pacheco et al. (2025) extend this reasoning through open social innovation, emphasizing collaboration across organizational and sectoral boundaries as a mechanism for mobilizing dispersed knowledge and resources. Periac et al. (2018) add that social innovations frequently emerge in response to institutional tensions among economic, social and environmental objectives, indicating that innovative arrangements can help reconcile competing development priorities. Calò et al. (2024) further demonstrate that socioeconomic crises can stimulate new partnerships while simultaneously revealing inequalities in institutional capacity and participation. Together, these contributions imply that inclusive innovation requires more than broad collaboration. Governance arrangements must determine how actors participate, whose knowledge influences decisions and how benefits are distributed. Multi-actor innovation systems can therefore strengthen inclusive development when communities and beneficiaries participate meaningfully in design and implementation, while institutions provide sufficient continuity for successful practices to generate lasting changes beyond temporary projects or crisis responses.

Beckman et al. (2023) caution that social-innovation research can become misleading when it neglects geography, sectoral differences, scale and power, since positive aggregate outcomes may coexist with highly uneven territorial or social benefits. Their contribution implies that social innovation should not automatically be considered inclusive merely because it addresses a recognized social problem. Pel et al. (2020) reinforce this concern by showing that transformative change depends on interactions between emerging practices and established institutions, including the rules determining which actors and forms of knowledge receive recognition. Ayob et al. (2016) further distinguish approaches centered on aggregate welfare from those emphasizing collective action and changes in social relations, indicating that different definitions lead

to different assessments of developmental success. Pacheco et al. (2025) add that open participation does not itself guarantee inclusion when decision-making power remains concentrated. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that the inclusiveness of social innovation must be evaluated through distributional and political dimensions as well as through observable outputs. Research and policy should therefore examine who participates, who controls resources, which territories benefit and whether institutional changes expand the agency of groups previously excluded from economic and social decision-making.

2.2. Grassroots, Frugal and Inclusive Innovation

Hart et al. (2015) show that disadvantaged rural communities should not be understood merely as recipients of technologies generated by formal research organizations because they also produce locally embedded innovations. This perspective implies that participation in innovation can itself become a source of capability development and economic inclusion. Hossain (2016) reinforces this interpretation by demonstrating that grassroots innovations frequently emerge from local knowledge, community needs and resource constraints, particularly where formal markets and innovation systems neglect specific problems. Maldonado-Mariscal (2023) further shows that grassroots innovation can be connected with social innovation when local solutions contribute not only to immediate problem solving but also to changes in cooperation, participation and institutional relationships. Villalba Morales et al. (2023) extend this reasoning through the concept of inclusive innovation systems, emphasizing that innovation policy should examine both who participates and who benefits. Taken together, these contributions imply that inclusive economic development requires innovation systems capable of recognizing marginalized populations as producers of knowledge and solutions. Public institutions should therefore connect grassroots initiatives with finance, technical expertise, markets and intermediary organizations while preserving their locally grounded characteristics and strengthening the capacity of excluded groups to participate directly in innovation processes.

Hossain (2018) identifies affordability, simplification and resource efficiency as defining characteristics of frugal innovation, suggesting that such approaches can expand access to products and technologies that conventional solutions leave beyond the reach of low-income populations. Rosca et al. (2018), however, caution that affordability does not automatically produce sustainable or inclusive outcomes because low-cost products may generate limited local value creation or uncertain environmental consequences. Hossain (2020) reinforces this qualification by showing that inclusion depends on the entire innovation process, from conception and development to diffusion and outcomes, since affordable technologies may still remain inaccessible when finance, distribution or institutional support is inadequate. Levänen et al. (2022) further demonstrate that frugal innovators must balance low cost with quality, sustainability, organizational viability and institutional expectations. Together, these contributions imply that frugal innovation should be evaluated beyond final price reductions. Its developmental contribution depends on whether resource-constrained users can obtain and effectively use innovations and whether local enterprises and communities participate in associated value creation. Inclusive policies should therefore combine affordability with distribution networks, financial accessibility, quality standards and institutional support capable of sustaining both social access and organizational viability.

Girija et al. (2024) show that women may continue to face barriers to frugal innovations despite lower prices because social norms, household resource control and limited participation in technological design influence actual access. Their contribution implies that intended beneficiaries cannot be treated as a homogeneous category when evaluating inclusive innovation. Villalba Morales et al. (2023) similarly emphasize that inclusive innovation systems must explicitly con-

sider which actors participate in knowledge creation and which groups ultimately receive economic opportunities and benefits. Hart et al. (2015) add that recognizing community members as innovators can strengthen capabilities and participation rather than maintaining one-directional relationships between formal institutions and disadvantaged populations. Rosca et al. (2018) further show that inclusive outcomes should include participation, employment, capability formation and value distribution rather than affordability alone. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that innovation becomes genuinely inclusive when marginalized groups influence its design, production and diffusion as well as consume its outputs. Gender-sensitive and territorially responsive policies should therefore address unequal resource control and participation while creating opportunities for excluded actors to contribute knowledge, develop productive capabilities and capture a meaningful share of the economic and social value generated by innovation.

2.3. Co-Creation, Digital Innovation, Public Policy and Scaling

Voorberg et al. (2015) show that citizens can participate in public-sector innovation as initiators, co-designers or co-implementers rather than remaining passive beneficiaries of predefined services. This perspective implies that inclusive development depends partly on whether disadvantaged groups can influence the design of interventions affecting them. Ciasullo et al. (2020) reinforce this governance dimension by demonstrating that socially responsive innovation emerges through coordination among public institutions, private actors and communities operating across multiple levels. Chan et al. (2019) add that governments can actively construct social-innovation ecosystems through financing and support mechanisms that enable experimentation around needs neglected by conventional markets. Chandra and Kerlin (2021) further emphasize that such arrangements must remain context sensitive because political, cultural and institutional conditions shape organizational legitimacy, financing and relationships with beneficiaries. Taken together, these contributions imply that inclusive social innovation requires both participation and enabling institutional architecture. Co-creation becomes developmentally meaningful when participants possess genuine influence and when public support connects community knowledge with financial, organizational and technical resources. Policies should therefore avoid standardized ecosystem models and instead create locally adapted structures through which communities, governments and social enterprises can jointly design and sustain responses to unmet social and economic needs.

Goyal et al. (2021) demonstrate that scaling social entrepreneurship among base-of-the-pyramid populations depends on combining affordability with accessibility, availability and awareness, indicating that low price alone cannot guarantee inclusion. Levänen et al. (2016) reinforce this argument by showing that frugal water and energy technologies become more developmentally significant when resource efficiency is accompanied by improved access, local economic activity and capability formation. Suseno and Abbott (2021) add that digital technologies can expand the reach of socially oriented ventures led by women, including initiatives related to employment, education, health and community development, although gendered constraints continue to influence participation and outcomes. Wierenga (2025) further shows that intermediary organizations can connect low-income innovators with technological expertise, finance, legal support and markets, enabling locally generated ideas to diffuse more widely. Together, these contributions imply that inclusive innovation requires supportive infrastructures surrounding technologies and entrepreneurs. Affordable solutions need distribution, information, financing and intermediary support if they are to reach underserved populations at scale. Digital platforms and ecosystem intermediaries can strengthen this process, but their developmental value depends on whether excluded actors can access resources, participate in value creation and convert innovation into durable economic opportunities.

Esteves et al. (2021) show that community-led initiatives, social and solidarity economy organizations and commons-based practices can translate broad sustainability objectives into locally embedded economic arrangements. Their contribution implies that inclusive development can emerge through collective organizational forms rather than exclusively through individually owned social enterprises. Wierenga (2025) complements this territorial perspective by demonstrating how ecosystem orchestration can transform grassroots knowledge into broader economic opportunities without requiring innovation to originate in large firms or formal research institutions. Voorberg et al. (2015) further emphasize that citizens can become active participants in designing and implementing solutions, while Chan et al. (2019) show that public support can reduce the barriers confronting initiatives whose social value may not initially attract conventional investment. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that inclusive innovation ecosystems should connect local ownership, participation and grassroots creativity with institutional resources capable of sustaining and diffusing successful initiatives. Public policy should therefore support cooperative, community-led and socially entrepreneurial organizations not merely as service providers but as productive actors within territorial development. Such arrangements can strengthen local capabilities and social cohesion while ensuring that economic value creation remains connected to community needs and wider sustainability objectives.

3. Inclusive Economic Development: Employment, Empowerment, Finance and Territorial Inclusion

3.1. Poverty Reduction, Employment and Social Inclusion

Kummitha (2016) shows that social entrepreneurship can address exclusion by transforming marginalized individuals from passive beneficiaries into active participants in productive activity through employment, skills and greater social participation. This implies that inclusion should be assessed through capabilities and recognition as well as income. Villotti et al. (2018) reinforce this perspective by demonstrating that work integration in social enterprises can improve perceived productivity and reduce stigma among individuals facing severe labor-market barriers. Džunić et al. (2018) add that social enterprises can provide employment opportunities for groups whom conventional firms and public employment programs do not always integrate effectively. Gallo and Melé (2025) further emphasize that work should be understood as a source of dignity, social relations and human development rather than merely as a productive input. Taken together, these contributions imply that the developmental value of work-integration social enterprises extends beyond the number of jobs created. Employment becomes genuinely inclusive when organizational arrangements accommodate different worker needs, strengthen capabilities and provide meaningful participation. Social-enterprise performance should therefore incorporate measures of employment quality, skill development, social recognition and sustained labor-market participation alongside conventional indicators of organizational growth and financial viability.

Zhang et al. (2022) show that social entrepreneurship can contribute to sustainable poverty alleviation by integrating rural households into value chains, productive relationships and entrepreneurial activity rather than positioning them solely as recipients of assistance. Their findings imply that poverty reduction becomes more durable when disadvantaged populations participate directly in value creation. Sutter et al. (2019) reinforce the need for differentiation by distinguishing entrepreneurial approaches that remediate poverty within existing structures from those seeking reform or deeper institutional change. Tam et al. (2021) add that socially oriented entrepreneurship programs can strengthen self-worth, employability and career com-

petence among disadvantaged young people even when participants do not immediately establish successful ventures. Setiawan et al. (2023) further emphasize that poverty is multidimensional and that scaling responses requires collaboration among governments, businesses, communities and support organizations. Together, these contributions imply that entrepreneurship should not be treated as inherently poverty reducing. Its contribution depends on whether initiatives expand capabilities, productive participation and access to opportunities while addressing the institutional barriers sustaining deprivation. Inclusive policies should therefore combine enterprise development with skills, networks and coordinated stakeholder support so that participation generates sustainable economic trajectories rather than temporary income improvements.

Sacchetti (2023) identifies stakeholder inclusion, learning and diversification as organizational capabilities that allow work-integration social enterprises to maintain social objectives while generating revenues necessary for continuity. This implies that inclusion is not secured solely by an initial social mission but requires organizational routines capable of responding to heterogeneous worker and stakeholder needs over time. Kummitha (2016) similarly shows that local relationships and legitimacy can strengthen the capacity of social enterprises to integrate marginalized people into productive activity. Gallo and Melé (2025) add that economically viable work environments can be deliberately adapted to promote dignity and human development among individuals excluded from conventional employment. Sutter et al. (2019) further demonstrate that entrepreneurial initiatives differ in the depth with which they address the structures underlying poverty and exclusion. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that inclusive economic development depends on both organizational sustainability and the quality of institutional arrangements through which participation occurs. Social enterprises need sufficient revenues to survive, but financial continuity becomes developmentally meaningful when stakeholder learning and adaptive governance enable organizations to preserve suitable employment conditions and expand beneficiaries' capabilities. Growth should therefore be evaluated according to whether it deepens inclusion rather than merely enlarging organizational scale.

3.2. Gender, Rural Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion

Haugh (2016) shows that women's participation in social entrepreneurship can expand capabilities, agency and control over economic choices, implying that empowerment cannot be measured through income gains alone. Talwar (2016) reinforces this interpretation by demonstrating that socially entrepreneurial activity can create structured spaces in which rural women accumulate knowledge, experience and collective confidence, with effects extending into household and community relationships. Ed-Dib and El Hamidi (2019) add that women's entrepreneurial participation in rural Morocco depends on the interaction between supportive formal institutions and restrictive informal norms, showing that access to programs or resources may remain insufficient when sociocultural constraints limit their effective use. Ngoasong (2016) further emphasizes that women's entrepreneurship is embedded within gender relations, family responsibilities and community structures that influence both business activity and socioeconomic autonomy. Taken together, these contributions imply that inclusive economic development should assess women's entrepreneurship through changes in agency, decision-making, mobility and resource control as well as through enterprise performance. Policies promoting women-led social enterprise should therefore combine financial and market support with measures that strengthen capabilities and address institutional barriers preventing women from converting entrepreneurial participation into broader substantive freedoms.

Kimbu (2016) demonstrates that women tourism entrepreneurs can combine commercial activity with local employment creation and community development, indicating that women-led

enterprises may generate benefits extending beyond the boundaries of the individual firm. Borquist and de Bruin (2019) reinforce this perspective by showing that women social entrepreneurs can simultaneously pursue personal economic objectives, community improvement and social change, although the combination of these goals varies according to cultural and institutional context. Nicolás (2016) adds that gender differences may be narrower in social entrepreneurship than in conventional entrepreneurship, suggesting that socially oriented enterprise can provide comparatively accessible spaces for women's economic participation. Rubio (2016) further shows that national development conditions influence these gender patterns, meaning that social entrepreneurship remains embedded within wider institutional and economic systems. Together, these contributions imply that women's social entrepreneurship can contribute to inclusive development through both individual empowerment and territorially distributed value creation. Its effects, however, depend on the institutional environment in which ventures operate. Entrepreneurship policy should therefore recognize the diversity of women's motivations and business models while strengthening education, finance, market access and institutional conditions that allow women-led enterprises to generate sustainable economic and community benefits.

Ait Hbib et al. (2021) show that financial technologies can extend access to financial services among unbanked informal workers, although adoption depends on perceived advantages, usability, awareness and related capabilities. This contribution implies that digital financial inclusion requires more than technological availability because excluded populations must also possess the knowledge and confidence necessary to use new services effectively. Ed-Dib and El Hamidi (2019) similarly demonstrate that formal economic opportunities may fail to produce equivalent entrepreneurial outcomes when informal sociocultural institutions constrain women's access to resources and participation. Haugh (2016) further shows that entrepreneurship becomes more empowering when it expands decision-making power and meaningful economic choice rather than merely generating additional income. Nicolás (2016) adds that social entrepreneurship may offer women participation opportunities that differ from those available in conventional commercial entrepreneurship. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that inclusive economic development depends on the interaction between technological access, institutional conditions and individual capabilities. Digital finance and social entrepreneurship can widen economic participation, but their effects remain limited when users lack effective control over resources or face persistent structural barriers. Policies should therefore combine technological inclusion with capability development and gender-sensitive institutional reform.

3.3. Sustainable Development, Territorial Inclusion and Developmental Outcomes

Diaz-Sarachaga (2022) shows that the contribution of social entrepreneurship to sustainable development should be assessed through specific indicators linking organizational activity to outcomes such as poverty reduction, employment, inequality, sustainable communities and partnerships. This perspective implies that a declared social mission is insufficient evidence of developmental contribution. Ariza-Montes (2022) reinforces this requirement by emphasizing systematic connections between social-enterprise practices and particular Sustainable Development Goals, thereby encouraging evaluation through multidimensional social and economic indicators rather than conventional business performance alone. Raman (2025) extends this perspective by linking social entrepreneurship with sustainable technologies and social innovation, showing that technological solutions can contribute to inclusive development when they improve access to resources, services and economic opportunities. Alka (2025) further emphasizes that technology becomes developmentally meaningful when it responds to community needs and remains accessible, affordable and participatory. Taken together, these contributions

imply that social entrepreneurship should be evaluated according to demonstrable pathways connecting organizational activity, technological innovation and societal outcomes. Inclusive economic development therefore requires measurement frameworks capable of identifying whether new solutions actually reach excluded populations, improve livelihoods and contribute to broader sustainability objectives rather than assuming positive impact from organizational intentions or technological novelty.

Nedungadi (2025) emphasizes the importance of innovation ecosystems in connecting technological resources, social entrepreneurship and community engagement, suggesting that inclusive outcomes depend on interactions among organizations rather than on isolated technological initiatives. Suresh (2025) reinforces this interpretation by showing that socially oriented ventures can function as intermediaries between sustainable technologies and communities inadequately served by conventional markets. Raman (2025) similarly highlights the convergence of entrepreneurial, technological and social-innovation approaches in addressing persistent development problems. Alka (2025) adds that community participation and accessibility determine whether technological modernization translates into meaningful inclusion. Together, these contributions imply that sustainable technologies do not generate inclusive development automatically through improvements in technical performance. Their developmental effects depend on organizational arrangements capable of adapting innovations to local needs, maintaining affordability and connecting users with the knowledge and resources required for effective adoption. Social enterprises can provide such institutional mediation, while broader innovation ecosystems can supply complementary finance, expertise and partnerships. Policy should therefore support technological innovation together with community-oriented organizational capabilities so that sustainable solutions expand participation and livelihood opportunities rather than remaining concentrated among populations already well positioned to benefit from technological change.

Leliveld (2018) argues that frugal innovation should be evaluated through development-oriented criteria extending beyond the diffusion of affordable products to low-income consumers. This implies that inclusion also depends on whether innovation strengthens local livelihoods, productive capabilities and participation in value creation. Knorrinda (2018) reinforces this bottom-up perspective by emphasizing questions concerning who participates in production, who captures economic value and whether locally embedded capabilities are strengthened through innovation. Diaz-Sarachaga (2022) complements this distributional interpretation by demonstrating the value of connecting social-enterprise activities with measurable sustainable-development outcomes rather than relying on organizational identity as evidence of impact. Nedungadi (2025) further indicates that innovation ecosystems can connect technological capabilities with social-purpose organizations and communities in ways that broaden participation. Considered jointly, these contributions imply that inclusive innovation should be assessed on both consumption and production sides. Greater access to affordable goods can improve welfare, but deeper inclusion occurs when disadvantaged populations also acquire skills, productive opportunities and a meaningful share of the value generated by innovation. Sustainable social entrepreneurship should therefore strengthen local capabilities and participation while demonstrating measurable contributions to economic, social and environmental development.

4. Discussion

The literature reviewed in this paper first indicates that the contribution of social entrepreneurship to inclusive economic development depends on the capacity of organizations to maintain a social mission while developing the resources and capabilities required for continuity. Stevens et al. (2015) and Santos et al. (2015) demonstrate that commercial and social objectives can

coexist, although their combination requires deliberate organizational arrangements. This observation becomes particularly important when organizations seek to grow. Bacq and Eddleston (2018) distinguish organizational expansion from the scaling of social impact, indicating that increases in revenue, personnel or geographical presence do not necessarily correspond to greater benefits for disadvantaged populations. Bauwens et al. (2020) similarly identify different pathways of scaling, including scale-up, scale-out and scale-deep, which suggests that developmental influence may expand through replication, networks or changes in local practices without simple organizational enlargement. Rawhouser et al. (2019) reinforce this interpretation by emphasizing the fragmented nature of social-impact measurement. Their contribution points to the need for explicit indicators of changes in employment, income, capabilities, empowerment and access to services. The literature therefore supports an assessment of social entrepreneurship based on demonstrated outcomes rather than organizational identity. Market capabilities and economic sustainability remain necessary, but they acquire developmental significance when they reinforce the production and extension of identifiable social benefits.

A second major finding concerns the participatory and institutional dimensions of social innovation. The studies considered in this paper suggest that innovation becomes more inclusive when disadvantaged populations participate in the production of solutions rather than remaining passive recipients. Voorberg et al. (2015) demonstrate that citizens may act as initiators, co-designers and co-implementers of public-sector innovation, while Hart et al. (2015) show that disadvantaged rural communities can generate locally grounded innovations from their own knowledge and experience. Hossain (2016) similarly emphasizes that grassroots innovations frequently emerge where conventional markets and formal innovation systems neglect particular local needs. These contributions suggest that participation itself can contribute to capability development. However, the literature also introduces important qualifications. Beckman et al. (2023) show that geography, sectoral differences, scale and power influence the distribution of innovation benefits, while Pacheco et al. (2025) indicate that open participation may coexist with concentrated decision-making power. Social innovation should therefore not be considered inclusive solely because several categories of actors are formally involved. The quality of participation, distribution of resources and influence over decisions also matter. Inclusive innovation consequently requires institutional arrangements that recognize local knowledge, strengthen community agency and enable disadvantaged groups to participate in the economic and social value generated through innovation.

The third major finding is that inclusive economic development is multidimensional and cannot be adequately represented by income or employment indicators alone. Kummitha (2016) shows that social entrepreneurship can transform marginalized individuals from passive beneficiaries into active participants in productive activity through employment, skills and social participation. Villotti et al. (2018) reinforce this argument by demonstrating that work integration can improve perceived productivity and reduce stigma among individuals facing severe labor-market barriers. The gender dimension further expands the meaning of inclusion. Haugh (2016) associates women's participation in social entrepreneurship with improvements in agency and control over economic choices, while Ed-Dib and El Hamidi (2019) show that formal support mechanisms may remain insufficient when informal sociocultural institutions restrict women's effective access to opportunities. Financial inclusion introduces similar considerations. Ait Hbib et al. (2021) indicate that access to financial technologies among unbanked informal workers depends on perceived advantages, usability, awareness and related capabilities rather than technological availability alone. Diaz-Sarachaga (2022) and Ariza-Montes (2022) further connect social entrepreneurship with measurable Sustainable Development Goal out-



comes. Taken together, these findings indicate that inclusive economic development encompasses employment, agency, capabilities, financial access, participation, territorial opportunity and sustainable improvements in living conditions.

Conclusion

The literature examined in this paper demonstrates that social entrepreneurship can contribute to inclusive economic development when social objectives are integrated into organizational structures and supported by sufficient entrepreneurial and institutional capacity. The social mission remains a defining element, but its existence does not in itself establish a positive developmental contribution. Organizational governance, stakeholder participation, financial sustainability and impact measurement determine whether socially oriented ventures can translate intentions into durable benefits. The distinction between organizational growth and social-impact scaling is particularly important because larger enterprises do not necessarily generate deeper or more broadly distributed inclusion. The reviewed studies consequently support a multidimensional assessment of performance in which employment, capabilities, empowerment, resource access and beneficiary participation complement conventional economic indicators. Institutional ecosystems are also central because social entrepreneurs depend on networks, finance, legitimacy, knowledge and supportive formal and informal arrangements. Social entrepreneurship should therefore neither be interpreted solely as a substitute for public provision nor reduced to an alternative commercial model. Its contribution to inclusive development lies in its potential to combine productive activity with responses to social needs while modifying relationships that restrict disadvantaged populations' access to economic opportunities.

The examination of social innovation reinforces this conclusion by showing that inclusive development also depends on how innovation is produced, governed and distributed. Grassroots, frugal, digital and collaborative innovations can widen access to goods, services, knowledge and productive opportunities, but affordability or technological diffusion alone cannot guarantee inclusion. The participation of communities in design and implementation, the distribution of decision-making authority and the capacity of marginalized populations to capture part of the economic value generated by innovation are equally important. The literature on employment, women's entrepreneurship, financial inclusion and sustainable development further confirms that inclusion is simultaneously economic, social, institutional and territorial. Sustainable results therefore require coordination between social enterprises, governments, communities, intermediary organizations and other ecosystem actors. Future research should strengthen the measurement of these interactions by examining not only whether social initiatives survive or expand, but also which populations benefit, how benefits are distributed and whether improvements persist over time. Social entrepreneurship and social innovation can thus contribute to inclusive economic development when they increase substantive participation and capabilities while ensuring that economic and technological change creates opportunities for populations that remain underserved by conventional development processes.

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