



Research Article

The Impact of Women Social Entrepreneurship in the attainment of Sustainable Development in Zambia

Eliza Mzumara ^{1*}, Dr Sankara Nayagam ²

¹ Research Scholar, School of Business and Commerce, DMI-St Eugene University, Zambia

² Senior Lecturer, School of Business and Commerce, DMI-St Eugene University, Zambia

Corresponding Author: *Eliza Mzumara

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18014002>

Abstract

This paper outlines the impact of women entrepreneurs on sustainable development in Zambia. Zambia continues to lag behind other countries in Africa when it comes to women entrepreneurship, despite the Zambian government putting in measures to try and empower women entrepreneurship in most of the districts. Women have embarked on different entrepreneurial undertakings in areas of agriculture, small-scale processing, clothing, and food processing, among others. This study clearly examines the way in which social enterprises led and owned by women contribute to the growth of the economy, and this leads to the alleviation of poverty and improves the living standards of people in several rural areas. This paper analyses the recent studies of women entrepreneurs in Zambia, which encompass small-scale and rural ventures, and identifies the key patterns of impact as well as persistent challenges. Women social entrepreneurs often create numerous opportunities and revenue collection to contribute to massive community development, and this fosters innovation. A mixed method was used, and data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire from 30 successful women who own SMEs. Some of the findings showed that Most of the women-led enterprises struggle to achieve sustainable livelihoods or long-term viability due to structural barriers such as limited access to finance, lack of institutional support, infrastructural and policy constraints, and gendered socio-cultural limitations Moreover, even when social entrepreneurs adopt modern tools such as digital marketing they often face difficulties measuring social impact, achieving scale, and sustaining operations over time.

Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 14-10-2025
- Accepted: 26-11-2025
- Published: 22-12-2025
- IJCRM:4(6); 2025: 454-457
- ©2025, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

How to Cite this Article

Mzumara E, Nayagam S. The impact of women social entrepreneurship in the attainment of sustainable development in Zambia. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2025;4(6):454-457.

Access this Article Online



www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Women Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has increasingly become a global priority, emphasising the need to balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental stewardship (United Nations, 2015). In Zambia, like many developing countries, challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and gender inequality persist, hindering the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Amid these challenges, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a dynamic approach to addressing social, economic, and environmental problems by combining business principles with social missions.

Women, in particular, play a pivotal role in social entrepreneurship, leveraging their unique perspectives, networks, and community engagement skills to create ventures that foster social change and economic inclusion. Globally, studies have shown that women-led social enterprises contribute significantly to poverty reduction, job creation, and community development (Ahl, 2006; Klyver & Grant, 2010). In the Zambian context, women social entrepreneurs often operate in sectors such as agribusiness, education, health, and renewable energy, addressing pressing societal needs while generating livelihoods and promoting sustainable practices.

Despite the growing recognition of the role of women in social entrepreneurship, limited research exists on how these ventures contribute to sustainable development outcomes in Zambia. Existing studies primarily focus on general entrepreneurship or business performance, often overlooking the social impact and sustainability aspects of women-led initiatives. Moreover, women entrepreneurs face numerous challenges, including limited access to finance, inadequate managerial skills, socio-cultural constraints, and insufficient institutional support, which may hinder the growth and sustainability of their ventures.

This study seeks to bridge this research gap by examining the impact of women's social entrepreneurship on sustainable development in Zambia. Specifically, it aims to explore how women-led social enterprises contribute to economic empowerment, social welfare, and environmental sustainability, while identifying the challenges that constrain their effectiveness. Understanding these dynamics is critical for policymakers, development agencies, and financial institutions seeking to promote gender-inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

By investigating the interplay between women's social entrepreneurship and sustainable development, this research contributes to the broader discourse on gender, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa. The findings are expected to provide practical insights into strategies that can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of women-led social ventures, ultimately supporting Zambia's efforts to achieve the SDGs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship has emerged globally as a hybrid approach combining business innovation with social value creation (Santos, 2012). In Zambia, the concept has gained

prominence as government and private actors search for sustainable ways to address persistent socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, poor service delivery, and environmental degradation (Zulu, 2025). Literature suggests that social enterprises can contribute to sustainable development by delivering social, economic, and environmental benefits (Littlewood & Holt, 2018).

2. Conceptual Understanding of Women's Social Entrepreneurship in Zambia

Social entrepreneurship is defined as an approach where entrepreneurial activities are driven by a social mission and a commitment to societal change (Santos, 2012). In Zambia, social enterprises typically operate in sectors such as education, agriculture, health, renewable energy, and community development (Zulu, 2025). Unlike traditional businesses, their success is measured by their **social impact** rather than purely financial returns.

Choongo et al. (2016) argue that Zambian entrepreneurs are increasingly adopting sustainable practices due to rising awareness of environmental challenges and community needs. Their study found that intrinsic motivations, particularly altruism, significantly influence the willingness of Zambian SMEs to pursue socially oriented opportunities. This reinforces the idea that cultural and value-based factors shape the formation of social enterprises.

3. Contribution of Women's Social Entrepreneurship to Sustainable Development

3.1 Economic Development and Poverty Reduction

Social enterprises promote inclusive economic growth by providing employment opportunities, particularly among youth and women. Zulu (2025) highlights that many Zambian social enterprises operate in rural and peri-urban communities where formal employment opportunities are scarce. By offering jobs, skills training, and micro-enterprise support, these enterprises help lift households out of poverty.

Research on SMEs in Lusaka also shows strong associations between enterprise activity and improved skills development (Phiri, 2023). Although not exclusively social enterprises, such SMEs often engage in socially beneficial activities, which indirectly support sustainable development goals.

3.2 Social Inclusion and Community Development

Studies on rural entrepreneurship show that community-based enterprises contribute to improved living standards, reduced rural-urban migration, and strengthened local social structures (Mwansa, 2022). These findings are relevant to social entrepreneurship, as many social enterprises in Zambia operate using community-driven models aimed at solving local problems such as access to clean water, education, and health services.

Further, social enterprises often adopt participatory approaches, involving community members in decision-making, which enhances ownership and sustainability (Littlewood & Holt, 2018).

3.3 Environmental Sustainability

Environmental entrepreneurship—a subset of social entrepreneurship—has been shown to positively correlate with

sustainable development indicators in Zambia. A study conducted in Lusaka's Central Business District demonstrated that adopting eco-innovation and environmentally friendly practices significantly improves environmental sustainability outcomes (Chanda, 2021).

These findings align with Choongo et al. (2016), who assert that environmentally conscious business models have substantial potential to address environmental degradation, a pressing challenge in Zambia.

4. Determinants Influencing Women's Social Entrepreneurship in Zambia

4.1 Socio-Cultural Drivers

Altruism and community orientation are key drivers of sustainable entrepreneurship in Zambia (Choongo et al., 2016). Cultural values emphasising social cohesion and collective responsibility encourage entrepreneurs to pursue initiatives that target community welfare.

4.2 Institutional and Policy Environment

The lack of a formal legal definition for "social enterprise" in Zambia remains a major constraint (Zulu, 2025). Without a distinct regulatory framework, social enterprises often struggle to access finance, tax incentives, or government support. This institutional gap makes scaling difficult and limits long-term sustainability.

Additionally, limited access to capital markets and financial instruments tailored to hybrid business models hinders growth (Littlewood & Holt, 2018).

4.3 Entrepreneurial Capacity and Education

Entrepreneurship education has been identified as a critical factor in enhancing social enterprise performance. According to Banda (2020), increased investment in entrepreneurial training enables individuals to better identify sustainable opportunities and manage socially oriented ventures. This is supported by evidence that SMEs offering skills training significantly improve human capital in Zambia (Phiri, 2023).

5. Challenges facing women Social Enterprises in Zambia

5.1 Financial Constraints

A recurring theme in the literature is that social enterprises face difficulties in attracting investment due to their hybrid nature. Traditional financiers view them as high-risk, while donors sometimes expect non-profit characteristics (Zulu, 2025).

5.2 Informal Structures and Weak Support Systems

Many social enterprises lack formal business development support, marketing skills, or impact-measurement tools, undermining long-term success (Banda, 2020). Support services such as incubation centres, accelerators, and mentorship programmes are limited compared to other African countries.

5.3 Limited Impact Measurement

Studies indicate that only a few Zambian social enterprises systematically track their social or environmental impact (Mwansa, 2022). This limits their ability to demonstrate value, secure funding, or scale their activities.

3. METHODOLOGY

Given that this is a broad study seeking to capture multiple dimensions (economic, social, and environmental), a mixed-

methods approach was used in which 30 successful women operating enterprises were interviewed. Survey a representative sample of social enterprises (or SMEs with social/environmental orientation) across urban and rural Zambia. A structured questionnaire to capture data on enterprise profile (size, sector, years of operation), outputs (jobs created, income generated, number of beneficiaries), practices (environmental practices, social programmes, community engagement), challenges faced, and perceived social/environmental impact was used. Also, it used statistical analysis (e.g. correlation, regression) to examine relationships between social-entrepreneurship practices and development outcomes (employment, income, community welfare, environmental indicators). Conducted in-depth interviews or focus groups with founders/owners of social enterprises, beneficiaries (community members, customers), and key stakeholders (policy makers, NGOs, support organisations).

4. FINDINGS

Based on the literature and prior studies in Zambia, the study revealed that women's social entrepreneurship positively contributes to employment creation, reducing poverty and improving livelihoods, especially among women and informal-sector workers. It was further found that women's social enterprises that adopt environmentally sustainable practices contribute to environmental conservation and promote sustainable resource use, advancing the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Skills development and capacity building, both among entrepreneurs and employees, are enhanced by social entrepreneurship, contributing to human capital development. However, the impact is constrained by structural and institutional challenges: limited financial resources, weak supportive policies, inadequate infrastructure, difficulty measuring social impact, lack of awareness/demand, and challenges scaling up.

5. CONCLUSION

Social entrepreneurship represents a powerful and underutilised tool for advancing sustainable development in Zambia. As this study shows (drawing from existing literature and empirical evidence), social enterprises contribute to economic empowerment, employment generation, community development, skills building, and environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, to unlock their full potential, supportive ecosystems in terms of policy, funding, education, awareness, and institutional support are essential. By investing in social entrepreneurship, Zambia can bolster inclusive growth, reduce poverty, promote environmental stewardship, and accelerate progress toward long-term sustainable development goals.

REFERENCES

1. Banda T. *Entrepreneurship education and informal sector development in Zambia*. Lusaka: UNZA Press; 2020.
2. Chanda M. Environmental entrepreneurship and sustainable development in Lusaka District. *J Green Bus*. 2021;4(2):34–49.

3. Choongo P, van Burg E, Paas LJ, Paas E. Factors influencing the identification of sustainable opportunities by SMEs in Zambia. *Sustainability*. 2016;8(1):81.
4. Littlewood D, Holt D. Social enterprise resilience in sub-Saharan Africa. *Bus Strategy Dev*. 2018;1(1):53–63.
5. Mwansa S. *Rural entrepreneurship and community development in Zambia*. Ndola: Copperbelt University Press; 2022.
6. Phiri J. SMEs and skills development in Lusaka District. *East Afr J Bus Econ*. 2023;5(3):112–120.
7. Powell M, Gillett A, Doherty B. Sustainability in social enterprise: hybrid organising in public services. *Public Manag Rev*. 2019;21(2):159–186.
8. Santos FM. A positive theory of social entrepreneurship. *J Bus Ethics*. 2012;111(3):335–351.
9. Zulu D. Exploring the key challenges affecting the viability and sustainability of social enterprises in Zambia. *Int J Entrep*. 2025;29(S2):1–14.
10. Zulu D. *Social enterprises: unlocking Zambia's potential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. 2025.

Creative Commons (CC) License

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

About the corresponding author



Eliza Mzumara is a Research Scholar in the School of Business and Commerce at DMI–St Eugene University, Zambia. Her academic interests include women entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, sustainable development, and inclusive economic growth, with a particular focus on empowering women-led enterprises in emerging economies.