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Zanzibari Social Entrepreneurs and Poverty Alleviation Strategies: Understanding Efforts to Build Local Community Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Poverty throughout Zanzibar, Tanzania encourages social entrepreneurs to think strategically about methods of human capital development, promoting economic sustainability and asset building. Local women social entrepreneurs are successfully active in (a) building the educational opportunities for girls and low income women, (b) evolving in business to meet change and economic growth, and (c) empowering vulnerable populations and people living with disabilities. This qualitative study interviews 15 women social entrepreneurs in the rural area of Jambiani and the urban area of Stone Town. Their ventures are alleviating poverty and social workers can support these local creative initiatives in diverse ways.

KEYWORDS

Entrepreneurship; African development; community sustainability; women and girls leadership; poverty alleviation

Introduction

The initiatives that lessen the prevalence of poverty are spearheaded not solely by organizations, but also through individual citizen innovation and opportunity. Social workers have been called to increase their role and influence as social entrepreneurs to promote equity and social justice (Bent-Goodley, 2002) and to respond to complex social problems, changing funding and environmental challenges (Nandan, London, & Bent-Goodley, in press). In addition, the US government, the United Nations, and other influential governmental bodies have acknowledged the need to promote women’s entrepreneurship (Government of Ghana, 2014; US Embassy, Dar es Salaam, 2010; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2013). This promotion has occurred through a focus on international women’s entrepreneurship initiatives and leadership summits (US Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2014; US Small Business Administration, 2014). Promoting entrepreneurship, better known as individual or group business ownership, is used as a means of stabilizing...

Social entrepreneurship is recognized as a means of allowing diverse talent and idea creation in solving some of the most pressing social and policy issues facing the global community (Pol & Ville, 2009; Tapsell & Woods, 2010). The field of social entrepreneurship is multidisciplinary, combining constantly evolving ideas in business, development, economics, sociology, and social work. Ratten and Welpe (2011) asserted that social entrepreneurship is part of contemporary society and is encouraged by international governments because of its ability to transform societies. They stated that social entrepreneurship provides opportunities for all members of institutions of society to address unmet social needs (Ratten & Welpe, 2011). In this regard, it is a distinct form of entrepreneurship focused on bringing together resources to address social needs. The local social entrepreneur is a visionary and innovator undertaking a venture individually or with a group, to alleviate a social problem on a local, national, or international level (Dees, 2007; Germak & Singh, 2010; Munshi, 2010). These are the women social entrepreneurs that are building small and large-scale initiatives that assist in alleviating poverty and promote the endurance of sustainable communities in Zanzibar. The overarching concept of social entrepreneurship, therefore, “looks at what social entrepreneurs do and achieve for the community, at the wide scope of their world, and at the help that is available and needed” (Thompson, 2002, p. 412). The efforts in Zanzibar to promote women’s local social entrepreneurship are a worthy area of exploration and this qualitative study explores the successes and challenges of venture-minded women in a rural and an urban area.

The case of Zanzibar

Zanzibar Island (known as Unguja in the African language of Kiswahili) is an archipelago, 50 miles long and 24 miles wide, off of the East African coast. It is one of two main islands, along with the island of Pemba, and 51 nearby islets that make up the country of the United Republic of Tanzania (Zanzibar Commission for Tourism, 2007). In the 1800s, Zanzibar was a gateway for international trade due to its location in the Indian Ocean and resource abundance of spices, tropical fruits, and rare bird species. The island became a fusion culture through the East African slave trade, the crusades of Portuguese missionaries, the arrival of Arab industrialists and mercantile traders, and colonization by German and British settlers. As Ingrams noted in 1967, “Zanzibar’s history is long and complicated, and customs of the people are colored, to a large extent by external influences. Zanzibari’s have absorbed [the mannerisms] of various civilizations imposed upon them”
(Ingrams, 1967, p. 19). Today, Zanzibar continues to navigate through systemic challenges to its development partly as a result of centuries of foreign influence. The government’s strategic plan to promote tourism embraces the mixed cultures and utilizes it for national economic growth. From 2000 to 2005, the island boasted a 17.5% visitor growth with the tourism industry accounting for 8% of the GDP. The majority of the population, however, works in the agricultural sector; accounting for 40% of the populace (The Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, 2007).

Research literature on Zanzibar focuses on its industries, including tourism, seaweed farming, coastal changes, and fishing (Porter, Mwaipopo, Faustine, & Mzuma, 2008), but less studied is the human resource impact and, particularly, the role that women play in shaping the future of Zanzibar’s economy. Women are a vulnerable group based on their limited access to productive assets, traditional roles ascribed by society, lack of support networks, and through unemployment. Similarly, female-headed households in rural areas are found to be more impoverished than male- or female-headed households in urban areas, partly due to unemployment (The Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, 2007). Given this backdrop, many Zanzibari women face the reality of living in poverty unless they utilize creative means of advancing their circumstances and improving the plight of their families and communities.

**Local poverty and its effects**

Poverty throughout Zanzibar impacts the educational opportunities, skills development, and employment availability for those who lack resource access. Poverty displays in this land as not simply a lack of money, but an inability to provide for oneself or one’s family, in addition to the lack of essential needs such as clean water, food, clothing, and safe shelter (Crawford et al., 2010). With a population of 1.1 million, 40% of Zanzibaris live in urban areas and 60% live in rural communities. The per capita income is 369,000 Tanzanian Shillings; the equivalent of $327 US per person, per year. In 2005, it was estimated that 49% of Zanzibaris live below the basic needs poverty line and 13% live below the food poverty line (The Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, 2007). Some basic household provisions are provided through social welfare agencies or various social services throughout the country. However, in some communities, such as the rural area of Jambiani, community members have a local economy in common market trades such as sewing, seaweed farming, mat and bag making, and pottery making (Foy Connor, 2014). Women’s involvement in, and promotion of, these social entrepreneurial industries have not only sustained the community, but allowed economic improvement despite the situation of poverty. Women in this community are active in fruit and vegetable selling, local
convenience store ownership, and catering to tourists by operating guest inns. These ventures are functioning in the community because of the insight and initiatives of local women social entrepreneurs (Foy Connor, 2014). However, despite the innovative approaches that are undertaken, there are still effects from global economic downturns impacting even the small island of Zanzibar. For social entrepreneurs, this creates a need to consider sustainable businesses operations while continuously meeting community needs.

**Women moving toward sustainability**

With the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) key indicators, it is emphasized that one method to assist with the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is the employment of women and youth as a target development goal (MDG Official List Indicators, 2008). The Grameen Foundation, a global nonprofit organization, has also worked for years to show how a focus on women in entrepreneurship is a successful national antipoverty strategy. Shams (2009) noted that “it became clear that while microcredit was a prerequisite for poverty alleviation, it was more effective when the social development needs of women and their families were met at the same time” (Shams, 2009, p.2). In this regard, the Foundation evolved from providing microcredit to rural poor in Bangladesh, to adopting a broader social development agenda. This shift focuses on sustainability of women’s businesses and continued upward movement out of poverty. It is clear that women are an integral part of alleviating poverty in any nation. Combining the efforts of women and the goal of social entrepreneurship as a method of innovation and creativity toward positively assisting the problems of poverty is a potential route for sustainable development.

When actions toward lasting community development are considered, it is essentially the daily improvements that promote sustainability. Sustainability is simply expressed by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (2013) as “Environmental, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow.” It is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Community sustainability is also defined as the actions of a society and its inhabitants to develop solid infrastructure in economic, social, political, or cultural development with an inherit focus on creating long-range and lasting positive impacts for future generations (Allen, Hetherington, Manyama, Hatfield, & van Marle, 2010; Chalmers & Fabricius, 2007; Crawford et al., 2010). The interdisciplinary approach of local social entrepreneurs assisting in local development and poverty alleviation is a combination of business techniques, with social progress as an inherent goal. The merging of these seemingly distinct disciplines is now viewed as a viable approach toward community betterment and sustainability. This qualitative
research study focuses on ways to improve national and international stability through women’s social entrepreneurial efforts impacting poverty alleviation. This article highlights one aspect of the study—the focus on social entrepreneurial strategies of Zanzibari women to alleviate poverty. The broader study not only looks at poverty alleviation, but provides a rare glimpse into the lived experiences of Zanzibari women social entrepreneurs, including successes and challenges in their personal and professional lives.

**Methodology and data analysis**

This study utilized a qualitative approach through 30- to 45-min interviews and site observations with 15 social entrepreneurs in the rural area of Jambiani and the urban area of Stone Town, Zanzibar. Interviews were utilized to learn about the social entrepreneur’s life experiences, what inspired them to create their venture, what are their successes and challenges, and how do they ultimately influence community sustainability. The interview guide was developed with feedback from persons familiar with entrepreneurship, Zanzibari culture, and women from the study population. The interviews were conducted and recorded in English and Swahili; the researcher was accompanied by a translator who is a bilingual native Swahili speaker. Participant observations were video recorded to identify the environment in which the social entrepreneur operates. Snowball sampling was utilized to identify participants meeting the inclusion criteria, which included being over the age of 18 and currently operating a social entrepreneurial venture. Through the snowball technique, women were identified throughout Zanzibar—operating businesses along the coast, in the city of Stone Town, and in a combination of the two. This approach presented an opportunity to speak with women in rural and urban areas and eventually explore the similarities and differences in their social entrepreneurial experiences. Human subject’s protection was received from the University Institutional Review Board, the State University of Zanzibar Research Unit, and the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar Research Committee.

The researcher lived with a family in the Vikokotoni area of Stone Town for almost 4 months and took intensive Swahili language courses at the local university while learning about the various communities in Zanzibar. The researcher then returned the next year to reconnect with community member networks and conduct interviews and site observations. The process of living and learning in the community enhanced the rigor of the study. Because the researcher was able to speak the language at a conversational level, even using local dialect, it assisted in establishing trust among participants. The immersion in the culture also resulted in forming relationships with respected community leaders who subsequently recommended potential interviewees to participate in the study.
To begin the process of data analysis, the researcher and translator reviewed the transcripts first independently and then together to ensure that concepts were accurately translated. The translator was secured through professional networks and verified for competence through a number of universities as each of these institutions includes Swahili language scholars that are either reflective of the study population or well versed in academic and professional translations. Utilizing a grounded theory approach, immersion in interview transcripts, note-based analysis, participant observation reviews and transcript analysis was conducted to analyze the data (Graham & Thomas, 2008). As part of this process, transcripts were independently cocoded and debriefing was conducted with the translator and transcribers. Through continuous comparison and data review (Mansourian, 2006), an audit trail was developed for reviewing material, developing codes, and confirming coding themes through documentation of the analysis process (Padgett, 2008). The transcripts were analyzed line-by-line using ATLAS.ti software. Axial coding occurred where multiple codes were grouped into categories. Common codes and categories emerged such as self-motivation, encouragement, and self-starter, which were identified under personal success. Categories such as these were analyzed to establish core categories and themes that were unifying concepts for the study.

**Findings**

The participants in both rural and urban areas ranged in age from 19 to 54 with an average age of 38 (see Table 1). Seven of the participants were married, 3 were widowed, 3 were single, 1 was divorced, and 1 did not report marital status. Six of the 15 interviewees have 3 or more children and the remainder has between 0 and 2 children. The highest education achieved ranged from primary school to one participant achieving a doctorate degree. Their age of interest in developing an entrepreneurial venture began at age 8 and went up to age 44. The interviewees’ social entrepreneurial venture was in operation for as little as 1 year up to 42 years. The highest increase in earnings experienced through the venture was one woman who went from earning US $48 per month to US $3,055 per month. On the opposite end of the spectrum, one entrepreneur was making $4,060 per month prior to starting her business, to now making $0 per month because she volunteers her services and reinvests any income into the business. The mean for current income is $535 per month for those participants providing income information. These figures display a dramatic shift in income for both increases and decreases in earnings. However, it is important to remember that these numbers reflect the economic status of just a few social entrepreneurial ventures that are nonetheless geared toward impacting community—level and national poverty circumstances.
Table 1. Demographic data sheet of study participants by region of venture operation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operation Based</th>
<th>Name/Participant #</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>Highest Education</th>
<th>Venture Type</th>
<th>Age at Start</th>
<th>Income Before</th>
<th>Current Income</th>
<th>Years in Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Raziya (1)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Seaweed/Oil</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>$120 US/mth</td>
<td>$36 US/mth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Endesha (7)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Pottery/Seaweed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$172 US/mth</td>
<td>$244 US/mth</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Fanikia (8)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Palm Doormats</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Faiza (9)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$112 US/mth</td>
<td>$160 US/mth</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Hafidha (10)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Coconut Palm Handicrafts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$100 US/mth</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Abla (3)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Fine Art</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Nana (6)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Uphostelry &amp; Handicrafts</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>$48 US/mth</td>
<td>$3,055 US/mth</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Akila (13)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Muna (14)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Suhaila (15)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Youth Education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Aaliyah (2)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Shellcraft</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>$4,060 US/mth</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Zera (4)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Food/Jam</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Barke (5)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Women &amp; Children</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>$61 US/mth</td>
<td>$153 US/mth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Samira (11)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Nadhari (12)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship for the Disabled</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The discussion regarding poverty alleviation focuses on a subset of a larger data set that includes information on the participants' influence in institutional capacity building, human resources, usage of human-made and natural resources, the role of technology and sources of investment capital. In pinpointing the experiences of social entrepreneurs as it relates to poverty alleviation, there are three themes that are identified: (a) building the educational opportunities for girls in rural areas with a focus on the fields of science and technology, (b) evolving in business to meet change and advance community growth, and (c) fostering future generations of entrepreneurs by empowering vulnerable populations such as women, youth and people living with disabilities. Each of these entrepreneurial efforts contribute to poverty alleviation through human capital development, promotion of economic sustainability and asset building for those in impoverished communities.

**Building educational opportunities for girls**

Although the entrepreneurial ventures focus on improving the life of the individual, family and larger community, a number of participants expressed purposefully focusing on expanding educational opportunities for girls and improving the lives of women as a strategy to alleviate poverty. One of these social entrepreneurial ventures, based in Stone Town, ensures that children have supplies for school and that rural women are able to grow and sell crops. This venture secures donor funds and grants and provides resources to community members in need. While discussing the approach to achieving benefits for the community, the participant stated that the donor organizations “give them [a grant] and they use the [money] . . . [to encourage] income generation . . . income generating activity.” The organization that she operates has women’s groups in both Unguja (Zanzibar) and Pemba (a neighboring island), who grow vegetables and operate a boat shuttle. The groups use their earnings to pay for their children’s schooling and materials or to create gift baskets for neighbors in need. In addition, these funds are used to support girls education in science and math. Right now the organization supports 200 vulnerable children and another 100 children who are orphans. Out of that number, 55 to 60 girls are being supported through a science program. The participants view a focus on science and math as providing long-term poverty alleviation for girls, their future families, and the larger community. One participant notes: “We have two projects for girls, . . . One is for science. . . . We give them the uniform, school material, money for their needs—special needs for girls—we give them. We get this money from donors. We have donors who help us support these girls.”

Another participant further noted how difficult it is to provide resources via donor funds in light of the volatility of funding. However, she states, “Until now we suffer to find another donor in case [the largest donor] stops.
So . . . it will . . . it will be difficult too for us, but we are on our way to find other donors. Yeah, we try, we try, we try and at last we will get. God will . . . God will help us.” She further explains the difficulty with maneuvering these funds to support the science and math focus. For example, the participant says:

They need [more skills] but [in this organization] it depends mostly on donors and what she wants or . . . what she is capable to pay for. Our donors for the science project students pay for the computer only. So even if the student wants to study another thing, it is difficult to pay for it . . . because you know now is the science and technology era.

She is noting that donor funding is essential in social entrepreneurial ventures seeking to support educational opportunities for girls and women. However, social entrepreneurs are often tied to receive funds in the donor focus area for that year or grant cycle. In this case, the focus is on building computer and science skills for young women. If there is a young lady who is interested in architecture, for example, then the venture can either encourage her to try a different discipline or they would have to find additional funds to support growth in architectural learning. This is an example of one of the difficulties that a social entrepreneur may face when operating a poverty alleviation venture that is still dependent upon donor funding and external capital.

**Evolving to meet change and advance growth**

Social workers assist individuals and communities during life transitions in both business and personal development. To evolve to meet the business demands of societal change, social entrepreneurs must be flexible and resiliant in unpredictable times. For the women social entrepreneurs in this study, they discussed their need to evolve in their business to meet new and complex needs facing their communities. They stressed that one cannot become complacent nor be deterred when obstacles are emerge. Participants emphasized the importance of continuously being innovative and constantly evolving as a strategy to address poverty alleviation and community advancement. One participant, based in the rural area of Jambiani notes the following:

We have fisheries in Zanzibar and [women] do fishing . . . using [a] kind of a net along the tidal area. And they are fishers—fisherwomen—but when you see [the] census in the past, in the ’90s, they were not counted. . . . I made a video [about that]. In 1990, only two women were selling their [fish] because it was not easy to go to the market [to] buy things and sell. So those women were strong. Now it’s changing. A lot of the selling of fish is done by women. If you go to the market now there’s lots of women buying fish and selling which was not possible [when it was taboo] 20 years ago.
This participant is discussing how she was able to create a pathway for others to become involved in an established income-generating business. By developing a video exposing some of the barriers that women had to business entry in the fishing market, she was able to create a new dynamic among viewers. Instead of that present situation of women being excluded from the fishing marker in Zanzibar, women were now buying and selling as active traders and consumers in the marketplace.

Another participant, based in the urban area of Stone Town, states: “Everyone does the same stuff. So we do different [things]. And some people they copy, but no matter what, they can’t design it. They always copy the same thing, but we don’t. We always make something new.” This participant is talking about the need to stay innovative and create new products or constantly improve upon the products that her venture is making. She describes the need to make each item unique in an effort to stay marketable as an entrepreneur and to continue to generate income for social projects. This same participant continued to talk about how she uses this approach and strategy to support others in the community to generate income and alleviate poverty. Her entrepreneurial venture is now recognized internationally and has created opportunities for awards and meetings with Presidents and Queens. There are now 47 people working in the venture and they all receive training to develop their skill set. In reflecting upon the business’ success, the participant states, “I’m really really happy and proud of us . . . that we’re still here and we’re still strong. We organize everything and now it’s different. Before we [had] less capital and now at least we have good capital. We can keep going.”

The unique element linking the social entrepreneurs in community work is their willingness to help one another by selling their items in each other’s shops. Another participant in Stone Town explicitly states that she looks for an opportunity to find a group that is in need of a market. She will take a few of the items that they have made and display them in her own shop. Unlike most entrepreneurs and some social entrepreneurs, where another business is viewed as a source of competition, this participant expresses that she seeks to collaborate with business owners in an effort to contribute toward their efforts to build the local community and alleviate poverty. She explains this approach by detailing the following arrangement:

When we finish, they come and take their money. If I have, I give them an advance. If I don’t, then I tell them to wait. That’s what I’m trying to do and I take information if people need something and I know where they can get it so I make them go there and find what they need.

Even before selling the items, this social entrepreneur will provide other female social entrepreneurs with payment for their merchandise if money from her own venture is available. Most important, this approach is a sharing
of information and resources with other social entrepreneurs. With an eye for increasing collaboration and providing mutual benefit, these entrepreneurs are ensuring the success of others’ social venture initiatives, in addition to operating their businesses, to assist with national community development and sustainability.

**Fostering future entrepreneurial generations: targeting vulnerable populations**

It is important to note that the participants view fostering entrepreneurship in future generations, particularly vulnerable populations, as being a key element of poverty alleviation and sustainability. As one participant operating in the rural area of Jambiani states:

> I think we are successful. We have these children. We are able to educate them. We are also able to pay for our needs both small and big. We get the money from this business. So it has helped us a great deal: We can eat; we have built our houses; we are able to dress ourselves and can foot any emergency bills. For example, whenever I need something, I have the money to pay for it.

This participant is mentioning that success in her business endeavors is tied to the ability to provide the necessities for her family and for those in the community. Education is viewed as an important need in addition to the basics of having food to eat, a place to stay in, clothes to wear and the ability to respond to emergency situations. Other participants discuss that they use their ventures to actually educate vulnerable populations on how to care for themselves in the future. Another participant in Jambiani states: “A lot of people that we work with in this organization are not educated. So we help them by giving them a skill and by offering and promoting knowledge.” She continues on to add, “Also through teaching and educating through a skill that they can use in the future, and assisting the younger generations.” In this statement, the interviewee notes that education is linked to skills development such that the person is able to take what is being learned and utilize it for advancement. Education and skill development are viewed as primary mechanisms to advance poverty alleviation.

Many of the interviewees also emphasize the importance of connecting social entrepreneurship to being engaged in community and political activity. They stressed that, as they work with young people, they discuss using entrepreneurship as a mechanism to not just advance the individual but to connect that growth to the advancement of the broader community; which is the essence of social entrepreneurship. One participant in the Stone Town area states:

> Now, most businesses are about selling and it’s not about social entrepreneurship. NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] are helping because of getting money
from donors. But it is better to see young people get involved with entrepreneurship and the issues in the community that social entrepreneurship can solve. Young people need to get involved and engaged with this issue. It can’t just be through the NGOs.

This participant is emphasizing that efforts toward community sustainability cannot be done by NGOs alone. Instead, social entrepreneurs motivate communities to be engaged in the process of advancing themselves. Another participant, who works with disabled persons in urban and rural areas, describes how her venture provides a clear strategy for poverty alleviation among disabled persons in Zanzibari communities. She states:

Actually, what we are doing there is to assist them to do business and [since] we see that people with disabilities are poor—the poorest of the poorest. So . . . we decide[d] to start a program of entrepreneurship which allow[s] them . . . to earn something . . . [and] their families.

The owner of this social entrepreneurial venture conducts three types of trainings for nearly 50 people with disabilities on both islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. The three training programs include business idea generation, starting your business, and business plan development and fundraising. The program involves participants with different types of disabilities. The participant further states that she views her venture as social entrepreneurial in its results because it is empowering a population that is stereotyped:

We try to change their mind set in order to understand, or, at least to get awareness [so they can say] “I can start this business.” We see that most of . . . people with disabilities have their capacity of doing but . . . [they don’t do it] because no one initiates that.

She further states, “Many of the society think that people with disabilities cannot do anything. But actually after they got this training . . . you’ll see that . . . they manage to help themselves. They built a house and also, they’re supporting their family.” A commitment to hard work and to family and community is a common thread displayed in the fabric of each social entrepreneurial initiative. The skills, talents, and efforts displayed are cultural assets that have sustained both urban and rural ventures thus far through moments of economic challenge in order to promote local development and poverty alleviation.

**Discussion and implications**

The implications arising from the experiences of Zanzibari women social entrepreneurs show that social work practice has a role to play in alleviating poverty. Although the generalizability of this study is limited, it still adds an important element to the conversation about women, social entrepreneurship, and
alleviating the concerns of poverty. Social work is linked to social entrepreneurial progress by promoting community development and recognizing indigenous strategies to promote these changes both nationally and internationally in rural and urban areas. This area of focus for the social work profession is gaining greater attention through studies such as this one. As such, social workers can support local initiatives, assist in resource development to advance communities, provide and promote entrepreneurial education, increase access to information, and connect entrepreneurship to advocacy.

Local knowledge, developed over years and generations, is often times the best knowledge for developing a society. It is based in understanding the ebb and flow of environmental, social, political, and economic changes and challenges across generations. Sometimes it is the local man or woman who has struggled and lived in a community for many years who has the on the ground experience and working knowledge of what will best serve the development of the community. It is crucial for all involved in development to “[acknowledge] and [respect] the significance of local knowledge in solving local development problems, no matter how modest the knowledge of local people may appear by conventional academic standards” (Zewde, 2010, p. 60). Social workers are in a unique position to understand the entrepreneurial context and work with individuals where they are, to help them achieve their stated goals. Along these lines, when institutions and social workers become involved in local and regional development of communities, it is essential that they integrate community leaders and members in the fact-finding, planning, execution, and evaluation plans. Such actions should take place in local communities both nationally and internationally as a strategy to advance and promote economic stability.

Supporting groups of social entrepreneurs can take various forms, but the most needed support is in terms of resources. Resources are not just financial, and in some cases, are not financial at all. For social workers, resources include assisting social entrepreneurs in developing strength and endurance to continue serving their communities despite potential obstacles. As previously mentioned, obstacles may include access to donor funds, access to a market for vending goods and services, or a lack of skill sets to become successful in social entrepreneurship. In this case, resource development also includes connecting social entrepreneurs with like-minded and action-oriented individuals and groups in the form of business networks and support networks. In Zanzibar, the community is small and many women social entrepreneurs know of each other’s businesses or know each other personally. Expectantly, there are many business owners that discuss methods of operations and trends with one another. However, in larger nations, women’s social entrepreneurial self-support may not be as readily available.
Social workers can link women to these support resources or start these services themselves, if possible.

Another issue that will be essential in the practice of social work with populations of local change agents is providing more information and access to entrepreneurship education. Steps to guide them in determining and finding markets for their services is essential to success, especially in rural areas that tend to be more impoverished. These social entrepreneurs are looking for ways to expand knowledge of their product or service but are hindered by lack of access to transportation or technology, for example. Transportation for women in rural areas would allow social entrepreneurs to travel to new communities to advertise their product or service and discuss the societal benefits of their venture. Technology, in the form of Internet access, creates a new and geographically endless market of clientele; which women in the urban area are taking advantage of. Workshops centered on how to manage and utilize technology and social media is an empowerment tool that social workers can utilize to foster growth among those in need of this service. In terms of financial support, social workers can play an important role in disseminating information on investment capital opportunities including local funding, national grants, government bids for proposals, or international government and NGO funding whenever it is available for social entrepreneurs in both urban and rural areas.

Rural women are often at a disadvantage in learning about, and applying for, outside funding to support their ventures. The blockade forms because of a lack of access to information and a language barrier that is preventing understanding of information that is available. For social work practice in this area, resource building in terms of self-development, group support, and funding linkages will be an asset for women social entrepreneurs, whether at the beginning or advanced stages of their venture operations. Funding is an important issue, but in practice one can see that there are a range of resources that could help effective practice of social entrepreneurs in addressing poverty concerns. Overall, the women in this study have been resourceful by using personal networks and their own assets to assist in community growth. They are continuing to use what is available to them to sustain their social entrepreneurial ventures and build the local island community.

**Conclusion**

This study shows how women social entrepreneurs are uniquely impacting circumstances of poverty and promoting community growth in Zanzibar, Tanzania by operating business ventures geared toward improving conditions in the nation. These Zanzibar women are influencing major aspects of society and promoting the development of individuals in order to combat a state of hardship. They represent a good example of how a few individuals in
a small community or island can have large effects on growth and development. The goal of community sustainability must be to assist community members in confronting local problems by identifying all available resources within the immediate vicinity, in neighboring communities, through government programs and initiatives, and through nonprofit organizations whether locally, nationally, or internationally. Local women social entrepreneurs in Zanzibar are not only making an important impact on social problems and poverty alleviation, but they are also providing motivation for individuals in communities. They are also empowering those around them through sharing their practical knowledge and skills with others. In both urban and rural areas, social entrepreneurs are empowering groups of individuals to learn the skills or trade that they are using in their social ventures. These individuals are then able to apply this newfound knowledge in a business to provide family income, or simply as a source of economic empowerment; creating personal and public value in their lives. Many may feel a sense of having control over their immediate destiny, changing the mindset to allow for new attitudes to be implemented toward community growth and poverty alleviation.

References


