

Social Entrepreneurship as a Strategic Tool in Implementing and Sustaining Local Economic Development: South Africa's Experience

KS Ngema and TC Adetiba
University of Zululand, South Africa

Abstract: Local municipalities around the world face challenges of inequality, unemployment and growing poverty levels owing to the limited provision of basic services to local communities. These challenges are aggravated by international trends and new realities like urbanisation, the technological revolution and globalisation, and the increasing global competitive environment. Creative and advanced policy strategies are necessary for municipalities to tackle the social ills manifested through the high unemployment and poverty levels and lack of access to basic services. There is an increasing need for effective and continuous participation of the poor and the marginalised people in economic processes at all levels, including informal and township economic activities, enabling and stimulating such economic activity, employment and self-employment rather than expecting and waiting for economic growth to absorb the poor and the unemployed into the formal sector of the economy. Using mixed method of analysis, this work argued that social entrepreneurship strengthens the economic and social conditions through solving the social challenges where governments have not been able to effectively meet the needs of the people and concludes that provision of basic services to the underserved South Africans while uplifting their standard of living through the use of social entrepreneurship as a strategic tool to implement and sustain local economic development.

Keywords: Apartheid, Development, Infrastructure, Poverty, Revolution, Social security

1. Introduction

The Constitution of South Africa (1996) has the founding principles that seek to protect and promote the human rights of South Africa's citizens, which includes equity, security and freedom. It further guarantees the access to basic needs and services to the citizens, such as health care, water, food and social security. Municipalities have a constitutional mandate to promote Local Economic Development (LED). Section 152 of the constitution stipulates the local governments objectives, within them the constitution stipulates that, local government must promote social and economic development and encourage involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government. In the same vein, section 153 state that, a municipality must strive and manage its administration, and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community and to promote the social and economic development of the community (DPLG, 2003). Local economic development (LED) aims at improving the economic prospects in the local areas to improve the standard of living of the residents and the stakeholder groups. It is also a process,

which creates a space where all the stakeholders in a community work together to increase the competitiveness, sustainability, growth and inclusiveness of the local economy. The process involves the local businesses within the community, the residents in the area, and the non-profit sector. LED also relies on many activities and disciplines on economic sciences, enterprise development, environmental and infrastructure planning, property and development and finance skills (South African Local Government Association, 2016).

According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), released by the statistics South Africa, for the first quarter of 2019, the official unemployment rate increased by 0,5% to 27,6% compared to the fourth quarter of 2018. This increase is due to the decline of 237 000 in the number of people in employment and an increase of 62 000 in the number of people who were unemployed between the fourth quarter of 2018 and the first quarter of 2019 (Statistics South Africa, 2019). This situation begs for a question whether local government is fulfilling its constitutional obligation of promoting sustainable ways of sustaining social and economic developments if there's continuous increase

of unemployment? Then what are the strategies employed in line with tackling such economic challenges? The White Paper on Local Government (1998) points out that the third sphere of governance, which is the local government, is the sphere that is mainly responsible for the development of local communities. It must fulfil this obligation by continuously improving the standards of living and advancing the interests of the people at the grassroots levels. The White Paper further stipulates and makes clear boundaries of local government duties, that local government is not responsible for job creation but instead responsible for creating an enabling environment or rather a conducive environment for the creation of employment and ensuring the overall economic and social conditions at the grassroots level. Evidently, there's an ever increasing rate of unemployment in South Africa, hence, an increase in the level of poverty and inequality and that LED is still on ground hence making it difficult for the local government to fulfil its constitutional obligation of promoting social and economic development. Municipalities are not responsible for job creation, but they must strive and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community and promote social and economic development of the community. uMfolozi Local Municipality (where this research was conducted) is no exception from, hence, its vision to improve the quality of life of all the people in the municipality by creating an economically viable and sustainable development (Integrated Development Plan Draft, 3rd IDP for the fourth generation, 2019/20).

Municipalities in South Africa pursue local economic development as a development strategy for socio and economic development (Nel *et al.*, 2015). Nghonyama (2011) asserts that given the challenges that South Africa faces, which are unemployment, poverty and inequality, LED creates a space which allows citizens at the grassroots levels to participate in local government initiatives with all the relevant stakeholders to find sustainable ways of uplifting their standard of living, through poverty alleviation, job creation. Local government also encourages people to participate in economic decision making innovations where entrepreneurship is promoted at all levels of the society as one of the strategies to alleviate poverty. In addition, LED allows public business and the non-profit sector partners to work together to find sustainable ways of creating better

conditions for economic growth and employment, with the aim of improving the quality of the lives of the people (World Bank Urban Development, cited in Rodriguez-Pose *et al.*, 2015).

It has been twenty-five years after South Africa transition to a democratic state, but still the country is continuously facing development challenges, evident is an ever increasing rate of unemployment, crime, poverty and inequality. This study aims to examine the role of social entrepreneurship as a strategic tool in implementing and sustaining local economic development, South Africa's experience.

2. Methodological Approach

According to Brynard *et al.* (1997), research methodology involves methods, techniques and procedures that are used in the process of implementing the research design or plan. Babbie *et al.* (2001, as quoted in De Vos *et al.*, 2011), further alludes that there are quantitative and qualitative methods, where a quantitative researcher is concerned with observations and measurements while a qualitative researcher is concerned with describing and understanding human behaviour. It is an in-depth and detailed description of data collection and analyses procedures for a planned study, which covers the techniques that will be employed in a study, the precise tool that will be used and specific instruments that will be used to collect the relevant data.

The use of the mixed method was to allow collection of data from different sources of information, to be able to review literature on the work done on social entrepreneurship and make recommendations after the data collection and analysis. The researchers are convinced that using this method will allow them to use multiple methods and measures of an empirical phenomenon in order to overcome problems of bias and validity. The study is designed to explore and discover the roles of social entrepreneurship as a strategic tool in implementing and sustaining Local Economic Development vis-à-vis South Africa's experience. This study used a combination of an integrative research approach, with specific focus on the issues surrounding social entrepreneurship in South Africa.

3. Literature Review

In developed countries, LED implementation strategies focused on attracting external investments

but later it shifted to promoting entrepreneurship, the provision of training programmes and access to finance (Nkuna, 2016). Social entrepreneurship according to Dees (2001) is the combination of the passion for social mission with business discipline, innovation, and determination, therefore, it is high time for socio-entrepreneurship to be implemented as the approach to mitigating social challenges, owing to the fact that major social sector institutions are often viewed as inefficient, ineffective and unresponsive; thus suggesting that social entrepreneurs are needed to develop new models for a new century. From LEDS (2014) the local economic development society of Kerala (India), promotes social entrepreneurship by strengthening value chains, working closely with small producers to enable them grow high-value products and sell to profitable markets. They further provide business training skills and development and promote or encourage community inclusiveness, while working together with the relevant stakeholders to promote social and economic development. Temple (2017) states that social enterprises contribute meaningfully in addressing the economic challenges, in UK they are successful such that they make 70% profit and are then able to address the social ills while contributing to the economic growth. By interpretation, social entrepreneurship speaks to addressing the social challenges, engaging with the community members in finding innovative and sustainable ways of developing their communities. Hence, the question whether South Africa benefited from social entrepreneurship, and whether it can be a strategic tool for the implementation and sustainability of LED programmes? These questions form the basis of this study.

Theoretically, Gallant *et al.* (cited in Zimmerman, 2015), explain that within the framework of empowerment theory, the development of interventions and the creation of social change focuses on health, adaptation, competence, and natural helping systems. It includes the perspective that many social ills are caused by unequal distribution of resources, information. Rodrigues-Pose *et al.* (cited in du Plooy, 2017), state that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has suggested that local economic development should entail programmes/strategies that will increase the local economic potential and sustainable employment through giving local governments the tools to devise locally tailored strategies in cooperation with local, regional and international stakeholders and actors.

Swinburn *et al.* (cited in du Plooy, 2017), further stipulate that LED aims to build-up the economic capacity of a local area, to improve its economic future and the quality of life for all. It is a process where all the stakeholders take part in to improve the standard of the lives of the people, through creating better conditions for economic growth and employment this includes the public, businesses and non-governmental sectors. What this suggests to mean is that engaging the public, businesses and non-governmental organisation to proffer solution to some of the socio-economic challenges facing South Africans through LED will punch up the ability of the future generations to access the resources. Further to this, this theory believed that when people work together they are able to find sustainable ways of using social entrepreneurship as a strategic tool to sustain LED and for their lives improvements and that of the future generations.

Masuku *et al.* (2016) have argued that local governments have an essential role of creating an enabling environment for pursuing business and creation of job opportunities. LED promotes a partnership between local government, business and NGO's. Community based groups and private sectors are established to manage existing resources and to create jobs that lead to improvement of local economy. Moreover, local government must generate and manage local projects aimed at addressing inequalities between citizens. And thus, social entrepreneurship is the process of pursuing entrepreneurship with a social mission which creates social and economic value (Choi *et al.*, 2014). Social entrepreneurs create social capital which is the key component of economic development (Leadbeater, cited in Staples, 2016).

According to Bomani (2018), entrepreneurship in rural areas is essential for poverty alleviation, food security, employment generation, wealth creation and the overall development of rural communities. He further states that entrepreneurship is adequately supported by the municipalities to address rural development, unemployment, poverty and food insecurity. In the same vein, Jili (2017) asserts that SME's improve the socio-economic states of rural households through income generation and the rural entrepreneurship allows business owners to rely on themselves rather than government; hence leading to economic development.

In addition, people-centred approach gives the community members the opportunity to do things

for themselves, making things more effective because they are involved in income generating projects that speak to and address their challenges and these projects become sustainable because people are doing what improves their standard of living as the community. When citizens are directly and actively involved in the development projects they become more knowledgeable on how to best solve their challenges hence improve their lives (Nghonyama, 2011). World Bank group (2011) asserts that the main aim of LED is to build up the economic capacity at the grassroots levels through the use of local resources to improve the quality of the lives of the people, hence reducing the level of poverty. Maraise (2010) further posits that LED generate positive outcomes when it comes to poverty reduction, job creation, economic well-being, food security and improving the standard of living of the people. This is possible when the people participate and take full responsibility in the LED implementation for their well-being. Nel (cited in Nghonyama, 2011) suggests that, in South Africa, local government should work with different stakeholders including the private sector and the local communities to effectively implement the LED policy, using the local resources, technical knowledge and production systems. This is mainly done for the purpose of uplifting the standard of living of the people. He further points out the LED prominent features from the country's Urban and Rural Development Strategies, which includes inter alia: job creation and poverty alleviation, targeting previously disadvantaged people, marginalised communities in rural areas, community involvement and local leadership, and use of local resources and skills.

Debatably, South Africa is a country that is characterised by high levels of unemployment, with the youth and graduates having the larger percentage. With LED having such prominent features to improve the lives of the people through job creation, and the local government being constitutionally bound to promote the economic and social development of the communities, this work questions the strategies that are in place to decrease the unemployment rate and help graduates utilise the knowledge they acquired to make a difference in their lives, their communities and the country at large, both economically and socially, while trying to determine the South Africa's experience in implementing the LED programmes with the use of social entrepreneurship as a strategic tool. According to Choi *et al.*

(2014) social entrepreneurship is entrepreneurship with a social mission and creates social and economic value which is directly involved with creating social capital and economic development. Hence this study aims to determine the strategies and measures for the formulation and implementation of effective social entrepreneurship initiatives for the sustainability of the local economic development. According to the World Bank local economic development has passed through the developmental stages since 1960, meaning that LED is not a new innovative concept. The period in history points out the records of three stages of development, between 1960-1980 (agricultural investments, local and international), 1980-1990 (multi-sectoral investment attraction), and 1990 to-date (shift from investment attraction to collective conducive businesses). These phases illustrate that we are in the third phase where partnerships in service delivery are imperative for socio-economic development. This then requires local government to come up with strategies to effectively create and improve a conducive, competitive and attractive local business environment, supporting and encouraging networks and collaborations, encouraging the development of businesses and investment clusters, encouraging workforce development and education and supporting quality of life improvements. It is evident that now the development and success of the community largely depends on their ability to adapt to the changing and increasingly competitive environment locally, nationally and internationally (LED – World Bank Group, 2005).

Section 152 of the South Africa's constitution obligates the local government to promote social and economic development and encourage community involvement in the matters of local government (RSA, 1996). DPLG (2005) further stipulate that local government should ensure a conducive socio-economic environment at the grassroots level to develop human, social capital, enhance community economic development and small, medium and micro enterprises development, identify and support clusters and business opportunities, facilitate community participation in created opportunities, organise necessary links with other government spheres, maintain database of available support mechanisms and grants for LED, market the area and provide marketing assistance to business, promote local business expansion and retention strategies and encourage the formulation of appropriate partnership and coalition structures.

According to Bomani (2018), rural entrepreneurship is of paramount importance because it speaks to poverty alleviation, food security, employment generation, wealth creation and overall development of rural communities. Rural unemployment being one of the major challenges for South Africa promoting social entrepreneurship is critical for local government to sustain LED. Establishing an LED forum within the community to mobilise the efforts and resources of local stakeholders around a common vision is one of the roles of local government in promoting LED hence, according to the national framework for local economic development in South Africa (2006-2011) proper and continuous communication between municipalities and stakeholders, the businesses is paramount. This enables them to come up with strategies that speak to effectively and efficiently addressing the challenges at the local sphere of government. Participation of communities and community organisations, labour and private sectors should be encouraged.

The study of social enterprises in South Africa, discovering a vibrant sector by the Gordon Institute of Business Science (2018) reveals that, enterprises operate mostly in education, health and housing sectors at the grassroots levels. The organisations describe themselves as the non-profit or social enterprises rather than businesses because they have a social mission of alleviating poverty and developing the communities. In South Africa, social enterprises are purpose driven, which is sustaining the lives of the people. However, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor shows that in South Africa there's less than 2% adults involved in social entrepreneurship (Bosma *et al.*, 2015). This therefore reveals the need to educate people more about the importance of social entrepreneurship and how they can participate in other to start and run organisations that seek to improve the lives of the people socially while generating income hence contributing to the economy of the country. This study further reveals that the social enterprises organisations create job opportunities and employ people on a permanent or full-time basis than using contracts. Social entrepreneurs are people that are passionate about the development of the lives of the people, through addressing the social ills with innovative and sustainable initiatives. This study suggests that it is high time that they be given more support to implement these initiatives' to sustain the local economic development in South Africa.

4. Social Entrepreneurship (SE) as a Strategic Tool to Combating Poverty and Employment Creation

The constitution of South Africa (1996) obligates every local government in South Africa to promote socio-economic development at the grassroots levels while improving the standard of living of the people. Significantly, it is of importance for local government to create an enabling and favourable environment for business to thrive and its sustainability as well as the creation of job opportunities. For this to be possible local government must create an ongoing relationship between them, the private sector, communities and community organisations and Non Profit Organisations (NPOs). Masuku *et al.* (2016) argued that when these stakeholders work together effectively and efficiently they will be able to successfully plan, generate and manage the LED programmes that speak to addressing the challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

In the same vein, Rogerson (2014) asserts that LED promotes the development of small businesses and cooperatives as a strategic tool of attracting more people into entrepreneurship hence boosting the creation of job opportunities. Furthermore, Koma (2010) posits that, through the use of human, natural and institutional local resources jobs can be created to improve the lives of the people at the local communities.

The aim of LED is to boost local economies, promote job creation and income generation and improve governance and municipal performance. The promotion of local economic development is based on a different approach to traditional development strategies. It focuses on improving a territory (that is the region or a city) competitiveness and economic performance. Local governments, businesses, community organisations and NGO's work together to develop an understanding of their local economy, reflect on the different revival options available to them and develop strategies and projects enabling them to share the benefits of the economic growth (Meyer, 2015).

The White Paper on Local Government (1998) posits that, local government must enhance local economic development through focusing on developmental initiatives and investing on basic survives. It went further that Municipalities should also promote

marketing and investment initiative as well as small businesses, support services should be provided as part of promoting social and economic development. There needs to be continuous research and technology improvement due to the ever changing environment globally so to stay relevant to the market and ensure competitiveness and positive development progress. Abrahams (2003) identifies a number of LED initiatives to address particular social and economic challenges at the local level, these includes focusing on the mobilization of local resources, redistribution of resources, promotion of local creativity and innovation, investment in human capital, the provision of technical assistance and training for self-employment and business start-up and support for enterprise creation. Most western countries regarded LED as an important tool to deal with poverty.

Mogale (2003) states that the business development approach at the local sphere of government is the most appropriate way of attaining the local economic development objectives, expanding growth, ensuring local investment and job creation. In addition to this he further outlines the four essential strategies of entrepreneurialism identified within the context of the business development approach, namely, centres of production, centres of consumption, centres of knowledge-processing and corporate decision making and centres for reception of central government surplus redistribution. Therefore, it is important for local government to incorporate strategic elements of both business and community development in the LED strategies or programmes.

Poverty alleviation is a critical challenge that should be tackled at the grassroots level for community development. This should be addressed in the formulation of local economic initiatives across South Africa and these initiatives should focus on business development so that people can be independent and not rely on government for the creation of job opportunities but for government to only create a favourable or an enabling environment for them to develop and sustain their businesses not for themselves only but also for the improvement of the lives of other citizens as socio entrepreneurship speaks to business initiatives with a social mission to uplift the whole community than self-gain. Local government should also motivate and support individuals, community groups and local communities to initiate and sustain economic initiatives.

5. Social Entrepreneurship as a Strategic Tool to Implement and Sustain Local Economic Development

Choi *et al.* (2014) defines social entrepreneurship as entrepreneurship with a social mission which creates social and economic development. In the same vein, Leadbeater (cited in Staples, 2016) conceives that social entrepreneurs are directly involved in creating social capital which is the main component of economic development. Sienkiewicz (2014) asserts that local economic development determines the significance of the public sector in creating an enabling environment for economic development, development of entrepreneurship initiatives where local citizens are encouraged to start businesses for social and economic growth for the improvement of their lives. Mbezi (2011) however states that in South Africa the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) is significantly increasing for the achievement of social stability and by creating jobs to address the high unemployment rate. According to Dees (2001) social entrepreneurs play a significant role of being change agents in the social sector by adopting a mission to create and sustain social value; recognising and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission; engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning; acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand and establishing a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for outcome created.

Nghonyama (2011) states that one of the challenges that hinder the sustainability of local economic development lies in the projects that are implemented local governments that have little or no business sense, where they can create and sustain jobs. This is due to LED practitioners lacking information or lack of creative capacity to plan and implements projects from an entrepreneurial perspective. Bomani (2018) asserts that limited access to information, advice and business services is one of the obstacles to effective promotion of rural entrepreneurship. Rural entrepreneurs are located far from business advisors and support services thus making it difficult for people to get assistance to start-up businesses and be able to sustain them, such that they improve their lives and those of the community members by creating job opportunities for others.

Sustainable economic growth is of paramount importance for people to be able to sustain their

lives enough to support their families and be able to pay for all their costs for living. Education and training which will assist people to start up their own businesses with a social mission to improve their lives and those around them in the community, be independent such that they won't have to wait for government to provide them with all their basic needs. Hence, the suggestion that social entrepreneurship be utilised as a strategic tool to implement and sustain local economic development at the grassroots levels in South Africa, where citizens are directly involved in development projects, come up with ideas that will directly tackle their challenges thus making the development sustainable. This will also assist government as the citizens will not only be dependent on government for job opportunities but the environment in which they are in will be conducive, so much that they can empower themselves and those around them, thus improving and sustaining their lives socially and economically.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Local economic development is the core mandate for local government to promote the standard of living of the people where there is a conducive environment for job creation and sustainability of the lives of the people. It is evident that LED is still not a priority in most municipalities, there is limited funding, political interference, and poor community participation. This needs to be addressed so that at the end of the day the LED attain its main objective of poverty and unemployment reduction hence improve the standard of living of the communities.

SACN (2004) asserts that in South Africa local economic development (LED) has been identified as the tool for development at the municipal level, but it's still not a priority due to limited funding, skills and capacity. There's a lack of a detailed LED plan on how it seeks to intervene, monitor and evaluate the social and economy in the small rural municipalities. The Gordon Institute of Business Science (2018) states that there exists a great number of marginalised communities that are underserved by institutions around them for their basic needs. Social enterprises would then play a significant role in serving those communities because they have their best interests at heart since they are social impact driven.

This study concludes that social entrepreneurship can be the strategic tool to sustain local economic development in municipalities owing to the fact that

social enterprises is set to address the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. They are socially driven, meaning that improving the lives of the people comes first before the generation of income, and if there is, it still goes back to serving the people. Fourie (2013) suggests that it is important that people from the rural areas of South Africa and townships be included in the economic activities (planning and implementation) in order to pursue an inclusive economic growth. This speaks to creating an enabling environment for such economic activities, the creation of employment and self-employment rather than waiting for government to absorb the poor and the unemployed into the formal sector of the economy. It is evident from above that social enterprises create job opportunities, hence, its importance in South Africa as it provides basic services to the underserved South Africans while uplifting their standard of living which can be done effectively with local governments making use of social entrepreneurship as a strategic tool to implement and sustain local economic development.

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