



Alumni
Netzwerk
Subsahara
Afrika e.V.

ANSA e.V. Konferenz 2018

Rahmenthema: Social Entrepreneurship

What it is and why many of us should get involved in it

The concept of Social Entrepreneurship came into the limelight in 2006, when Muhammed Yunus, founder of the Grameen bank, was awarded with the Noble Price for Peace in 2006 for his idea of giving out microcredits to previously not-creditworthy parts of the population. In 1980, Ashoka Foundation, which is up to this day one of the biggest non-profits fostering social entrepreneurship around the world, was founded in the US. Today, with increased critique of capitalism and development aid, Social Entrepreneurship has garnered significant attention.

Social Enterprises are generally defined as enterprises addressing societal challenges in the fields of health, environment, education, among others. Social Entrepreneurship proposes nothing less than a sustainable, innovative business model with a positive impact on society. Considering that ANSA conference participants consist of students, recent graduates and young professionals from Germany and Sub Sahara Africa, the conference aims at exploring some fundamental questions about Social Entrepreneurship, and connecting these to larger issues in the realm of Europe-Africa relations.

The main purpose of Social Entrepreneurship is to have an impact on society, rather than maximizing profit. Innovative methods and out-of-the-box thinking are also inherent to Social Entrepreneurship. The nature of a conventional business, on the contrary, lies mostly in achieving profit and growth. What about not-for-profits, like NGOs? While they also propose a positive impact on society, they do so without any aims of making profit and depend on donations and sponsors. Social enterprises thus lie in between. They are designed to be self-sustainable and make profit for the sake of reinvesting it into society, or the business itself, rather than paying dividends to business owners. Social Enterprises therefore constitute an important alternative to both conventional for-profits as well as NGOs.

The ways of working in Social Enterprises are often spurred by digitalization, which bridges divides between urban and rural areas, as well as between countries and continents. New digital technologies contribute to the innovative nature of social entrepreneurship. In Africa, a number of Social Enterprises make use of digitalization already, bringing about a wealth of novel business relations between the continents. Ideally, a Social Enterprise is scalable, or applicable to more than one locale. However, Social Entrepreneurship does not necessarily have to take a global perspective. As the last example below shows, communities can also benefit from a locally-confined social enterprise.

The following are examples of inspiring, often global, Social Enterprises:

- **Ubuntu Made** (<https://www.ubuntumade.com/>) empowers mothers of special needs children in Kenya by offering them a meaningful job and health insurance. The enterprise sells several products on their website, including customizable shoes (<http://www.afridrille.com/>) to customers worldwide. Profits of the social enterprise are invested into the center for children with special needs.
- Through **The Editing Enterprise** (<https://www.the-editing-enterprise.com/startseite/>), founded by ANSA-member Annika Surmeier, highly-qualified university graduates, usually PhD-students from Southern Africa, can offer editing services to scholars across the world. By connecting these graduates to the global market, their chances for working in a challenging job with an acceptable salary increase drastically.
- **Mobisol** in Eastern Africa (<http://plugintheworld.com/>), as well as **PegAfrica** (<https://www.pegafrika.com/>) and **Rensource** (<http://www.rensource.energy>) in West Africa have similar missions. They boil down to providing electricity through solar systems, both to individual households and industrial customers. These companies address two notorious societal challenges: Access to electricity in Sub-Sahara Africa and the promotion of carbon-neutral and renewable sources of energy.
- **Chancenwerk e.V.** is a German association that aims at empowering secondary school students by offering learning support at a low cost. It specifically aims at students from low-income households, who may lack the role models and support to reach their full potential at school.

In Europe, three major aspects call for Social Entrepreneurship: the environmental footprints of large corporations, their inability to be truly innovative and their indifference to social impact beyond established Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. Furthermore, the so-called millennial generations are no longer merely looking for stability and income in their working life. They want to find a deeper sense and purpose in their work, which is why there is an increasing demand on the employees' side for enterprises with a social impact.

In Africa, the needs for Social Entrepreneurship exist as well, albeit for different reasons. Centuries of exploitation of resources have made many countries dependent on the exportation of unrefined natural resources, such as crude oil and cocoa, which prevents more diversified economies and provides little benefits for the majority of citizens. Moreover, decades of development aid have shown little proven success in terms of social and economic development, which increases the call for a type of economic development that is not based on aid. Furthermore, in many countries of Sub-Sahara Africa, an incredibly large number of young people, including qualified graduates, meet a labor market unfit to "absorb" them. On the one hand, this young, creative and energetic workforce could be the next generation of (Social) Entrepreneurs. Emerging social enterprises, on the other hand, could bring about much needed change in extraction-based economies.

In order to get started as a social entrepreneur in Germany, the Social Impact Lab, a network of several regional "labs", provides assistance and funding for Social start-ups. In Sub-Sahara Africa, the Global Shapers Community (<https://www.globalshapers.org>) for example has more than 20 "hubs".

Looking at ANSA's goal of fostering a diverse and equal alumni network, it is interesting to look at the question of how Social Entrepreneurship can help cultivate equal business relationships between Europe and Africa, and beyond. It will also be interesting to look at the roles which digitalization plays in Social Entrepreneurship – both in terms of product innovation and in terms of connecting people globally (allowing, for instance, for the seamless organization of this conference). Will Social Entrepreneurship eventually be able to replace exploitative and non-sustainable business relationships?