

## **Environmental Factors for Social Entrepreneurship Success: Comparing Four Regions**

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*Social entrepreneurship attempts to address social problems traditional entrepreneurs and governments fail to address. A growing amount of literature now exists that attempts to explain patterns that characterize successful social enterprises. But these patterns play out differently in different regions and countries. In this study we compare successful social entrepreneurs from North America, Latin America, India, and Sub-Sahara Africa to find out how they exploited or worked around locally- constraining or institutional conditions in order to reduce humanitarian problems. We used information from the Ashoka Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship. Our main finding is that institutional differences result in different approaches to social entrepreneurship, including the choice of social problems to tackle and population segments to focus on. In North America social entrepreneurs focus a little more on social injustice problems than on rural poverty. It is the opposite in Africa.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of social entrepreneurship in the alleviation of intractable social problems is being increasingly recognized globally. Probably the best illustration of this point is the elevation of highly successful social entrepreneurs to Nobel Prize laureates. One such social entrepreneur is Muhammad Yunus, for his microfinance innovation to reduce rural poverty in Bangladesh. The microfinance movement is now international. In academia, professional organizations such as the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship now requires their members to join the Social Entrepreneurship interest group. At universities there is a growing number of social entrepreneurship centers. One such center is the Skoll Center for Social Entrepreneurship at Oxford. There is also a growing number of corporate and philanthropic foundations devoted to the promotion of social entrepreneurship globally. An example of these foundations is the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, which also sponsors the annual World Economic Forum, in which social entrepreneurship is regularly discussed and leading social entrepreneurs are celebrated (Urban,2008).

Social entrepreneurship is being celebrated because it attempts to address social problems traditional entrepreneurs and governments fail to address. Problems such as wide-spread poverty and disease have tended to grow worse world-wide, following the reduction in social welfare spending due to budget cuts in many countries since the early 2000s (Borker & Adams 2012; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016). A growing amount of literature now exists that attempts to explain patterns that characterize successful social

entrepreneurship and social enterprises. One major study by Alvord, Brown and Letts (2004), all of Harvard University, examined seven highly successful social enterprises world-wide and identified several key patterns in these social enterprises. The seven cases included the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, and the Plan Puebla of Mexico. The patterns included core innovations and adaptive leadership capacity. The patterns existed in all seven cases, but in different forms and degrees, depending upon environmental factors. For example, while the core innovation for the Grameen Bank was to initiate a micro credit package to assist poor women in Bangladesh, the core innovation for Plan Puebla (Mexico) was the creation of new agricultural technology for improving family income and welfare.

Mair and Marti (2006) defined social entrepreneurship as “the interaction between social entrepreneur and context”. Urban (2008) points out that while social problems are the central driver for social entrepreneurship, the key underlying forces for social entrepreneurs arise out of political institutions, economic institutions and social-cultural institutions. For example, undemocratic political institutions cause political upheavals and ensuing social problems to which social entrepreneurs often have to respond. But developed democratic institutions encourage social entrepreneurs to help victims of market failures and economic fluctuations (Alvord et al, 2004 and Datta and Gaily, 2012). A weak banking system is bad for the commercial sector and results in high levels of unemployment and poverty, which are common targets of social entrepreneurship. The presence of underclasses in a society prevents segments of populations from participating in the mainstream political and economic activities, thus resulting in their marginalization. The presence of religious freedom encourages the establishment of faith-based social enterprises. The encouragement of social capital in a society is good for social entrepreneurship, just as it is for commercial entrepreneurship (Sharir and Lerner, 2006).

In this study we compare successful social entrepreneurship in Africa, India, Latin America and North America. Regarding Africa, the study covers only sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa. The basic premise of this study is that the roads to successful social entrepreneurship in these regions are significantly different, given the fairly obvious differences in the political, economic and socio-cultural environments in the four regions. These four regions include a region that is one of the most politically and economically developed regions and another region that is one of the least politically and economically developed regions in the world, North America and Africa, respectively. The four regions also include a region that is one of the most individualistic regions and a region that is one of the most collectivistic regions in the world, North America and Latin America, respectively. These regional differences translate into different environmental factors for social entrepreneurship. Kerlin (2010), in her study “A comparative analysis of the global emergence of social enterprise”, divided the social enterprise world into seven regions. She found the four regions covered in the study belong to completely different categories in terms of social entrepreneurship. In the South Asian region, to which India belongs, the emphasis of social enterprises is on “sustainable development”. In Latin America the emphasis is on “social/political benefit”. In North America the focus is on “sustainability”. Kerlin also found that international aid was particularly important for launching and growing social enterprises in Africa, much less so than it is in Latin America, where civil society initiatives were more predominant.

To study the differences in social entrepreneurship in Africa, India, Latin America, and North America, we used Internet-based data available on the Ashoka Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship website. The Ashoka Foundation is the biggest international organization that supports social entrepreneurs globally. The organization celebrates social entrepreneurship success by electing social entrepreneurs to become Fellows in the organization’s social entrepreneurship network. To qualify for the election, the social entrepreneur must demonstrate scalability to broad-based social impact of his or her initiative. In order to be elected to be a Fellow, an evaluation team formed by the Ashoka Foundation prepares a detailed statement about the candidate and his/her social enterprise. These statements are posted on Ashoka Foundation’s website. Currently there are over 3000 Ashoka Fellows from all regions of the world. By analyzing the information on the Internet related to African, Indian, Latin American, and North American fellows, we discovered differences between these regions, such as differences in the innovations chosen, differences in the targeted demographics, differences in the financing of social ventures, and differences in the factors that inspired the social entrepreneurs to undertake the initiatives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition Issues

Urban (2008) referred to Peter Drucker as the first management scholar to introduce the concept of social enterprise, arguing that business organizations are social enterprises because they are creations of political and social institutions and as such they owe certain social obligations to society. However, even though there is a growing interest about social entrepreneurship due to its focus on attacking highly challenging social problems, there doesn't appear to exist a common definition of the concept. Social entrepreneurship has become a global phenomenon, and the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor defined it as "any attempt at new social enterprise activity...with social or community goals...and where the profit is invested in the activity itself...rather than returned to investors" Urban (2008). Although social entrepreneurship varies from one region to another (Kerlin, 2010), it is universally considered to be a form of entrepreneurship (Dees 2007, Contanzo, 2014; Borker & Adams, 2012; Neck et al, 2009; Yunis, 2006; Meyskens et al, 2010; and Buegre, 2014).

**TABLE 1**  
**VENTURE TYPOLOGY (ADAPTED FROM HEIDI NECK, CANDIDA BRUSH, ELAINE ALLEN, THE LANDSCAPE OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP (2009))**

		<i>Venture Mission</i>	
		Economic	Social
<i>Primary Market Impact</i>	Economic	Commercial/Traditional Entrepreneur A	Social Business Entrepreneur (SBE) D
	Social	Corporate Social Responsibility B	Charity Organization/Government Social Services C

Generally, entrepreneurship involves acting on opportunities, acquiring resources, and the building of an organization that creates something of value (Schumpeter, 1934; Timmons and Spinelli, 2004). A commercial entrepreneur has an economic mission and his impact is primarily economic, to satisfy effective demand in the market and gain financially. Please see quadrant A in Table 1. Financial performance is his/her primary metric. In quadrant B in Table 1 is a venture undertaken by a for-profit organization to attack social problems. This is intra-social entrepreneurship, a social enterprise started within an existing organization. It is also called corporate social responsibility or philanthropy if the organization merely makes monetary or material donations to charities. Charities are indicated in quadrant C. Quadrant D represents individuals or groups who establish ventures with solutions to social problems as the primary mission. However, they also seek economic sustainability. That is, they charge fees to cover their costs. They don't highly depend on charitable contributions or government support, for operating costs.

In reality, there aren't many social ventures that can achieve total economic sustainability or even seek economic sustainability. Dees (2007) has pointed out that only very few social ventures survive without philanthropic support and volunteers. And according to Alvord et al. (2004) the capacity to build bridges between social ventures and external sources of support, especially financial support, is one of the key patterns in highly successful social ventures.

Muhammad Yunus (2006), the founder of the legendary Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, classifies social enterprises into 4 categories according to the extent the social venture is able to recover its costs: No cost recovery (1), Some cost recovery (2), Full cost recovery (3), More than full cost recovery (4). Yunus refers to category 4 social enterprises as social business enterprises (SBEs). SBEs plough after-cost earnings back into the enterprises to scale up their social impacts. If there are any investors, they receive only nominal rates of return. So, according to Yunus any enterprise with a social mission is a social enterprise and its initiator is a social entrepreneur. A government-run project to fight poverty or illiteracy is a social enterprise. So is a charitable organization, such as ACTION AID. While “social mission” is the foundation of all social enterprises, and charities generally meet this criterion, their modus operandi is commonly to provide short term solutions to social problems, such as food donations for poor people. Bill Drayton, the founder of the leading foundation that supports social enterprises globally is quoted as saying that “Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish, or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry” (Neck, et al., 2009). Increasingly though, charity organizations such as Choice Humanitarian are moving from short term service delivery approaches to long term sustainable solutions. The charity’s projects all over the world have transformed villages in poor countries from dependence to self-sustainability (ChoiceHumanitarian, 2016). These charities provide long term solutions to social problems, although they themselves remain dependent on philanthropic support.

### **The Rise of the Social Enterprise Sector: Historical Setting**

Kerlin, 2010; Borker & Adams, 2012; Urban, 2008; Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016; and The Economist, 2006 argue that the emphasis on social enterprises in the last 30 years is the result of the failure of the welfare state and welfare economics. Kerlin points out that “the United States, Western Europe...as well as South America experienced, to different degrees, a withdrawal of state support to [social benefit programs] in the 1980s and/or 1990s”. In addition, many Latin American, South Asian and African countries were subjected to economic liberalization reforms, popularly known as “structural adjustment programs” (Kerlin, 2010). These internationally-sponsored policies adversely impacted government social benefit programs. The response to government failure to address social problems has been global but varied from region to region. Accordingly, social enterprises have been found to take different forms and do different things. Kerlin (2010) identified seven world regions in her comparison of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship approaches, namely, North America, Western Europe, Japan, East Central Europe, Latin America, Sub-Sahara Africa, and Southern Asia. Table 2 highlights these differences as identified by Kerlin (2010). Table 2 covers only the four regions that relate to this study.

As can be seen from Table 2, the four regions in the table differ from one another considerably. In the Southeast Asia region, to which India belongs, and Latin America the focus of social enterprises was employment and human services such as education and health. In the Africa region the focus on employment is much deeper. It even includes employment for self-sustainability or survival, hence the boom of microfinance as the most common form of social enterprise in the region. In the U.S. there was no focus as such. All causes, social and non-social, attracted the attention of social ventures, which tended to be charitable organizations. Other differences between the four regions relate to funding sources. Foundations were the main sources of funding in the U.S. Civil society organizations sponsored most of the social enterprises in Latin America. Most of the social ventures in Latin America are “community-based enterprises” or cooperatives where community members collaborate to reach a common goal (Paredo & Chrisman, 2006 and Urban, 2008). Social ventures in the Africa region greatly depended on international donors. It also turns out that Africa had the highest international aid per capita. Further, while state capability was weak in Africa, Southeast Asia (India), and Latin America, it was very strong in the U.S. Combining a strong state capacity with a well-established market system the social ventures in the U.S. were highly dependent on private domestic foundations and corporations. And most of the social ventures in the U.S are charitable organizations supported by donations from philanthropists and corporations (Borker and Adams, 2012).

**TABLE 2**  
**COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN FOUR WORLD REGIONS AND COUNTRIES (ADAPTED FROM JANELLE KERLIN, 2010 “A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE GLOBAL EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE”)**

	North America (U.S.)*	Latin America (Argentina)*	Sub-Saharan Africa (Zambia & Zimbabwe)*	Southeast Asia (Nine countries)*
Program area focus	All nonprofit activities	Human service/employment	Employment and self-employment	Employment/human services
Common organizational type	Nonprofit/company	Cooperative/mutual benefit	Microfinance institute(MFI)/small enterprise	Small enterprise/association
Development base	Foundations and private companies	Civil society	International donors	Mixed
Market functioning rating	3.5 Strong	1 Weak	1 Weak	1 Weak
International aid per capita	NA/Negligible	\$2	\$54	\$15
State capability rating	4 Strong	1 Weak	1 Weak	1.5 Weak

\*countries sampled in the region

Alvord, Brown and Letts (2004), all associated with the Hauser Center for Non Profit Organizations at Harvard University, did a study in which they identified four key patterns in highly successful and well-known social entrepreneurial ventures. They based their study on seven cases. Two of these cases operate in Africa, (The Green Belt Movement in Kenya, and the Se Servir de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel in West Africa), one in India (The Self-Employed Women’s Association), one in Mexico (Plan Puebla), and one in the U.S. (The Highland Research and Education Center). The cases also include the now world-famous Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. With the exception of one case, the Highlander Research and Education Center, operating in the Appalachian region of the United States, all seven cases relate to developing or underdeveloped countries.

Furthermore, with the possible exception of the Green Belt Movement, which also focuses on sustaining the environment, all seven cases are centered on the eradication of poverty. Table 3 provides some summary information about the cases we refer to in more detail in the following section. However, Table 3 also refers to ApproTec, (Appropriate Technologies for Enterprise Development), a highly successful social venture in Kenya and several other African countries.

**TABLE 3**  
**PATTERNS IN SIX HIGH IMPACT SOCIAL VENTURES (ADAPTED FROM ALVORD, ET AL. 2004, SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY)**

Social Venture	Core Innovations	Leadership (Building Bridges)	Scaling Up Strategies	Social Impact 15 Years and Over
GB* Bangladesh	Group lending for poor people without collateral.	Relationships with NGOs, government and academia	-Created new microcredit packages	Reached 90 villages Model is now global
GBM** Kenya	Grassroots mobilization to plant trees	Relationships with parliament women groups.	Attracted more volunteers & donors	45 million trees planed
Plan Puebla Mexico	Agricultural technology for poor farmers	Relationships with universities and Government	Used government services to expand	300% increase in family income.
SEWA*** India	Union to campaign for services for poor women workers	Social activist lawyer built connections with other activists & elite officials	Expanded policy influence campaigns.	90% of India's female labor force served
HREC**** USA	Adult education to support grassroots groups to fight inequalities	International experience and relationships with academia, social activists	Reached more adult actors in social movements	Strengthened labor and civil rights movements
ApproT*** ** Kenya	Inexpensive farm tools for poor farmers	Relationships with international NGOs and manufacturers	Cheaper farm tools -Small profit ploughed back	Over 500,000 people moved out of poverty.

\*Grameen Bank

\*\*Green Belt Movement

\*\*\*Self Employed Women Association

\*\*\*\* Highland Research and Educational Center

\*\*\*\*\* ApproTec (Appropriate Technologies for Enterprise Development)

### **The Importance of Innovation, Leadership and Perseverance in Social Entrepreneurship**

The seven cases studied by Alvord et al. (summarized in Table 3 above) are not only means to fight against poverty, but their approaches are highly entrepreneurial in the sense that they all embrace very innovative components. Innovation is considered by many observers to be the foundation of entrepreneurship (Timmons & Spinelli, 2009 and Allen, 2012). These social entrepreneurial ventures attack poverty, and do so in an innovative way. For example, Grameen Bank started out as a deliberate effort to find a way for helping poor women in Bangladesh. Muhammad Yunus, the founder, in a university research project seeking ways to reduce poverty, found out that group lending could rescue poor people from exploitative money lenders. Poor women groups could get small loans (micro-financing) without offering collateral. There was no need for the traditional collateral because group members put enough social pressure on one another to repay the loans. A well-known hurdle in the entrepreneurial path is lack of financing, especially in the start-up phase. The hurdle is particularly high for women, especially poor women (Rouse & Jayawarna, 2006). In the case of the Green Belt Movement

in Kenya, founder Wangari Maathai used her charisma and contacts to get poor people come and work together to improve their well-being through tree planting. In the case of Plan Puebla in Mexico, a group of university researchers developed maize production technology to enable poor farmers to improve their crop yield and income. The Self-Employed Women Association in India is a trade union and that was founded to organize self-employed women in the informal sector in order to improve working conditions such as wages and police protection. The Highland Research and Education Center in the U.S. was founded in 1932 to fight poverty in a poor rural Appalachian mountain community. It provided adult education to organize groups to fight economic and political inequalities.

In Table 3 we also include Appropriate Technologies for Enterprise Development (ApproTec), a social venture in Kenya that is commonly considered to be highly successful (Rangan 2003, Deeds 2007), although it was not one of the seven social enterprises studied by Alvord et al. (2004). Even though the two founders were not Kenyan or even African, they were deeply touched by the poverty within rural peasant farming communities. They were in Kenya as volunteers for U.K.-based international charity organization, ACTIONAID. ACTIONAID, as most other charity organizations, provide goods and services to the poor, which is not necessarily a lasting solution to the poverty problem. The founders left the charity and established ApproTec where they came up with an inexpensive pedal irrigation pump which farmers can use to increase crop yield. This is a more lasting solution to the poverty problem than what ACTIONAID and some other charities commonly do.

All seven cases studied by Alvord et al had leaders with a strong passion about a social problem and the ability to garner support from diverse stakeholders (bridging capacity) to deal with the problem. These two characteristics enabled the founders to find needed resources in the form of money, materials and volunteers. Dees (2007) pointed out that only a small number of social ventures succeed without external support. Dees (1998) also characterizes social entrepreneurs as never being stopped by inadequacies of current resources. Also, the leaders were transformational leaders. Transformational leaders have the ability to inspire others to work for shared causes. They are often called upon to champion and manage radical change in organizations (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank, even though belonging to an elite class (university professor), was touched by the poverty among women in rural Bangladesh. To set up the microfinance bank (Grameen Bank) he had to win support from international donors and government. Most importantly, Yunus was trusted by poor villagers and he trusted them. Ela Bhatt was a social activist lawyer concerned about the social injustices against poor women before she founded a union, the Self-Employed Women's Association, to fight against those injustices. She needed and won the support of other social activists and professionals.

Social networking and social capital have frequently been cited as key factors that lead to entrepreneurial success (Aldrich & Zimmer 1986; Rooks et al., 2016). They are especially important in social ventures. Sharil and Lerner (2006) investigated eight factors that contribute to success in social enterprises. The founder's social network was identified to be the most important factor. Social capital and social networking are particularly important in movement-based social enterprises such as the Self-Employed Women Association in India and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya.

Another common characteristic of high impact social ventures is the founders' realization that poverty eradication has no quick fixes, that scaling the social impact of a social venture is a function of perseverance. Social Entrepreneurship is entrepreneurship in the first place. Joseph Schumpeter (1947) and many others define successful entrepreneurship in terms of venture growth. In the case of social entrepreneurship, expanding the social impact of the venture is the most visible sign of success. Obviously there are different ways a social enterprise can scale up its social impact. Alvord et al. (2004) have identified three patterns in scaling up social impact in social ventures: expanding geographical coverage to provide services to more people, expanding the range of services/products to the initial group or groups targeted by the venture, and undertaking activities that change the behavior of other allies/actors who directly or indirectly influence a given social problem. Grameen Bank started in a single village. It now operates in over 80,000 villages throughout Bangladesh. Additionally, the bank has introduced many additional loan packages, e.g., housing loans and education loans. The Green Belt Movement in Kenya has grown so much as to divide into two: "Green Belt Movement KENYA" and "Green Belt Movement

INTERNATIONAL”. Founded by Wangari Maathai, this organization has been responsible for planting 45 million trees in Kenya, since its inception in the early 1980s. It now operates in 9 districts in Kenya. Rooted in two social movements, women and environment, the Green Belt Movement appeals to a wide cross section of the population, both in Kenya and outside. Clearly, its expansion is hugely related to the constant flow of volunteers, donors and other allies.

The founders of the Grameen Bank, the Self Employed Women Association, the Green Belt Movement and ApproTec came from the elite in their societies. Muhammad Yunus and Wangari Mathai were university professors. E. Bhatt, the founder of the Self Employed Women Association, was a lawyer. So, why did they decide to embark on their social ventures and grow those social ventures? The motivation of social entrepreneurs remains an unanswered question (Ruskin, et al, 2016). In an attempt to explain what motivates people to engage in the creation of social ventures, Constance Beugre (2014) refers to the concept of “moral engagement”. Some people see social problems as violations of moral order. For example, some people believe that people should be treated justly. Accordingly, social injustice is a violation of what is morally right. Unmet social needs must be addressed. A social venture, such as the Self-Employed Women Association in India, described earlier, is a reflection of moral engagement. Social entrepreneurs justify the morality of their actions by creating social ventures. They have to do something about *what* is morally wrong. It is a moral mandate. The moral engagement construct suggests that the most important trigger for launching a social venture is the presence of a violation of one’s moral standards (Buegre, 2014 and Yitshaka & Kropp, 2016, Ruskin. et al, 2016).

## **METHODS**

To study the differences in social entrepreneurship in the four regions (Africa, India, Latin America and North America) we used Internet-based data available on the Ashoka Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship website. The Ashoka Foundation is the biggest international organization that supports social entrepreneurs. The organization celebrates social entrepreneurship success by electing social entrepreneurs to become Fellows in the organization’s social entrepreneurship network. In order to be elected to be a Fellow, the social entrepreneur must satisfy a five-fold selection criteria: new idea, creativity, entrepreneurial quality, social impact, and ethical fiber. The criteria are briefly reviewed below. First, the entrepreneur’s idea must be new, not one that has already been tested in the field. Second, creativity must be an obvious personality trait of the social entrepreneur. Third, the social entrepreneur’s entrepreneurial passion and steadfastness must be high to help him or her deal with foreseeable and unforeseeable challenges. Fourth, the social entrepreneur’s idea must lend itself to adaptability in order to be applied widely to scale up its social impact. Fifth, the social entrepreneur must be trustworthy to be able to create a groundswell of support for the social venture (Ashoka.org, 2016). It is notable here that all five of the criteria Ashoka uses to elect Fellows are commonly cited as factors associated with successful entrepreneurship. A self-sustaining business model involves all five criteria (Allen 2012, Longenecker et al, 2012). As we saw earlier, social entrepreneurship is entrepreneurship to begin with (Dees, 2007 & Beugre, 2014).

Social entrepreneurs nominate themselves or are nominated for candidacy for Ashoka Fellowship election. An Ashoka Foundation country team does the preliminary interview of the candidate, followed by another interview by an Ashoka representative from another country. The most critical step in the selection process is the evaluation by a panel of three “leading social and business entrepreneurs” in the country. This panel makes the final recommendation to the Ashoka Board of Directors who grant Fellowship status to social entrepreneurs. A statement summarizing how the candidate meets the five-fold selection criteria is written by an Ashoka team. These statements or profiles contain observable desirable features of social entrepreneurs and their social ventures, according to the Ashoka Foundation. The Ashoka Foundation posts Ashoka Fellows’ profiles on its website. Currently there are over 3000 Ashoka Fellows from all regions of the world.

By analyzing the information on the Internet related to Fellows from Africa (sub-Sahara minus South Africa), India, Latin America (Brazil, Mexico and Argentina) and North America (U.S. and Canada), we



expected to discover certain inter-regional differences in social entrepreneurs and social enterprises. In the literature review, it was pointed out that social enterprises are driven by social, political and economic environmental factors. These factors are remarkably different in the four regions. While North America and India have been stable democracies for decades, the same cannot be said of Africa and Latin America, to some degree. The North American economies are post-industrial, whereas most Sub-Sahara African economies are pre-industrial, where vast populations depend on peasant farming. India, Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, to some degree, are emerging/industrializing economies.

Culturally, the four regions differ noticeably, especially based on Geert Hofstede's model of National Cultures (Geert-Hofstede.com, 2016). Two aspects of this model are particularly pertinent to this study: power distance and individualism/collectivism. Power distance is a measure of acceptance or rejection of inequalities, such as economic, political and social inequalities. Competitive politics and progressive tax structures, which generally reduce inequalities, are more entrenched in North America than in any of the other three regions. All four regions, with the strong exception of the U.S., accommodate inequalities rather easily. In addition, the U.S. differs from the other three regions in terms of the individualism cultural dimension. The U.S. is as particularly individualistic as the other three regions are particularly collectivistic (Geert-Hofstede.com, 2016).

Given the fairly obvious differences in the four regions covered in the study, social enterprises should focus on different social problems, target different population demographics, and finance their ventures differently. In addition, we should expect to discover differences in the personal characteristics of the initiators of social enterprises, such as career histories before embarking on social ventures, and motivations behind those social ventures (Kerlin, 2010 and Urban, 2008). More categorically we expected to discover and proposed that:

*H1: the most important focus of social enterprises in Africa, India and Latin America is the eradication of poverty.*

*H2: the most important focus of social ventures in the U.S.(North America) is the amelioration of inequalities. Being an advanced economy, we shouldn't find poverty to be the leading driver of social entrepreneurship in the U.S. It hasn't been in the past, as was noted in the literature review section.*

*H3: the focus on inequalities in Latin America, India and Africa should be relatively low given the national cultures in these regions which tend to be tolerant to inequalities. Furthermore, the focus on inequalities in Africa should be particularly low due to the prevalence of undemocratic political institutions (Alvord et al 2004, Datta & Gaily, 2012).*

*H4: personal exposure to social problems tends to be the key trigger for undertaking social ventures, although less so in the U.S. than in the other three regions.*

*H5: social ventures are started with initiators' resources (personal savings, sweat capital and volunteers), although much less so in the U.S. than in the other three regions.*

*H6: external financing (grants by charities and government) is more available for social venture expansion than for launching social ventures, although to a lesser degree in the U.S. than in the other three regions.*

These Propositions will be found to be null ( $H_0$ ) based on the Chi Square ( $X^2$ ); the critical values are set at  $p=.05$ .

The Ashoka Foundation categorizes social entrepreneurship Fellows into five fields: Economic Development, Civic Engagement, Environment, Health, Human Rights, and Learning and Education. We

decided to focus on the field of Economic Development because of its direct connection with poverty alleviation. One reason for our interest in poverty alleviation is that “No Poverty” is the number 1 of the 17 UN-backed Sustainable Development Goals. The second goal is “No Hunger”, a co-relate of poverty. World-wide, poverty eradication has tended to attract the most attention of social entrepreneurship (Alvord et al. 2004). Poverty (population living below a country’s poverty line) is rampant in Africa, with the largest number of the poorest countries in the world. But it does exist even in the U.S. (Borker and Adams, 2012). Another co-relate of poverty is “inequalities”, but this is goal number 10 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The study covers 301 Ashoka Fellows: Africa (17 sub-Sahara countries, excluding South Africa) 98; India 75; Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Mexico) 91; and North America (Canada and U.S.A.) 37. These were the entire populations under the Economic Development field on the Ashoka Social Entrepreneurship Foundation website when it was checked in 2015.

## FINDINGS

Table 4A shows the five sectors/areas of social issues upon which the surveyed Ashoka fellows focused: Rural Development, Job Skills for Employment, Rights for Disadvantaged Communities, Appropriate Technology and Development of Entrepreneurs. The table indicates that the emphasis placed upon these issues differed between African, Indian, Latin American and North American Ashoka fellows. These differences were significant according to Chi-square tests ( $X^2=55.950$ ). As can be seen in table 4A, the surveyed African Ashoka fellows placed a lot more emphasis on rural development than did their counter-parts in the other three regions. Rural development was least emphasized in North America. Thirty-six percent (36%) of the 98 surveyed African fellows had their focus on rural development. An example of an African social enterprise that focused on the eradication of rural poverty is Arid Lands Information Network in Kenya. The organization enables rural farmers to access essential agro-information. Only 11% percent of North American fellows focused on rural development. Thus, Proposition H1, the most important focus of social enterprises in Africa, India and Latin America is the eradication of poverty is mostly valid. However, there was a discrepancy with regard to India.

On the other hand, North America fellows placed most (65%) emphasis on equal rights. Only 11% of the North American fellows focused on rural development. Thus, Proposition H2, the most important focus of social ventures in the U.S. is the amelioration of inequalities. Being an advanced economy, we shouldn’t find poverty to be the leading driver of social entrepreneurship in the U.S. It hasn’t been in the past, as was noted in the literature review section, was overwhelmingly supported.

**TABLE 4A**  
**MAJOR SECTORS AIMED AT BY SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS\***

Ashoka Fellows from	Rural Development	Job Skills for Employment	Equal Rights	Appropriate Technology	Entrepreneurial Skills	N
Africa	<b>36%</b>	14%	19%	24%	7%	98
India	21	12	<b>47</b>	15	5	75
L. America	33	24	20	8	15	91
N. America	<b>11</b>	5	<b>65</b>	11	8	37
Total	28	16	32	15	9	301

\*  $X^2 = 55.950$ , significant at  $p=.05$

Only 19% of the African fellows and only 20% of the Latin American fellows emphasized equal rights in their social ventures. But Indian fellows, with 47%, were closer to the North American fellows than to Africa and Latin America. The emphasis on inequalities in India is relatively high, as it is in

North America. Probably this is a reflection of strong democratic institutions in North America and India (Datta and Gaily, 2012 and Alvord et al., 2004). An example of a social enterprise to fight inequalities in India is the Sammaan Foundation. The organization was started to help rickshaw operators own their rickshaws instead of renting them. As a result rickshaw operators can save enough money to access healthcare, which was previously unaffordable. Proposition H3, the focus on inequalities in L. America, India and Africa should be relatively low given the national cultures in these regions which tend to be tolerant to inequalities. Furthermore, the focus on inequalities in Africa should be particularly low due to the prevalence of undemocratic political institutions (Alvord et al 2014) is not totally supported by this study.

To further highlight the influence of environmental forces on social entrepreneurship we also compare the North American fellows with fellows from each of the other three regions. North America is strikingly different from the other three regions. It is highly economically and politically developed. Sociologically, it has a highly individualistic society. It is also more egalitarian than the other three regions (Geert-Hofstede.com, 2016).

In Table 4B the North American fellows are compared with fellows of each of the other three regions. As Table 4B shows, the comparisons of North American fellows with African and Latin American fellows yield significant differences according to Chi Squares (\* symbol). This is largely due the institutional differences between North America and these 2 regions. However, the comparison of North American with Indian fellows yields insignificant differences. There are differences, but not statistically significant ones. This finding is largely due to the high emphasis on equal rights by both the North American and Indian fellows. Both North America and India have well established democracies (The Economist 2015) that permit and/or encourage social activism leading to equal rights-oriented social ventures.

**TABLE 4B**  
**MAJOR SECTORS AIMED AT BY SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS**  
**(N. AMERICA VS. OTHER REGIONS)**

Ashoka Fellows from	Rural Development	Job Skills for Employment	Equal Rights	Appropriate Technology	Entrepreneurial Skills	N
<b>N. America</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>VS. Africa *</b>	36	14	<b>19</b>	24	7	97
<b>VS. L. Am *</b>	33	24	<b>20</b>	8	15	91
<b>VS. India**</b>	21	12	<b>47</b>	15	5	75

\*Differences between North America & these regions are significant.

\*\* Difference not significant.

Table 5A shows the population segments targeted by Ashoka fellows in the four regions. The targeted populations differed between regions significantly ( $X^2=42.084$ ). Especially significant are the differences between African fellows and fellows in the other three regions. These differences echo those in table 4A about the social problems that were targeted by the social entrepreneurs. While 40% of the African fellows targeted rural peasant farmers, the corresponding number for North American fellows was 14%. On the other hand, the vast majority (62%) of the North American fellows targeted the general community in their social ventures. Latin American and Indian social entrepreneurs tended to target similar population segments. Although there is some poverty in North America, targeting poverty and poor people doesn't appear to attract much attention from social entrepreneurs. This is a further support to Proposition H2.

**TABLE 5A**  
**POPULATION SEGMENTS TARGETED BY SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS\***

Ashoka Fellows from	Rural Farmers	Youth	Women	Entrepreneurs	General Community	N
Africa	<b>40%</b>	20%	18%	3%	<b>19%</b>	98
India	23	8	15	12	43	75
L. America	29	10	10	10	42	91
N. America	<b>14</b>	5	5	14	<b>62</b>	39
Total	29	12	13	9	37	301

\*  $X^2 = 42.084$ , significant at  $p=.05$

Table 5B compares North American fellows with fellows from the other three regions. The comparison with African fellows yields significant differences. The comparisons with Latin American and Indian fellows yields only insignificant differences. It appears that Latin America and India aren't as institutionally different from North America as Africa is. Institutional environmental differences result in differences in social entrepreneurship, as was indicated in the literature review.

**TABLE 5B**  
**POPULATION SEGMENTS TARGETED BY SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS**  
**(N. AMERICA VS. OTHER REGIONS)**

Ashoka Fellows from	Rural Farmers	Youth	Women	Entrepreneurs	General Community	N
<b>N. America</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>VS. Africa *</b>	40	20	18	3	<b>19</b>	98
<b>VS. L. Am **</b>	29	10	10	10	<b>42</b>	91
<b>VS. India **</b>	23	8	15	12	43	75

\*Differences between North America and this region significant; \*\*Differences not significant

Table 6A shows the career backgrounds of Ashoka fellows in terms of the four regions covered in the study. The career backgrounds of the four groups differed significantly ( $X^2 = 62.983$ ). As can be seen from table 6A, 45% of the African fellows were government employees before embarking on their social enterprise initiatives. Probably this is a reflection of the importance of government employment in Sub-Saharan African countries. Forty-four percent of North American fellows were in the private sector as employees or business owners. Again this reflects the dominance of the private sector in the U.S. and Canada. Thirty-seven of Latin American fellows were employees or volunteers in charity or civil society organizations. Again this is a reflection of the huge role civil society organizations play in initiating social enterprises in this region (Kerlin 2010). Table 6A also shows that 20% of the Indian fellows had been social activists (community organizers) for long periods in their lives, often since high school, and rarely holding regular jobs. An example of an Indian long-term social activist is the owner of an organization that helps poor women beggars at temples become independent entrepreneurs. She had been an activist to help beggars since high school. Her Master of Arts degree dissertation was on street beggars in temple complexes.

**TABLE 6A**  
**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR'S CAREER BEFORE LAUNCHING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE\***

Ashoka Fellows from	Educational Institution	Government	Private sector Employment	Volunteer/employee in Existing Charity	Social Activism	N
Africa	17%	<b>45%</b>	19%	17%	2%	94
India	11	19	32	18	<b>20</b>	74
L. America	14	18	28	<b>37</b>	3	90
N. America	3	22	<b>44</b>	31	0	36
Total	13	27	28	25	7	294

\* $X^2 = 62.983$ , significant at  $p=.05$

Table 6B shows that comparisons between North American fellows with fellows from Africa and India in terms of careers before initiating their social ventures yields significant differences. On the other hand there were only insignificant differences between North America and Latin America. The long history of charity organizations in the U.S. is probably the reason why a relatively large percentage (31%) of the North American fellows had career connections with charities, just as civil society organizations were the starting point for new social enterprises in Latin America (37%).

**TABLE 6B**  
**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR'S CAREER BEFORE LAUNCHING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE**  
**(N. AMERICA VS. OTHER REGIONS)**

Ashoka Fellows from	Educational Institution	Government	Private sector Employment	Volunteer/employee in Existing Charity	Social Activism	N
<b>N. America</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>VS. Africa*</b>	17	45	19	17	2	94
<b>VS L. Am**</b>	14	18	28	<b>37</b>	3	90
<b>VS. India*</b>	11	19	32	18	20	74

\*Differences between North America and regions significant

\*\* Differences not significant

Table 7A shows the social entrepreneurs' sources of inspiration. The personal factors that inspired or motivated social entrepreneurs to undertake their social ventures differed significantly between the four regions ( $X^2 = 30.288$ ). The majority of Latin American and African fellows embarked on their social ventures as a result of personal experiences, an empathetic feeling (Ruskin, J. et al, 2016). An example of an Indian social enterprise which arose out of a social entrepreneur's personal experience is a women and child development service center near Calcutta, India. The center was started by a divorced Muslim woman to help divorced Muslim women access services traditionally denied to divorced Muslim women. Another example is in Kenya, Africa, and is called "Market Information Points". The social entrepreneur witnessed how small farmers, including his parents, were being exploited by middlemen. His organization provides farmers the information they use to negotiate with crop buyers in order to increase their earnings. Regarding personal experience as an inspiration for social entrepreneurs, it is noteworthy that this kind of inspiration, was lowest (38%) for North American fellows. Proposition H4, personal exposure to social problems tends to be the key trigger for undertaking social ventures, although less so in the U.S. than in the other three regions seems to be valid.

**TABLE 7A**  
**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR'S MAJOR SOURCE OF INSPIRATION\***

Ashoka Fellows from	Personal Experience	Concern for Others	Family	Total
Africa	<b>53%</b>	44%	3%	94
India	42	<b>51</b>	8	74
L. America	<b>54</b>	25	21	91
N. America	38	35	<b>27</b>	37
Total	49	39	13	296

\* $X^2 = 30.288$ , significant at  $p = .05$

On the other hand, as Table 7A shows, concern for others' social problems was the key (51%) inspiration behind social ventures in India. This is an expression of sympathetic feeling toward others (Ruskin, J. et al, 2016). It may be recalled that social activism was also highest (20%) in India, as compared to the other three regions covered in this study. Organizations in India, such as Tata Social Enterprise Challenge are actively encouraging the youth to become social entrepreneurs (2016).

Families, especially parental background, are a major influence on the decisions of would be entrepreneurs (Longenecker et al. 2012). As table 7a shows, 27% of the North American fellows were inspired by their families to initiate social enterprises. Such influence was especially low in Africa, probably a reflection of the newness and limited size of the social enterprise sector in Africa. An example of a social enterprise that was inspired by family background is the Azzi Institute in Brazil. The founder's mother had always been involved in social work and inspired her son to create an organization (Azzi Institute) to connect philanthropists with social causes.

**TABLE 7B**  
**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR'S MAJOR SOURCE OF INSPIRATION**  
**(N. AMERICA VS. OTHER REGIONS)**

Ashoka Fellows from	Personal Experience	Concern for Others	Family	Total
<b>N. America</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>VS. Africa *</b>	<b>53%</b>	44%	3%	94
<b>VS. L. Am **</b>	<b>54</b>	25	21	91
<b>VS. India *</b>	42	<b>51</b>	8	74

\*Differences between North America and regions significant. \*\*Differences not significant

In Table 7B North American fellows are compared with fellows from the other three regions. In terms of inspiration for their social ventures North American, African and Indian fellows differed significantly. However, only insignificant differences were found between North American and Latin American fellows.

Table 8A shows the sources of financing used by the Ashoka fellows in the four regions to start and expand their social enterprises. The table shows that these sources differed significantly between the four regions ( $X^2 = 55.853$  for starting up and  $X^2 = 51.307$  for expanding). However, in all four regions the importance of owners' resources in financing new social enterprises is clear. This is a common pattern even for commercial ventures (Longenecker et al., 2014 and Allen, 2012). It is probably more profound for social entrepreneurs whom Dees (1998) characterizes as being defiant to limitations of resources.

**TABLE 8A**  
**FINANCING THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE**

Starting Up*						
Ashoka Fellows from	Owner's Resources	Government Resources	Charity Support	Formal Borrowing	Multiple Sources	N
Africa	76%	7%	10%	0%	8%	91
India	82	3	8	4	10	73
L. America	49	1	<b>18</b>	2	21	90
N. America	<b>43</b>	2	11	0	<b>43</b>	37
Total	65	6	12	2	15	291
Expanding**						
Africa	52	12	13	4	19	93
India	44	12	18	7	19	73
L. America	26	11	<b>19</b>	2	42	91
N. America	<b>17</b>	3	8	0	<b>72</b>	36
Total	38	11	15	4	33	293

\*  $X^2 = 55.853$ , significant at  $p=.05$

\*\*  $X^2 = 51.307$  significant at  $p=.05$

Table 8A also shows that North American fellows depended on owners' financing the least. An example of a social enterprise that was started with owner's resources in the U.S. is the Sustainable Economies Law Center, which champions legal reforms to support people who lose jobs when companies close plants. The organization relied on volunteers for the first three years. So, Proposition H5: social ventures are started with initiators' resources (personal savings, sweat capital and volunteers), although much less so in the U.S. than in the other three regions seems to be strongly supported by this study.

Table 8A shows that government and charities were rarely the main sources of financial support for social enterprises in all four regions. Also, these sources were used a little more for expanding social enterprises than for launching them. Accordingly, Proposition H6: external financing (grants by charities and government) is more available for social venture expansion than for launching social ventures, although to a lesser degree in the U.S. than in the other three regions is somewhat supported by this study.

We also see from Table 8A that Latin American social entrepreneurs depend a little more on charity financial support than social entrepreneurs in the other three regions do. This is probably a reflection of the active role civic organizations play in social entrepreneurship in the region (Kerlin, 2010), as was noted in the literature review section. Debt/bank financing is almost non-existent for social ventures.

In Table 8B we compare North American fellows with fellows from the other three regions in term of financing their social enterprises. Table 8B shows that North American fellows finance their social start-up social ventures significantly differently from fellows in the Africa and India. On the other hand, there were only insignificant differences between North American and Latin American fellows.

**TABLE 8B**  
**FINANCING THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (N. AMERICA VS. OTHER REGIONS)**

Starting Up						
Ashoka Fellows from	Owner's Resources	Government Resources	Charity Support	Formal Borrowing	Multiple Sources	N
<b>N. America</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>VS. Africa *</b>	76	7	10	0	8	91
<b>VS L. Am **</b>	49	1	18	2	21	90
<b>VS. India *</b>	82	3	8	4	10	73
Expanding						
<b>N. America</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>VS. Africa *</b>	52	12	13	4	19	93
<b>VS. L. Am *</b>	26	11	19	2	42	91
<b>VS. India *</b>	44	12	18	7	19	73

\*Differences between North America and regions significance

\*\*Differences not significant

## DISCUSSION, SUMMARY AND LIMITATIONS

As expected, Ashoka fellows in North America, Latin America, Africa and India are significantly different in many ways. Clearly the most important differences are between North America and the other three regions. Most of the differences and similarities can be traced to institutional differences. As Kerlin (2010) and Urban (2008) pointed out social problems drive social entrepreneurs. But social problems arise out of environmental forces. The weak economies in most sub-Saharan Africa create wide-spread poverty and disease. This study showed that of the four regions being compared, fighting rural poverty is most predominant among African social entrepreneurs. In contrast, rural poverty is least emphasized among North American social enterprises. Another major finding in the study relates to the high focus on social injustices in North America and India. Social injustices do exist in all four regions covered in the study, but they are most addressed by North American and Indian social entrepreneurs. As Alvord et al. (2004) and Datta and Gaily (2012) point out, it is safe and even attractive to address such injustices where strong democratic institutions exist, as they do in North America and India.

Opportunity recognition is the beginning of any entrepreneurial process. In addition, motivation is the basis of any entrepreneurial undertaking. In North America, a relatively big percentage of the Ashoka fellows fight against social injustices out of sympathy with the victims of social injustices. Such injustices arise out of the vagaries of the capitalistic market economy, such as closing a plant and relocating to a non-union region. In Africa a relatively large percentage of the Ashoka fellows fight against poverty because they experienced it personally; it was out of empathy rather than sympathy (Ruskin, J. et al. 2016).

Although the Ashoka fellows in the four regions differed in the ways they financed their social ventures, there are some noticeable similarities. Like commercial entrepreneurs, most social entrepreneurs finance their start-ups internally (personal savings and sweat capital and volunteers) (Allen, 2013). This was especially the case for African social entrepreneurs. North American fellows depended on their own resources the least. The dependence on own resources was still high for expanding social ventures because external sources of financing increased only slightly. Again this pattern is shared with commercial entrepreneurs (Meyskens, et al, 2010 and Austin et al., 2006). North American and Latin American social ventures depended on grants and charities the most. Probably this reflects the long history of charities and civic organizations in these regions.



This study clearly shows that economic and political institutions determine the nature of social entrepreneurship in any country. The comparisons between North American fellows and fellows from the other three regions indicate that Africa is the most different region from North America. Fellows from these two regions significantly differed in every category of comparison that was made in the study. The North American region is different from the other three regions economically, politically and socio-culturally, but the gap is biggest with regard to Africa. In this study five comparisons between North America fellows with other fellows were made. In four comparisons the differences between North American and Latin American fellows were statistically insignificant, using Chi Squares. The comparisons between Indian and North American fellows yielded insignificant differences two times. It seems that Latin America is closer to North America than India is, at least in terms of social entrepreneurship. The similarities between North America and Latin America probably reflect economic measures, as per World Bank data (World Bank, 2016). The similarities between North America and India probably reflect political/democratic measures as per the Democratic Index (The Economist 2015). However, North American social entrepreneurs were closer to the Latin American social entrepreneurs than they were to the Indian social entrepreneurs. Therefore, this study seems to imply that economic environmental factors may constitute a more important influence on the processes and outcomes of social entrepreneurship than do political and sociological factors. There is a need for a more systematic empirical study on this matter.

A major limitation of this study is the nature of the sample. Even though South Africa was excluded from the African sample, Nigeria and Kenya, probably the most developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa, other than South Africa, contributed nearly 50 percent of the African sample. In addition, only Ashoka fellows focusing on Economic Development were studied. Extending the study to other focuses, such as Health, will most likely provide a fuller understanding of how social entrepreneurs are tackling the eradication of poverty.

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