

Social Entrepreneurship and the Circular Economy: A Path to Sustainable Development

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How to cite this article: Sathish Kumar S, Ashish Mishra, Sajitha J Kurup, Sanjose A Thomas, Salma Begum (2024) Social Entrepreneurship and the Circular Economy: A Path to Sustainable Development. *Library Progress International*, 44(3), 16243-16251

Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy as a pathway to sustainable development. As global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality become increasingly urgent, innovative solutions are essential for fostering resilience and promoting equitable growth. Social entrepreneurship, defined by its dual mission of addressing social issues while achieving economic viability, offers a unique framework for integrating circular economy principles, which emphasize the restoration of ecosystems, resource efficiency, and waste reduction.

The paper analyzes key concepts and theories underpinning both fields, highlighting how social enterprises can serve as catalysts for circular initiatives. By leveraging community engagement and collaborative models, social entrepreneurs can create value that not only supports economic growth but also enhances social equity and environmental sustainability. Case studies illustrate successful implementations of circular practices within social enterprises across various sectors, demonstrating their potential to transform local economies and contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Furthermore, the paper identifies barriers to the integration of social entrepreneurship and circular economy practices, including regulatory challenges, funding gaps, and the need for greater awareness and education. By addressing these challenges, policymakers and stakeholders can support the growth of social enterprises and facilitate the transition toward a circular economy. This synthesis of literature contributes to a deeper understanding of how social entrepreneurship can drive sustainable development and offers insights for future research, practice, and policy. Ultimately, this paper underscores the importance of fostering synergistic relationships between social entrepreneurship and the circular economy to achieve a more sustainable and equitable world.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Circular Economy, Sustainable Development, Resource Efficiency, Waste Reduction, Ecosystem Restoration, Social Impact, Economic Viability, Community Engagement, Collaborative Models, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Innovative Solutions, Equity, Policy Framework, Case Studies

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a pivotal force in addressing pressing societal challenges, promoting innovative solutions that align economic viability with social and environmental sustainability. In recent years, the concept of the circular economy has gained traction as a transformative framework that seeks to minimize waste and maximize resource

efficiency by designing products and systems that prioritize reuse, recycling, and regeneration. This synergy between social entrepreneurship and the circular economy offers a promising pathway to sustainable development, particularly in the face of escalating global issues such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality.

By integrating circular economy principles into their business models, social enterprises can create systemic changes that not only enhance environmental stewardship but also empower marginalized communities. These enterprises often operate at the grassroots level, leveraging local knowledge and resources to implement solutions that foster social inclusion and economic resilience. This study explores the intersection of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy, highlighting how innovative practices can drive sustainable development while addressing societal needs.

Through an examination of various case studies and theoretical frameworks, this paper aims to elucidate the mechanisms through which social entrepreneurs contribute to the circular economy and promote sustainable practices. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to harness the full potential of social entrepreneurship in fostering a sustainable future, thereby contributing to the global agenda of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Background of the study

The increasing urgency of environmental degradation, resource depletion, and socio-economic inequality has catalyzed a shift toward sustainable development practices across the globe. Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a pivotal mechanism to address these multifaceted challenges by combining social objectives with entrepreneurial vigor. It seeks to create innovative solutions that not only generate economic value but also yield social and environmental benefits, thereby fostering a more equitable and sustainable society.

In parallel, the concept of the circular economy has gained prominence as an alternative to the traditional linear model of production and consumption. The circular economy emphasizes resource efficiency, waste reduction, and the continual use of materials through recycling, reuse, and regeneration. This approach not only mitigates the adverse impacts of economic activities on the environment but also creates new business opportunities and promotes sustainable practices.

Social Entrepreneurship in the Circular Economy



Source: [fastercapital.com](https://www.fastercapital.com)

The intersection of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy presents a unique pathway to sustainable development. By leveraging entrepreneurial innovation within the framework of circular economic principles, social enterprises can address pressing societal needs while contributing to environmental sustainability. This integration allows for the development of business models that prioritize social impact, enhance community resilience, and promote responsible consumption and production patterns.

Despite the potential synergies between social entrepreneurship and the circular economy, there remains a significant gap

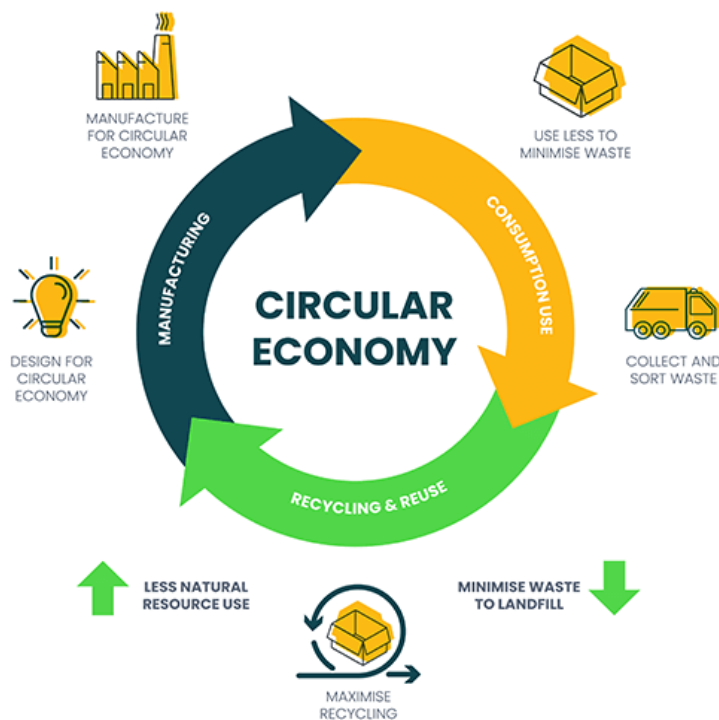
in the literature regarding their combined impact on sustainable development. This study aims to explore how social enterprises can effectively harness circular economy principles to drive sustainable practices, enhance social value, and contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through a comprehensive review of existing research, this paper seeks to illuminate the pathways through which social entrepreneurship can support the transition to a circular economy, ultimately fostering sustainable development and addressing the critical challenges of our time.

Justification

In recent years, the interconnected challenges of environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic instability have necessitated a transformative approach to development. This paper explores the symbiotic relationship between social entrepreneurship and the circular economy as a pathway to sustainable development.

1. Addressing Global Challenges: Social entrepreneurship plays a critical role in addressing pressing global challenges, including poverty, inequality, and environmental sustainability. By integrating social objectives with innovative business models, social enterprises create solutions that not only generate profit but also drive positive social change. This paper aims to highlight how these enterprises contribute to sustainable development goals (SDGs) by providing inclusive economic opportunities and addressing environmental issues.

2. The Circular Economy Paradigm: The concept of a circular economy is increasingly recognized as essential for promoting sustainability. Unlike the traditional linear economy, which follows a "take-make-dispose" model, the circular economy emphasizes resource efficiency, waste reduction, and the sustainable use of materials. This review will discuss how social entrepreneurs leverage circular economy principles to create business models that minimize waste and promote resource regeneration, thus fostering environmental sustainability.



Source: LinkedIn

3. Intersection of Social and Environmental Goals: This research will explore the intersection of social and environmental goals within the framework of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy. It is crucial to understand how social enterprises can effectively balance profit-making with their commitment to social and environmental responsibility. By analyzing case studies and existing literature, this paper will demonstrate how social entrepreneurship can drive circular economy initiatives that lead to sustainable development outcomes.

4. Policy and Framework Implications: The findings of this study will also have significant implications for policymakers and practitioners. By understanding the role of social entrepreneurship in promoting circular economy practices, policymakers can design supportive frameworks and incentives that encourage the growth of social enterprises. This paper will provide recommendations for integrating social entrepreneurship into national and local development strategies,

thereby enhancing the potential for sustainable development.

5. Contribution to Existing Literature: Despite the growing interest in social entrepreneurship and the circular economy, there remains a gap in the literature that comprehensively examines their interplay and collective impact on sustainable development. This review seeks to fill that gap by synthesizing existing research, identifying best practices, and proposing a holistic framework for understanding how social entrepreneurship can effectively advance circular economy principles. This paper is justified by the urgent need to explore innovative approaches to sustainable development through the lens of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy. By addressing global challenges, promoting resource efficiency, and informing policy, this research contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable development and highlights the potential of social enterprises as catalysts for change.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore how social entrepreneurship practices can integrate circular economy principles to create sustainable solutions that address social, economic, and environmental challenges.
2. To assess the contributions of social enterprises to achieving specific Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to environmental sustainability, economic growth, and social equity.
3. To highlight successful case studies of social enterprises that have effectively implemented circular economy strategies, illustrating the potential for scalability and replication in various contexts.
4. To investigate the key challenges and barriers faced by social entrepreneurs in adopting circular economy models, including funding, policy, and market access issues.
5. To provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to foster an ecosystem that supports social entrepreneurship and the circular economy, facilitating sustainable development.

Literature Review

The intersection of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy (CE) has garnered significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of sustainable development. Social entrepreneurship is defined as a process through which individuals or organizations develop solutions to social problems, while the circular economy promotes resource efficiency and sustainability by minimizing waste and maximizing resource use (Yunus et al., 2010; Geissdoerfer et al., 2018). This literature review aims to explore the synergies between social entrepreneurship and the circular economy and their collective contributions to sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of social entrepreneurship often draw upon social innovation and value creation theories. According to Leadbeater (1997), social entrepreneurs are driven by a desire to create social change, leveraging entrepreneurial practices to develop innovative solutions to societal challenges. This notion is supported by the work of Peredo and Chrisman (2006), who emphasize the role of social entrepreneurs in addressing systemic issues through innovative and sustainable business models.

The circular economy, on the other hand, is rooted in systems thinking and ecological economics. It aims to decouple economic growth from resource consumption, focusing on the regenerative capacity of natural systems (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). The principles of the circular economy—such as designing for longevity, promoting sharing and reuse, and ensuring that materials are recycled—are essential in crafting sustainable business practices that align with social entrepreneurship's goals (Murray et al., 2017).

Social Entrepreneurship and Circular Economy Integration

The integration of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy is increasingly recognized as a pathway to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs). Research indicates that social enterprises often embody circular economy principles, creating business models that prioritize sustainability while addressing social issues. For instance, social enterprises focused on waste management not only contribute to environmental sustainability by reducing landfill waste but also generate employment opportunities for marginalized communities (Rizvi et al., 2020).

Moreover, the role of social entrepreneurs in advancing circular economy practices is critical. According to Bocken et al. (2014), social enterprises are uniquely positioned to drive innovation in circular business models by fostering collaborations among various stakeholders. These collaborations facilitate knowledge sharing and resource optimization, ultimately leading to more sustainable practices. Furthermore, social entrepreneurs often prioritize social equity in their operations, ensuring that marginalized populations benefit from circular economy initiatives (Schmid et al., 2020).

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the potential synergies, the integration of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy faces several challenges. One significant hurdle is the lack of awareness and understanding of circular economy principles among social entrepreneurs (Witjes et al., 2018). Additionally, financial constraints and limited access to resources can hinder the development of circular business models in social enterprises (Hahn et al., 2015).

However, opportunities exist for overcoming these challenges. Increased collaboration among stakeholders—including governments, non-profits, and private sector actors—can provide the necessary support for social enterprises to adopt circular economy practices (De Angelis et al., 2020). Furthermore, education and training programs focused on circular economy concepts can empower social entrepreneurs to innovate and develop sustainable solutions (Pereira et al., 2020). The interplay between social entrepreneurship and the circular economy presents a promising avenue for advancing sustainable development. By leveraging innovative business models that prioritize both social equity and environmental sustainability, social enterprises can play a crucial role in promoting circular economy principles. As research in this field continues to evolve, further exploration of the synergies, challenges, and opportunities will be essential for understanding the full potential of social entrepreneurship in achieving sustainable development goals.

Material and Methodology

Research Design:

This research employs a systematic literature review design to explore the intersection of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy, focusing on their contributions to sustainable development. The research aims to synthesize existing literature, identifying key themes, trends, and gaps in the current body of knowledge. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how social entrepreneurship initiatives can enhance circular economy practices and promote sustainability.

Data Collection Methods:

Data for this study was collected through an extensive search of academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. The search strategy involved using a combination of keywords such as "social entrepreneurship," "circular economy," "sustainable development," and "social impact." Articles published from 2000 to 2024 were prioritized to ensure the inclusion of recent studies and emerging trends. The selection process included peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and relevant book chapters, focusing on empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and case studies that illustrate the practical applications of social entrepreneurship within the circular economy framework.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

Inclusion criteria for this review encompassed:

- Articles published in peer-reviewed journals or reputable academic sources.
- Research that specifically examines the relationship between social entrepreneurship and circular economy practices.
- Studies that provide empirical evidence or case studies demonstrating the impact of social entrepreneurship on sustainable development outcomes.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Articles not written in English.
- Studies that focus solely on traditional entrepreneurship without consideration of social or environmental impacts.
- Publications lacking empirical data or theoretical frameworks relevant to the topic.

Ethical Consideration:

This study adheres to ethical standards in research by ensuring that all included studies are properly cited and that the authors' intellectual property rights are respected. No original data collection was conducted, and all secondary data used in the review were sourced from publicly available literature. The review aims to contribute positively to the discourse on social entrepreneurship and the circular economy, promoting transparency and integrity in the reporting of findings.

Results and Discussion

1. **Synergistic Relationship:** The study reveals a significant synergistic relationship between social entrepreneurship and the principles of the circular economy. Social enterprises are often at the forefront of implementing circular practices that not only reduce waste but also address social challenges, demonstrating how these two fields can complement and enhance each other.

2. **Innovative Business Models:** Findings indicate that social entrepreneurs are developing innovative business models that prioritize sustainability and social impact. These models often incorporate circular economy principles, such as product lifecycle management, resource recovery, and sustainable sourcing, allowing them to achieve both economic viability and social objectives.
3. **Community Engagement:** The research highlights the importance of community engagement in social entrepreneurship efforts related to the circular economy. Successful social enterprises often involve local communities in decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration. This participatory approach enhances the effectiveness of circular initiatives and builds stronger social ties.
4. **Environmental Impact:** The study demonstrates that social enterprises contribute significantly to environmental sustainability by adopting circular practices. By focusing on waste reduction, recycling, and resource efficiency, these organizations not only mitigate environmental harm but also educate and empower communities to adopt sustainable practices.
5. **Economic Resilience:** Findings suggest that social entrepreneurship enhances economic resilience within communities. By creating jobs and fostering local economies through circular business practices, social enterprises can provide stable employment opportunities, particularly in underserved areas, thereby contributing to overall economic development.
6. **Challenges and Barriers:** Despite the positive outcomes, the study identifies several challenges faced by social entrepreneurs in integrating circular economy principles. These include limited access to funding, lack of awareness about circular practices, and regulatory barriers that hinder innovation. Addressing these challenges is crucial for maximizing the potential of social entrepreneurship in achieving sustainable development.
7. **Policy Support:** The research underscores the need for supportive policy frameworks that encourage the growth of social enterprises and their engagement with the circular economy. Policymakers are urged to create incentives, provide funding opportunities, and foster collaboration between social enterprises, government agencies, and the private sector to facilitate sustainable development.
8. **Future Directions:** The study concludes with recommendations for future research to explore the long-term impacts of social entrepreneurship on the circular economy. It suggests that further investigation into successful case studies and the development of metrics to measure social and environmental outcomes can provide valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers alike.

The findings of this study illustrate the potential of social entrepreneurship as a catalyst for advancing circular economy practices and promoting sustainable development. By aligning economic goals with social and environmental responsibility, social enterprises play a crucial role in addressing pressing global challenges while fostering a more sustainable future.

Limitations of the study

1. **Scope of Literature:** This review primarily focuses on literature published in English, which may limit the inclusion of relevant studies from non-English speaking countries. Consequently, this may introduce a bias in understanding the global landscape of social entrepreneurship and circular economy practices.
2. **Evolving Nature of Concepts:** Social entrepreneurship and circular economy are rapidly evolving fields. The findings and insights presented may not fully capture the latest developments or emerging trends, given that the review is based on existing literature up to a specific date.
3. **Variability in Definitions:** The terms “social entrepreneurship” and “circular economy” are interpreted differently across various contexts and cultures. This variability in definitions may lead to inconsistencies in the application and analysis of these concepts, potentially impacting the conclusions drawn from the literature.
4. **Lack of Empirical Evidence:** Many studies included in this review may be theoretical or conceptual in nature, with limited empirical evidence to support their claims. This lack of empirical data may hinder the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the impact of social entrepreneurship on sustainable development within a circular economy framework.
5. **Focus on Specific Regions:** The majority of the reviewed literature may concentrate on specific geographical regions, such as Europe or North America. This regional focus may limit the applicability of the findings to other areas, especially in developing countries where social entrepreneurship and circular economy practices may differ significantly.

6. **Methodological Limitations:** The methodologies employed in the reviewed studies vary widely, ranging from qualitative case studies to quantitative analyses. This heterogeneity can complicate comparisons and synthesis of findings, potentially affecting the overall robustness of the review.
7. **Time Constraints:** Due to the time limitations inherent in conducting a literature review, some relevant studies may not have been included. This could result in an incomplete understanding of the relationship between social entrepreneurship and circular economy initiatives.
8. **Potential Bias in Source Selection:** The selection of literature for this review may be influenced by the author's biases or preferences, which could affect the objectivity of the findings. A more systematic approach to source selection may yield different insights.
9. **Focus on Successful Models:** The review may emphasize successful case studies of social entrepreneurship and circular economy practices, potentially overlooking challenges and failures. This focus might create an overly optimistic view of the potential for social entrepreneurship to drive sustainable development.

Future Scope

The intersection of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy presents a promising avenue for sustainable development, warranting further exploration in several key areas:

1. **Innovative Business Models:** Future research should focus on developing and testing innovative business models that integrate social entrepreneurship principles with circular economy practices. This includes examining how social enterprises can effectively leverage circular strategies to enhance both social impact and environmental sustainability.
2. **Policy Frameworks:** There is a need for comprehensive studies on the impact of governmental policies and regulations that facilitate the growth of social enterprises within the circular economy. Future research can evaluate existing frameworks and propose new policies that support sustainable practices, encouraging collaboration between public and private sectors.
3. **Impact Measurement:** A critical area for future inquiry is the development of robust metrics and tools to measure the social, economic, and environmental impacts of social enterprises operating in a circular economy. Establishing standardized impact assessment frameworks will enable better comparisons and insights into best practices.
4. **Sector-Specific Studies:** Further investigation into specific sectors, such as agriculture, fashion, and technology, can provide valuable insights into how social entrepreneurship can be integrated into circular economy principles. These studies can uncover unique challenges and opportunities faced by different industries.
5. **Community Engagement:** Future research should emphasize the role of community engagement and participation in the success of social enterprises within the circular economy. Understanding how local communities can actively participate in and benefit from these initiatives will be crucial for fostering sustainable development.
6. **Technology and Innovation:** The role of technology in enhancing the efficacy of social enterprises within the circular economy is an important area for future research. Investigating how digital tools and innovations can optimize resource use and promote sustainable practices can lead to more effective solutions.
7. **Global Perspectives:** Comparative studies across different geographical regions will enrich the understanding of how cultural, economic, and social contexts influence the interplay between social entrepreneurship and the circular economy. This global perspective can identify best practices and facilitate knowledge sharing.
8. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conducting longitudinal studies on successful social enterprises operating within the circular economy will provide deeper insights into the long-term sustainability and scalability of these models. Such research can inform future strategies for emerging social entrepreneurs.

By addressing these areas, future research can contribute significantly to the understanding and advancement of social entrepreneurship within the circular economy, ultimately fostering a more sustainable future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intersection of social entrepreneurship and the circular economy presents a transformative approach to achieving sustainable development. By leveraging innovative business models that prioritize social impact alongside economic viability, social entrepreneurs can effectively address pressing societal challenges while promoting environmental sustainability. The principles of the circular economy—such as resource efficiency, waste reduction, and

sustainable production—align closely with the mission of social enterprises to create long-lasting, positive changes in their communities.

This paper highlights the potential of social entrepreneurship to foster resilience and adaptability in the face of global challenges such as climate change and social inequality. As social enterprises adopt circular economy practices, they not only contribute to a more sustainable future but also inspire systemic change across industries and sectors. Policymakers, business leaders, and communities must collaborate to create supportive ecosystems that empower social entrepreneurs, facilitating their access to resources, knowledge, and networks.

Ultimately, embracing the synergy between social entrepreneurship and the circular economy can catalyze a shift towards a more sustainable and equitable world. By prioritizing both social and environmental objectives, stakeholders can work collectively towards a future where economic growth is inclusive, responsible, and beneficial for all. As we move forward, continued research and dialogue will be essential to explore the evolving landscape of social entrepreneurship and its role in advancing sustainable development within the framework of the circular economy.

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