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## FEMALE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS IN AFRICA CREATING SOCIAL VALUE THROUGH INNOVATION\*

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**Abstract.** The objectives of the study were to identify the types and levels of innovations and the business categories of Female Social Entrepreneurs in Africa (FSEAs) and to determine how these FSEAs create social value in their societies. The database of Ashoka, an international organisation promoting exceptional social entrepreneurs, known as changemakers, were used to identify 142 FSEAs from 20 African countries. Schumpeter's (1939) typology of innovation and Hamel and Breen's (2007) hierarchy of innovation were used to determine the type and social value created and the FSEAs' contribution to society. The results indicate that at 85%, most FSEAs have post-school qualifications, of which 43% have a degree and 24% post graduate qualifications. The business categories of the majority of FSEAs are in Education and Learning (30), Development and Prosperity (30), and Health and Fitness (21). Furthermore, the Schumpeterian type of innovation of the majority is Opening of New Markets (78) and Introduction of New Products or Services (46). The Hamel and Breen's level of innovation of the majority of FSEAs is Product and Service Innovation (114). We found that the FSEAs identified and addressed important challenges in their communities through various types of innovation. This process created valuable social contributions to their communities, the broader society and, in some instances, other African countries.

**Keywords:** Africa; female; innovation; social entrepreneurs; social value

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## 1. Introduction

Female entrepreneurs are more inclined to contribute to society than to create personal wealth, therefore, they are important for the socio-economic development of their countries (Bosma, Ionescu-Somers, Kelley, Levie & Tanarwa, 2019; Veras, 2015). In this study we investigated the level and types of innovations of female social entrepreneurs in Africa (FSEAs) and how they create value in their societies. From the literature it is clear that innovation is an essential entrepreneurial activity (Guerrero & Urbano, 2021; Lumpkin & Frese, 2009; Pearce, Fritz & Davis, 2010; Rauch, Wiklund, Schumpeter & Miller, 1987; Yusoff, Razak, Hassan & Zainol, 2018). Entrepreneurship theories have identified different types (Schumpeter, 1939; Zhao, 2005) and levels (Elbaz, Binkour & Majdouline, 2013; Hamel & Breen, 2007; Lewick, Williams, Omar & Tjandra, 2015) of innovation. Entrepreneurs create commercial value and contribute to economic development (Loof & Heshmati, 2006; Lumpkin & Frese, 2009; Neneh & Van Zyl, 2017; Rauch, Wiklund & Schumpeter, 1965) whereas the primary aim of social entrepreneurs is to create social value (Nicholls, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2020; Schumpeter, 1909). Furthermore, the contribution or value created by female entrepreneurs is important for economic development (Ambrish, 2014; Veras, 2005) and the aim of their businesses is to make a difference and improve society (Bosma et al., 2019). A gap in the literature is that limited empirical research have been conducted to determine the social value that FSEAs create through their innovations.

The objectives of this study are to:

- (1) Identify the types and levels of innovations of FSEAs.
- (2) Determine how these FSEAs create social value in their societies.

Therefore, the contribution of this study is to provide an understanding of the importance, relevance and value that FSEAs create through innovations in their societies. The study thus addresses three primary research questions:

- (1) What are the types of innovations introduced by FSEAs?
- (2) What are the level of innovations introduced by FSEAs?
- (3) What social value do FSEAs create in their societies?

The structure of the paper is as follows:

A literature review section to conceptualise the most important concepts and theories relevant to the study, including social entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurs, value creation and innovation. This section culminates in a discussion of the relevant theories and associated propositions to be investigated.

The research methodology section explains FSEAs' type and level of innovation, while the social value that they add is explored through a qualitative research approach.

In the results section the information obtained through the questionnaires are analysed and this section is followed by a discussion of the findings and the conclusions drawn.

This study contributes to the understanding of the innovations and social value created by FSEAs.

## 2. Literature Review

Entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurs, social value and innovation are contextualised as being relevant to this study.

### 2.1. Entrepreneurship and Social Entrepreneurship

In some economies, including South Africa, Guatemala, Panama and India, at least seven out of 10 entrepreneurs indicated that they started their organisations to 'make a difference in the world'. The motivation of less than two out of 10 entrepreneurs in Norway and Poland is to build wealth. These results illustrate that the entrepreneurs have aspirations other than wealth creation (Bosma et al, 2019). Entrepreneurs are unique because few have the ability and confidence to act beyond the familiar, know how to overcome resistance, and are resilient when facing

adversity (Schumpeter, 1949). Analysis of Schumpeter's texts (1909, 1934) (published by Taylor & Francis, 2003), through a social innovation and social entrepreneurship lens, indicate that entrepreneurs drive economic development based on creativity. According to McNeill (2012), Schumpeter's (1909, 1934) definition of an entrepreneur as a person who reconfigures the allocation of existing resources, generates new value, and moves towards egalitarianism, demonstrates a link between social and commercial entrepreneurship. However, it seems that social entrepreneurs are even more exceptional than commercial entrepreneurs. They adapt existing models for the benefit of people, communities, and countries, believing that they can change communities and societies. Thus, they act creatively by combining business, charity and social models to address communities' problems and ensure sustainable new social value (Nicholls, 2008). Porter and Kramer (2020) indicate that the capitalist system is under scrutiny with the view that companies prosper at the expense of the general community and propose resetting the boundaries of capitalism through shared value. Shared value involves expansion of the total pool of economic and social value and opens up new avenues for innovation. Serving developing economies, that are usually home to many disadvantaged communities, offers excellent opportunities as viable markets. Social entrepreneurs use viable business models and new product concepts to meet social needs and create shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2020). According to Schumpeter (1909), social entrepreneurs have bold visions and a social mission. They make fundamental changes to address the cause of problems in the social sector to reform and revolutionize societies. They aim to make beneficial changes to societal systems and ensure the sustainability of their improvements. Their initiatives in areas such as economic development, education, health care and other social fields usually start in local communities but are often replicable and can contribute to improvements globally. Santos (2012) opines that an organization should have a dominant focus, either value capture as in commercial entrepreneurial organizations, or value creation as in social entrepreneurship. From the reviewed literature it can be concluded that all entrepreneurs are creative and innovative to ensure viable business models. Yet, there is clear distinction between commercial and social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurship focuses on social value creation and long-term change as opposed to commercial entrepreneurship that is primarily concerned with profit or value capture. Therefore, social entrepreneurs are a special type of entrepreneur – they are changemakers who create social value within the societies in which they operate.

Studies in the field of social entrepreneurship indicate that these entrepreneurs are motivated by the non-pecuniary benefits of innovations aimed at improving people's lives (Dacin, Dacin & Matear, 2010; Jensen, Liu & Schøtt, 2017). Yet, earning an income and/or profitability are also vital to social entrepreneurs to ensure the sustainability of their businesses. Thus, innovation is important because, according to Jensen et al. (2017), the level of innovation of a business increases the self-determination of entrepreneurs and ensures financial and non-financial benefits, including job and life satisfaction. In addition, and due to severe resource constraints of social entrepreneurs, their ability to rely on their network building and relationship management contributes to their success (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006). Thus, it is clear that the primary motivation of social entrepreneurs is to create social value, but their businesses have to ensure income through their personal networks and be sufficiently profitable to ensure sustainability.

## **2.2. Female entrepreneurs**

Female entrepreneurship is vital in many countries and, according to a United Nations report, the advancement of females contributes to economic development and steady economic growth. In contrast, economies in which women do not participate remain stagnant (Ambrish, 2014). Véras (2015) found that female owned businesses are moving from "economically insignificant to growing contributors to the economy" and that their increased relevance should be taken into consideration because they can grow their businesses in their countries as well as internationally. Empowerment of female entrepreneurship can contribute significantly to economic growth. Women who start businesses more often agree that their motivation for so doing is to make a difference to the world and that entrepreneurship is critical to alleviate female poverty (Bosma, Ionescu-Somers, Kelley, Levie & Tanarwa, 2019). According to Brush and Cooper (2012) less than 10% of all research in the field of entrepreneurship is about women entrepreneurs, therefore, even though their contribution to employment,

innovation and the welfare of society is essential, our knowledge about them is limited. In addition, most of the studies on female entrepreneurs are on women in developed countries with little research having been undertaken on women in developing countries. In agreement, Meyer (2018) states there is limited research on women, entrepreneurship and their contribution to business and society. She also found that there are fewer female entrepreneurs than males and that women are less likely to grow their businesses. Women's motivation to remain in business includes independence, work-life balance, the challenges involved and their contribution to society (Meyer, 2018). Due to business opportunities entrepreneurship is a viable career option for women in Africa. Thus, women play an essential role in society and specifically in their contribution to economic welfare as employees, managers, entrepreneurs and leaders. These women create businesses to earn an income for themselves and their employees. Some of these women are social entrepreneurs whose primary objectives are to create social value in their communities.

Generally, the belief is that male entrepreneurs outperform female entrepreneurs (Amine & Straub, 2009; Nichter & Goldmark, 2009). In a study involving 937 South African enterprises Williams and Kedir (2018) found that businesses with a female owner, sometimes in conjunction with a male owner, outperformed those owned by males only. Their findings are in agreement with those of Robson and Obeng (2008) and Badran (2014) who determined that the performance of female entrepreneurs is equal to those of males, while other researchers (Deshpande & Sharma, 2013; Sasidharan & Raj, 2013; Zolin, Stuetzer & Watson, 2013) determined that females outperformed their male counterparts. Kariv (2010), however, found that the role of gender does not affect business performance significantly, rather that creativity and innovation contribute significantly to business performance. Veras (2015) found that female entrepreneurs often address societal needs resulting in social improvement and economic progress. Scarlata, Alemany and Zacharakis (2021) found that teams with a higher proportion of females in venture philanthropy firms have a higher risk-taking profile than teams dominated by men. This implies that social entrepreneurs looking for financing might have a better chance of getting their investment approved if the venture philanthropy management team has a higher proportion of females. The reason can be that when confronted with critical issues such as poverty, climate change, malnutrition, access to education and other social problems women are willing to take more risks. Due to their orientation to create social value the higher risk propensity of females versus males might also be a distinguishing characteristic for female social entrepreneurs.

Thus, as stated previously, the value and contribution of female entrepreneurs are significant and warrant the dedication of more resources to promote female involvement in business ownership. Their social contribution can be increased by supporting female entrepreneurship through education, training and opportunities, as well as resources such as capital and land.

### **2.3. Innovation**

Although there are various definitions of entrepreneurship, most conclude that entrepreneurship is the process that an entrepreneur follows to establish an organisation that starts with identifying an opportunity and an innovation that the entrepreneur can commercialise through planning, start-up, managing and growing the business. Innovation is a continuous process of exploring, learning and improving that is always accompanied by the risk of failure (Dees, Emerson & Economy, 2001). However, innovative and ambitious entrepreneurs are more likely to grow their organizations; therefore, the focus has moved to growth and innovation-oriented entrepreneurship rather than increasing the number of small and medium enterprises (Stam, 2015). According to Anwar, Khan and Khan (2018), entrepreneurial innovation determines a country's competitive advantage. Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel and Wright (2014) point to the importance of the entrepreneurial ecosystem that influences the quality and quantity of entrepreneurial innovation because it affects the potential rewards of entrepreneurship. The present study acknowledges the importance and relevance of innovation as a key requirement of successful entrepreneurs.

## 2.4. Innovation theories and models

Godin (2019:180) analysed theories on innovation and found while there are many models, approaches and conceptual thoughts on innovation, comprehensive theories are limited and modest. He determined that the theory of innovation formulated by Schumpeter (Business Cycles, 1939:87-102), one of the first authors who reflected on innovation, is a theory of technological change based on an analytical tool or model to explain the causes of change in economic life. Innovation is a theoretical concept implying to do something differently through the introduction of new ideas, methods or products. The entrepreneur combines resources or production factors to ensure innovative new combinations, and, as a result, becomes a ‘change-maker’. The innovation model applied in the present study consists of five types of innovation (Schumpeter, 1934), and adapted to the more recent social innovation models of the OECD (2010) and of Porter and Kramer (2019):

- Introduction of a new product or service or new quality of product or service, that are unfamiliar to consumers. According to the OECD (2010) identifying and delivering new products and services that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities.
- Introduction of a new method of production, not necessarily a new discovery but applied in another context. According to the OECD (2010) identifying and implementing new labour market integration processes, new competencies, new jobs, and new forms of participation, as diverse elements that each contribute to improving the position of individuals in the workforce.
- Opening of a new market, thus introducing something that is new to a specific market and, according to Porter and Kramer (2019), reconceiving products and markets.
- A new source of supply of raw materials or semi-manufactured goods.
- Carrying out the new organisation of any industry.

Based on this model proposition 1 is:

### **Proposition 1: FSEAs apply at least one type of innovation.**

To determine the value of an innovation, Hamel and Breen (2007:14) developed a hierarchy of innovation whereby they propose that higher tiers will contribute to higher levels of value creation. Building up from the base the innovation hierarchy are:

- Level 1 – Operational Innovation: makes it possible for businesses to operate better, at a higher and/or leaner pace by improving inter alia their manufacturing, service delivery and administration processes.
- Level 2 – Product and Service Innovation: varies from completely new products or services, repositioning existing products or services, new product lines or extending product and/or services lines.
- Level 3 – Business Model Innovation: when a business manages to gain value from a new business model by successfully commercialising it.
- Level 4 – Architectural Innovation: reconfiguration of a system by linking the components of the system innovatively.
- Level 5 – Management Innovation: innovative management of any processes including strategic-, knowledge- and project management to allocating capital, managing science, technology and intangible assets, capturing employees’ wisdom and developing international businesses.

Based on the Hamel and Breen (2007) hierarchy proposition 2 is as follows:

### **Proposition 2: Through analysis of their business strategies the level of innovation of FSEAs can be identified.**

In their study Guerrero and Urbano (2021) found that the effects of entrepreneurial innovation improved capabilities in their businesses through the implementation of innovation mixed practices, through innovation in product/services, and through innovation in processes. When businesses developed innovation capabilities in innovation mixed practices of products and processes the probability of developing sustainable entrepreneurial

innovation projects increases. They suggest that business managers should evaluate the costs and the benefits of sustainable innovative and entrepreneurial projects.

### **Social Value**

Businesses, and especially social enterprises, can create economic value by creating social value in three ways “by reconceiving products and markets, redefining productivity in the value chain, and building supportive industry clusters at the company’s locations” (Porter & Kramer, 2020:59).

In common with commercial entrepreneurs, innovation is core to social entrepreneurs. The difference is that social entrepreneurs innovate to add social value (Duvnäs, Stenholm, Brännback & Carsrud, 2012) It is, however, difficult to determine the contribution, value created and/or impact that social entrepreneurs have on their communities and societies and to justify the resources used to create such social value. As so aptly noted by Dees (2001:3): “It is inherently difficult to measure social value creation. How much social value is created by reducing pollution in a given stream, by saving the spotted owl, or by providing companionship to the elderly? The calculations are not only hard but also contentious. Even when improvements can be measured, it is often difficult to attribute them to a specific intervention”.

According to Gasparin, Green, Lilley, Quinn, Saren & Schinckus (2020) a creative ecosystem includes economic, social and cultural values, which are crucial to the socio-economic development of a country. They define a creative ecosystem as network of stakeholders, including individuals and organisations whose goal is to create economic, social and cultural values through creative and innovative activities. Their strategic framework for social innovation includes the positive impact that social innovation can have on society and describes methods to create and capture economic, social, cultural and ecological values.

Gasparin and Quin (2020) found that in transitional economies the focus of value creation should not be, as in Western studies, primarily on economic value but rather on a combination of economic, social, and cultural value creation. They conclude that social, economic and cultural values are created in transitional economies as innovation ecosystems develop, even in the absence of formal governance.

### **Proposition 3: Through their innovations FSEAs are change makers and add social value.**

To determine acceptance or decline of the three propositions (listed above) a qualitative research approach was followed. The following section explains the research methodology used in this study.

### **3. Research Methodology**

For this study a qualitative research approach was utilized as it enables deeper insight and understanding of the topic under discussion. McNeill (2012) points to viewing practice-based source materials through a social lens for a better understanding of the processes and impacts of social innovation and social entrepreneurship. To gain in depth insights about women entrepreneurs, de Bruin, Brush and Welter (2007) indicate a need for a more qualitative research approach to complement and contrast the primarily quantitative studies previously undertaken in the field of entrepreneurship. This statement aligns well with Schumpeter's (1949) notion that the analysis of existing data, such as biographies of businesspeople, could be used advantageously to better understand their entrepreneurship processes, innovation and impact. This research study followed a collective case study approach through which detailed information on various businesses of female social entrepreneurs was collected from a reliable database (Ashoka) and webpages of the FSEAs' businesses. From this information a questionnaire with open-ended questions were completed on each FSEA. The data thus collected was used and quantitatively analysed.

For this study the population is all social entrepreneurs associated with Ashoka, an international organisation with a comprehensive data base of social entrepreneurs, referred to as ‘Ashoka Fellows’. Through a rigorous selection process these social entrepreneurs become Ashoka fellows who are committed to ‘championing new patterns of social good’. Open access is available to the Ashoka web page and profiles of all Ashoka Fellows as per their web page <https://www.ashoka.org/en-za/our-network>. Globally there is a total of 3500 Ashoka Fellows.

In line with the objective of the study, the sample consists of all female social entrepreneurs from Africa (FSEA) who are Ashoka Fellows. Through a network search option, the sample was drawn from the comprehensive data base of social entrepreneurs on the Ashoka web page ([www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org)). A total of 142 female social entrepreneurs from African countries were identified.

On the Ashoka web page, the profile of each of the 142 identified Ashoka Fellow is comprehensive and presented in the format of a transcribed interview. This information was used to complete questionnaires on each of the identified FSEAs. In addition, all web links to these particular organisations were followed to gain additional information. Some organisations did not have other active and/or accessible web pages, and in these cases, their Ashoka profiles were used as the only source of data. Completion of the questionnaires was done with the assistance of a research assistant and finalised and verified by the researcher.

Based on the objectives, reviewed literature and propositions, a questionnaire was developed to collect information regarding *inter alia*:

- Demographics such as countries in which these Ashoka Fellows operate and their level of education
- Business categories, i.e. business; economic development, education and training; employment; gender, health and social issues.
- The problems they identified and their business ideas to solve these,
- The type and level of innovation
- The value that the social entrepreneurs created for their communities and societies.

Through manual content analysis of the individual questionnaires of each of the 142 FSEAs, information was categorised as ‘demographics’, ‘type and level of innovation’ and ‘social value created’ to address the research questions. The collated data from all the study participants was then summarised, combined and structured to determine trends and insight on FSEAs and to address the propositions and objectives of this research study.

### **Ethical considerations**

The data set for this study was compiled from information that was in the public domain and confirmed by Ashoka as such. The requirement from Ashoka indicates that we should keep the social entrepreneurs anonymous, therefore, numbers from [1] to [142] were allocated to the study participants and no specific reference is made to any personal trait. However, in some instances where FSEAs have active websites names of their businesses might be included. An Ethical Clearance application to conduct the study was submitted to the College of Business and Economics Research Ethics Committee, University of Johannesburg, South Africa, and permission to do so was granted on 31 March 2020 with the Ethical Clearance Code 20SOM04.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of the study are based on the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of the study. Credibility was ensured by utilising the Ashoka database of leading social entrepreneurs in the world to complete questionnaires, together with additional information from their businesses’ web pages. The questionnaires were completed by a research assistant and validated by the researcher. The data of all 142 participants was combined, categorised, analysed and interpreted. This is a qualitative study, thus, the findings are non-generalisable but can be transferable to other contexts and similar populations. Content analysis was conducted to categorise information on innovations and for thick descriptions of social value created by FSEAs to enable transferability. The results of the study are dependable because they are based upon reliable data obtained

from the Ashoka database and web pages of reputable businesses. Confirmability was ensured because the research process was transparent and the researcher is accountable for any deviations, such as the use of the available web pages of some participants.

#### 4. Results

The results reflect some relevant demographics of the FSEAs. Their type and level of innovation as well as the social value created by the FSEAs, together with the findings of the associated propositions, are presented in this section.

##### **Demographics**

The Ashoka FSEAs originate from 20 African countries. The majority of the FSEAs (47) are from South Africa, followed by Nigeria (25), Burkina Faso (12), Kenya (11) and Senegal (9). There are eight (8) FSEAs from Uganda, six (6) from Egypt, five (5) from Mali, four (4) from Zimbabwe, two (2) from each of Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana and Liberia, and one (1) from each of Botswana, Libya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Togo, Tunisia and Zambia.

A summary of the highest level of education is presented in Table 1 below. The majority (85%) of the FSEA have post school qualifications. Of these 43% have a first degree and 34% have post graduate qualifications of which 8% have Doctorates.

**Table 1.** Level of education

Level of education	Number of SEs	Percentage
School dropout	3	2%
School completed	10	7%
Some post school	26	18%
Degree or equivalent	61	43%
Honours or equivalent	4	3%
Master	18	13%
Doctor	12	8%
Don't know	8	6%
Total	142	100%

##### **Categories of businesses and examples of the value created by FSEAs**

FSEAs in the various categories make valuable contributions to the communities and societies in which they operate. Table 2 below reflects the different business categories, the number of FSEAs involved in each business category and the number of FSEAs from respective countries.

**Table 2.** Business categories with numbers of FSEAs and countries

Business Categories	No. of FSEAs	Countries
Education and Learning	30	South Africa x12; Nigeria x6; Senegal x4; Burkina Faso x2; Egypt x1; Gambia x1; Ghana x1; Mali x1; Mozambique x1; Uganda x1.
Development and Prosperity	30	South Africa x8; Nigeria x7; Kenya x5; Senegal x2; Uganda x2; Zimbabwe x2; Burkina Faso x2; Egypt x1, Mali x1.
Health and Fitness	21	Nigeria x7; South Africa x6; Uganda x3; Kenya x2; Burkina Faso x1; Cote d'Ivoire x1; Mali x1.
Human Rights and Equality	16	South Africa x5; Burkina Faso x2; Nigeria x2; Cote d'Ivoire x1; Egypt x1 Gambia x1; Kenya x1; Libya x1; Mali x1; Rwanda x1.
Business and Social Enterprise	12	South Africa x4; Kenya x2; Senegal x2; Burkina Faso x1; Ghana x1; Uganda x1; Zambia x1.
Children and Youth	11	South Africa x4; Egypt x2; Burkina Faso x1; Kenya x1; Liberia x1; Nigeria x1; Senegal x1.
Citizen and Community Participation	9	South Africa x3; Zimbabwe x2; Burkina Faso x2; Egypt x1; Liberia x1.
Environment and Sustainability	6	South Africa x2; Burkina Faso x1; Botswana x1; Nigeria x1; Togo x1
Peace and Harmonious Relations	4	South Africa x3; Uganda x1.
Civic Engagement	3	Mali x1; Nigeria x1; Tunisia x1.
Total	142	

### Type and Level of Innovations

The questionnaires of the FSEAs were analysed to determine the types of innovations (Table 3 below) and levels of innovation (Table 4 below). In Table 3 some examples of innovations are included.

**Table 3.** Types of innovations

Type of Innovation	No. of SEs	Examples
1.Introduction of new product or service	46	[76] Girls from marginalised backgrounds attend a course in creative coding and careers in the ICT field. [60] Training programme in mechanics for females [14] Assists Vitiligo patients by changing the attitudes of people towards those suffering from this disease and involving doctors and dermatologists in caring for them.
2.Introduction of new method of production or operation	8	[83] Developed the innovative reel gardening concept – a bio-degradable tape that consists of seeds spaced correctly for the plants to grow. [128] Loans money to groups of seven to ten members in which members are co-guarantors for other members
3.Opening a new market	78	[86] Assisted 2300 Kenyan artisans to connect directly with the international market, customers and industry
4.Utilisation of new resources of supply for raw materials or intermediate goods	9	[130] Assists small farmers to access an 84% reliable weather forecasting system upon which they can base their decisions to increase efficiency and yield. [10] Combines high level scientific research empowering farmers to improve resistance to disease of food crops.
5.Carrying out some new organisational form of the industry	6	[8] Researched and developed innovative methods of production to make quality hygiene products affordable to millions of young girls.
Total	147*	

[Number replaces FSEA's name]

\*The total is more than 142 entries because some FSEAs have more than one innovation: [8] has four types of innovation; [2] has two types of innovation (new product and service; opening new market). 142 participants, 1 with 4 types, 1 with 2 types = 147

Proposition 1 is accepted as FSEAs apply at least one type of innovation as indicated in Table 3 above.

**Table 4.** Level of Innovation

<b>Level of Innovation</b>	<b>Participant</b>
1.Operational innovation	<b>10</b>
2.Product and service innovation	<b>114</b>
3.Business model innovation	<b>20</b>
4.Architectural innovation	<b>0</b>
5.Management innovation	<b>3</b>
Total	<b>147*</b>

Based on Hamel & Breen's (2007) Levels of innovation.

\*A total of 147, not 142 because some FSEAs' innovations are at multiple levels. FSEA [8]'s innovation is at an impressive three levels: operational; product and service and business model. Three are at two levels: [10] business model and management; [31] and [53] at two levels: product and service and business model.

Proposition 2 is accepted because through the analysis of their business strategies the FSEAs' level of innovation could be identified, as illustrated in Table 4 above.

### Social Value Created by the FSEAs

An analysis of the 142 FSEAs proved that all made valuable contributions directly to people, communities, other organisations and countries. Table 5 below is a brief summary of examples of the FSEAs' different businesses and the value created through their innovations.

**Table 5.** Social Value created by FSEAs

<b>Business description of the FSEA</b>	<b>Social value created by FSEA's business.</b>
<b>Business Categories: Education and Learning (30) and Children and youth (11)</b>	
<b>Business description [FSEA]</b>	<b>Social value created by business.</b>
[99] Enables disadvantaged youth to access tertiary education or employment by linking successful graduates to support learners from disadvantaged backgrounds in their final year of high school.	More than 5,000 learners from 30 township locations are supported. Of those who completed grade 12, 84% passed and 73% were eligible for tertiary education and 85% have accessed post-school opportunities such as tertiary education, learnerships, employment and upgrading of their matric to ensure better opportunities.
[11] Provides affordable vocational education and training to the youth of Southern Africa through training centres. These training centres are learning spaces as well as business hubs for entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs housed in the centres are also involved in training students in their respective fields.	Has enabled 26,000 youths to graduate in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, approximately 83% of the Mozambican graduates gained employment or self-employment.
[13] Teaches learners mathematics and science through culturally relevant learning methodology that integrates rural knowledge systems into the school curriculum.	Has trained 900 teachers from 30 schools benefiting 50,000 learners in rural districts.
[76] Exposes young girls from marginalised backgrounds to a course in creative coding and careers in the ICT field. The course is based on local content and applied to familiar things to teach algorithms and integrates play and dance to make coding understandable.	More than 200 volunteers who are computer scientists or engineers from four universities as well as alumni are mentors to more than 4,500 mentees in Ghana. The curriculum is also available in French with plans to bring coding to girls in French speaking African countries.
[77] Expands the opportunities of rural youth and their mothers who are farmers by assisting them to develop and expand sustainable businesses in agriculture.	More than 1.6 million youth and women that have been trained, 14,000 businesses have been created and expanded and 320,000 youth have graduated with 96% continuing to higher education and 55% in technology-related fields.
[81] Creates enabling environments for females in ICT centres providing training services as well as childcare support.	Has reached more than 32,000 women and girls of whom more than 1,800 started or expanded their businesses after the ICT training.
[83] Developed the innovative Reel gardening concept that is a bio-degradable tape that consists of seeds spaced correctly for the plants to grow. The seed tapes make gardening possible for anyone. Reel gardening are introduced to schools by linking	Has provided disadvantaged communities with access to fruit and vegetables and encouraged them to start their own gardens. Has implemented the project in 2,700 schools impacting 111,000 people in South Africa. Over 1,000,000 metres of seed tape have been donated by

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nutritional education, practical gardening and the national school curriculum. Equips schools with gardens and trains teachers to use gardens as a teaching tool. A free App guides teachers and learners through the gardening process.	Reel gardening and sponsors and 13,000,000 litres of water saved (Reelgardening, 2021).
<b>Business Categories: Development and Prosperity (30) and Business and Social Enterprise (12)</b>	
Business description [FSEA]	Social value created by business.
[128] Makes group lending through micro-credit available to women in Zimbabwe who borrow money for micro-enterprises and projects. Based on the principle to loan money to groups of seven to ten members where members are co-guarantors for other members and that their enterprises have to be in operation for at least 12 months (Similar to the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh.)	Has provided thousands of members with millions in loans for micro-enterprise assistance, more than 30,000 beneficiaries have benefitted from this project. Has an excellent repayment record.
[23] Empowers the youth by creating connections across socio-economic and cultural differences.	Has trained 4,300 people, 90% of these practice entrepreneurial skills, has initiated 1,100 social impact projects and benefited 85,000 participants and secondary beneficiaries.
[34] Provides access to good quality clothing and appliance merchandise at discounted prices from top retail companies in South Africa to unemployed mothers (clothing) and fathers (appliances) who can then trade with it, primarily in the informal sector. They go through an intensive two year practical and experiential training and mentorship programme covering topics such as life -, business -, financial - and computer skills, to assist them to grow their businesses. The third project is the establishment of early childhood development centres through social-franchising in disadvantaged communities that are also financially sustainable businesses.	Has established nine branches during a 5-year period, 12 retail partners, recruited 3,663 women generating more than R356.5million profit; 321 men that generated more than R10 million profit; established 43 schools with 1,599 children creating jobs for 217 people.
[42] Assists Kenyans to start their own businesses	Has assisted hundreds of thousands of Kenyans to start their own businesses and enabled them to move from slums to new houses and have access to medical insurance.
[60] Offers training programmes in mechanics for women in Nigeria	Has broken stereotype by establishing successful female mechanics throughout Nigeria, assisted them to gain employment in mechanical workshops, helps those who want to start their own businesses to get small loans and technical support. Together with apprentices offer car safety classes to businesses to cover operating costs and support growth and expansion of the FSEA.
[86] Assists artisans throughout Kenya to connect directly with the international market, customers and industry through accessibility to mobile phones.	More than 2,300 artisans receive orders and payment directly from the virtual factory network and earn five times more than they would for similar work done through other channels.
[130] Provides small farmers with access to a reliable weather forecasting system at 84% reliability of prediction of tropical weather patterns at a hyperlocal range on which they can base their decisions to increase efficiency and yield. Users do not need smartphones as forecasts are delivered by SMS.	Due to decrease in risk and loss farmers have experienced up to 80% increase in income. Works with over 700 field officers and civil sector organisations who work with the farmers on a daily basis.
[112] Promotes the use of nutritious products based on bananas, a primary crop in a region of Senegal to overcome child malnutrition in low-income families. The fruit and skin of the banana is combined with other ingredients to produce various products including nutritious baby food.	Has assisted women producers in the community, 14 villages with 300 members have become entrepreneurs and earn an income. They have commercialised the multipurpose banana flour, created couscous, beignets, soap to cure skin problems and, most importantly addressed, child malnutrition.
[114] Creates an appreciation of local, traditional and nutritious food in Zambia by creating entrepreneurial hubs to ensure markets for these foods and developing an appreciation for local food.	Has trained more than 20,800 farmers to supply products, and organised farmers' clubs that work together to address challenges and ensure quality products. Has addressed high levels of poverty and helped small farmers to become commercial farmers of local food, thus contributing to economic and social development. From leaves of pumpkin, sweet potato and cassava and moringa, her company produces moringa soup, teabags, cereals, orange maize cereal for a school feeding programme and export some of these foods. Has received more than 60 local and international awards and now offers training in Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania.
[10] Uses a variety of scientific and community interventions to increase food security and incomes of small farmers throughout Africa. She did this by combining high level scientific research to	Has involved over 500,000 farmers in Kenya in food security projects who now earn three times more income than previously. Aims to provide 300 million people in Africa access to healthy, vitamin- and iron-rich

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

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2022 Volume 9 Number 4 (June)

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improve resistance to disease of food crops and empowering farmers.	drought-resistant sorghum.
[50] Uses agriculture and livestock research and development experience to increase the productivity of poor livestock farmers through service centres. The service centres are franchises that provide access to affordable and high-quality products and services to farmers.	Has reached more than 200,000 farmers through this initiative, 93% of farmers working with the service centres have increased their income from crops and livestock. 160,000 farmers and professionals received training through these centres.

<b>Health and fitness (21)</b>	
<b>Business description [FSEA]</b>	<b>Social value created by business.</b>
[33]; [45], [48]; [82]; [121]; [124]; [129]; [141] provides medical, emotional and social care to people living with HIV/AIDS.	Has trained and employed people with AIDS as caretakers and supporters. Training programmes include counselling, testing, medical treatment, access to AZT and tri-therapy medication, as well as social support to become healthy and access to microfinance to enable them to generate income. Also assists home-based care for sick or dying, help with childcare. Established telephone hotlines that provide anonymous information and assistance. Thousands of infected people belong to these HIV/AIDS assistance groups.
[35] Improves the quality of life of people with moderate to severe disabilities. Posture support, wheelchairs, mobility equipment and positioning devices are designed, manufactured and supplied to those in need.	Has supplied over 70,000 wheelchairs and support devices and improved the lives of more than 450,000 users and their families. Aims to supply 250,000 people in Southern Africa with wheelchairs and support devices.
[29] Equips unemployed youth in Africa to create employment for themselves and others by becoming professional yoga teachers. She actively develops the market for their skills and creates new opportunities.	Has used her business model to make the health and wellness benefits of yoga accessible to low- and middle-income communities in Kenya and other African countries. More than 400 young people have been trained as yoga teachers and are earning an income by teaching yoga to thousands of participants in hundreds of community yoga classes.
[8] Provides access to quality hygiene products to young girls to ensure dignity in their puberty years.	Has provided sanitary products and services to 2.5 million schoolgirls and women in Kenya by 2020. Products include sanitary pads (18 million by 2014) underwear (900,000 pairs by 2014).
<b>Business Category: Human Rights and equality (16)</b>	
<b>Business description [FSEA]</b>	<b>Social value created by business.</b>
[55] Makes information on women's rights accessible and understandable to all ages.	Has empowered thousands of women to make informed choices on maternal and new-born health and sexual and reproductive health services.
[56] Has established a girl child network that educates children and the youth and supports rights, gender equality and inclusion in Zimbabwe.	Has benefitted hundreds of thousands of children through this initiative.
[57] Builds the capacity of women to advocate for their rights and become involved in governance structures and political processes at local, state and federal government levels in Nigeria.	Has enabled many women to attain positions at various levels of government.
[37] Addresses child sexual abuse cases by mobilising communities to make the criminal justice system accountable, ensure swift prosecution and ensure sensitive treatment of victims.	Has reached more than 4,500 children per month, has made hundreds of court appearances in support of abused children and feeds 1,200 children every month with the support of sponsors.
[21] Provides counselling and support groups to assist women who are victims of violence with skills training to enable them to gain employment so that they can become independent and free from abusive relationships.	Has assisted more than 50,000 women and girls annually in South Africa to survive the trauma of domestic violence, including rape and other forms of sexual assault.
<b>Business Category: Citizen and community participation (9)</b>	
<b>Business description [FSEA]</b>	<b>Social value created by business.</b>
[127] Turns passionate retired civil servants from the public sector into agents of change as adjudicators in courts.	Has mobilised leaders and women's groups to help women to own land, has enlisted the assistance of elders to intervene on a case-to-case basis by using bylaws in the courts and, thus, has assisted women to become prosperous.

In [...] is the reference number of the FSEA/[number replaces FSEA's name]

In (...) is the number of FSEAs in the category

Proposition 3 is accepted because through their innovations FSEAs are change makers and add social value as illustrated in Table 5 above.

## 5. Discussion

There is a correlation between the number of FSEAs and the size of the economies of their countries. Countries with the most FSEAs are South Africa (47) and Nigeria (25), which have the largest economies on the continent. Smaller economies are represented by less FSEAs. Social entrepreneurs experience serious resource constraints (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006) a situation that is exacerbated in poorer countries with restricted economies.

The levels of education of the FSEAs investigated in this study are exceptionally high with 43% having a first degree and 34% post graduate qualifications. This result is in accordance with the findings of Bosma, Schott, Terjesen and Kew (2015) that indicate that in general the level of education of social entrepreneurs is higher than commercial entrepreneurs. In addition, various authors have identified a positive correlation between an entrepreneur's level of education and ability to start and manage a business successfully (Clercq & Arenius, 2006; Roxas, Cayoca-Panizales & de Jesus, 2008; Kalyoncuoglu, Aydintan & Goksel, 2017).

From the results of this study, it is clear that there is a relatively limited number of Ashoka FSEAs who qualify as changemakers or innovative social entrepreneurs in Africa – a total of only 142 in fact. Yet, they are innovative with the majority (78) who opened a new market for new or existing products and services in a variety of ways, such as linking small scale farmers with businesses that need their produce and artisans with international markets. Forty-six FSEAs developed new products and services ranging from hygienic products to food gardening applications (Apps) and supplying high quality clothing at affordable prices to the poor. These facts confirm the findings of Bosma et al. (2019) who state that many small and medium enterprises introduce new products and services, with these often being new only to the local area.

Nine FSEAs utilised new or alternative resources, such as using grandmothers to educate girls and address other female issues. Eight FSEAs applied new methods of production, such as improving food crops' resistance to disease thereby increasing the output of farmers. Six FSEAs carried out some new organisational form of the industry such as the creation of a tool that provides farmers with real-time data and the current prices of different crops in specific markets thereby enabling them to conduct their businesses efficiently and effectively. This finding regarding the innovation of social entrepreneurs confirms that they are nearly indistinguishable from commercial entrepreneurs because they are equally innovative in their attempt to reach their goals (Dacin et al, 2010; Meyskins et al, 2010).

FSEAs social value exists in the benefits they provide for people and communities through their various business categories such as Education and Learning (30) and Development and Prosperity (30). The benefactors of their value creation ranges from a few hundred to millions of individuals, through to communities and their countries and even extending to other countries. *Inter alia* they make access to training and education possible at various levels, create employment, assist the disadvantaged people to start, grow and/or improve their businesses and farming operations, provide guidance on nutrition, healthy living, health care, human rights and community participation. The results of this study confirm those of Veras (2015) who states that female entrepreneurs are valuable contributors to the economy and, in the case of the FSEAs discussed in this study, to society both locally and nationally. Many of these FSEAs empowered other females to start a business or to make a difference in their communities. Through their businesses FSEAs not only create value in the communities and societies in which they operate but also grow their own businesses, thus, proving how efficient they are in creating shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2020).

## **6. Future research**

Recommendations for future research on the innovation and social value created by social entrepreneurs are:

A quantitative study that investigates the relationships between *inter alia* types of innovation and social value created by social entrepreneurs, level and type of education and extent of value created.

To investigate the social entrepreneurial innovation of female social entrepreneurs in various countries;

A quantitative study to compare male and female social entrepreneurs, including their leadership styles, business objectives and approach towards business growth.

A more diverse study that includes smaller and less prominent social entrepreneurs for a more balanced view of social entrepreneurs because the majority of them operate small businesses.

The role of entrepreneurship education in the operation and success of social entrepreneurs.

## **7. Conclusion**

The objectives of this study were to determine the contribution of FSEAs to create value for their communities and society through innovation.

Proposition 1 is accepted because FSEAs apply at least one type of innovation as is indicated in Table 3 above. The type of innovation of the majority (78) of FSEAs involves the opening of a new market, with 46 of them having also introduced new products or services.

Proposition 2 is accepted because through the analysis of their business strategies the level of innovation of FSEAs could be identified. In the vast majority (114) this aspect involved product and service innovations.

Proposition 3 is accepted because through their innovations FSEAs are change makers and add social value to their communities and often to their countries. It seems as if most social value is created in the business categories of Education and Learning (30), Development and Prosperity (30) and Health and Fitness (21).

It was found that in spite of the small number of Ashoka FSEAs (142) identified in this study, their individual and combined contributions to individuals, their communities and extended societies are magnificent. Such benefits range from reaching a few hundred to millions of beneficiaries and improving their lives, health and well-being, as well as educating them and saving their lives. These findings exhibit the ripple effect of an innovation initiated by a single person that initially affects her community, then the wider society and sometimes spreads across multiple countries.

The contribution of this study is a better understanding of the types and levels of innovations instigated by FSEAs and the importance, relevance and value that they create.

## **8. Limitations**

This study's sample of 142 FSEAs is large for a qualitative study but the aim was to acquire an in-depth understanding of the social value created by FSEAs. Hence, a qualitative study with thick descriptions of social value and associated innovations was deemed appropriate. Secondary data was used to complete questionnaires on each of the 142 FSEAs. Although this method could be deemed a limitation, the advantage is that the data is exceptionally detailed and the profiles and web pages contain the same or more information than what would be obtained through interviews.

The sample included only prominent Ashoka fellows, whereas the majority of social entrepreneurs have small businesses and are not Ashoka fellows. A future study should include smaller or less prominent social entrepreneurs.

Ashoka has existed for more than 35 years, thus, some of the profiles of Ashoka fellows are old and have not been updated. Some of the names of businesses or ownership might have changed over the years. As far as possible, these were updated with information from their business web sites.

For the data analysis process it was not always possible to determine the updated and exact social value created by FSEAs because current information was not always available or quantifiable. In these cases, general information was deduced from their Ashoka profiles and web pages as far as possible. In some instances, information on the the FSEAs was limited and, thus, the types and levels of their innovations difficult to identify. In these cases, the knowledge and analysis of the researchers were relied on.

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2022 Volume 9 Number 4 (June)

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