RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Assessing the Challenges and Implications of Corporate and Social Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development Goals in South Africa: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Corporate and social entrepreneurship (CSE) are crucial in driving sustainable development in South Africa, addressing key issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Understanding the challenges and implications of these entrepreneurship forms is vital for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study employs a systematic literature review, adhering to the PRISMA guidelines, to examine these dynamics. A comprehensive search of Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and EBSCOhost databases ranging from 2018-2024, identified key challenges facing entrepreneurs, including regulatory and institutional barriers, financial constraints, and human capital deficiencies. The findings corroborate the critical role of CSE in fostering sustainable development through job creation, economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, and inclusive economic growth. However, progress is significantly hindered by a complex regulatory environment, limited funding access, and inadequate entrepreneurial skills. The study underscores the necessity of simplifying regulatory frameworks, increasing financial support, investing in human capital, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaborations to create a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Recommendations include regulatory reforms, enhanced financial access, targeted education and training, and promoting sustainable business practices. By addressing these challenges CSE can significantly contribute to the SDGs in South Africa, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable society. This review provides insights for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders on strategies to enhance entrepreneurship's contribution to SDGs.

Keywords: *corporate entrepreneurship; economic growth and development; innovation and best practices; social entrepreneurship ventures; SDGs*

Introduction

In recent years, corporate and social entrepreneurship (CSE) have gained increasing attention due to their significant role in advancing sustainable development (Dzomonda, 2021; Gandhi and Raina, 2018). Both forms of entrepreneurship are essential for fostering economic growth and sustainable progress in South Africa. Sustainable development is defined as progress that introduces innovative solutions to address the current challenges without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Tien *et al.* 2020). This approach seeks to balance societal well-being with environmental preservation and responsible resource use. This paradigm is increasingly shaping business and non-business activities, particularly in developing economies like South Africa (Benavides, Alvarez and Lopez, 2023). Social entrepreneurship, characterised by the application of entrepreneurial principles to generate positive social impact (Elliot, 2019), relies on innovative strategies to drive long-term societal change. By identifying and capitalising on opportunities, social entrepreneurs invest in community development (Diab, 2019), addressing critical gaps in areas such as healthcare, education, housing, climate action and access to clean water, especially where traditional institutions have fallen short (Littlewood and Holt, 2018). Social

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entrepreneurship is recognised for its transformative potential to create meaningful, sustainable impact, a mission that shares a synergistic relationship with corporate entrepreneurship.

Corporate entrepreneurship involves established businesses developing innovative solutions to address societal challenges, working in parallel with social entrepreneurship to create meaningful impact through novel approaches. According to Tseng and Tseng (2019), such innovative strategies may manifest through new products or services, implementing administrative systems, or introducing new programs design to positively impact society. These entrepreneurial efforts align closely with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as illustrated in Table 1 below, and support South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 objectives (Zeb-Obipi and Okeah, 2023). The synergy between entrepreneurial initiatives and national development planning proves particularly vital for addressing South Africa's critical challenges of inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation. Key NDP strategies targeting SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) emphasise harnessing human potential, building an inclusive economy (SDG 8), and fostering societal collaboration (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Silva (2021) further highlights how the SDGs promote holistic well-being (SDG 3) through multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly with business sector engagement (SDG 9). Despite this alignment, CSE face substantial implementation challenges that hinder their SDG contributions (Diaz-Sarachaga and Ariza-Montes, 2022). While the interconnected nature of the SDGs creates cascading effects across, this study focuses on the primary SDGs where CSE encounter significant challenges. The study aims to explore these challenges and their implications for sustainable development in South Africa.

Table 1: Sustainable Development Goals

SDGs Number	Sustainable Development Goals	SDGs Number	Sustainable Development Goals
1	*No poverty*	**10**	*Reduced inequalities*
2	*Zero hunger*	**11**	*Sustainable cities and communities*
3	*Good health and well-being*	**12**	*Responsible consumption and production*
4	*Quality education*	**13**	*Climate action*
5	*Gender equality*	**14**	*Life below water*
6	*Clean water and sanitation*	**15**	*Life on land*
7	*Affordable and clean energy*	**16**	*Peace, justice and strong institutions*
8	*Decent work and economic growth*	**17**	*Partnerships for the goals*
9	*Industry, innovation and infrastructure*		

The multitude of environmental, social, and economic challenges facing the world today stems largely from prevailing production and consumption modes, prioritising profit maximisation (Kovac Vujasinović, Lipenkova, and Orlando, 2019). These challenges cut across three pillars of sustainable development, environment, society, and economy, posing significant global concerns (Konda, Starc and Rodica, 2015). While existing literature suggests that sustainable development offers viable solutions to these societal concerns (Hudek and Hojnik, 2020), aligning corporate and entrepreneurial interventions with the SDGs can yield substantial benefits (Gunzel-Jensen *et al*. 2020a). South Africa, in particular, faces persistent poverty, economic decline and inefficient resource utilisation (Nel *et al.* 2020). The country's unemployment rate further underscores these challenges, rising from 31.9% in the third quarter of 2023 to 32.1% in the fourth quarter (Statistics South Africa, 2023). CSE presents a potential pathway to addressing unemployment, aligning with SDG 8. However, persistent skills gaps hinder enterprises from fully realising this objective. Moreover, as Gandhi and Raina (2018) note, many developing nations are experiencing a widening wealth gap, with over a billion people living in poverty amid unsustainable production patterns that jeopardise economies, societies and human well-being. Against this backdrop, this study conducts a systematic review the complex challenges CSE pose in South Africa and their implications for achieving the SDGs.

This study is particularly relevant as the world grapples with the systematic challenges exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges that demand structural transformations and collaborative SDG aligned solutions. While corporate entrepreneurship primarily emphasises organisational resilience, social entrepreneurship addresses pressing societal needs; both, however, share a common pursuit of long-term sustainability. By investigating the interplay between entrepreneurship, societal progress, and environmental sustainability, this study contributes critical insights to guide business strategies that advance sustainable development within South Africa. Through rigorous analysis, the study aims to strengthen sustainable development initiatives both locally and globally. The study is guided by the following objectives:

i. To identify and analyse the key challenges faced by corporate and social entrepreneurs in South Africa as they strive to contribute to SDGs.
ii. To examine the implications of CSE initiatives on achieving SDGs in South Africa in areas such as poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.
iii. To investigate the role of corporate social responsibility practices and social entrepreneurship ventures in addressing social and environmental challenges while promoting sustainable development in South Africa.
iv. To provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to enhance the contributions of CSE toward achieving SDGs in South Africa.

Literature Review

Social entrepreneurship, as articulated by Dzomonda (2021), represents a deliberate response to the imperative for societal transformation, driven by the collective actions of individuals, organisations and networks. This innovative paradigm constitutes a dynamic process that critically examines and reshapes socio-economic structures, with a specific focus on rectifying systemic inequalities in the distribution of social and environmental resources (Mukonza, 2020). By identifying latent opportunities within these structures, social entrepreneurship transforms them into catalysts for meaningful change, thereby promoting greater equity and sustainability. In line with this perspective, Lubberink (2019) highlights the distinctive character of social enterprises, which synthesises the operational modes of traditional businesses with the mission driven ethos of charitable organisations. These hybrid entities aim not only to generate economic value for stakeholders but also prioritise broader societal benefits over private interest (Chipeta, Kruse and Surujlal, 2020).

Operating at the nexus of profitability and social purpose, they serve as powerful vehicles for community development and societal progress. The sustainability dimension of entrepreneurship is further underscored by Shabbir (2023), who posits that sustainable entrepreneurial strategies involve capitalising on market opportunities through ethical business conduct and the development of environmentally responsible products and services (Franco-Leal and Diaz-Carrion, 2022). Such eco-innovative approaches simultaneously enhance operational effectiveness and contribute to environmental stewardship. This paradigm extends beyond the social sector. As Nel *et al*. (2020) observe, private enterprises are increasingly integrating SDGs into their strategic frameworks, reflecting a growing corporate commitment to sustainability. By aligning their resources with global development priorities, businesses amplify their capacity to address complex societal challenges (Monareng, Casteleijn and Franzsen, 2024). Public organisations, conversely, advance SDGs through policy implementation and service delivery, illustrating the multi-stakeholder collaboration essential for sustainable development (Meuleman, 2021). Ultimately, social entrepreneurship emerges as a transformative force for inclusive growth. Through its dual capacity to challenge entrenched systems and operationalise sustainability principles, it offers a viable pathway for achieving socio-economic and environmental objectives. Through collaborative cross-sector efforts, the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship can be harnessed to create a more equitable and sustainable future.

While entrepreneurship holds significant potential for advancing sustainable development, it also faces notable challenges. According to Benavides *et al*. (2023), both corporate and social entrepreneurship are subject to overlapping difficulties, including limited financial resources and the constant need to adapt to rapidly evolving social and economic demands. Endris and Kassegn (2022) further argue, that inadequate funding severely restricts the capacity of social and corporate entrepreneurs to contribute meaningfully to SDGs. The growth of entrepreneurial ventures and their impact on the SDGs is often constrained by a lack of access to funding, mentorship, and market access. Dzomonda (2021) notes that social and corporate entrepreneurs are frequently required to address a broad range of societal issues, which may divert their ability to focus on the most pressing challenges within their communities. De Wet-Billing (2022) observed that in South Africa, issues such as poverty, inequality, violence, and limited access to education and employment tend to overshadow environmental concerns like climate change. Similarly, Littlewood and Holt (2018) identify chronic unemployment estimated at 25% in 2010, and low national levels of skills and education as major impediments to sustainable development. Although social entrepreneurs are well-positioned to tackle these complex issues through innovative and sustainable solutions, there remains a critical shortage of investors willing to provide the financial support necessary to scale their impact.

Canestrino *et al.* (2020) suggest that social and corporate entrepreneurs possess the potential to act as change agents by mobilising funding opportunities to support sustainable development targets and by monitoring progress towards these goals. However, Haywood *et al*. (2018) emphasise that creating an enabling environment characterised by supportive regulations, policies and incentives is essential for industries to make meaningful contributions to sustainable development. Unfortunately, regulatory frameworks can sometimes constrain entrepreneurial activity by limiting innovation and economic stimulation. Regulatory compliance, in particular, presents a significant challenge for both social and corporate entrepreneurs, posing risks to long-term sustainability. Montero and Le Blanc (2019) note that non-compliance with regulatory standards can lead to serious consequences, including financial penalties, reputation damage and potential legal action, all of which may impede progress toward achieving the SDGs. Conversely, Binsaeed (2023) argues that adherence to regulatory requirements signals an organisation's commitment to ethical and sustainable practices, and can enhance its capacity to operate competitively at a global level. In this sense, aligning entrepreneurial efforts with SDG priorities not only contributes to social impact but may also offer social and corporate entrepreneurs a strategic competitive advantage.

Businesses play a pivotal role in the development and transformation of South Africa. This encompasses not only conventional for-profit enterprises but also social enterprises, which integrate social and economic goals within their operational frameworks (Littlewood and Holt, 2018). According to Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022), a community is considered economically sustainable when it offers sufficient employment opportunities, maintains steady economic growth and fosters both collective and individual prosperity. Akoh and Lekhanya (2022) argue that social and corporate entrepreneurs can enhance their contribution to sustainable development by actively engaging with stakeholders to generate positive social value. According to the Integrated Reporting and Assurance Services, as cited by South Africa Statistics (2023), 55.5% of-companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) acknowledged their commitment to SDGs in their 2022 annual reports, up from 28.1% in 2021. Phakathi and van der Woude (2023) note that enterprises in South Africa's mining sector have significantly contributed to sustainable development by promoting decent work and economic growth, in alignment with SDG 8, as demonstrated in their annual reporting. Furthermore, Diaz-Sarachaga and Ariza-Montes (2022) highlight the role of social entrepreneurship as a catalyst for innovation, driving processes that address complex societal challenges. These initiatives contribute to environmental sustainability by reducing carbon emissions, creating employment within the green economy, and promoting nature-based solutions (Nel *et al*. 2020), thereby advancing SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy). Kuratko *et al*. (2017) underscore the proactive nature of social enterprises, which aim to take a leadership role in addressing pressing social issues and achieving transformative impact. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship is characterised by its focus on creating value for all stakeholders through socially oriented missions (Urmanaviciene and Arachchi, 2020). By leveraging entrepreneurial skills and creativity, social enterprises develop innovative and context-specific strategies to effectively resolve societal problems effectively.

Given the ongoing challenges faced by corporate and social entrepreneurs, it is imperative to implement strategies that support organisations in contributing meaningfully to the SDGs. Silva (2021) advocates for the use of technology to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of projects, promote collaboration with other organisations and communities, adapt initiatives to evolving social or economic needs, and explore new and diversified sources of funding. These strategic tendencies can be further realised by improving planning instruments, effectively developing human resources, raising public awareness, and leveraging advanced technologies to drive sustainable growth (Cardella *et al*. 2021). However, as Hattab (2023) cautions, development strategies that rely solely on rapid material economic growth often encounter costly resource constraints, leading to unsustainable outcomes. Increased resource consumption and the generation of unproductive waste contribute to financial inefficiencies, thereby limiting the availability of funds for social and economic development. Among the most critical strategies employed by social and corporate entrepreneurs is the promotion of collaboration and cooperation. Benavides *et al*. (2023) identify inter-organisational and community partnerships as essential mechanisms for addressing complex economic and social challenges. Eggers (2020) reinforces this view, asserting that collaborative efforts in CSE generate innovative and sustainable solutions that address interconnected social, economic, and environmental issues.

Hudek and Bradac Hojnik (2020) further highlight that sustainable development is positively impacted by entrepreneurship that is both innovative and opportunity driven. In line with this, Emas (2015) emphasises that innovation is fundamental to securing competitive advantage, noting that environmental regulations that incentivise innovation can enhance enterprise competitiveness. In many countries including South Africa, the United Nations Development Programme has prioritised science, technology, and skills development as key pillars in the implementation of the SDGs (Froehlich, Siebrits and Kotze, 2020; Allen, Metternicht and Wiedmann, 2021). Herutomo, Dhewanto, and Prasentio (2022) explain that digital technology, in particular, plays a pivotal role in improving societal conditions and facilitating inclusive development. The integration of technology and digitisation presents a critical opportunity for social and corporate entrepreneurs to develop innovative solutions and expand their reach to new markets and beneficiaries.

Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review to examine the challenges and implications of corporate and social entrepreneurship (CSE) for SDGs in South Africa. The review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework and checklist of 2020, ensuring a transparent and replicable research approach. The objectives of the study were to identify key challenges that necessitate policy and practice interventions; share insights into current entrepreneurial dynamics related to SDG implementation; highlight gaps in the existing literature; and propose actionable recommendations for future research and practice. As noted by Page *et al*. (2021), systematic literature reviews aim to identify, critically appraise, and synthesise relevant studies in a methodical and transparent manner. To achieve this, the study clearly defined its literature search strategy, including the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of academic sources, as well as the analytical methods employed (Venter and De Bruyn, 2022). The review process followed four key steps: (1) Identification of key terms and location of studies; (2) Selection and evaluation of studies; (3) Analysis and synthesis; and (4) Reporting and use of research results.

The first step in conducting a systematic literature review involves identifying key search terms that form the foundation of the study. These terms are then used to locate relevant literature within established academic databases (Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart, 2022). Once the key terms are defined, a search protocol must be developed to guide the review process (Briner and Denyer, 2012). Guided by the research topic and corresponding research questions, the following key terms were used to search for journal articles, conference papers, books, theses, and dissertations: *social entrepreneurship ventures*, *partnerships and collaborative efforts*, *innovation and best practices*, *poverty alleviation*, *environmental sustainability*, *economic growth and development*, and *South Africa*. These terms were applied in various combinations to generate relevant and comprehensive search results. For example, specific phrases such as "corporate initiatives for achieving SDGs in South Africa" and "social entrepreneurship initiatives for achieving SDGs in South Africa" were employed. To identify studies that addressed challenges, phrases like "challenges faced by corporate and social entrepreneurs in South Africa" and "social entrepreneurs' challenges in South Africa" were used. The review targeted scholarly literature available in the following academic databases: Scopus, EBSCOhost, Emerald Insight, and ScienceDirect. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of high-quality academic publications and their accessibility to the authors. The search was limited to works published between 2018 and 2024, a period during which research on entrepreneurship and innovation in South Africa has experienced notable growth. Although the review considered publications dating back to the early post-apartheid era, the majority of studies that met the inclusion criteria were published within the last five to ten years, reflecting a more current and relevant body of knowledge.

According to Mengist, Soromessa, and Legese (2020), researchers conducting systematic literature reviews must clearly specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to guide the selection process. In this study, the inclusion and exclusion are outlined in Figure 1. To ensure relevance, the titles and abstracts of all identified studies were carefully screened. Only those studies that met the established criteria and were deemed directly relevant to the research objectives were selected for further analysis. Mengist *et al*. (2020) explain that the process of analysis and synthesis in a systematic literature review involves critically examining each study, identifying relationships, and integrating findings to form a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the research topic. In this study, the selected scholarly works were analysed qualitatively using thematic analysis and the constant comparison method to identify patterns and conceptual relationships. Each study was critically reviewed, and relevant data were extracted and systematically documented. The extracted data were then compared to identify similarities, differences and recurring themes, which were subsequently organised under common conceptual categories. A prominent theme that emerged from the reviewed literature is the identification of challenges facing rural entrepreneurship and innovation in South Africa. In addition, the studies examined various entrepreneurship and innovation activities, highlighting the role of government interventions and support structures, such as actor networks in facilitating rural entrepreneurship and innovation.

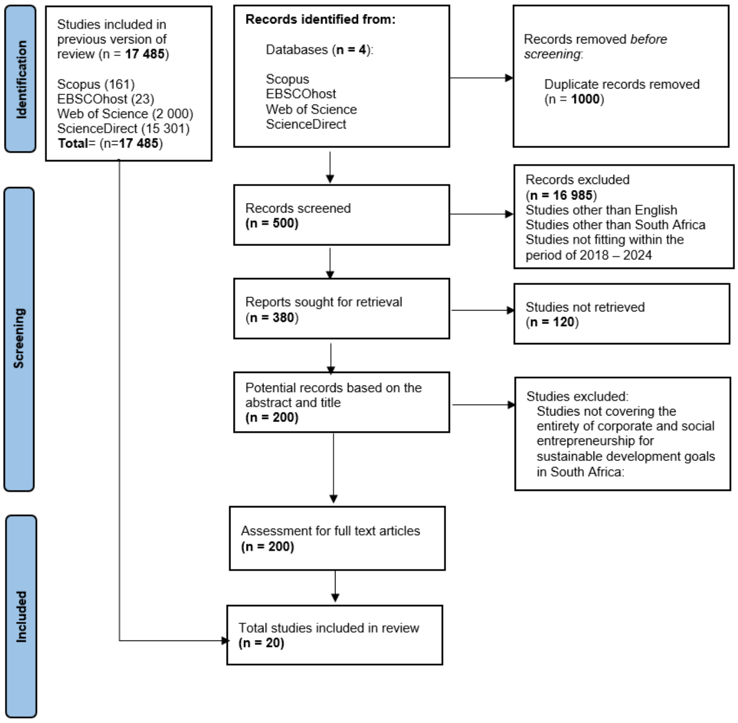

Figure 1: PRISMA framework (adopted from Page *et al.,* 2021)

Discussion of Findings

This section interprets the key findings of the study in relation to existing literature whilst addressing the research objectives. The findings were synthesised into coherent thematic categories and systematically reported to inform the study's conclusions and recommendations.

Key challenges faced by corporate and social entrepreneurs in South Africa

Corporate and social entrepreneurs in South Africa face a host of systemic challenges that constrain their ability to contribute meaningfully to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These challenges stem from the regulatory environment, access to finance, and persistent human capital deficits. Understanding these constraints is critical for formulating policy and institutional responses that create a more enabling environment for sustainable entrepreneurship:

i. Regulatory and institutional challenges

Navigating the legal and regulatory landscape for launching and operating a business in South Africa presents significant challenges for entrepreneurs, largely due to the country's complex and often burdensome regulatory environment (Littlewood and Holt, 2018). Entrepreneurs frequently encounter bureaucratic inefficiencies, institutional bias, and corruption, which complicate their efforts to contribute meaningfully to the SDGs. Klaaren (2020) notes that bureaucratic delays and demands for bribery not only hinder the growth of social and corporate enterprises but also discourage entrepreneurial activity altogether. These issues erode trust in regulatory institutions and disincentivise both the formalisation of businesses and long-term investment in innovation and growth. The cumbersome regulatory framework increases compliance costs and slows down business operations, thereby undermining the sustainability of entrepreneurial ventures (Gunzel-Jensen *et al*., 2020b). In the South African context, registering a new business can be a time-consuming process, often marred by procedural complexities and administrative delays (Chidau, Khosa and Phillips, 2022). Such barriers discourage potential entrepreneurs from starting new ventures and extend the time required to bring innovations to market. For example, prolonged registration processes and stringent compliance requirements delay the scaling of enterprises, ultimately reducing job creation and hindering economic growth, both of which are critical to achieving SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). Furthermore, the inability of entrepreneurs to navigate the regulatory environment stifles innovation and infrastructure development, making it difficult to achieve SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure). Finally, systemic corruption and the lack of transparency within regulatory institutions weaken public confidence in governance systems and obstruct the development of a just, accountable, and inclusive society, which is essential for realising SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

ii. Financial barriers

Financial constraints remain one of the most significant challenges facing social and corporate entrepreneurs in South Africa. According to Monareng *et al*. (2024), the inability to access adequate funding and resources severely limits entrepreneurs' capacity to deliver services that support the achievement of the SDGs. Franco-Leal and Diaz-Carrion (2022) further emphasise that entrepreneurs from historically disadvantaged backgrounds face heightened difficulties in securing financing, which impedes their ability to implement innovative ideas and generate meaningful social impact within their communities. The situation is exacerbated by the limited availability of government support and insufficient private sector investment. As Tseng and Tseng (2019) point out, many potentially transformative initiatives remain underfunded and therefore unable to scale. For instance, a social enterprise focused on providing clean water solutions to rural communities may struggle to access capital due to restrictive loan conditions and inadequate financial infrastructure. As a result, such enterprises are unable to expand their operations to reach other underserved areas. The lack of financial support directly undermines efforts to address SDG 1 (no poverty), as poverty alleviation initiatives cannot be scaled to benefit wider populations (Kumar and Pathak, 2022). Additionally, without adequate investment, social enterprises working toward improving water access are constrained in their ability to advance SDG 6, which aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Moreover, entrepreneurs from marginalised and under-resourced communities face systemic financial exclusion, which reinforces existing socio-economic disparities. This directly contradicts the objectives of SDG 10, which advocates for the reduction of inequalities within and among countries. Without targeted financial interventions and inclusive funding mechanisms, the full potential of CSE in driving sustainable development will remain unrealised.

iii. Human capital and skills deficiencies

The development of human capital and access to relevant skills are essential for the success and sustainability of entrepreneurial ventures. Chipeta *et al.* (2020) highlight that South African social and corporate entrepreneurs face substantial challenges related to limited market accessibility and underdeveloped skills. Many entrepreneurs lack the business acumen and managerial expertise required to effectively operate and grow their enterprises. Moreover, entering new industries and reaching intended target audiences presents additional barriers to success. Monareng *et al*. (2024) argue that without adequate resources and support for skills development, entrepreneurs struggle to scale their businesses and generate meaningful societal impact. This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive training programmes and targeted educational interventions aimed at enhancing the capabilities of emerging and existing entrepreneurs. According to the framework proposed by Zeb-Obipi and Okeah (2023), SDG 4 aspires to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030, a goal that is critical to producing a skilled and informed entrepreneurial workforce. For instance, an entrepreneur with an innovative idea for sustainable agriculture may lack essential business management skills. Despite the potential of the innovation, the enterprise may struggle with challenges related to marketing, financial planning, and scalability. The lack of access to business education and training ultimately limits entrepreneurial effectiveness and stifles innovation. This not only hinders the realisation of SDG 4 (quality education) but also undermines efforts to achieve SDG 2 (zero hunger), as inadequate skills prevent the successful implementation of sustainable agricultural solutions that could enhance food security. Furthermore, entrepreneurs lacking knowledge in sustainability practices are less likely to contribute effectively to SDG 13, which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Implications of CSE initiatives for achieving specific SDGs in South Africa

Beyond the challenges, corporate and social entrepreneurship initiatives play an important role in advancing specific SDGs in South Africa. Their contributions span areas such as poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and inclusive economic growth. By examining these implications, the study highlights how entrepreneurial activity can be strategically aligned with development objectives to maximise social, economic, and environmental impact.

i. Poverty alleviation

One of the primary ways in which CSE contributes to the achievement of the SDGs in South Africa is through job creation and economic empowerment. With the national unemployment rate recorded at 33.9% in 2022 (De Wet-

Billings, 2022), addressing poverty has become an urgent priority, aligning directly with the goals of SDG 1. The NDP of South Africa also outlines strategic interventions aimed at reducing poverty and promoting inclusive economic participation. Through establishing social enterprises and adopting sustainable business practices, entrepreneurs can generate employment opportunities, particularly for marginalised and underserved communities. This contributes significantly to poverty reduction and promotes long-term socio-economic inclusion (Mukonza, 2020). For example, a social enterprise focused on agricultural development in rural areas may offer training, resources, and market access to smallholder farmers, thereby improving productivity, income levels, and food security. Such initiatives directly advance the objectives of both SDG 1 and SDG 2. Zeb-Obipi and Okeah (2023) highlight that by 2030, the SDG framework aims to ensure equal rights to economic resources, including ownership and control over land and property, as well as access to basic services, new technologies, and financial resources. Achieving these targets is essential for eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable economic development. Social entrepreneurs are uniquely positioned to drive this transformation, given their ability to combine social impact with business innovation. Moreover, by promoting sustainably produced goods and services, social entrepreneurs not only empower communities economically but also minimise environmental degradation. This approach supports a multidimensional development agenda, advancing several SDGs simultaneously, including those related to climate action and sustainable consumption and production (Chaudry, 2023; Apostu and Gigauri, 2023). Additionally, the role of CSE in poverty alleviation is both practical and transformative, offering scalable solutions that can bridge economic disparities while supporting South Africa's broader developmental objectives.

ii. Environmental sustainability

CSE in South Africa holds significant potential to advance environmental sustainability and combat climate change. By adopting eco-friendly business strategies, entrepreneurs contribute to the protection of the environment and the preservation of natural resources (Gobena and Kant, 2022). These strategies include reducing carbon emissions, promoting the use of renewable energy, and implementing effective waste management solutions (Kanayo, Agholor, and Olamide, 2021). For instance, a corporate entrepreneur may invest in solar energy projects that supply clean and affordable power to underserved communities. Such initiatives reduce dependence on fossil fuels and support the achievement of both SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) and SDG 13 (climate action). Through the integration of the SDGs into their core business strategies, social and corporate entrepreneurs play a critical role in fostering a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient society (Azmat *et al*., 2023). Moreover, their environmentally conscious initiatives often lead to innovations that simultaneously protect the ecosystem and drive social and economic development. These dual-impact solutions exemplify how entrepreneurship can serve as a catalyst for sustainable transformation, particularly in emerging economies such as South Africa.

iii. Economic growth and development

The alignment of the SDGs with the strategic orientations of CSE highlights the potential of entrepreneurs to serve as key drivers of economic growth in developing countries (Canestrino *et al*., 2020). According to Zeb-Obipi and Okeah (2023), SDG 8 can serve as a guiding framework to position entrepreneurship as a catalyst for inclusive and sustained economic development. Business institutions possess both the resources and legitimacy to align their operations with long-term societal objectives while simultaneously advancing their commercial interests (Cosa, 2024). For instance, a tech start-up developing affordable healthcare solutions not only contributes to improved health outcomes (SDG 3) but also creates employment opportunities and stimulates broader economic activity, thereby reinforcing SDG 8. CSE initiatives that prioritise inclusive economic growth play a pivotal role in addressing structural inequalities. By ensuring that the benefits of economic development are equitably distributed, these initiatives contribute to the achievement of SDG 10 of reducing inequalities (Sorooshian, 2024). Moreover, such entrepreneurial ventures foster the emergence of sustainable business models that underpin long-term economic stability and resilience. Notably, when strategically aligned with the SDGs, CSE can support economic growth that is not only robust but also socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

Role of corporate social responsibility practices and social entrepreneurship ventures

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices and social entrepreneurship ventures are instrumental in driving innovation, fostering partnerships, and promoting sustainable practices. These initiatives illustrate how business and community-based interventions can work together to address complex development issues. Understanding their role provides insights into best practices and collaborative models that can accelerate progress toward the SDGs.

i. Social entrepreneurship ventures

Mallika, Smith, and Jones (2024) argue that social entrepreneurship has emerged as a powerful force in addressing both social and environmental challenges. Unlike traditional business models that are primarily driven by profit maximisation, social entrepreneurs deliberately integrate social and environmental objectives into their core business strategies (Sorooshian, 2024). While social entrepreneurship focuses on developing creative and sustainable solutions to pressing societal issues, corporate entrepreneurship has evolved as a mechanism through which established enterprises drive economic growth and employment generation (Monareng *et al*., 2024). Ofusori (2023) highlights that social entrepreneurs are capable of launching enterprises and community-based projects that directly generate job opportunities for youth, often by addressing local needs and employing young people across various sectors. These entrepreneurs not only tackle global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation but also create tangible economic value in the process.

Understanding the role of social entrepreneurship is crucial for policymakers, business leaders, and civil society, as it offers strategic insights into viable pathways for sustainable development (Mallika *et al*., 2024). In the South African context, social entrepreneurship has gained significant traction as a vehicle for advancing social transformation and economic empowerment. As noted by De Wet-Billing (2022), social enterprises in South Africa frequently address systemic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation by leveraging entrepreneurial approaches to deliver innovative and sustainable solutions. Short, Moss, and Lumpkin (2019) underscore the critical role of social entrepreneurship in fostering innovation. Motivated by a mission to solve deeply embedded social problems, social entrepreneurs often develop novel products, services, and delivery models that address unmet needs. This innovative capacity is especially vital for the achievement of SDGs related SDG 7, SDG 3 and SDG 4.

ii. Partnerships and collaborative efforts

The effectiveness of corporate social responsibility initiatives and social entrepreneurship ventures is significantly enhanced through partnerships and collaborative efforts. Collaboration among businesses, government entities, non-governmental organisations, and communities facilitates the development of more comprehensive, inclusive, and impactful solutions to complex development challenges. Klaaren (2020) notes that evaluating the obstacles and implications of CSE reveals a nuanced influence on sustainable development in South Africa. Despite these challenges, such entrepreneurial models hold the potential to promote equitable development, generate employment opportunities, and address social and environmental issues in a targeted and innovative manner. Ofusori (2023) illustrates this through the example of partnerships between social entrepreneurs and the Social Enterprise Development Agency, which offers funding aimed at youth employment creation. These collaborations empower social ventures to scale their impact while addressing community needs. By encouraging co-creation, resource pooling, and joint problem-solving, corporate and social entrepreneurs can support the advancement of the SDGs. Mallika *et al*. (2024) emphasise the critical role of multi-stakeholder partnerships in achieving the SDGs, particularly in contexts where resources are limited and problems are multifaceted. Such partnerships facilitate knowledge exchange, coordinated action, and shared accountability, all of which are essential for addressing entrenched social and environmental challenges. Additionally, Kumar and Pathak (2022) highlight the mutually beneficial nature of partnerships between corporations and social enterprises. Corporations can contribute financial support, technical expertise, and access to broader networks, while social enterprises bring innovative, community-rooted solutions and local insights. Together, these partnerships not only strengthen impact but also create synergies that accelerate sustainable and inclusive development.

iii. Innovation and best practices

Innovation lies at the core of both corporate social responsibility practices and social entrepreneurship ventures, serving as a critical driver for addressing the multifaceted challenges of sustainable development. The ability to develop and implement innovative solutions is essential for advancing the SDGs and fostering inclusive growth. Silvestre and Tirca (2019) argue that innovation should form the foundation of sustainability initiatives; however, the global transition toward more sustainable practices has been slow. While innovation is often assumed to be inherently beneficial for sustainability, Kuzma *et al*. (2020) caution that not all innovations yield consistent positive outcomes. The uncertainty surrounding radical, disruptive, or novel innovations, particularly those not yet mainstream can complicate efforts to measure their effectiveness in delivering sustainable impact. Mallika *et al*. (2024) highlight a range of best practices in both CSR and social entrepreneurship that have demonstrated success across diverse contexts. These include integrating sustainability principles into business models, using emerging technologies to amplify social impact, and adopting inclusive business strategies that prioritise active stakeholder engagement. Such practices not only enhance organisational resilience but also contribute directly to community well-being. Short *et al*. (2019) emphasise that innovation plays a crucial role in scaling social impact. Tools such as social impact bonds, microfinance initiatives, and digital platforms are examples of innovative mechanisms that expand the reach, efficiency, and impact of social entrepreneurship efforts. Together, CSR and social entrepreneurship serve as vital platforms for promoting social and environmental transformation in South Africa. Drawing on insights from Mallika *et al*. (2024), Kumar and Pathak (2022), and Short *et al*. (2019), it is evident that these initiatives not only contribute to the achievement of the SDGs but also enhance business performance, foster community engagement, and create long-term value. By embedding innovation into their core strategies, organisations can drive sustainable development through strategic partnerships, technological advancement, and the integration of social and environmental objectives into their business operations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study critically reviewed the challenges and implications associated with CSE in advancing the SDGs in South Africa. The findings underscore the pivotal role that both CSE play in promoting sustainable development, particularly through their contributions to job creation, economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, and inclusive economic growth. However, the study also reveals that entrepreneurs in South Africa operate within a challenging ecosystem marked by regulatory, financial, and human capital constraints. These systemic barriers not only hinder the growth and sustainability of individual ventures but also slow the country’s broader progress toward achieving the SDGs. Regulatory obstacles, including complex legal requirements, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and corruption, create an environment of uncertainty and mistrust, which discourages entrepreneurial activity and innovation. Financial constraints, such as limited access to funding and investment, further restrict the ability of entrepreneurs, especially those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds to scale their operations and implement impactful solutions that address issues like poverty and inequality. Human capital deficiencies, including gaps in business skills and managerial expertise, exacerbate these challenges, limiting entrepreneurs’ capacity to adapt, innovate, and sustain their enterprises in the long term. Despite these formidable challenges, the potential of CSE to act as catalysts for sustainable transformation remains significant. With the right enabling conditions including streamlined regulatory processes, inclusive financial support mechanisms, and targeted capacity-building initiatives whereby entrepreneurs can play a transformative role in advancing the SDGs.

In response to the findings, the study recommends that policymakers can simplify regulatory frameworks to reduce bureaucratic red tape, create a more entrepreneur-friendly environment, and implement measures to combat corruption, ensuring transparent and fair business registration and operation processes. Policymakers are also encouraged to promote the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices by entrepreneurs and support the integration of SDGs into their business models, through incentives like tax breaks or subsidies for green initiatives. Furthermore, CSE can foster collaborations between government, private sector, and NGOs to create a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. This helps with promoting partnerships between corporate and social enterprises to leverage resources, knowledge, and networks for greater impact. Stakeholders can also work to expand access to funding for both social and corporate entrepreneurs—particularly those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds—through government grants, low-interest loans, and public-private partnerships. In addition, financial literacy programs should be developed to help entrepreneurs better manage resources and access funding. To ensure inclusivity, practitioners and stakeholders can provide entrepreneurial support programs made accessible to women, youth, and other marginalised groups, thereby promoting equal access to economic resources, property rights, and financial services as outlined in SDG targets. Practitioners should also promote mentorship and coaching initiatives where experienced entrepreneurs provide guidance and support new and emerging entrepreneurs. Further, practitioners can invest in education and training programs focused on entrepreneurship and business management skills, ensuring accessibility for all, including marginalised communities. Finally, practitioners and stakeholders can raise awareness about sustainability's importance and business's role in achieving SDGs through public campaigns and education programs. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should also be established to assess entrepreneurship's impact on SDGs and adjust strategies accordingly.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: The study demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach by merging entrepreneurship, economics, policy, sociology and environment to examine how CSE contribute towards achieving SDGs in South Africa. The study explores the challenges, implications, innovation and policy context with the aim to inform strategies for leveraging entrepreneurship as catalyst for sustainable development.

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