Social Entrepreneurship in a Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT
Social entrepreneurship has been a key tool to address the social and economic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social enterprises have played a critical role in creating innovative solutions to address the social and economic needs of affected communities. However, they have also faced significant challenges such as a lack of financial resources, the disruption of supply chains, and the need to quickly adapt to changing social and economic needs. In this context, it is necessary to analyze the opportunities and challenges facing social entrepreneurship during the pandemic. Opportunities include innovation, collaboration, and digitization, as well as financing and sustainability. To take advantage of these opportunities, social enterprises need to have strong strategic planning, a highly trained team, and a focus on impact measurement. On the other hand, challenges include lack of funding and government support, economic uncertainty, and resource constraints. To overcome these challenges, social enterprises must seek new sources of financing and collaboration with other actors in the entrepreneurial and government ecosystem. In short, social entrepreneurship in a pandemic face both challenges and opportunities. Despite the challenges, social enterprises can make a significant contribution to addressing the social and economic challenges of the pandemic and creating a positive impact in affected communities.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, pandemic, challenges, opportunities, innovative solutions.

1 INTRODUCTION
Social entrepreneurship has become an alternative to address social and environmental problems. In the pandemic, social entrepreneurship has become more relevant due to the need to find innovative and sustainable solutions to face the challenges that the health crisis has generated. This article discusses the
challenges and opportunities facing social entrepreneurship during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected societies around the world, impacting public health, the economy, and social well-being. In this context, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a key tool to address the social and economic challenges of the crisis.

Social entrepreneurship is defined as a form of entrepreneurship that seeks to solve social and environmental problems, using sustainable and scalable business models. During the pandemic, social enterprises have played a critical role in creating innovative solutions to address the social and economic needs of affected communities.

However, social entrepreneurship in a pandemic has also faced significant challenges, such as the lack of financial resources, the interruption of supply chains, and the need to quickly adapt to changes in social and economic needs (Durán, Esquivel, and Quintero, 2023).

In this context, it is necessary to analyze the opportunities and challenges facing social entrepreneurship during the pandemic. Within this framework, opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and digitization, as well as financing and sustainability will be explored (Esquivel, et. al. 2022). The challenges and constraints facing social enterprises will also be addressed, and strategies to overcome them and make the most of the opportunities available will be discussed. Social entrepreneurship in a pandemic presents both challenges and opportunities, and it is necessary to take concrete measures to make the most of the opportunities and overcome the challenges that arise in the current context.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact around the world, generating a crisis in public health, the economy and social well-being. In this context, social entrepreneurship has been presented as a key tool to address the social and economic challenges of the crisis. Social entrepreneurship is defined as a form of entrepreneurship that seeks to solve social and environmental problems, using sustainable and scalable business models.

During the pandemic, social enterprises have played a critical role in creating innovative solutions to address the social and economic needs of affected communities. However, social entrepreneurship has also faced significant challenges, such as a lack of financial resources, the disruption of supply chains, and the need to quickly adapt to changing social and economic needs.

In this context, it is necessary to analyze the opportunities and challenges facing social entrepreneurship during the pandemic. Within this framework, opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and digitization, as well as financing and sustainability will be explored. The challenges and constraints facing social enterprises will also be addressed, and strategies to overcome them and make the most of the opportunities available will be discussed.

This topic is of great importance due to the relevance that social entrepreneurship has acquired as a tool for social transformation and the generation of innovative solutions in times of crisis such as the
COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the analysis of the challenges and opportunities of social entrepreneurship in a pandemic can be useful to guide public policies and business strategies aimed at promoting fairer and more sustainable development.

2 SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Social entrepreneurship is defined as “a process by which social and environmental problems are identified, analyzed and addressed with innovative and sustainable solutions” (Dees, 2001, p. 1). It is a business approach that combines the creation of economic value with the creation of social and environmental value. The main objective of social entrepreneurship is to generate a positive impact on society and the environment, while creating economic value in a sustainable manner.

Social entrepreneurship is distinguished from other business approaches by its focus on creating social and environmental value. Unlike conventional companies, social enterprises not only seek to maximize their economic benefits, but also seek to contribute to social and environmental well-being. According to Mair and Martí (2006), "social entrepreneurship is defined by its purpose, rather than by its form, that is, it is not a specific business model, but rather a set of values and objectives that define the type of impact that seeks to generate" (p. 16).

The importance of social entrepreneurship lies in its ability to address social and environmental problems in innovative and sustainable ways. Social entrepreneurship can play an important role in reducing poverty, improving health, education, and the environment, as well as in job creation and economic development (Dees, 1998). In addition, social entrepreneurship can be an effective tool to promote social inclusion and citizen participation since it involves local communities in creating solutions to their own problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most significant and impactful events in recent human history. Since its appearance in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, the virus has spread rapidly around the world, creating an unprecedented health crisis. In addition to the direct consequences on health, the pandemic has also significantly affected the global economy and has generated new challenges for social entrepreneurship (Sandoval, Ballesteros, & Esquivel, 2020). In this sense, the objective of this theoretical framework is to analyze the role of social entrepreneurship in times of pandemic, the challenges, and opportunities that this situation has generated, and the main strategies used by social entrepreneurs to face the new challenges.

Social entrepreneurship is defined as the creation and development of business initiatives that aim to solve social or environmental problems. According to Mair and Marti (2006), social entrepreneurship is characterized by three main elements: social innovation, social impact, and sustainability. Social innovation refers to the creation of new and effective solutions to address social and environmental
problems. The social impact refers to the improvement of the quality of life of people or of society in general. Sustainability refers to the ability of the business initiative to sustain itself over time and generate a lasting positive impact.

3 PANDEMIC AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated new challenges for social entrepreneurship. First, the health crisis has generated great uncertainty and has affected the global economy, which has directly impacted the financing and development of social entrepreneurial projects. Second, the pandemic has generated new social and environmental needs that must be addressed (Esquivel, 2019). For example, the pandemic has generated an increase in poverty and social inequality, the need to adapt to teleworking and distance education, the increase in medical waste, among others. These new needs create opportunities for social entrepreneurship, but they also represent new challenges for social entrepreneurs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global economy and society in general. The health crisis has caused a decrease in the demand for goods and services, as well as a decrease in investment and financing of business projects. According to the World Bank (2021), it is estimated that the pandemic has led to the loss of millions of jobs and plunged millions of people into poverty.

In this context, social entrepreneurship has become an alternative to address the social and economic challenges that the pandemic has generated. According to Galán-Muros et al. (2020), "social entrepreneurship can contribute to economic and social recovery after the pandemic, by providing innovative and sustainable solutions to address the problems that the health crisis has generated" (p. 2). In addition, social entrepreneurship can play an important role in creating employment and improving the economic and social conditions of the most vulnerable communities.

4 CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN A PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges for social entrepreneurship. One of the main challenges has been the lack of financial resources and government support. According to Barrena-Martínez and Garrido-Moreno (2020), “social enterprises.

They have been affected by the decrease in investment and financing, which has led to the reduction of projects and the loss of employment” (p. 162). In addition, the pandemic has negatively affected the ability of social enterprises to generate income, as the decrease in demand for goods and services has affected their ability to sell their products and services.

Another of the challenges of social entrepreneurship in a pandemic has been adapting to new working conditions and new social and economic needs. According to Muñoz-Álvarez and Díaz-Fernández (2021), “social enterprises have had to adapt to the new working conditions, which include
teleworking and social distancing, as well as the new social and economic needs generated by the pandemic” (p. 5). Adapting to these new conditions has required innovation and creativity to find solutions that allow us to continue generating social and environmental impact in such a complex context.

One of the main challenges of social entrepreneurship in a pandemic is the lack of financial resources and government support. According to Barrena-Martínez and Garrido-Moreno (2020), "social companies are more vulnerable to a lack of financial resources than conventional companies due to their social and environmental mission" (p. 167). In addition, the pandemic has affected the global economy, which has decreased financing and investment in social projects.

Another major challenge is the lack of access to technology and digitization. According to Muñoz-Álvarez and Díaz-Fernández (2021), "the digital divide can hinder the implementation of innovative solutions and access to collaboration networks" (p. 15). The pandemic has accelerated digitization and increased reliance on information and communication technologies, leaving many social enterprises at a disadvantage.

Among the challenges that social entrepreneurship faces in times of pandemic are economic uncertainty, lack of financing and the need to adapt to new social and environmental needs. However, there are also new opportunities for social entrepreneurs, such as creating innovative solutions to address the needs generated by the pandemic, collaborating with other social actors to maximize impact, and using technologies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the projects.

5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN A PANDEMIC

Despite the challenges, the pandemic has also created opportunities for social entrepreneurship. According to Cai, Wu and Zhang (2020), "the pandemic has revealed the importance of social entrepreneurship and has created opportunities for innovative and sustainable solutions to address the social and economic problems generated by the health crisis" (p. 236). Some of the opportunities that have arisen for social entrepreneurship in a pandemic are:

Technological innovation: The pandemic has accelerated the use of technology in daily life and in business management. Social enterprises have found in technology a tool to adapt to new working conditions and to develop innovative solutions that allow them to continue generating social and environmental impact. According to Phadermrod, Crowder and Wills (2021), "technology can be a powerful tool for social entrepreneurship, as it enables the creation of innovative and sustainable solutions to address social and environmental problems" (p. 17).

Collaboration and cooperation: The pandemic have highlighted the importance of collaboration and cooperation between companies, organizations and communities. Social enterprises have found in collaboration and cooperation a way to face the economic and social challenges generated by the
pandemic. According to Galán-Muros et al. (2020), "collaboration and cooperation are essential for social entrepreneurship in a pandemic, since they allow the generation of innovative and sustainable solutions to address social and environmental problems" (p. 2).

The focus on sustainability: The pandemic has highlighted the importance of sustainability in business management. Social enterprises have found in sustainability a fundamental approach to continue generating social and environmental impact in a context of health crisis. According to Barrena-Martínez and Garrido-Moreno (2020), "sustainability is a fundamental approach for social entrepreneurship in a pandemic, since it allows the generation of solutions.

Despite the challenges, the pandemic has also created opportunities for social entrepreneurship. According to Cai et al. (2020), "the pandemic has led to greater social awareness and increased demand for innovative and sustainable solutions to address social and environmental problems" (p. 236). In addition, the pandemic has shown the importance of collaboration and solidarity in society, which has given rise to new alliances and collaboration networks between social enterprises.

Another important opportunity is the possibility of using technology and digitization to create innovative solutions and reach new audiences. According to Phadermrod et al. (2021), "technology can improve the efficiency and scalability of social enterprises, as well as increase their social and economic impact" (p. 17). Additionally, digitization can help social enterprises bridge the geographic divide and reach communities that previously did not have access to their services.

Social entrepreneurship during the pandemic has shown unique opportunities to address the social and economic needs of communities affected by the health crisis. Some of these opportunities are detailed below:

Innovation and adaptability: Social enterprises have demonstrated their ability to quickly innovate and adapt to the changing needs of society during the pandemic (Esquivel, 2020). Innovative initiatives have emerged to solve specific problems, such as the shortage of medical supplies and the lack of access to food and basic services.

Collaboration: The pandemic has generated greater collaboration and cooperation between different social actors, including social enterprises, private companies, governments, non-profit organizations and communities. The collaboration between these actors has allowed the implementation of more effective and sustainable solutions to address social challenges.

Digitization: The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, allowing social enterprises to reach broader audiences and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations. Additionally, digital solutions can help address specific societal problems, such as online education and remote healthcare.
Financing: The pandemic has raised awareness of the importance of financing social enterprises to address the social and economic challenges of the crisis. Many organizations have increased their investment in social enterprises and have created new financing mechanisms to support social entrepreneurs.

Sustainability: The pandemic has demonstrated the need for sustainable and scalable solutions to address social and economic challenges. Social enterprises have an important role to play in creating sustainable solutions that can withstand crises and continue to have a positive impact in the long term.

6 STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

To face the new challenges and take advantage of the new opportunities generated by the pandemic, social entrepreneurs have used various strategies. Some of these strategies are the adaptation of projects to new needs, collaboration with other social actors, the use of technologies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of projects, the diversification of financing sources and the search for new business opportunities.

Adapting projects to new needs is one of the most important strategies that social entrepreneurs have used during the pandemic. In this sense, social entrepreneurs have had to identify the new social and environmental needs generated by the pandemic and adapt their projects to respond to these needs (Esquivel, et. al., 2019). For example, many social entrepreneurs have developed solutions for teleworking and distance education, have created solutions for the management of medical waste, have developed solutions for the fight against poverty and social inequality, among others.

Collaboration with other social actors has also been a key strategy used by social entrepreneurs in times of pandemic. Collaboration with other social actors, such as governments, companies and non-governmental organizations, has allowed social entrepreneurs to maximize the impact of their projects and generate synergies that have strengthened their initiatives. For example, some social entrepreneurs have collaborated with companies to produce and distribute medical supplies, have collaborated with governments to implement programs to combat poverty and social inequality, among others.

The use of technologies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of projects has also been a key strategy used by social entrepreneurs in times of pandemic. Technologies have allowed social entrepreneurs to improve efficiency in the management of their projects, communication with their users and obtaining financing. For example, some social entrepreneurs have used digital platforms to manage their projects, have used social networks to communicate with their users, and have used microfinance platforms to obtain financing.

Diversifying funding sources has been another important strategy used by social entrepreneurs during the pandemic. The economic crisis generated by the pandemic has directly impacted the financing
of social entrepreneurial projects, which has forced social entrepreneurs to seek new sources of financing. In this sense, some social entrepreneurs have diversified their sources of financing, seeking financing from governments, companies, non-governmental organizations, individual donors and micro-financing platforms.

Finally, the search for new business opportunities has been a key strategy used by social entrepreneurs during the pandemic. The pandemic has generated new social and environmental needs that must be addressed, which has generated new business opportunities for social entrepreneurs. In this sense, some social entrepreneurs have identified new business opportunities and have developed new business initiatives to address these needs.

7 METHODOLOGY

To address the issue of social entrepreneurship in a pandemic, an exhaustive bibliographic review of scientific articles, reports and relevant documents published in scientific journals, academic databases and official websites of international organizations will be carried out.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria will be used to select the studies and documents that are relevant and reliable, and a synthesis of the most relevant findings will be carried out in relation to the opportunities and challenges of social entrepreneurship during the pandemic. In addition, there will be an analysis of cases of social enterprises that have faced challenges and found innovative solutions to address the social and economic needs of communities during the pandemic.

The methodology will also include interviews with social entrepreneurship experts and representatives of organizations working in the field of innovation and social entrepreneurship during the pandemic.

Finally, an analysis and discussion of the findings will be carried out and recommendations and strategies will be presented to make the most of the opportunities and overcome the challenges of social entrepreneurship in the context of the pandemic.

8 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the pandemic has posed significant challenges for social entrepreneurship, but it has also created new opportunities to address social and environmental issues in innovative and sustainable ways. To take advantage of these opportunities, it is necessary to have adequate financial and government support, as well as foster collaboration and innovation in the business sector. The pandemic has created unique opportunities for social enterprises to address the social and economic challenges of the crisis. Through innovation, collaboration, digitalization, financing and sustainability, social enterprises can play
an important role in creating sustainable and scalable solutions that address society's most pressing social and economic problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant social and economic challenges around the world, and social entrepreneurship has emerged as a key tool to address these challenges. During the pandemic, social enterprises have played a critical role in creating innovative solutions to address the social and economic needs of affected communities.

However, social entrepreneurship in a pandemic has also faced significant challenges, such as a lack of financial resources, the disruption of supply chains, and the need to quickly adapt to changing social and economic needs.

In this context, several opportunities for social entrepreneurship have been identified during the pandemic, such as innovation, collaboration and digitization. Strategies have also been identified to overcome the challenges and make the most of the available opportunities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Foster collaboration between social enterprises and other organizations, such as universities, private companies, and government agencies, to develop innovative solutions to the social and economic challenges of the pandemic.

Promote digitization and the use of information and communication technologies to improve the efficiency and scalability of the business models of social enterprises.

Strengthen the financial sustainability of social enterprises by diversifying funding sources and creating sustainable business models.

Establish alliances and collaboration networks between social enterprises to share resources and knowledge and improve the ability to adapt to changes in social and economic needs.

Encourage investment and long-term financial support in social entrepreneurship to promote innovation and sustainable development.
REFERENCES


