


# Opportunities and challenges of young social entrepreneurs in Phuthaditjhaba: Social entrepreneurship, community development and socio-economic challenges

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**Orientation:** There has been growing research interest in social entrepreneurship, both global and local levels; little is known about the youth who participate in or aspire to be social entrepreneurs in South Africa's rural-urban communities.

**Research purpose:** This study explored the opportunities and challenges of young social entrepreneurs' experience in addressing socio-economic challenges affecting rural-urban villages of Phuthaditjhaba, Free State.

**Motivation for the study:** This study was thus motivated by the need to investigate the opportunities and challenges youth encounter in becoming social entrepreneurs in Phuthaditjhaba.

**Research design, approach and method:** This study adopted a case study design of a qualitative research approach to investigate the above-mentioned purpose of the research. Thirteen participants who were identified as active social entrepreneurs, aspiring social entrepreneurs and representatives from youth development support organisations between the ages of 22 and 35 years were interviewed through semi-structured interviews.

**Main findings:** Findings indicate that the main challenges confronting young social entrepreneurs are the unavailability of infrastructure and resources for social enterprises, ineffective collaboration between the community, government and social enterprises, and difficulties in social enterprises registration. Opportunities for young social entrepreneurs include gaining inspiring hands-on experience to establish a social business from other agencies, selling, international recognition, development of healthy networks with stakeholders, etc.

**Practical/managerial implications:** This study has implications for young aspiring social entrepreneurs and active social entrepreneurs in rural-urban villages, addressing socio-economic issues through the application of social entrepreneurship.

**Contribution/value-add:** The formation of youth-led social entrepreneurship targeted interventions is essential to enhance youth empowerment in social entrepreneurship and positive impact maximisation in rural-urban communities.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship; socio-economic challenges; youth; positive impact; empowerment; rural-urban villages.

## Introduction

Social entrepreneurship appears to be a central strategy in driving social impact development aimed at reducing poverty, hunger, unemployment and enhancing the livelihoods of communities that are faced with development difficulties. The literature positions social entrepreneurship to concentrate on driving social change and addressing societal problems, such as unemployment and poverty (Chatterjee, Cornelissen & Wincent 2021; Oberoi, Halsall & Snowden 2021). According to Pothipala, Keerasuntonpong and Cordery (2020), social entrepreneurs work with rural residents to reduce inequality and increase their income and employment. Furthermore, a collective form of social entrepreneurship has served as an empowerment mechanism for the growth of entrepreneurial behaviour, economic protection and improved family contributions (Datta & Gailey 2012). Among the others, a survey by Shin et al. (2022) showed that 100% of women agreed on improvement in social contacts because of accelerating empowerment in social entrepreneurship.

However, despite the growing social entrepreneurship popularity, it remains under-represented in the context of young people who aspire to be social entrepreneurs, particularly in South Africa's rural-urban communities. The opportunities and challenges experienced by aspiring youth social entrepreneurs have not been explored, which hold immense potential to address socio-economic challenges affecting rural-urban communities of South Africa. However, social entrepreneurs are facing challenges, such as long-lasting team, resource mobilisation, funding and others (Akoh & Lekhanya 2022; Dzomonda 2021; Ivankovic & Essa 2022). Findings by Elliot (2019) have revealed that being close to social problems perpetuates attitudes towards social entrepreneurship. According to Bulelwa Makalima-Ngewana (2019), an immense number of youths uphold the idea that they can establish something that generates income for themselves while they address issues they see affecting their communities, making young social entrepreneurs key stakeholders for positive change in South Africa. This study is thus motivated by the need to analyse the opportunities and challenges youth encounter in becoming social entrepreneurs in Phuthaditjhaba, a youthful region mostly populated by young individuals. It asks: What are the opportunities and challenges of young social entrepreneurs in addressing socio-economic challenges affecting rural-urban villages of Phuthaditjhaba, Free State?

Addressing this question is critical because socio-economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, gangsterism, crime, substance abuse, etc., are pressing difficulties for young people in Phuthaditjhaba (Tsoetsi & Omodan 2022). These socio-economic challenges affect the community of Phuthaditjhaba at large because of the reality of water scarcity, poor service delivery, collapsing public infrastructure, limited economic opportunities and livelihood opportunities (Funmbi et al. 2022; Mocwagae & Mphambukeli 2023). These circumstances have extremely hindered the success and growth of communities, families and individuals of Phuthaditjhaba. The region faces an underperforming economy, and insufficient skills and skills mismatch for the labour market (Seore 2018). However, some of the youths have turned to the application of social entrepreneurship to deal with the rising socio-economic problems affecting them and Phuthaditjhaba. In addition, there is limited empirical evidence on how rural-urban young social entrepreneurs experience, resist and adapt with social entrepreneurship in rural-urban villages.

This study contributes to knowledge by guiding and informing youth-led social entrepreneurship targeted interventions, thus enhancing the empowerment of youth in social entrepreneurship to maximise further positive social impact in rural-urban communities that are faced with socio-economic problems. It fills the knowledge gap on the application of social entrepreneurship by young people who are based in rural-urban settings, such as the rural-urban communities of Phuthaditjhaba. This study brings attention to the lived experiences of young people who aspire to be social entrepreneurs and the lived experiences of young active social

entrepreneurs (ASEs) in rural-urban villages of Phuthaditjhaba. This study also supplies comprehensive insights for development practitioners, relevant social impact stakeholders, policy makers and social entrepreneurs about young people's insights and awareness of social entrepreneurship to address socio-economic challenges in Phuthaditjhaba.

## Literature review

### Conceptualising social entrepreneurship and community development

Social entrepreneurship and community development are two different phenomena, but they are interrelated and interconnected. These phenomena hold the common idea of contributing to positive change, especially in the development of communities and society at large. There is no single definition of social entrepreneurship (Buchko 2018; Huybrechts & Nicholls 2012). However, the main idea of utilising business procedures and strategies to address social and/or environmental issues continues to be consistent across the various definitions of social entrepreneurship. This study utilises Abu-Saifan's (2012) definition of social entrepreneurship as a practical act of a social mission-driven person who uses entrepreneurial strategies or business behaviour to support social values of an underserved group of individuals through an entrepreneurial-oriented agency that is sustainable, self-sufficient and financially independent (Department of Social Development, South Africa 2014).

On the other hand, community development is defined as:

[A]n active, long-term integrative and holistic citizenry empowerment practice with set values and practices which play a special role in addressing inequality in society, to bring about change and a deepening democracy founded on social justice, equality and inclusion towards improved well-being for members of society. (p. 12)

Community development and social entrepreneurship are very important practices that can be used to drive the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, if carefully applied and practised. Their unique nature responds to the development of a society, brings about positive social impact, change and improved well-being of the communities. Extant literature (Chen et al. 2024; Kalangari 2022; Kanayo, Ndlovu & Agholor 2021; Setiawan et al. 2023) highlights that social entrepreneurship and community development strategies have prioritised employment, economic growth, livelihoods support, reduction of poverty, inequalities and hunger. As a result, this responds and aligns with the attainment and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals number 1, 2, 5, and 8 and 10, which set out to combat poverty, hunger, reduce inequalities, job creation and contribute to local economic growth, respectively.

### Social entrepreneurship in the global context

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a dynamic and distinct research field between the 1970s and 1980s that integrates principles of entrepreneurship with social mission

to address community issues (Wiam, Nouhaila & Khaoula 2025). However, Teasdale et al. (2022) highlight that social entrepreneurship can be traced back to 1920, when Wharton was viewed as a social entrepreneur, because she utilised her networks and social skills to generate opportunities for wealthy people in New York high society. It is growing into a global movement that amalgamates traditional business strategies with positive social impact to create sustainable models where social and/or environmental benefits, and financial viability coexist (Pérez-Barea 2025). Emerged as a concept in the United Kingdom for social enterprises (El Ebrashi 2013) and gaining traction in Asia and the United States through initiatives like Muhammad Yunus's Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, its foundations were based on utilising principles of traditional business for social good (Bookin 2023). Social entrepreneurship at a global level emphasises the need to create sustainable and innovative business models to resolve pressing environmental and social challenges, prioritising social impact maximisation over pure profit maximisation (Reddy, Honig & Urbano 2025; WIPO 2024). The key area of focus is on generating lasting, scalable and empowering communities from severe community issues such as poverty, social injustices, climate change, etc.

Over time, social entrepreneurship research has moved from basic efforts to define the concept and/or field and focused on non-profit organisations to a broader, multidisciplinary study of innovation of hybrid models that ignite financial sustainability and social mission (El Ebrashi 2013; Pérez-Barea 2025). Recently, research on social entrepreneurship has consisted of a wider range of activities, including those within for-profit businesses, the public sector and hybrid models that contribute to environmental and social goals found in business practices (World Economic Forum 2025). Global discussions on social entrepreneurship revolve around navigating power dynamics between the Global North and South and ensuring equitable representation and inclusion within the field itself (Lashitew & Rosca 2025). Other discussions centre around the role of social entrepreneurship in achieving Sustainable Development Goals, the impact of global crises like the pandemic on these efforts of social entrepreneurship (Popkova et al. 2023). Social entrepreneurship has been seen as a significant force in resolving complex social issues through entrepreneurial and innovative solutions (Uzzol & Uddin 2025).

### The contribution of social entrepreneurship in Africa

In Africa, social entrepreneurship is believed it have existed for decades (LEAP Africa 2024). Still, it started to be visible during the late 1980s and early 1990s with organisations like Ashoka, LEAP Africa, Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, etc. being established during those times (Bignotti & Myres 2022). In Africa, social entrepreneurship has a long history that is rooted in community-based development initiatives, which focus on social well-being, education and health. Social innovation, social entrepreneur,

social value, market orientation and social enterprise are grouped concepts that are closely related to social entrepreneurship (LEAP Africa 2024). Social entrepreneurship in Africa has evolved over the years from defining the concept, policy environment for social entrepreneurship, differentiating it from traditional entrepreneurship (Ngatse-Ipangui & Dassah 2019), to understanding it through an African lens, and acknowledging that social entrepreneurship operates within a complex ecosystem that includes economic, cultural and political factors (Farhoud et al. 2023). According to Kraemer-Mbula (2024), the context of Africa renders a productive ground for social entrepreneurship based on Africa's unique opportunities and challenges.

In Africa, social entrepreneurs have been hailed for sustaining livelihoods, community development, environmental protection, education, financial inclusion and healthcare (Abdulmelike 2017; Littlewood et al. 2022). An increase in youth well-being and provision of solutions to community issues by young innovative entrepreneurs drives socio-economic development and employment opportunities for others and themselves (Adewole 2022). Raniga and Ringson (2021) argue that social entrepreneurship projects are a means of sustaining income security, livelihoods and provision of job opportunities, especially for unemployed women within communities. Alexander (2018) noted that it is vital to support innovation in youth, grooming them to be strong change agents for Africa's development.

In South Africa, a large social entrepreneurship base can greatly promote the achievement of sustainable development goals (Dzomonda 2020), combating the increasing rates of unemployment and addressing socio-economic challenges experienced by communities. There is a high unemployment rate in South Africa, sitting at 60% affecting most young people aged 15 and 24 years. In the Free State, the overall unemployment rate is 38% (Maluleke 2024). Youth-led social entrepreneurship offers possibilities of addressing unemployment and other socio-economic challenges facing communities.

### Youth involvement in social entrepreneurship

In this article, the youth refer to individuals who are in the ages between 14 and 35 years old from diverse ethnic groups with aspirations, talents and skills (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, South Africa 2020; Dhliwayo 2023). In addition, this definition is in line with the African Union definition of youth (African Union 2006). In this context, youth-led social entrepreneurship refers to individuals who are involved in leading innovative ventures and practising entrepreneurial activities with the core goal of addressing community issues through their social enterprises (Bublitz et al. 2020; Clarke & Dougherty 2010).

Decision-making bodies tend to overlook insights and perspectives of youth regarding development agendas within communities (Mpungose 2020), especially in rural areas, despite the fact that young people are involved in social entrepreneurial activities and employment creation.

Although social entrepreneurs face challenges such as a lack of long-lasting team, limited resource mobilisation, funding and support from government and high crime rates (Akoh & Lekhanya 2022; Dzomonda 2021; Ivankovic & Essa 2022), findings by Elliot (2019) revealed that being close to a social problem creates attitudes toward social entrepreneurship. According to Makalima-Ngewana (2019), many among the youth believe that they can establish something that generates income for themselves while they address issues, they see affecting their communities. This makes young social entrepreneurs key stakeholders in positive change in South Africa. According to Zulkifle and Aziz (2023), characteristics of social entrepreneurs include self-reliance, social awareness and prior experience in entrepreneurship. In addition, Pangriya (2019) highlights that the traits of social entrepreneurs are prior work experience, education, creativity, global exposure, empathy, etc.

## Research methods and design

The study adopted a qualitative case study design (Creswell 2013; Merriam 2002; Yin 2003) to articulate the experiences of youth who desire to become social entrepreneurs, young ASEs and representatives of youth development support organisations in Phuthaditjhaba, Free State. The research involved five young aspiring social entrepreneurs (YASE), five ASE and three representatives of youth development organisations (YDOs), giving a total of 13 participants. These key individuals were purposively selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic. Participants of the study were aged between 22 and 35 years old; eight were men, and five were

women. These key informants were adequate for the research questions that were under investigation; it was sufficient because the focus was on in-depth exploration of the experiences of selected research participants. This article draws information from data that were collected between June and September 2023 in the rural-urban villages of Phuthaditjhaba in the Thabo Mofutsanyana District under Maluti-a-Phofung Local Municipality, Free State Province, South Africa.

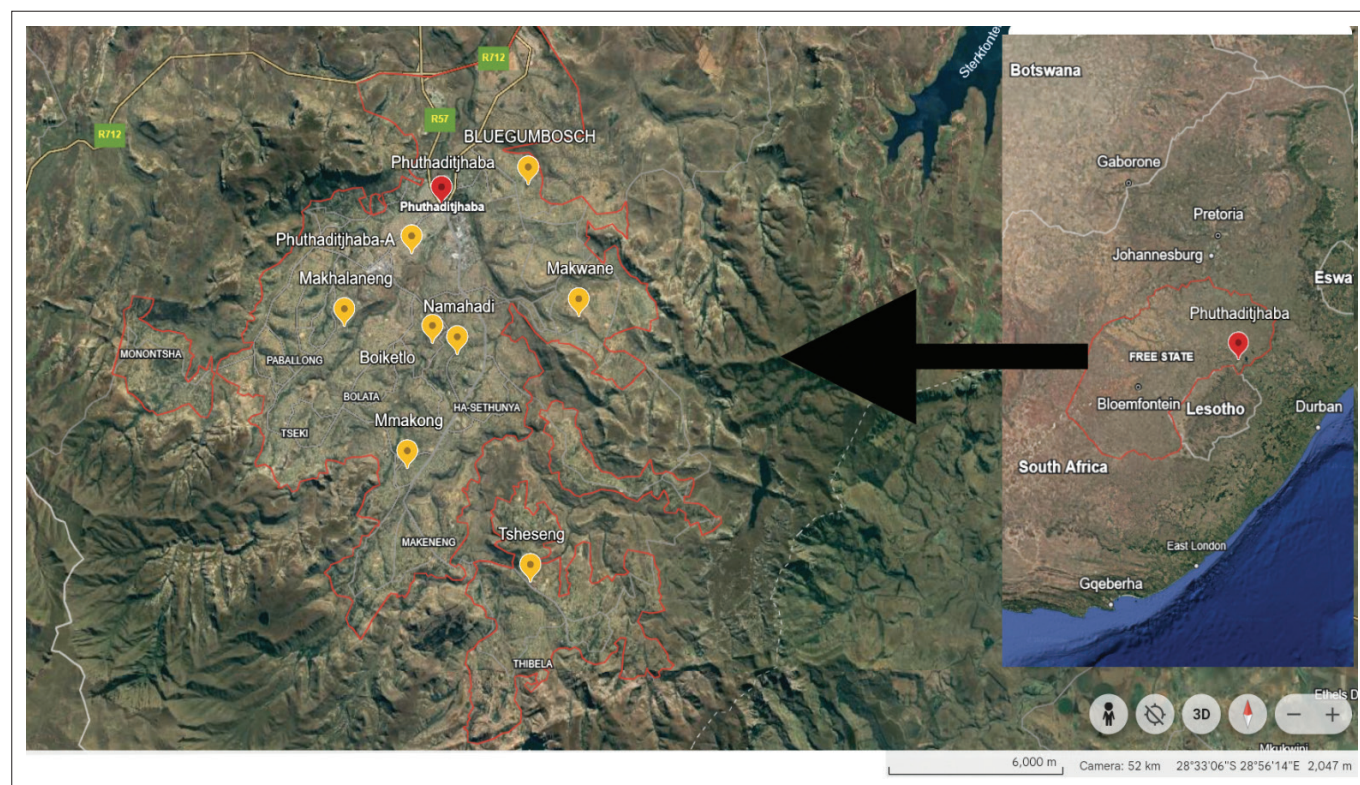
## Study site

This study was conducted in Phuthaditjhaba's rural-urban villages, Free State, South Africa (see Figure 1 for the geographical map). The population of Phuthaditjhaba, mostly inhabited by black/Africans, is between 264 977 and 398 459 with mixed ethnic groups such as black/African, white, Indian/Asian and mixed race (Magaiza et al. 2024). Phuthaditjhaba is a mountainous rural-urban settlement with the characteristics of subsistence farming and a growing population in Phuthaditjhaba's CBD (Funmbi et al. 2022; Taylor 2023). The selected study sites were Tsheseng, Mmakong, Namahadi, Boiketlo, Makgalaneng, Makwane, Bluegumbosh and Phuthaditjhaba-A, characterised as rural-urban villages.

The yellow-pinned location markers indicate Phuthaditjhaba's rural-urban villages included in the study.

## Sampling strategy

Purposive sampling was adopted to select mixed genders from the African/black group as research participants of the study. Because purposive sampling involves the selection of



Source: Google Earth 2025

FIGURE 1: Study sites in Phuthaditjhaba.

members possessing certain characteristics (Tongco 2007), the inclusion or exclusion criteria were based on age and inclination towards social entrepreneurship. Young people who were not involved and interested in social entrepreneurship and were below the age of 20 were excluded from the study, because of the assumed limited social entrepreneurial knowledge they might have. To ensure the replicability and transparency of the study, the selection criteria of research participants were based on youth who aspire to be social entrepreneurs who have exposure to social entrepreneurship, active young social entrepreneurs who run their own social enterprises and are all engaged in addressing socio-economic challenges at Phuthaditjhaba. Additionally, youth development support organisations were included in the study because they engaged with youth through their youth-targeted programmes.

### Data collection methods

The main research method employed was semi-structured individual interviews with open-ended questions (Magaldi & Berler 2020). Young aspiring social entrepreneurs responded to the following main questions: 'What motivates a young person to become a social entrepreneur?', 'What area of knowledge and skillset would you need to become an active social entrepreneur?' and 'What kind of support do young aspiring social entrepreneurs need from the government and other organisations?' Young ASE responded to questions: 'If you were to share strategies you used to establish and sustain your enterprise to aspiring youth, what would you share?', 'What role does the enterprise play in developing the community in this area?' and 'How is your effectiveness accelerated through working with your stakeholders?'. Youth Development support organisations representatives responded to the questions: 'What services and programmes does your organisation facilitate in the area?', 'What role can you play in conserving and/or preserving the growing ecosystem of young social entrepreneurship in Phuthaditjhaba?' and 'How can young social entrepreneurs access resources in your organisation to support their social entrepreneurship initiatives?'. The duration of each interview was between 30 and 60 min for research participants in this study.

### Data collection instruments

The researcher used categorised semi-structured individual interview guides for YASEs, young ASEs and the youth development support organisations. The development of semi-structured interviews encourages peaceful mutual exchange of knowledge and information in research studies between the interviewer and research participants (Kallio et al. 2016). Moreover, to carefully extract data on social entrepreneurship and youth, a sound recorder was used to record the semi-structured individual interviews, with consent obtained from research participants before recording. Crichton and Childs (2005) suggest that clipped audio files assist with honouring the voice of research participants and keeping collected data original. The protected

sound-recorded files were used to transcribe data collected into research transcripts from Sesotho to English for data analysis by the researcher.

### Data analysis method

The data were thematically analysed using thematic analysis six steps of Braun and Clarke (2006). Firstly, familiarisation with data involved the researcher familiarising himself with data collected through transcripts that were developed. Secondly, in the generation of codes, the researcher meaningfully systematically organised the collected data, addressing specific research questions using open coding, which allowed the researcher to develop and modify codes through the coding process. Thirdly, in searching and finding themes, the researcher organised coded data into themes that responded to specific questions. These themes included the following: drivers for social entrepreneurship, challenges and opportunities for social entrepreneurship, essential skills and knowledge to transform into a social entrepreneur and aid required by aspiring youth social entrepreneurs and recommendations. In the fourth stage of theme review, the researcher reviewed the generated themes to ensure that they make sense and respond to specific questions. The reviewed themes were: drivers for social entrepreneurship; challenges and opportunities for social entrepreneurship; essential skills and knowledge to transform into a social entrepreneur; and aid required by aspiring youth social entrepreneurs and recommendations. In stage 5 of defining themes, the researcher revisited and made necessary final refinements of themes to ensure that themes have meaning and make sense. Lastly, the report writing stage was when the researcher used the selected themes that respond to specific research questions and academic objectives to write and produce this article.

### Credibility and trustworthiness of findings

The study used several strategies to enhance trustworthiness and credibility as recommended by Nowell et al. (2017). This was achieved through spending a longer time in the field (research was conducted over a period of 4 months) and engaging in data sources triangulation. The researcher used a combination of data from multiple sources to supply a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon (see References List). To ensure confirmability, the researcher regularly discussed research progress, asked for reviews and received feedback from both colleagues and participants. To ensure the believability of the study, the researcher used a detailed, comprehensive description of the research setting and research participants, including their demographic information. The verbatim quotes from research participants provide a more nuanced understanding of the study topic.

### Ethical considerations

The ethical clearance of this study was acquired from the University of the Free State, General/Human Research Ethics

Committee, referenced UFS-HSD2021/0803/21/3. Study participants voluntarily participated after the researcher thoroughly explained the study aims. All research participants signed written consent forms to participate in the study after reading the research information sheet. To ensure the anonymity of research participants, the researcher used codes such as YASE1, YASE2, YASE3, YASE4, YASE5, ASE1, ASE2, ASE3, ASE4, ASE5, YDSO1, YDSO2 and YDSO3 to ensure participants' confidentiality. The research principles and ethics by Freed-Taylor (1994) and Buchanan and Warwick (2021), such as cause no pain or harm, no exploitation, and that the researcher maintains good relationships and respects research participants throughout the research process. The collected data are securely protected in a safe place and can only be accessed by the researcher.

## Results

In this section, the findings of the study are presented, exploring the youth experiences, challenges and opportunities from those who desire to become social entrepreneurs, the young ASEs and youth development support organisations. Firstly, the section presents a demographic characteristics profile of research participants (see Table 1). Secondly, it outlines the four themes that emerged from the data analysis. The themes are: (1) drivers for social entrepreneurship; (2) challenges and opportunities for social entrepreneurship; (3) essential skills and knowledge to transform into a social entrepreneur and (4) aid required by aspiring youth social entrepreneurs and recommendations.

## Research participants' demographic information

Table 1 presents a description of research participants, being young aspiring youth social entrepreneurs, active young social entrepreneurs and representatives from youth development support organisations. All participants are African or black people and speak Sesotho as their primary language. Aspiring youth social entrepreneurs were five in total, two women and three men, aged between 22-years-old and 29-years-old. Three of them hold Bachelor's degrees, one holds a diploma and certificates and one ended in Senior Secondary School. Two of them are unemployed, one is studying, one is partially employed (part-time contracted) and one is self-employed. Active social entrepreneurs were five in total, one woman and four men aged between 28-years-old and 35-years-old. All ASEs are self-employed. Three of them hold diplomas, one holds a university bachelor's degree and one has a National Senior Certificate. Representatives from a youth development support organisation were three, two women and one man, while two of them did not disclose their ages, one was aged 34-years-old. In terms of educational qualifications, one has a National Senior Certificate, another holds a diploma and the last one has a diploma and some certificates. This information is illustrated in Table 1.

## Drivers for social entrepreneurship

Empathy for the community's well-being and the burning desire to provide solutions and make positive changes to situations such as unemployment, crime, injustices, poverty

**TABLE 1:** Description of research participants.

Codes of research participants	Explanation of code	Gender	Age (years)	Educational background	Employment situation	Desired or actual business venture
YASE1	Young Aspiring Social Entrepreneur 1	F	24	University bachelor's degree	Unemployed	Desires to start an affordable agricultural cooperative
YASE2	Young Aspiring Social Entrepreneur 2	F	22	University bachelor's degree	Studying	Desires to start a waste management business for dumping and littering purposes
YASE3	Young Aspiring Social Entrepreneur 3	M	24	University bachelor's degree	Part-time Employed	Desires to start a social business that employs youth at risk of committing a crime
YASE4	Young Aspiring Social Entrepreneur 4	M	32	Certificates and Diploma	Unemployed	Aspires to address load shedding for students through innovative electricity supply inventions
YASE5	Young Aspiring Social Entrepreneur 5	M	29	Senior Secondary School	Self-employed	Aspires to establish a knowledge and skills development centre to share survival skills
ASE1	Active Social Entrepreneur 1	F	34	National Senior Certificate	Self-employed	Small-scale (crops) farming and a self-reliant programme for youth
ASE2	Active Social Entrepreneur 2	M	35	Diploma	Self-employed	Sports, manufacturing organic compost, waste management, tourism and small-scale (crops) farming
ASE3	Active Social Entrepreneur 3	M	28	Diploma	Self-employed	Poultry farming for egg production and knowledge transfer on agricultural-related information
ASE4	Active Social Entrepreneur 4	M	30	Diploma	Self-employed	Basic education, after-class support programmes, educational awareness on HIV/AIDS and TB
ASE5	Active Social Entrepreneur 5	M	35	University bachelor's degree	Self-employed	Psychosocial support and crime prevention programmes for children at risk of committing a crime
YDSO1	Youth Development Support Organisation 1	F	34	National Senior Certificate	Employed	Support teen services on teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, food security, GBV, sports, craft, art and entrepreneurship.
YDSO2	Youth Development Support Organisation 2	F	Undisclosed	Diploma	Employed	Development initiatives for youth, like skills development, cultural activities, art and sports
YDSO3	Youth Development Support Organisation 3	M	Undisclosed	Diploma and Certificates	Employed	Support services on the provision of agricultural materials, food security programme and community outreach

GBV, gender-based violence; HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; AIDS, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome; TB, tuberculosis; F, female; M, male.

and basic education disparities in the community were identified as the key drivers for social entrepreneurship. The following verbatim transcripts illustrate these points:

'[W]e witnessed that it's essential to assist kids at risk of committing crimes to step away from criminal-related activities.' (Male, 35-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'[T]his community requires an agency that is community-needs focused and a self-help empowering organisation ...' (Male, 35-years-old, Diploma)

'Scarce jobs gives me sleepless nights, I know if I can run and open social enterprise, I can hire myself and others in community.' (Female, 22-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'It's disheartening to hear community members telling me that they slept with an empty stomach and being unemployed ... while they wait for something, I want to make them realise they can do it for themselves ... taking action to get what they want.' (Female, 34-years-old, National Senior Certificate)

Participants emphasised that aspirations move them to uplift the community and to satisfy the demand for certain products by supplying them at lower costs, thus decreasing the high price pressure on the community. For example, ASE3, who is into egg production, argued that increased prices of eggs motivated him to engage in this business. He further argued that the demand is high, and employment opportunities are not available. Another participant (YASE3) stated that he was motivated by the fact that there were development gaps in the community, such as the neglect in the provision of basic social services, and he wanted to assist in solving these. An ASE4 in the education space, dealing with intermediate and secondary school learners, stated that his goal was to respond to the challenges faced by parents regarding the current education curriculum. He argued:

'The current education curriculum is complicated for parents to be able to assist their kids with homework, increasing core subjects' failure amongst learners ... pushed us to assist students with homework in the community.' (Male, 30-years-old, Diploma)

## Challenges and opportunities for social entrepreneurship

In their journey of becoming social entrepreneurs, ASEs and YASEs encounter both challenges and opportunities. These are presented next.

### Challenges

Young ASEs shared that they are confronted with multiple challenges, such as water shedding, a struggling economy, a lack of security, ineffective collaboration between community, government and social enterprises, limitation to market access, expensive resources, negative effects of unemployment, unavailability of infrastructure for social enterprises and other community members debilitate work carried out by social enterprises for the benefit of the community. The following quotes highlight challenges expressed by young ASEs:

'Water is a problem in this area; the economy is moving slow.' (Female, 34-years-old, National Senior Certificate)

'The community and government are not putting in efforts to join forces with us; the funds are not enough to run the enterprises' projects.' (Male, 35-years-old, Diploma)

'Major problems are accessing the market or other retailers and expensive feeds.' (Male, 28-years-old, Diploma)

'We do not have our own infrastructure; this one it is not ours and this community of ours has unemployed parents which affects their ability to contribute to our efforts.' (Male, 30-years-old, Diploma)

'We come across people who undermine the work we are doing for the community. Some people in this area have the mentality which says "I will never make someone rich," overlooking the core objective of our organisation, which aims to benefit the community.' (Male, 35-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

Young aspiring social entrepreneurs expressed that they are faced with costly resources, difficulties in identifying a productive like-minded team, theft of resources, load shedding, registration of social enterprises, discouragement, limited marketing, lack of a place of operation, limited idea protection and funding. Some of these are expressed as follows:

'For me, it is business registration- to establish it, and the difficulty of getting the right people ...' (Male, 24-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'As a result of load shedding, I halted my operations since I depend heavily on electricity ...' (Male, 29-years-old, Senior Secondary School)

'[R]esources that I once gathered were stolen, the place that I was working on was too small, as a result, I was discouraged.' (Female, 24-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'[R]esources are expensive ...' (Male, 32-years-old, Certificates and Diploma)

### Opportunities

The young ASEs mentioned that few opportunities exist as they run their social enterprises. These include being change agents, international recognition, growing a brand and developing healthy networks with stakeholders. The following are some of their views:

'The satisfaction that comes that comes from being able to assist with making positive change to my beneficiaries is higher than the value of money, and I benefit from learning more about this sector.' (Female, 34-years-old, National Senior Certificate)

'It is surprising to witness that there are international organisations out there that recognise the work we do and take what we do very serious ... our brand is growing.' (Male, 35-years-old, Diploma)

'Our cooperative is getting positive feedback from our customers and people in the community, and we have potential for building good relationships with stakeholders.' (Male, 28-years-old, Diploma)

However, ASE5, who specialises in crime prevention programmes in his agency, shared a different experience on

opportunities for social entrepreneurship. He argued that opportunities in his area were very limited.

Active young social entrepreneurs also identified other opportunities, including the empowerment of the community via shared resources, fostering of collective efforts, enhancement of self-reliance and the encouragement of a spirit of collaboration for resource mobilisation. The following submissions were made:

'When we witness that our beneficiaries require the support that we don't have, we refer the person to relevant organisations within the community that can support our beneficiary ...' (Male, 30-years-old, Diploma)

'[W]e enable young people to plough, and grow their own food and so that we can venture into cooperatives where we can work together ...' (Female, 34-years-old, National Senior Certificate)

'[T]his community food garden allows community members to get food, by nurturing and maintaining the community food garden, two or more can put food on the table.' (Male, 35-years-old, Diploma)

'[I]ssues that are facing community members are related to each other, it is essential as agencies to work together to help the community ...' (Male, 30-years-old, Diploma)

Young aspiring social entrepreneurs shared that there is potential to get inspiring hands-on experience to establish a social business from other agencies, engage in the selling of goods, access funds allocation for prototypes, generate innovative ideas, protect idea protection, learning about social business operations and receive training opportunities on entrepreneurship. The following cited quotes highlight these claims:

'[L]earnt excessively about machines, including other stuff required to run a business on a daily basis ...' (Male, 24-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'The chance to sell the work that I do to customers who are looking for my abilities and working with various agencies and acquiring great experience persuades me to establish my own social enterprise.' (Male, 29-years-old, Senior Secondary School)

'To start my prototype, I used TIA funds, and this brought me a chance to be more innovation with the idea I had ...' (Female, 22-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'[R]eceived training on entrepreneurship and certificates from other agencies and protected my idea and work with TIA ...' (Male, 32-years-old, Certificates and Diploma)

According to YASE2, the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), which funds small social entrepreneurs and social innovators under the Grassroots Innovation Programme under the Department of Science and Innovation, South Africa.

### Essential skills and knowledge to transform into a social entrepreneur

Young aspiring social entrepreneurs highlighted that they need to be educated on social innovation, marketing strategies for social enterprises and making positive change

in the community. Furthermore, they emphasised the need for experience with working with communities and making a positive impact. The following quotes present the evidence of their claims:

'[E]nhancing my attributes on social entrepreneurship and social innovation, and connecting with the community, looking on social entrepreneurship.' (Female, 22-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'[W]orkshops and trainings on management of soil, working with people and enhancement on contributing to bring about change in the community ... and be certified to do social entrepreneurship work.' (Female, 24-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'Acquiring extensive experience on positive change creation in my community.' (Male, 29-years-old, Senior Secondary School)

'[S]kill on making my business idea aligned with the social way of doing business and experience in management and operation of social business ...' (Male, 32-years-old, Certificates and Diploma)

Young aspiring social entrepreneurs also reported that they need assets and/or funding, private sector investment and mentorship programmes on social entrepreneurship. Claims made by YASEs are as follows:

'I need institutions that are on private sector to invest in my idea ...' (Female, 22-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'[S]upport in funding, being assets/money to establish the social enterprise ...' (Female, 24-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'[W]e remain in unprogressive place if the funding is not available, we need funds for operations.' (Male, 29-years-old, Senior Secondary School)

'[W]e require any support from other organisations which can supply us with resources like funding and a person who can mentor in social entrepreneurship process.' (Male, 24-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

In addition, active young social entrepreneurs and one of the youth development support organisations recommended means for YASEs to be ASEs in Phuthaditjhaba. They argued for a strong supporting team that shares the same vision, persistence, courage, zeal and passion for the chosen social entrepreneurship space. They also stated the need for aspiring social entrepreneurs to establish a business venture that assists in resolving community problems, is sustainable and makes a positive difference in society. Some of their sentiments are expressed as follows:

'In terms of making difference and maintaining value for products be sustainable as possible as you can ...' (Female, 34-years-old, National Senior Certificate)

'Establish strong supporting team, work with people who share similar vision as you, and in everything you do be persistent.' (Male, 35-years-old, Diploma)

'Have passion, courage and love for what you do. Search and get yourself someone who is already in the space to mentor you.' (Male, 28-years-old, Diploma)

'Once you have a vision focus on it and work on achieving that vision, grow it and go with it. It is also important to do what you love ...' (Male, 35-years-old, Bachelor's degree)

'[C]reate processes and procedures to operate a business in a way that helps with resolving specific community problems, unlike other businesses that use their systems to generate more money for personal gain.' (Female, 34-years-old, National Senior Certificate)

## Discussion

The study explored the challenges and opportunities experienced by aspiring young social entrepreneurs and young ASEs at Phuthaditjhaba, a community affected by diverse socio-economic challenges. The findings of the study provide valuable insights and perspectives into the opportunities and challenges faced by young ASEs and YASEs in addressing socio-economic challenges in Phuthaditjhaba. The findings of this study support and answer the call by Farhoud et al. (2023), where the authors emphasise the need to do contextual analysis studies in Africa, where social entrepreneurship research has been scarce. In this case, the research and findings of this study are rooted in Phuthaditjhaba, a rural-urban and under-resourced area found in the Eastern Free State in South Africa. Moreover, the findings of the study address a limited knowledge gap in what way social work graduates can apply social entrepreneurship to decrease unemployment confirmed by Leburu and Skhosana (2024). While the research participants in this study were mostly men and a few were women who are involved in social entrepreneurship and who aspire to be social entrepreneurs, the study by Raniga (2023) shows that women established the social enterprise to assist and train female-headed households to generate income, combat poverty and generate livelihood opportunities. In addition, LEAP Africa (2024) reports that in Africa, 64% of social enterprises are male-owned, 36% of social enterprises are female-owned, and 2.3% of social enterprises are owned by people with disabilities and internally displaced persons of which most of whom are young people.

### Drivers of social entrepreneurship

Findings indicate that aspiring young social entrepreneurs and ASEs are driven by the desire to make change on community problems, such as injustices, crime and unemployment. This is in line with the study by Wani and Govender (2023), which highlighted that 83% of research participants agreed that social entrepreneurship in South Africa can decrease unemployment among youth. The study's findings also revealed that aspiring social entrepreneurs and active young social entrepreneurs are motivated by desires to close the gap created by the neglected provision of basic social services and provide in-demand products at lower cost. According to Ngatse-Ipangui and Dassah (2019), social entrepreneurs are impacting the development of the community positively through educating, training and facilitating engagement of the communities. Social entrepreneurship has a promising potential to impact communities positively and enhance the well-being of the communities. These findings support a significant aspect of

social entrepreneurship, which is social value creation. Social value creation highlights the attainment of long-lasting and basic needs such as shelter, food and water, rather than the creation of wealth, generating positive social impact or change in the community by tackling social challenges (Rehman & Galib 2021).

### Challenges for social entrepreneurship

The study by Dzomonda (2021) found that social entrepreneurs are faced with multiple challenges, such as insufficient funding, support from the government and keeping a qualified team, which align with the findings of this study. Furthermore, this study discovered additional challenges, such as the unavailability of infrastructure for social enterprises, ineffective collaboration between the community, government and social enterprises, difficulties in social enterprises registration, idea protection, expensive resources, other community members debilitating the work carried out by social enterprises, and water and load shedding. These challenges threaten the existing social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Phuthaditjhaba, putting it at risk of being ineffective. The practice of social entrepreneurship in Phuthaditjhaba can be lost if it is not encouraged and protected, leading to increased socio-economic challenges for the area.

### The opportunities for social entrepreneurship

This study has revealed social entrepreneurship opportunities for aspiring social entrepreneurs, ASEs and the community. These opportunities include gaining inspiring hands-on experience to establish a social business from other agencies, selling, international recognition, development of healthy relationships with stakeholders, funds allocation for prototype, creation of innovative ideas, idea protection and being a change agent. Moreover, the opportunities generated by the existence of social enterprises in the community include empowerment of the community via shared resources, encouraging the spirit of collaboration for resource mobilisation among these social enterprises, and enhancing self-reliance and collective efforts to benefit the community. The practice of social entrepreneurship in Phuthaditjhaba benefits young social entrepreneurs themselves, their social businesses and the community itself. This finding corresponds with the relationship between community development and social entrepreneurship practices, which is to respond to the development of a society, contribution to positive social impact, change and the enhanced well-being of communities. Furthermore, it confirms research findings by Kajiita (2022), which highlight that social enterprises in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality improve and facilitate community development through the provision of innovative and alternative services to address social development shortfalls, capacitating and empowering youths and women for the enhancement of socio-economic freedom. But, on the other hand, limited opportunities in the rural village itself and social entrepreneurship for other young social entrepreneurs seem to be a limiting issue for social entrepreneurs to practice social entrepreneurship fully.

## The success ingredients for social entrepreneurship

The findings indicate that there are necessary skills and knowledge required to become a social entrepreneur in Phuthaditjhaba. While Viswanath and Kumar (2024) outlined that becoming a social entrepreneur needs one to have arranged knowledge and skills, aspiring young social entrepreneurs in this study stated that for them to be social entrepreneurs, they need to be educated on making positive change in the community, social innovation, marketing strategies and experience working with community members. The findings of Loukopoulos et al. (2023) emphasise that blended learning and work-based methods are decisive for social entrepreneurs to respond to learning needs and provide adequate training that improves work practice skills. Aspiring young social entrepreneurs can enrol in educational programmes, like the Bachelor of Community Development at the University of the Free State, to obtain crucial attributes and knowledge for the purpose of making positive social change they want to see in their communities. Additionally, they can look into workshops that are being offered by one of the youth development support organisations to enrich skills and knowledge for social entrepreneurship. This finding indicates that having the right knowledge and skills in social entrepreneurship increases the chances of young social entrepreneurs being enablers and catalysts of development in their communities.

## Limitations of the study

The small sample size of this study on youth and social entrepreneurship may have affected the diversity of views on this subject. Another limitation was translating Sesotho spoken words into English during transcription of the data; while data were successfully transcribed into English, other words, such as 'Manolo a hlwele mathata ka hodimo', 'Bofuma bojele setsi ...' and 'Metsi ke le qeme ...', were taking away the actual meaning of some claims made by research participants when translating into English. Moreover, while the findings of this study are relevant to the population studied, they may not be generalised to other contexts or populations. For example, this study was concentrated on young people in rural-urban communities of Phuthaditjhaba, thus limiting its application to other groups. This extensive exploration of social entrepreneurship and youth lays out an exact and comprehensive comprehension of complex issues in place, presenting insights that might be hidden by generalisation and quantification rooted in larger-scale studies.

## Implications of the study and future research

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by extending social entrepreneurship applications into rural-urban contexts of South Africa, indicating that socio-economic challenges can also be addressed through social impact expansion by youth-led social enterprises. To make sustainable and meaningful positive social change in rural-urban communities in addressing socio-economic problems, this research puts forward essential skills and knowledge needed for successful social entrepreneurship practices for

emerging young social entrepreneurs and social enterprises. The findings of this study prompt a rethinking of social entrepreneurship practice to reflect diverse socio-economic realities better, to extend the social impact nature of social entrepreneurship, adding value to outcomes of community development. The findings of the study supply significant insights into young people who are involved in social entrepreneurship about their key drivers that drive them to be driven to contribute to social impact, and positive social change towards socio-economic transformation of rural-urban communities of Phuthaditjhaba.

The presence of multiple challenges threatens the ecosystem of social entrepreneurship in Phuthaditjhaba. It is essential to preserve the practice of social entrepreneurship in Phuthaditjhaba through the formulation of youth-led social entrepreneurship targeted interventions to maximise positive social impacts in rural-urban communities that are faced with socio-economic challenges. The implications of this study are profound, with the potential of youth social entrepreneurship enabling rural-urban communities that experience socio-economic challenges to improve community well-being and development. Development practitioners, social entrepreneurs, policymakers and relevant stakeholders in Phuthaditjhaba are recommended to design and develop actionable social entrepreneurship practice agendas that prioritise the sustainability of positive social impact to address the socio-economic challenges facing the communities of Phuthaditjhaba. This research reveals limited knowledge on how community members are directly benefiting from social entrepreneurship practices, especially those who are faced with socio-economic challenges in rural-urban communities, how they are empowered, and participating in addressing socio-economic problems, which can be an area of exploration for future research.

## Conclusion

This article explored participants' views on challenges and opportunities experienced by YASEs, active young social entrepreneurs and youth development support organisations in addressing socio-economic challenges in Phuthaditjhaba. Results reveal that young social entrepreneurs are battling multiple challenges, such as the unavailability of infrastructure for social enterprises, ineffective collaboration between the community, government and social enterprises, difficulties in social enterprises registration, idea protection, expensive resources and other community members' debilitation of work carried out by social enterprises, water and electricity load shedding. However, opportunities exist for gaining inspiring hands-on experience to establish a social business from other agencies, selling, international recognition, development of healthy relationships with stakeholders, funds allocation for prototype, creation of innovative ideas, idea protection and being a change agent. Community members stand to benefit through empowerment of the community via shared resources, encouraging the spirit of collaboration for resource mobilisation among these

social enterprises, and the enhancement of self-reliance and collective efforts in the rural-urban communities of Phuthaditjhaba.

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## Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

## CRedit authorship contribution

Ngaka M. Mosia: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Visualisation, Writing - review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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## Data availability

All data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Mosia N. Martin, on reasonable request.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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