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# Social Entrepreneurship and Societal Transformation

## *An Exploratory Study*

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This study provides a comparative analysis of 7 cases of social entrepreneurship that have been widely recognized as successful. The article suggests factors associated with successful social entrepreneurship, particularly with social entrepreneurship that leads to significant changes in the social, political, and economic contexts for poor and marginalized groups. It generates propositions about core innovations, leadership and organization, and scaling up in social entrepreneurship that produces societal transformation. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications for social entrepreneurship practice, research, and continued development.

**Keywords:** development nongovernmental organizations; sustainable development; social change; social entrepreneurship; scaling up

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The concept of entrepreneurship, long hallowed in the context of business ventures, has been increasingly applied to the context of social problem solving (e.g., Dees, 1998; Emerson & Twerksy, 1996; Thake & Zadek, 1997). The challenges of finding effective and sustainable solutions to many social problems are substantial, and solutions may require many of the ingredients associated with successful business innovation. However, solutions to social problems—such as sustainable alleviation of the constellation of problems associated with long-term poverty—often demand fundamental transformations in political, economic, and social systems. The test of business

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entrepreneurship is the creation of a viable and growing business organization. The test of social entrepreneurship, in contrast, is change in social systems that create and maintain the problem, although the organizations involved may become smaller or less viable as they catalyze societal transformation.

Although the concept of social entrepreneurship may be new, initiatives that employ entrepreneurial capacities to solve social problems are not. For years, agencies have launched programs and implemented interventions to help impoverished and marginalized groups. Government aid agencies and private foundations have invested billions of dollars to support such initiatives, and some of them have been quite innovative. But all too often, the results of these initiatives have been disappointing in terms of both effectiveness and sustainability, let alone their capacity to scale up their impacts into significant social changes (e.g., Cernea, 1987; Tendlar, 1989).

Some research in the development literature has assessed characteristics common to large-scale, successful poverty alleviation initiatives (e.g., Krishna, Uphoff, & Esman, 1997; Tendlar, 1989). Some investigators have focused on the organizational and institutional characteristics of effective development agencies (e.g., Brown & Covey, 1987; Korten, 1980; Paul, 1982), and others have looked at the characteristics of successful social movements (e.g., Gamson, 1975; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Tarrow, 1998). But there is less available on the links between social entrepreneurship and sustainable societal transformations, which we explore in this research.

We set out to examine a few initiatives that have transformed the lives of thousands of poor and marginalized people around the world. We begin with a brief description of social entrepreneurship, and we identify some important aspects of it that we will examine in our analysis. We then describe the sample of cases and our approach to analyzing the available data. We report the results of comparisons across the cases and formulate several propositions about core innovations, leadership and organization, and scaling up and societal transformation. The final section discusses implications of this analysis for social entrepreneurship in the future.

## BACKGROUND

Our starting point for this investigation has been social entrepreneurship by individuals and groups and its long-term impacts on poverty alleviation and societal trans-

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formation. But many other concepts and fields of inquiry can help to illuminate these issues. We begin with a brief discussion of social entrepreneurship and then draw on development studies, organization theory, and social movement research to focus our analysis of case studies.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of entrepreneurship has a long history in the business sector. A major theme has been the creation of value through innovation (Drucker, 1985; Schumpeter, 1951). As applied to social concerns, the concept has taken on a variety of meanings.

Some, for example, have focused on social entrepreneurship as combining commercial enterprises with social impacts. In this perspective, entrepreneurs have used business skills and knowledge to create enterprises that accomplish social purposes, in addition to being commercially viable (Emerson & Twerksy, 1996). Not-for-profit organizations may create commercial subsidiaries and use them to generate employment or revenue that serves their social purposes; for-profit organizations may donate some of their profits or organize their activities to social goals. These initiatives use resources generated from successful activities to advance and sustain social activities.

Others have emphasized social entrepreneurship as innovating for social impact. They focus on innovations and social arrangements that have consequences for social problems, often with relatively little attention to economic viability by ordinary business criteria (e.g., Dees, 1998). Social entrepreneurs are focused on social problems. They create innovative initiatives, build new social arrangements, and mobilize resources in response to those problems rather than market criteria.

Still others see social entrepreneurship as a way to catalyze social transformations well beyond solutions to the initial problems. From this perspective, social entrepreneurship can produce small changes in the short term that reverberate through existing systems to catalyze large changes in the longer term (Ashoka Innovators, 2000). Social entrepreneurs in this tradition need to understand not only immediate problems but also the larger social system and its interdependencies, so they can introduce new paradigms at critical leverage points that lead to cascades of mutually reinforcing changes in social arrangements. Sustainable social transformations include the innovations for social impacts and the concern for mobilizing resources that characterize the first two perspectives—and they lead to shifts in the societal context within which the original problem is embedded and sustained.

Although we believe that all three approaches to social entrepreneurship have considerable utility, we are particularly interested in social entrepreneurship as a catalyst for social transformation. More specifically, this study focuses on social entrepreneurship that creates innovative solutions to immediate social problems and mobilizes the ideas, capacities, resources, and social arrangements required for sustainable social transformations.

Many other research literatures are relevant to understanding these issues. We will draw on three—development studies, organization theory, and social movement research—that are particularly helpful. Development studies focus on the economic, social, and political challenges of social change; on the nature of development problems and the kinds of innovations required to solve them; and on the importance of building local capacity to sustain improvements (e.g., Korten, 1980; Paul, 1982; Tendlar, 1989; Uvin, Jain, & Brown, 2000). Organization theorists examine the spe-

cial characteristics of agencies concerned with catalyzing social change and development, such as their visions, missions, and strategies; their organizational architectures; and their capacities to learn from experience in changing contexts (e.g., Brown & Covey, 1987; Esman & Uphoff, 1984; Smillie & Hailey, 2001). Social movement researchers examine the attributes of collective action to redress social problems, examining issues such as political opportunity structures, resource mobilization, movement identity formation, and political strategy and tactics (e.g., Gamson, 1975; McAdam et al., 1996; Tarrow, 1998). We will draw on these and other perspectives in focusing attention on three aspects of the cases: the nature of their innovations, the characteristics of their leadership and organization, and the paths by which they scaled up their impacts to produce societal transformations.

First, most definitions of social entrepreneurship emphasize the innovative character of the initiative, and both development and organization theorists emphasize understanding core strategies and tasks in explaining effectiveness. In comparing the cases, we will examine the nature of the innovation in some detail. Not all development work amounts to social entrepreneurship, of course. In many cases, replication or expansion of existing services does not require social entrepreneurship. But when the resources or capacities to duplicate existing services for poor and marginalized groups are not available, creative initiatives can reconfigure existing resources or services for more effective or wider delivery (e.g., Uphoff, Esman, & Krishna, 1998). We will be interested in patterns of innovation that appear across cases: Is there a single pattern for success? Are there several forms of innovation associated with different kinds of problems or contexts?

Second, we will look closely at the characteristics of leadership and organization for these ventures. In some cases, leadership analyses focus primarily on individuals and their personal skills or attributes (e.g., Gardner, 1995; Heifetz, 1994); in others—particularly in cultures that put less emphasis on individualism—leadership groups may be more important than individual leaders (Paul, 1982; Thake & Zadek, 1997). Are there characteristics regularly associated with leadership in entrepreneurial social ventures? Substantial evidence also suggests that organizational and institutional arrangements are often important to effectively solving problems and expanding impacts (Paul, 1982; Tendlar, 1989; Uphoff et al., 1998). We will examine the organizational and institutional aspects of successful initiatives to identify common patterns. Are there “best practices” that appear across many different cases? How do initiatives cope with conflicting or shifting task and environmental challenges?

Finally, we are interested in the paths by which entrepreneurial ventures expand and sustain their impacts and transform larger systems in which they are embedded. Some studies of expansion of development impacts suggest that routinizing technology (Tendlar, 1989) is critical to reaching larger constituencies and that the careful creation of a sequence of gradually expanding projects and programs is critical to successful scaling up (Rondinelli, 1983). Other studies suggest that we can identify a menu of different patterns for scaling up impacts and that the key issues in scaling up involve organizing to fit the strategy chosen (Edwards & Hulme, 1992; Uvin et al., 2000). Social movement research suggests that fundamental changes in distributions of power and political influence on decision making are central to lasting change (e.g.,

Gamson, 1975; Gaventa, 1980; Tarrow, 1998). To what extent are different approaches to scaling up visible across the cases? Are some patterns of scaling up particularly successful in catalyzing long-term changes in societal arrangements?

## METHOD

This study provides a comparative analysis of cases of social entrepreneurship that have been widely recognized as successful. We seek to identify patterns and regularities across these initiatives. It is a proposition-generating rather than a hypothesis-testing approach to a complex and not yet well-understood topic. Comparative analysis of cases can be useful to generate new understanding of complex phenomena that involve long-term dynamics (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1984). Case descriptions provide rich sources of information that enable recognition of unexpected patterns that might not be captured by more constrained methodologies. The cost of such richness is increased difficulty in making systematic comparisons and drawing unambiguous conclusions.

Given our interest in social entrepreneurship and societal transformation, we sought cases with sufficient history to evaluate their long-term impacts. Because we hoped to identify themes relevant across regional and national differences, we looked for cases from many countries and regions. Eventually, we selected 7 cases that were

- widely regarded as successful social entrepreneurship on behalf of poor and marginalized communities;
- from many diverse regions, including Asia, Africa, Latin America, and North America;
- sufficiently described in available literature to answer our key questions; and
- potential catalysts for societal transformations.

There are clearly some drawbacks to this sampling approach. Focusing on successes rather than on a mixed group of successes and failures limits our capacity for comparison. There is some variance in our sample with respect to success in fostering social transformations, so we are able to compare success and failure on that dimension. Our reliance on data from existing accounts limits our ability to gain precisely comparable data and subjects us to the biases of multiple observers. We accepted these limitations for this proposition-generating study because of the high costs of collecting original data on four continents. Such costs may be more justifiable if robust patterns emerge across cases in exploratory studies like this one.

We compiled information about the cases from published and unpublished reports, Internet resources, and interviews with organization members and informed observers. We first used these data to identify patterns related to our areas of interest in each case. Then, we compared patterns across cases by using tables and matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1984). The results of this process should be considered tentative propositions, although we believe that recurrence across cases from many regions increases their plausibility. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the cases and their impacts. In the next section, we will present more detailed data.

**TABLE 1**  
**The Social Entrepreneurship Cases**

<i>Case</i>	<i>Essential Innovation</i>	<i>Scope</i>
Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee: established in 1972 by Fazle Abed, a corporate executive, in the aftermath of the Independence War	Focuses on local constituent needs and capacities through a systemic approach to poverty alleviation that emphasizes systematic learning at many levels. Instituted rapid scaling up of the organization while ensuring sustainability.	Operates in 60,000 of the 86,000 villages in Bangladesh. Organizes the poor for self-help and builds local capacities for economic development, health care, and education. Focuses on working with women and other oppressed groups. Seeks to change local attitudes and culture for landless poor and shift economic circumstances (Abed & Chowdhury, 1997; Lovell, 1992).
Grameen Bank: established in 1976 by Muhammed Yunus, a Bangladeshi economic professor, and his colleagues	Provides group lending for poor people without collateral. Succeeded in expanding organizational capacity to serve millions of small borrowers.	Provided small loans to 2.3 million very poor borrowers. Created 12 other businesses (e.g., fisheries, hand loom factories, renewable energy plants) to serve the poor. Expanded poor women's roles in income generation, as well as in microcredit theory and practice around the world (Mizan, 1994; Todd, 1996; Yunus, 1997, 1999).
Green Belt Movement: established in 1977 by Wangari Maathai and the National Council of Women in Kenya	Promotes grassroots mobilization, "conscientization," and leadership development through environmental activities.	Facilitated planting of 20 million trees in Kenya (70% survival rate). Mobilized 50,000 Kenyan households to care for the environment and improve their own welfare (Maathai, 1985).
Highlander Research and Education Center: founded by Myles Horton in 1932 in a rural Appalachian mountain community in the southern United States	Uses adult education to help grassroots individuals and groups develop their own solutions to problems of political voice and local problem solving. Transfers leadership of innovative programs to individual movements and serves as support organization.	Developed labor education programs that enabled American labor movements and, in turn, international labor movements, to generate political and economic changes. Developed leadership for the civil rights movement (Southern Christian Leadership Committee and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). Trained thousands of African Americans in literacy skills to increase voting rights and participation in local communities (Adams, 1975; Glen, 1996).

(continued)

TABLE 1 (continued)

<i>Case</i>	<i>Essential Innovation</i>	<i>Scope</i>
Plan Puebla: initiated in Mexico in 1966 by a small group of agricultural researchers	Improves crop production by focusing on small, farmer-oriented cooperatives and providing support activities, rather than simply improving agricultural technology.	Increased maize production by 62% among 47,000 Mexican farmers in the Plan Puebla region. Educated poor, small subsistence farmers about income diversification and facilitated a 252% increase in family income (Cisneros, Sánchez, Laird, & Fernández, 1997; Domínguez, 1994; Veltmeyer & Petras, 2000).
Self-Employed Women's Association: founded in 1972 by Ela Bhatt	Organizes groups of women who are atomized and have little reason to cooperate for political change, or otherwise address economic, social, and health issues. Builds local leadership capacity to scale up organization and movement.	Organized 315,000 self-employed women as union members. Improved working conditions, access to health care, credit, and savings for the more than 90% of India's self-employed/unorganized female laborers. Influenced the creation of self-employment labor division in the Indian government. Influenced the International Labor Organization to pass standards for home workers (including minimum wage and working conditions) (Chen, 1986; Rose, 1992; Sreemivasan, 2000).
Se Servir de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel: established in 1976 by Bernard Ledea Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso) and Bernard Lecomte (France)	Instituted "flexible funding" for local projects approved by regional networks of village elders. Promoted capacity building to prepare villages to use resources effectively. Promoted network building within regions and countries to foster more information sharing.	Involved 2 million people in village projects across nine countries in the West African Sahelian region. Assisted villagers in 1,500 villages to develop self-sustaining, income-generating projects. Organized 6,500 village groups to strengthen village infrastructure and capacity for project development (Lecomte, 1986; Lecomte & Krishna, 1997; McCarthy, 2000; Pradervand, 1989; Uemura, 2000).



## PATTERNS IN THE CASES

This section examines the patterns identified across the 7 cases on three aspects: characteristics of innovations, characteristics of leadership and organization, and approaches to scaling up and societal transformation. We provide tables with brief descriptions of the cases on various dimensions of these aspects. We briefly discuss the concepts that emerge from this analysis and formulate propositions to describe their links to initiative success.

### Characteristics of Innovations

The innovations described in Table 2 are very diverse. They range from microcredit services provided by the Grameen Bank, to agricultural and tree-planting support from Plan Puebla and the Green Belt Movement, to support for grassroots social movements from the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the Highlander Research and Education Center, to village development initiatives by Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and *Se Servir de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel (Six-S)*. It is not immediately obvious that these innovations have much in common because they focus on different groups, implement different interventions, and seek to solve quite different problems.

The first column of Table 2 contains a brief description of the basic form of the innovation. The 7 initiatives often built on their core innovations by adding other programs as they grew and evolved, but most began with a basic form that shaped their central identities. This pattern of ongoing fidelity to an initial identity and frame has been observed in other civil society organizations (e.g., Ebrahim, 2001). We have identified three such forms among these cases: building local capacity, disseminating a package, and building a movement.

Building local capacity involves working with poor and marginalized populations to identify capacities needed for self-help and helping to build those capacities. This approach is based on the assumption that given increases in local capacities, local actors may solve many of their own problems. Examples include the systemic village development programs of BRAC, Six-S, and (less clearly) the Green Belt Movement. This approach involves working closely with local groups around issues that those groups deem important.

Other initiatives focus on disseminating a package of innovations that serve a widely distributed need. An underlying assumption of this approach is that information and technical resources can be reconfigured into user-friendly forms that will make them available to marginalized groups. Examples include the demand for small loans met by the Grameen Bank and the demand for improved maize technology met by Plan Puebla. The construction of such packages may require considerable expertise and creativity to adapt existing materials and resources for low-cost diffusion to many users; however, once that development work is done, the package's dissemination may occur through channels requiring comparatively less expertise.

A third approach is building a movement that mobilizes grassroots alliances to challenge abusive elites or institutions. The assumption underlying movement build-

**TABLE 2**  
**Innovation Characteristics**

<i>Case</i>	<i>Core Innovation Pattern</i>	<i>Mobilizing Assets and Capacities of Poor</i>	<i>Emphasis on Continuous Learning</i>
BRAC	Build local capacity: Create village groups that can solve local problems and provide a variety of services and supports for village development.	High: Shift from relief and service delivery to building local organizations and capacities for self-help, with particular attention to women.	High: Embrace commitment to being a learning organization very early; establish systems for "learning from experience" for benefit of individuals, programs, and the organization as a whole.
Grameen Bank	Microcredit package: Provide group loans for poor and marginalized people to develop income-generating activities; follow up with other development programs.	High: From the start, focus on improving the capacity of poor and marginalized people, especially women, to participate in small businesses.	Medium: Make systematic investments in learning of participants and staff; invest less in formal learning processes at the organizational level.
Green Belt Movement	Build local capacity: Use tree-planting and civic education programs to build local skills and organization for self-help activities.	High: Focus on building villagers' capacity to work together to solve problems, such as remedying deforestation.	Medium: Make substantial investment in learning of village groups and some in staff development; there are no major resources or commitment to organizational learning.
Highlander Research and Education Center	Build local movement: Use adult education to empower and organize local unions, civil rights groups, and others to confront abusive elites.	High: Use participatory adult education to help marginalized grassroots actors (e.g., labor, civil rights groups) organize and campaign effectively for their rights.	Medium to high: Emphasize staff and partner learning; make less systematic investment in organizational learning.
Plan Puebla	Agriculture package: Develop and promote innovations in maize production that enable subsistence farmers to improve family welfare and increase income.	Medium: Emphasize technology to improve agricultural productivity of small farmers; further improvements depend on outside experts and resources.	Medium: Emphasize staff and participating farmers' learning about agriculture, but there is little investment in organizational learning. Government takeover reduces future learning process.

SEWA	Build local movement: Mobilize self-employed women to campaign for policies to support work activities and to develop services adapted to their work and overall welfare needs.	High: Focus on building capacities of poor, self-employed women to organize and secure economic and legal rights.	High: Help members learn new skills and develop political leadership capacities; make long-term commitment to organizational learning and growth in a changing political context.
Six-S	Build local capacity: Support village projects to improve sustainable local resources, increase income-generating activities, and build village capacities through networking of village organizations.	High: Provide nonfinancial resources for village groups. Serve as intermediary between donors and village organizations that demonstrate initial effectiveness in securing financial resources for improvement projects.	Medium: Invest in staff and village leader learning, focusing primarily on village organizational development and technical skills; there is unclear investment in systematic learning at the network or Six-S organizational level.

NOTE: BRAC = Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee; SEWA = Self-Employed Women's Association; Six-S = Se Servir de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel.

ing is that increasing the political voice of marginalized groups can help solve their major problems. Examples include SEWA's campaigns against police abuse of vendors and Highlander's support for the union and civil rights movements. Movement building is often a highly politicized activity that involves challenging powerful antagonists and, thus, may subject the initiative to high risks and repressive challenges.

Over time, many initiatives added programs that supplemented their core innovations: The Grameen Bank added many other services to its microcredit package, and SEWA added capacity-building services to its movement building. However, the initial core innovations of these 7 cases reflected quite different analyses of the underlying problems and very different roles for the marginalized groups involved.

*Proposition 1:* Successful social entrepreneurship initiatives can take at least three forms, including building local capacities to solve problems, providing "packages" needed to solve common problems, and building local movements to deal with other powerful actors.

It is not a surprise, given our criteria for case selection, that these innovations focus on improving the lives of poor and marginalized groups. What is striking, however, is how much they focus explicitly on mobilizing existing assets of marginalized groups to improve their lives, rather than delivering outside resources and services. Thus, in the second column of Table 2, we have rated and briefly described the extent to which the initiative focused on helping clients use their own assets to solve problems. A rating of "high" reflects primary reliance on the assets and capacities of local actors for self-help; a rating of "medium" indicates emphasis on self-help combined with continuing outside resources; a rating of "low" indicates that outside resources and services are essential to improvements. All but 1 of these cases were rated "high" on mobilizing local assets.

Mobilizing grassroots assets takes various forms in these initiatives. Some focus on organizing village people and resources to solve local problems: Six-S and the Green Belt Movement focus on village development, and BRAC organizes poor groups to improve local services. Others such as the Grameen Bank and the Plan Puebla emphasize helping individuals or small groups to participate more effectively in local economies. Still others, such as SEWA and Highlander, help grassroots groups organize themselves to be more effective in influencing other actors and political forces. To a large extent, however, they all treat the assets and capacities of the marginalized groups as vital to the development initiative. Without the willing cooperation of local partners, the initiative would fail. Sharing control and mobilizing resources with the local partners increase the likelihood of sustainable change because of their grounding in local commitment and capacities.

*Proposition 2:* Successful social entrepreneurship uses innovations that mobilize existing assets of marginalized groups.

The third column of Table 2 describes the initiatives' emphasis on continuous learning by individuals and organizations. The issue of learning in development initiatives has received considerable attention (Korten, 1980; Uphoff et al., 1998). Individual learning by staff and partners is clearly important if the initiative seeks to improve its

performance on complex projects. Organizational learning that goes beyond individual development to enhance organizational capacities is also critical in addressing the volatile and conflicted contexts of development (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Smillie & Hailey, 2001). The third column of Table 2 rates emphasis on learning as “high” for systematic investment in individual and organizational learning, “medium” for investment in individual or organizational learning, and “low” for little systematic investment in learning. Relevant individual and organizational learning varies considerably across these initiatives. All of the initiatives emphasize individual learning by their staffs and clients, as might be expected of organizations that are innovating in the face of complex problems. Significant investment in organizational learning is less common, particularly when initiatives face problems of scarce resources and struggle to make ends meet. It is probably not coincidental that the initiatives characterized by high levels of organizational learning—BRAC, SEWA, and Highlander—all operate at a large scale or seek to influence others that operate on a large scale.

*Proposition 3:* Successful social entrepreneurship initiatives emphasize systematic learning by individuals and by the organization (if the organization operates on a large scale).

### Characteristics of Leadership and Organizations

The founders of these initiatives come from rich and poor backgrounds, from industrialized and developing countries. Some founders are individuals, and some are teams; some are men, and some are women. They include lawyers, professors, managers, and grassroots organizers. No immediately obvious and highly visible characteristics distinguish these leaders by background, country of origin, gender, and occupation, or even as individuals or groups. Comparing these cases, what characteristics emerge as being associated with successful social entrepreneurship?

Table 3 presents summary data and ratings across the cases on a dimension of leadership and a dimension of organizational arrangements that seem characteristic of successful social entrepreneurs in these cases: (a) bridging capacity that enabled leaders to work effectively across many diverse constituencies and (b) operational organization, which refers to the actors (e.g., staff, volunteers) involved in the implementation of the initiative’s fundamental activities. Note that we have reorganized the rows in Table 3 to reflect the characteristics of the three types of innovations identified in the last section, so that it will be easier to identify characteristics associated with these different forms of core innovation.

The first column of Table 3 rates and describes each initiative in terms of its leadership’s ability to understand the perspectives of and work effectively with constituencies whose concerns and resources were critical to the initiative. In many cases, individuals have experiences and skills that enable bridging capacity with very diverse stakeholders; in others, the leadership is composed of a team that possesses the necessary skills and resources. We rated the leadership “high” when it could understand and work effectively with all of the stakeholders that are central to the organization’s strategy, “moderate” if it had the skills to work with most key stakeholders, and “low” if it was ignorant of or at odds with stakeholders critical to its success. Although this aspect

TABLE 3  
**Characteristics of Initiative Leadership and Organization**

	<i>Bridging Capacity</i>	<i>Aspects of Operational Organization</i>
<i>Build local capacity</i> BRAC	High: Founder was international business executive who committed himself to reducing poverty in his country. Developed close contacts with grassroots communities and activists as well as with government officials, business leaders, donors, and development nongovernmental organizations.	<i>Size:</i> Very large; Staff delivers programs. <i>Systems:</i> High: There are comprehensive delivery structures, strong financial systems, and many feedback systems. <i>Staff:</i> High: Commits significant budget for training, promotes from within, and highly values education. <i>Monitoring and Evaluating:</i> High: Formal research and evaluation unit provides impact information for all programs.
Six-S	High: Founding team of two development activists from France and Burkina Faso have been able to understand and work across North-South boundaries as well as with villages, donors, and governments.	<i>Size:</i> Small: Staff works with local activists. <i>Systems:</i> Medium: Councils and zones oversee grant making. There is little data on financial or technical systems. <i>Staff:</i> High: Train staff and trainers for local work. <i>Monitoring and Evaluating:</i> Medium: There is no formal evaluation unit but beneficiary and impact data are tracked.
Green Belt Movement	Moderate: Founder was biology professor who grew up in Kenyan village and has good relations with grassroots groups, environmental activists, and international groups. However, leader had difficulty building broad coalitions for expanding impacts and has not maintained strong donor relationships.	<i>Size:</i> Small: Staff works with village representatives. <i>Systems:</i> Low: There is a strong leader but a lack of middle management and weak financial and planning systems. <i>Staff:</i> Medium/low: There is training for field levels but not at middle- and upper-management levels. <i>Monitoring and Evaluating:</i> Low: There are weak systems for tracking impact data and no formal research and evaluation unit.
<i>Share package</i> Grameen Bank	High: Founder was an economics professor who grew up in Bangladesh and completed graduate education in the United States. Over the years, founder has built strong and lasting relationships with business leaders, government officials, donors, academics, and poor villagers, both men and women.	<i>Size:</i> Very large; Staff delivers services to borrowers. <i>Systems:</i> High: There is comprehensive microlending and other service delivery, as well as strong financial systems. Other enterprises have separate management systems. <i>Staff:</i> High/medium: Trains staff but without formal system. <i>Monitoring and Evaluating:</i> High: Research and evaluation unit tracks data on microlending/credit activities.

Plan Puebla	Moderate: Founding team of four young researchers worked with universities and farmers but did not develop networks with broader constituencies. Government officials with less bridging capacity succeeded them.	<p><i>Size:</i> Small: Staff and consultants develop package.  <i>Systems:</i> Medium: Management relies on technical consultants, but systems were bureaucratized after government takeover.  <i>Staff:</i> Low: There is no formal staff development.  <i>Monitoring and Evaluating:</i> High: Initial leaders were committed to research and evaluation activity.</p>
<i>Build movement</i> Highlander Research and Education Center	<p>High: Founder grew up poor in rural Appalachia, but his schooling afforded links to elite intellectuals and opportunities for international experience that inspired founding of Highlander to support grassroots self-help and advocacy. Had few relationships with donors and depended on networks and colleagues to connect donors to the initiative.</p>	<p><i>Size:</i> Small: Staff provides technical assistance to activists and allies.  <i>Systems:</i> Medium: Has a history of weak management systems but recent 2 decades of improvement.  <i>Staff:</i> Medium/low: There is little attention to staff development.  <i>Monitoring and Evaluating:</i> Medium: There was no formal tracking systems until research evaluation function started in 1980s.  <i>Size:</i> Large: Staff works with members on campaigns and delivers services.</p>
SEWA	<p>High: Founder born into high caste and trained as a lawyer in social activist family (e.g., India's independence movement). Maintained relationships with elite officials, professionals, and social activists while convening disparate groups of very poor, self-employed women around common issues.</p>	<p><i>Systems:</i> High: There are well-developed governance and management systems. The organizing is done by trade.  <i>Staff:</i> High: Training comes from SEWA Academy.  <i>Monitoring and Evaluating:</i> High: The SEWA Academy performs research and documentation.</p>

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NOTE: BRAC = Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee; Six-S = Se Servir de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel; SEWA = Self-Employed Women's Association.



of leadership emerged from our examination of the cases, it is consistent with the challenges posed by settings in which success turns to effective dealing with many different constituencies (e.g., Brown & Covey, 1987; Moore, 2000).

In most of these cases, the social entrepreneurs—whether individuals or groups—had backgrounds and experiences that enabled them to build effective links with very diverse actors. The leaders of BRAC, SEWA, and Grameen Bank, for instance, were members of national elites who were committed to work with marginalized groups; the founder of Highlander came from poor circumstances but gained access to elite constituents through education; the founders of Six-S had diverse backgrounds that collectively enabled them to understand and connect with very different constituencies. The two initiatives whose leadership had less success in bridging diverse stakeholders had more difficulty in expanding the impacts of the initiatives. The founder of the Green Belt Movement was challenged by tribal politics, tensions with government actors, and lack of long-term donor support. The leadership team of Plan Puebla focused on building relationships with local farm communities and academic colleagues, and it targeted government officials, but the team's inability to cultivate relationships with a variety of outside donors or other development organizations resulted in reduced funding and an eventual government takeover that undermined many of its social change and community improvement goals.

*Proposition 4:* Successful social entrepreneurship initiatives are often founded by leaders with the capacity to work with and build bridges among very diverse stakeholders.

The organization and management literatures are full of discussions about the best ways to organize to carry out various tasks, and similar analysis has been applied to development programs (e.g., Paul, 1982). We might expect that the different forms of innovation—building local capacity, sharing packages, and building movements—would require different arrangements for operational organization. The second part of Table 3 focuses on four aspects of operational organization that appear to be important to the success of these innovations: size, management systems, staff development, and monitoring and evaluating activity.

The initiatives we reviewed are extremely diverse in their operational organizations. Their sizes range from tens of thousands to dozens of staff members. This diversity in size does not appear to be organized by type of innovation: There are very large or very small core organizations in all three innovation categories. In some cases, expansion has taken the form of building a large organization to expand operations to affect hundreds of thousands of people, such as SEWA, Grameen Bank, and BRAC. For other initiatives, expansions have taken the form of building alliances with many other agencies rather than growing their own organizations. Some have cooperated with networks of local actors to carry out program activities, as do Six-S, the Green Belt Movement, and Plan Puebla. Others have become resources to larger movement organizations, as Highlander did with the labor and civil rights movements. In expansion through alliances, the initiative may remain quite small because its impacts depend on allies rather than on its own operational capacities.



These initiatives also vary considerably in the attention they have devoted to building their organizational capacity—specifically along such dimensions as management systems, staff development, and performance evaluation systems. Some, such as BRAC, Grameen Bank, and SEWA, have invested heavily in management systems—such as financial and technical systems, clear divisions of responsibility, and leadership succession plans—that are critically important to running large agencies. Others, such as Highlander or the Green Belt Movement, have focused much less attention on management and management systems. The initiatives vary considerably in their attention to staff development systems as well. The organizations with the largest staffs—BRAC, Grameen Bank, and SEWA—also have strong commitments to staff development. Plan Puebla and Highlander are less explicitly invested in staff development, in part because they do not have to recruit as many initially low-skilled workers to fill out a large organizational complement. For similar reasons, the initiatives also vary substantially in their development of performance evaluation systems. BRAC, Grameen Bank, SEWA, and Plan Puebla have all developed such systems; the other initiatives track some impact data but lack a more comprehensive system. In general, the creation of sophisticated organizational systems and arrangements is correlated with organizational size—the larger the organization, the more resources it tends to devote to organizational arrangements.

*Proposition 5:* Social entrepreneurship initiatives may expand their impacts by either (a) investing in organization and management systems to support organizational growth to expand their coverage, or (b) investing in alliance building with clients or other actors that will carry out operational activities.

### Scaling Up and Social Transformation

The patterns of scaling up and the social transformation impacts of these cases are summarized in Table 4. Although all of these initiatives have been successful in expanding and sustaining their impacts to some degree (or they would not have been selected for this study), there are substantial differences in the extent to which they have been able to do so.

Prior analyses of scaling up have identified three major patterns for widening the impacts of successful social entrepreneurship initiatives: (a) expanding coverage to provide services and benefits to more people, (b) expanding functions and services to provide broader impacts to primary stakeholders, and (c) initiating activities that change the behavior of other actors with wide impacts, scaling up impacts indirectly (Uvin et al., 2000). The first column of Table 4 focuses on the initiatives' uses of such different strategies for scaling up.

The selection of scaling up strategy appears to be related to the form of the innovation. For capacity-building programs, for example, initiatives first developed a combination of services and functions that enhanced village or group capabilities for self-help or asset use; they then expanded their activities to cover many client groups with that combination. Thus, BRAC, Six-S, and the Green Belt Movement all developed programs or activities that enhanced client group capacities and then scaled up the delivery of those programs to serve large populations of villages or groups.

TABLE 4  
Scaling Up and Social Transformation Impacts

	Scaling Up Strategy	Transformation Leverage	Overall Impact of the Initiative
Build local capacity BRAC	Develop programs for village development; expand coverage by expanding organization	<i>Cultural:</i> Organize village capacity for action on development problems <i>Economic:</i> Establish micro-credit for business	<i>Reach:</i> High <i>Transformation:</i> Economic is high; political is low; cultural is high
Six-S	Develop programs to prepare villages expand coverage by building larger network of local partners	<i>Cultural:</i> Build village capacity to manage own development projects <i>Economic:</i> Create jobs for young people in dry season; identify new resources	<i>Reach:</i> High <i>Transformation:</i> Economic is medium; political is low; cultural is high
Green Belt Movement	Develop program for skill building with village groups; expand coverage by training more villagers	<i>Cultural:</i> Organize village for tree planting and other local problem solving <i>Political:</i> Build local organization for voice on key issues	<i>Reach:</i> Medium <i>Transformation:</i> Economic is low; political is medium/low; cultural is medium
Share package Grameen Bank	Create and test microcredit package; expand coverage via large organization; follow up with support functions	<i>Economic:</i> Support women in new economic and business roles <i>Cultural:</i> Provide capital for small business development	<i>Reach:</i> High <i>Transformation:</i> Economic is high; political is low; cultural is medium
Plan Puebla	Create new maize technology; expand coverage via government service; support functions as needed	<i>Economic:</i> Increase farmer productivity	<i>Reach:</i> Medium <i>Transformation:</i> Economic is high; political is low; cultural is low
Build movement Highlander Research and Education Center	Build grassroots education program on movement issues; expand by giving adult education services to larger movement actors	<i>Cultural:</i> Improve civic engagement; reduce racial violence and prejudice <i>Political:</i> Empower local actors to exert political voice	<i>Reach:</i> High <i>Transformation:</i> Economic is low; political is high; cultural is high
SEWA	Mobilize members for policy influence campaigns; provide support services otherwise unavailable to members	<i>Cultural:</i> Legitimate new roles and choices for poor women <i>Economic:</i> Improve business climate for self-employed women <i>Political:</i> Empower poor women for voice on harassment	<i>Reach:</i> High <i>Transformation:</i> Economic is high/medium; political is high; cultural is high

NOTE: BRAC = Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee; Six-S = Se Servit de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel; SEWA = Self-Employed Women's Association.

The package dissemination programs, by contrast, have created more narrowly defined interventions that can be applied to individuals. The Grameen Bank can make small loans to village residents, and Plan Puebla can improve the maize technology of a few subsistence farmers without affecting the rest of the village. For package-disseminating initiatives, a range of follow-up services may come after the package delivery, as in the various supplementary services provided by Grameen and Plan Puebla.

For movement-building initiatives, the scaling-up impacts often depend on influencing the actions of other actors, such as policy-influence targets or campaign allies affected by the initiative's work. Thus, Highlander provides technical assistance to union and civil rights movements, and SEWA campaigns with many other actors to reshape the policies of municipal governments and national policy makers.

*Proposition 6:* Scaling up strategies vary across forms of social entrepreneurship: Capacity-building initiatives strengthen local capacities for self-help and then scale up coverage to a wider range of clients; package dissemination initiatives scale up coverage with services that can be delivered by low-skill staff or affiliates to individuals or small groups; movement-building initiatives expand their influence by alliances and campaigns to shape the activities of decision makers.

The social transformation leverage and impacts of these initiatives are also briefly described in Table 4. Transformation leverage refers to different arenas of primary stakeholder experience that can be affected by socially entrepreneurial ventures. For some initiatives, the primary arena of social transformation impact is economic. The Grameen Bank, for example, seeks to improve incomes by providing heretofore unavailable working capital. In initiatives characterized by economic leverage, the first impacts of social transformation are likely to be visible in changing incomes and economic status of primary stakeholders. For other initiatives, the primary transformation leverage is in the political arena. SEWA, for example, mobilized street vendors as a united front to protect themselves from abuse by municipal police and bureaucrats. With initiatives that use political leverage, critical initial impacts may involve changes in policy formulation and implementation. For still other initiatives, the transformation leverage is primarily cultural. When BRAC organized women and landless people into groups to solve local problems, for example, it began to change cultural norms, roles, and expectations about the role of women at the village level. Cultural change initiatives can reshape the awareness and efficacy of marginalized groups in ways that fundamentally alter their problem-solving efficacy and the quality of their lives.

The second part of Table 4 identifies the initiatives' transformation leverage in the sense of their intended strategies for generating social transformation. The last part of Table 4 assesses the initiatives' overall impacts in terms of reach and transformative effects in the economic, political, and cultural arenas. The reach of the initiative refers to the number of people affected by its programs. "Low" reach indicates an impact on fewer than 10,000 people, "medium" indicates impact on between 10,000 and 1,000,000 people, and "high" indicates impacts on more than 1,000,000 people. Because these cases were included in this study based on their success, it is not surpris-

ing that most have reached more than 10,000 people and that many have reached more than 1,000,000.

Activities with leverage for economic transformation are very common. Five of the 7 initiatives made use of them, as might be expected for programs focused on poor and marginalized populations. Leverage from economic interventions is particularly characteristic of the package delivery initiatives. Packages that are relatively easy to disseminate have been developed to improve individual economic results. Thus, the Grameen Bank focused initially on microlending that enhanced the viability and growth of microenterprises for millions of poor entrepreneurs. It also quite quickly developed additional services that fostered cultural change for its borrowers. Plan Puebla provided subsistence farmers with improved technology for maize growing and, in so doing, substantially improved their economic status. Activities with potential for economic transformation were used (although not primarily) across many initiatives: BRAC, SEWA, and Six-S all carried out programs focused on economic change in addition to their primary programs.

Leverage for political transformation was used less frequently, although political transformation was the primary focus for both of the movement-building initiatives. Highlander, for example, focused on educational interventions designed to empower local actors struggling with powerful adversaries, such as mining corporations or white power structures. SEWA mobilized women in the informal sector to influence decision makers in many contexts. Political transformation was more visible as a potential outcome for other initiatives. The Green Belt Movement emphasizes strengthened political voice as a possible outcome, but it is less visible as an interest of other initiatives.

Finally, activities that used leverage for cultural transformation were also common among many initiatives but were particularly characteristic of capacity-building initiatives. BRAC's village capacity-building programs, for example, alter the abilities of marginalized groups (particularly poor women) to solve local problems and build sustainable livelihoods. Participation in these programs allows women to address local issues while reshaping cultural assumptions about the roles and appropriate behaviors of women. Six-S builds village organizations and capacities to solve regional problems they identify and focuses particularly on problems that undermine the viability of village life during the dry season. Changes in village infrastructure parallel changes in residence patterns and increased senses of efficacy among those who no longer have to leave during the dry season. Similarly, the Green Belt Movement uses organizing for tree planting to provide a generalizable model for village organization and voice on local problems. Many capacity-building initiatives affect the economic and political arenas as well. But reshaping cultural assumptions and norms about how to take initiatives, use local assets, and solve local problems appears to be most characteristic of this form.

The data under "Overall Impact of the Initiative" column of Table 4 suggest that the overall impact of these initiatives tends to be closely associated with the types of transformation leverage emphasized in their initial activities and by their forms of innovation. Thus, the economic leverage of the package-based initiatives was reflected in

high impacts in the economic realm. The capacity-building initiatives had high impacts on cultural transformation in two of the three cases, although the Green Belt Movement appeared to have only a medium impact in that arena. As expected from their primary leverage, movement-building initiatives had high impacts in the political sphere but also had high impacts in the cultural arena. We may attribute the latter impact to the fact that marginal groups' political success would necessarily reflect changes in cultural norms and expectations associated with their previous passivity.

*Proposition 7:* Social transformation leverage and impacts vary across innovation forms: Capacity-building initiatives alter local norms, roles, and expectations to transform the cultural contexts in which marginalized groups live; package distribution initiatives provide tools and resources to enhance individual productivity and transform economic circumstance; movement-building initiatives increase the voice of marginalized groups to transform their political contexts and their ability to influence key decisions.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research has sought to identify common patterns across a small set of successful social entrepreneurship initiatives. The data suggest several patterns, which we have framed as propositions. Three general observations are important to further learning about social entrepreneurship and social transformation.

First, we recognized differences across the 7 cases in innovation forms. The forms we identified—building local capacity, disseminating a package, and building a movement—are quite different. To our knowledge, these patterns have not been identified as clearly in other studies of social entrepreneurship. Identifying other forms and clarifying the differences among these three are important avenues for further exploration. The more we know about the forms that social entrepreneurship may take and the contexts within which such forms are effective, the more it will be possible to design successful future initiatives.

These data already suggest some important correlates of the choice of innovation form. Capacity-building initiatives were associated with attention to local groups and resource providers, an emphasis on scaling up by group organizing and cultural change leverage, and transformational impacts on cultural norms and expectations. Package dissemination initiatives paid attention to user and disseminator stakeholders, emphasized scaling up through packaged services to individuals that enabled their use of economic leverage, and had transformational impacts on economic outcomes. Movement-building initiatives emphasized external relations with allies and political targets, used indirect scaling-up strategies that affect large-scale actors, and used political leverage to have transformational impacts on both political and cultural contexts. Further research might clarify how these and other attributes of social innovations can shape outcomes and successes in different contexts.

Second, the data also suggest some factors that are common across initiatives, regardless of innovation form. All the initiatives sought to mobilize and build on the assets of the poor constituencies they served; as a result, they were able to leverage rel-

atively small investments to produce sustained changes, resourced in large part by poor and marginalized groups. In addition, capacities for bridging and adaptive leadership appeared to be present in most successful initiatives. Leaders must identify the key stakeholders in creating the kind of transformational change they envision. They must develop strategies for overcoming challengers and strengthening allies—whether they lead capacity-building innovations, package delivery programs, or political movements.

All three innovation forms demonstrated the potential for reaching millions of people and catalyzing high levels of social transformation in one or more of the cultural, economic, or political arenas. Four initiatives—BRAC, Grameen Bank, SEWA, and Highlander—were characterized by both high-reach (millions of people) and high-transformational impacts. In the first two cases, the initiatives created increasingly large and sophisticated nongovernmental organizations as vehicles for expanding their impacts. In the third, SEWA created local, national, and eventually international alliances of membership organizations to mobilize women in the informal sector. In the fourth case, Highlander remained small and organizationally unsophisticated, but it built close alliances with much larger and more organizationally complex movements that could use its support to effect major political and cultural changes. High-reach and high-transformational impact may be achieved through many organizational arrangements, depending on the issues and the strategies adopted expand the initiative.

This initial research leaves many propositions to explore and many questions unanswered. We do not know, for example, when or how strategically timed financial support can make a pivotal difference to the emergence of a successful social innovation, although the importance of leadership-bridging capacity suggests that initiatives may benefit greatly from early access to financial, technical, and political support. We do not know what contextual patterns encourage or hinder the emergence of different kinds of innovations—although it is probably not accidental that our two movement-building initiatives emerged in India and the United States, where the dominant political traditions tolerate some degree of political challenges by low-power groups. We believe that these results suggest intriguing avenues for further exploration by practitioners and researchers of social transformation. The intent of this analysis is to provoke further exploration of the emerging phenomenon of social entrepreneurship, which we believe can make a great difference in the next century of human and societal development.

#### NOTE

1. The following Web sites were used to collect background and impact information on the initiatives: [www.brac.net](http://www.brac.net), [www.grameen-info.org](http://www.grameen-info.org), [www.geocities.com/gbmovement](http://www.geocities.com/gbmovement), [www.hrec.org](http://www.hrec.org), and [www.sewa.org](http://www.sewa.org).



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