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## **Social Enterprises as a Revitalization Strategy for Rural Communities**

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### **Abstract**

There is growing academic and practitioner interest in social enterprises (SEs), due to their - mostly assumed - positive social impacts on communities. However, there is less research available on the place-based nature of SEs, such as within the rural context, especially regarding factors that influence their capacity and success in social impact creation. This chapter focuses on the rural context because of the unique challenges that influence service/product provision to rural communities. These issues contribute to rural areas disproportionately facing challenges such as poverty, inequality, and more recently the COVID Pandemic and thus lagging metro ones on many indicators.

Discussions in this chapter offer important insights on this issue through a review of 26 Rural Social Enterprise cases from published empirical studies. The analysis identifies factors that influence social impact creation ability in Rural Social Enterprises, categorizes them under a motivation, capability, and opportunity framework as levers for social change, and elaborates how they influence social impact creation ability in the enterprises. These results are important to rural development practitioners, supporters, policymakers, and researchers interested in using Rural Social Enterprises to revitalize rural communities in the post COVID Pandemic era.

**Key words;** rural social enterprise; success factors; rural development; qualitative meta-synthesis

## **Introduction**

Social enterprises (SEs) have emerged globally as tools for addressing the myriad challenges facing rural communities which lag their metro counterparts on many indicators (as noted in previous chapters (e.g., Deller & Conroy). The largest proportion of poor people live in rural areas (World Bank, 2021) and the COVID Pandemic is likely to cause greater socio-economic challenges in rural communities due to their inherent conditions and those of their residents (e.g., OECD, 2020a, 2021).

Rooted in the European cooperative movement from the nineteenth century, SEs try to use mechanisms adapted from commercial firms – market-based approaches – to address social problems (Di Domenico et al., 2010; Mair, 2020; Miles et al., 2014). In this chapter, SEs are defined as organizations which engage in social entrepreneurial activities for the fulfilment of socio-economic/environmental goals using market-based approaches. Scholars and governments alike have noted the potential for SEs to deliver necessary products and services in rural and regional areas, contributing to local development and bring positive social change (Eversole et al., 2014; Haugh, 2005; Steiner & Teasdale, 2019).

Despite the growing importance of social entrepreneurship in rural areas, it is still an emerging field with definitional and conceptual inconsistencies, the study of which is dominated by descriptive case studies (Musinguzi et al., 2021). An emerging focus on successful SE cases from disparate fields that indicate factors contributing to general SE success is especially relevant to current discussions (e.g., Alvord et al., 2004; Kaufmann Hans et al., 2012).

Moreover, social entrepreneurship research does not specifically address rural areas (Steiner et al., 2019; Weerakoon, 2021). This study contributes to the emerging topic of Rural Social Enterprises (RSEs<sup>1</sup>)—SEs with a focus on rural development. This development is achieved

through their various interventions<sup>ii</sup> e.g., health, wellbeing and resilience improvement, (women) environmental sustainability etc. These different interventions lead to e.g., increased independence of the participants; reduced isolation of participants from increased capability to travel through rural transport provision; improved access to health and related care services; economic resilience by generating economic income through e.g., job creation, investments in the local areas such as local communities selling produce, addressing rural market failure through promoting local commodity marketing; stimulation of voluntary and collaborative community culture; supporting and building skills amongst young people; environmental education; promoting sustainable energy and agricultural production such as organic farming etc. (e.g., Eversole et al.,2014; Olmedo et al.,2019; Steiner & Teasdale, 2019; van Twuijver et al.,2020).The study contributes to the RSE topic through a systematic qualitative meta-synthesis<sup>iii</sup> of the topic. Specifically, this research identifies empirical studies of RSEs, synthesizes them, and examines factors that influence their success in social impact<sup>iv</sup> creation. This is achieved with a meta-synthesis of RSE case studies from around the world. The findings contribute to rural development policy and practice from the perspective of rural entrepreneurship and emerging rural social entrepreneurship (e.g., van Twuijver et al., 2020).

To the authors' knowledge, this is a first meta-synthesis addressing operations and success of RSEs so the findings will interest rural development practitioners, supporters, policymakers, and scholars. It identifies and elaborates on factors promoting success for RSEs that target current challenges such as poverty and inequality. The factors are organized based on the key social change levers i.e., motivation, capability, and opportunity (MCO) within a positive social change framework. The study validates Stephan et al.'s (2016) framework in the context of RSEs and provides the identified factors with more theoretical and practical relevance, in line with the target audience. The synthesis also promotes an 'actionable

knowledge base' (cf; Denyer & Tranfield, 2006) to design RSEs for greater impact and more so in the post COVID Pandemic economy.

The chapter is organized as follows. The first section gives a brief context to the study followed by a description of the methods used in the systematic qualitative meta-synthesis of 21 RSE studies including 26 cases. The next section presents and discusses findings. Subsequent discussions advance the research and practice on this topic with future research prospects and conclusions presented in the final section.

### **Rural Social Enterprises in Context**

Rural areas are often seen as less suitable for the operations of many mainstream service providers, both public and private, and this means that rural areas are often under-served (Steiner & Teasdale, 2019; Steinerowski & Steinerowska-Streb, 2012). SEs contribute to filling the gap in services left by retreating governments and private service providers across a range of sectors (Miles et al., 2014). Di Domenico et al. (2010, p. 681) state that SEs are seen as an essential “mechanism for supporting economic activities in areas deemed unprofitable by the private sector and neglected by the state” and these mainly include rural areas. RSEs are acknowledged as having the potential to deliver products and services in rural areas and thus contribute to local development (e.g., Steiner & Teasdale, 2019). Thus, they offer a mechanism to provide social impact and contribute to positive social change overall (Stephan et al., 2016) especially in rural areas (Musinguzi et al., 2021).

At the same time, rural and regional areas face disproportionate levels of threat. This can be due to ongoing out-migration, uncertainty over climate change impacts, biodiversity loss, conflicts over land and water, poverty and environmental pollution (Gupta et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2014; Steiner et al., 2021). Other cause of this situation also include; unemployment, energy access and cost, education, basic health care, lack of water and sanitation facilities, homelessness, refugee integration and care for the elderly, etc. (Ibid).

The resulting shortage of essential services can negatively affect the wellbeing of rural residents and lead to their greater exposure to major challenges such as high poverty rates and inequality (e.g., Paola, 2019).

Existing research regarding enabling factors for SEs to achieve their objectives has largely ignored the unanswered questions of geography (Muñoz, 2010; Steiner et al., 2019). This is surprising, given the centrality of geography to firms' commercial decision-making (e.g., Clausen, 2020). Moreover, rural and regional locations present several challenges to for-profit enterprises and thus to economic development more generally. Such disincentives include higher costs of communication and transport, lack of raw material, small local markets with long distances to larger ones, and a lack of skilled labor (Clausen, 2020).

Moreover, economic geography suggests locational patterns of economic activity that depend on factors such as comparative advantage and agglomeration effects that rural and regional areas struggle to provide (Dabson, 2020; OECD, 2020b).

The lack of research into geographical aspects of SEs is also striking because of the known urban/regional divide for firms' performance (Clausen, 2020; Pett et al., 2021). The agenda of RSEs beyond profitability has thus attracted interest in terms of regional and rural development (Eversole & Duniam, 2019). However, less is known about factors that influence their success.

Richter et al. (2019) and Barraket et al. (2019) show that RSEs can leverage a variety of resources e.g., physical, social, human, to offer local solutions in areas where they are located. Thus, their embeddedness – essentially their place-based nature - is essential for their success in this regard. Embeddedness also makes locals a major target for their interventions and outputs, paving the way for social impact creation. According to Baxter et al. (2020, p. 13), RSEs “establish a way of doing something completely new in the system” for providing relevant remedies to problems in the rural areas within which they are operating and related

to their entrepreneurial capacity/orientation. RSEs are also capable of engaging in relations with both local and external actors (i.e., within and beyond rural areas) and use their networks to advocate social change within that local context.

Georgios and Barraí (2021) identify socially innovative governance- inclusive/participative governance - a form of governance that considers local characteristics/factors - with extra-local factors. This form of governance helps to disseminate the neo-endogenous agenda for rural development in the efforts to revive rural areas and can promote local initiatives and thus social impact creation.

Local agencies in rural areas also require reinforcement by non-local groups, a notion central to neo-endogenous development (Bosworth et al., 2016; Olmedo & O'Shaughnessy, 2022). Consequently, both local embeddedness in rural communities and being anchored in regional or global policy networks are essential for RSE success (Baxter et al., 2020; Richter et al., 2019). To navigate local, regional and/or global networks, appropriate leadership (Horlings et al., 2018) such as connective leadership is needed, which in the case of RSEs refers to their ability to form and maintain alliances and networks as well as coordinate various stakeholders in delivering RSE interventions (cf; Stephan et al., 2016).

This current literature paints a picture of factors that enable the adaptation of RSEs to challenges and opportunities arising from their rural operational contexts. However, the emergent nature of the field and studies, mostly case in nature, and their being scattered across various disciplines, show a need for a systematic qualitative meta-synthesis of existing studies.

## **Methodology**

This study follows a systematic review process for literature search that generated 21 articles, of which 20 contained 26 cases selected for analysis in this chapter (Table 1). One study was

excluded because it analyzed a similar RSE case as another one included in the review although it applied a different method and analytical lens. The analysis follows a qualitative systematic meta-synthesis approach (Hossain et al., 2017, p. 2). A thematic content analysis was applied to illuminate factors contributing to the successes of identified RSEs. In the synthesis, low-inference descriptors in the form of direct quotations from the cases are used to enhance the internal reliability of the study along with triangulation of evidence from relevant sources. A summary of the studies showing the cases is provided in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1. A Summary of selected Studies and associated Cases**

Article Author (s)	Cases	Article Author (s)	Cases
Caló et al. (2019)	1	Kabeer & Sulaiman (2015)	18
Steiner and Teasdale (2019)	2	Bonny & Rajendran (2013)	19
Franzidis (2018)	3	Sakata & Prideaux (2013)	20
Barstow et al. (2016)	4	Tobias et al.(2013)	21
Butler & Lobley (2016)	5	McKague & Tinsley (2012)	22
	6	Pless & Appel (2012)	23
	7	O’Shaughnessy et al. (2011)	24
Cieslik (2016)	8	Lapeyre (2010)	25
Farmer et al. (2016)	9	Torri (2010)	26
Vázquez-Maguirre et al.(2016)	10		
Mohanan et al.(2016)	11		
Spencer et al. (2016)	12		
Holt & Littlewood (2015)	13		
	14		
	15		
	16		
	17		

Source: Compiled by Authors

Explicated factors were categorized into 10 sub-themes and three overarching (aggregate) themes (Fig.1) using an adapted version of Stephan et al.’s (2016) positive social change framework. This framework was used because: i) it has not been previously applied explicitly to the study of RSEs;, and ii) it is grounded in positive social change theory. The framework also provides an organizing scheme of the identified factors into three change levers: motivation, capability, and opportunity (MCO) anchored in business and management research, which adds theoretical and practical relevance.

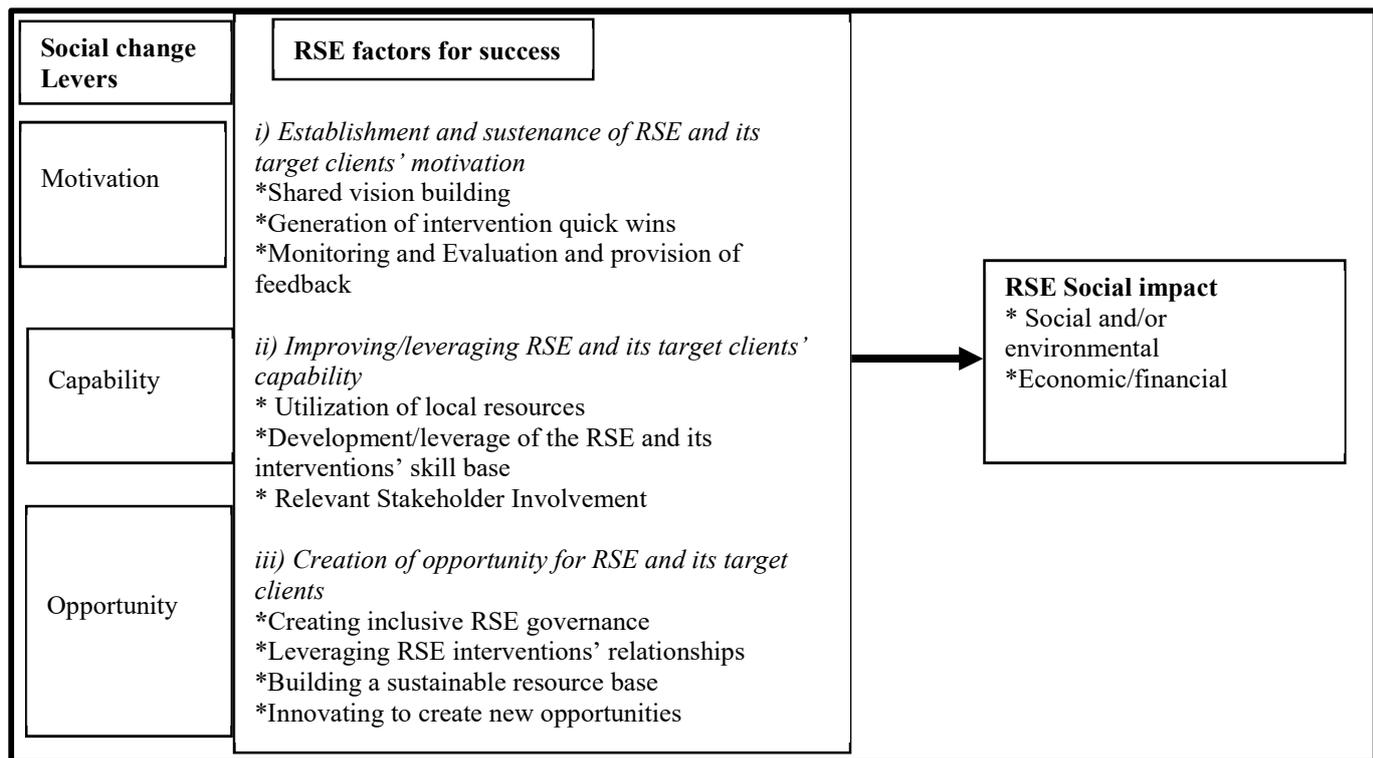


Fig. 1. Factors affecting RSE Success in Creating Social impact.

Source: Adaptation of Stephan et al.'s (2016) Positive Social Change Framework validated based a synthesis of RSEs studies.

### Identified factors that affect Success of Rural Social Enterprises

#### *Motivation*

Motivation is summarized using themes that are triggers for intrinsic motivation of the key stakeholders (management, staff ,and clients/beneficiaries) in RSEs as they design and implement interventions. Intrinsic motivation is vital in interventions by RSEs, since these interventions are ongoing and as such, their implementation will benefit from actively engaged stakeholders with interest, commitment, and perseverance (Stephan et al., 2016). For instance, staff with an intrinsic motivation can interact with RSE clients during an intervention's implementation and contribute to behavioral change by creating (positive) social impact. The analysis in this study identifies three themes with factors that enable the development of intrinsic motivation of RSE stakeholders: shared vision building; generation

of quick wins; and monitoring and evaluation and provision of feedback. Each is explained next.

*Shared vision building.* Shared vision of RSE interventions provides motivation by providing a common understanding of social mission of RSEs. This strengthens coordination among stakeholders and reduces uncertainty about short term RSE intervention goals (Stephan et al., 2016). All the cases studied had social missions that were communicated to relevant stakeholders using internal reports or via their websites to achieve a shared vision (e.g., cases 3, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22&23). Thus, in the interventions studied, shared visions are essential since they instil a positive sense of purpose and identity.

*Generation of quick wins.* To keep stakeholders motivated, SE interventions must generate and report quick wins—small achievements that can be demonstrated as outputs due to intervention. These successes stimulate stakeholders and provide momentum to progress toward social impact. In this review, cases portrayed this approach mainly through activity and monitoring reports within the organization and/or on their websites (e.g., cases 3, 16, 18 &23).

*Monitoring, evaluation, and provision of feedback.* The process of impact evaluation and reporting provides information to stakeholders about progress toward outputs, outcomes, and change more generally. Only a few cases (2, 18 &22) had monitoring and evaluation processes all the way through to social impact evaluation. Evaluation practices and feedback provision enable stakeholders to make sense of evolving social impact and help reduce uncertainty about the RSE intervention.

### ***Capacity***

The current synthesis identifies three themes related to organizational capabilities in strategic management that influence RSE social impact generation. These factors include routines and

skills that enable adaptation of the RSE to its clientele for effective execution of activities, and creation of social impact.

The synthesis shows that engagement within rural settings requires RSEs to dive into unique issues (e.g., generally unfamiliar, or not explicitly operating by mainstream market principles). All cases examined in this research operate within a rural context to avoid issues arising from unfamiliarity with this scenario and challenges that might arise. This embeddedness further enables RSEs to obtain resources for successful operations and the creation of social impact.

Current research results show five interrelated but distinct factors vital for the RSEs to become embedded in the rural scenario and increase the prospects for creating social impacts. These factors include: utilization of local resources; development of the RSE and its intervention skill base; and relevant stakeholder involvement.

*Utilization of local resources.* All cases rely on local resources to engage with target stakeholders in pursuing social impact. They include: i) local natural resources such as land, forests, and related products; and ii) local human resources. In many cases, natural resources are a major source of income in rural areas.

Enhancing skills and capabilities such as making crafts, and producing organic honey or herbal medicine, were common related activities (e.g., cases 3, 14, 15 & 26). This concurs with the existing mainstream rural entrepreneurship and emerging rural social entrepreneurship literature noting the importance of rural physical resources/biophysical assets (e.g., Barraket et al., 2019). Some RSEs also source most or all of their production inputs from the local areas to reduce leakage and thus contribute to local economic development.

Using human resources in the implementation of all RSE case interventions offers twin benefits. The livelihoods of the residents are impacted through their employment by enterprises and subsequent incomes earned. Locals were also the target clients or beneficiaries of the interventions, which brought about a social impact achievement by the RSEs. The low capacity of human resources in many rural contexts is widely reported (e.g., Christmann, 2017; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2011; Shucksmith, 2004 cited in Steiner et al., 2021). RSEs often recruit highly qualified non-locals for tasks such as marketing, management, high profile stakeholder engagement and collaborations (such as with governments, national and international organizations), resource mobilization (fundraising), specialized equipment operation and web design.

Outsourcing aligns with the demonstrated importance of neo-endogenous development (e.g., Bosworth et al., 2016; Olmedo & O'Shaughnessy, 2022) for RSEs. For instance, cases 3 and 16 used non-local, including international, staff to fill human resource gaps. Some RSE Boards and founders are directly involved in performing some of these complex tasks when they have suitable skills and experiences.

Recruiting from outside the area confronts the reluctance of some workers who prefer not to live and work in remote rural areas (e.g., case 23). This approach can negatively influence the social impact creation capacity although it cannot be substantiated in this study since it is explicitly reported in only one case study, that has an overall positive social impact. This fact adds to the imperative that RSEs build the capacity of local workers in relevant skills. The presence of such skills in the locality of the enterprise also contributes to sustainability of interventions and impact.

*Development of an RSE and its interventions' skill base.* All the RSE cases feature capacity building and empowerment of relevant stakeholders, so we postulate is among the

essential factors in reported positive social impacts. RSE staff are trained to improve their skills in executing interventions, and to secure more fruitful future employment. Relevant to the RSE skill base is marketing capacity, and all the cases exhibit this skill, albeit at varying levels i.e., those able to market locally, nationally, or internationally. These capacities also relate to the ability of RSE to form partnerships, collaborations or the multilevel networks enabling them to make linkages and access other markets. Market access enables sales of various products and provides funds to participating clients/beneficiaries, which increases the social impact achievement. It also enables RSEs to generate funds for their operations and thus their sustainability. Failure in marketing and its negative association with social impact creation was explicitly noted in case 25.

RSE cases with effective business planning skills (e.g., cases 3, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19&26) reported positive social impacts and thus we suggest that a RSE possessing good business planning skills is more likely to create social impacts. This is a cursory suggestion given that poor business planning is shown in only two cases (11& 25), both of which created no (or limited) social impacts.

Skill improvement in clients/beneficiaries is shown in most studied RSEs. This includes training for farmers in improving production, quality, quantity and marketing of their products. It also entails enhancement of their civic engagement by enabling participatory leadership, democratic decision making at farmer group level, and taking part in RSE management (e.g., cases 14, 17, 21&26). This latter development is in essence inclusive/participative governance that has been noted as vital for the success of rural interventions (e.g., Georgios & Barraí, 2021).

*Relevant stakeholder involvement.* This theme is found in all cases examined and the key stakeholders are the beneficiaries/clients of RSEs. RSEs try to address the key social-

economic issues that they face i.e., the RSEs try to benefit the local community. To harness the potential of beneficiaries/clients as key RSE stakeholders, most RSEs enter into partnerships/collaborations with their communities (e.g., cases 3, 14, 15, 18, 20, 23&26) to practice the inclusive governance discussed in more detail in the opportunity section ‘creating inclusive RSE governance’.

Another set of key relevant stakeholders includes local and national organizations and businesses, and governments (local government ministries e.g., health, environmental programs, and similar agencies) that collaborate with the RSEs. Such engagement was observed in all the cases examined. These stakeholders were important in enabling the RSEs to implement interventions in the local context, while at the same time enabling them to build local and national social capital.

This situation creates a multilevel network that helps the RSEs form the horizontal and vertical networks so vital in accessing and leveraging resources (e.g., Baxter et al., 2020; Richter et al., 2019) that, in turn, enable them to create social impact. The comparisons found that several RSEs (e.g., cases 3, 4, 10, 12, 15 & 23) partner, or are supported by, governments in their interventions. This occurs despite the absence in some countries of legal or institutional bases for SEs, and an accompanying lack of SE-related policies which are noted as vital for SE development (OECD/EU, 2017).

The final set of key relevant stakeholders is international in nature where RSEs partner, are supported by, or are part of an international organization (e.g., cases 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23 & 25) with some having many international partners/collaborators (e.g., cases 14, 18 & 23). These partnerships/collaborations create social capital, which is international in nature and is vital for obtaining resources – mostly financial (e.g., cases 14,

18 & 23). They also contribute human resources in terms of foreign volunteers (e.g., cases 3 & 16).

The resource-constrained nature of rural areas could be a driving force for these three types of partnerships/collaborations with the different key stakeholder types identified. These findings concur with the rural entrepreneurship literature on neo-endogenous development and the importance of non-local resources in reinforcing local efforts (Bosworth et al., 2016; Olmedo & O'Shaughnessy, 2022) to achieve rural development in the form of social impacts for the clients/beneficiaries in this study.

Regarding capacities for RSEs to work with the various stakeholders noted above, it is important to note that RSEs require appropriate leadership to mobilize/create these partnerships/collaborations (Horlings et al., 2018) e.g., connective leadership (cf; Stephan et al., 2016). The importance of good (connective) leadership skills to social impact creation is shown in most RSE cases (e.g., 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 & 26) reporting positive overall social impact. One case (25) where inadequate (connective) leadership skills are portrayed, had mixed results (positive overall social impacts before 2004 and limited/diminishing social impacts after 2004). Connective leadership skills have previously been linked to rural social entrepreneurs' characteristics and thus to the success a RSE in creating social impacts.

### **Creating Opportunity**

The synthesis research in this study identifies four themes of opportunity creation—creating inclusive RSE governance; leveraging RSE interventions' relationships; building a sustainable resource base; and innovating to create new opportunities. These enable the creation of fertile conditions for establishment, and mobilization of resources for successful execution, of RSE interventions for impact generation.

*Inclusive RSE Governance Structures.* This finding was observed in most RSE cases that provide beneficiaries/clients with opportunities to participate and influence decisions about RSE interventions. Local clients/beneficiaries are members of the RSE board, in joint venture partnerships with the RSEs, and in co-ownership or as shareholders (e.g., cases, 14, 26, 15, 3, 18, 20, & 23). These arrangements constitute inclusive and participatory governance, which has been highlighted as essential to the success of RSEs (e.g., Georgios & Barraí, 2021). Case 25 with an apparent inadequacy in inclusive/participatory governance, reported mixed results with positive social impact before 2004 when the RSE fully practiced this form of governance, but these dwindled with the loss of active in inclusive/participatory governance in the RSE over time.

*Leveraging RSE Intervention Relationships.* This theme occurs across all cases and all have partnerships/collaborations, albeit at different levels. These partnerships/collaborations are a like-minded consortium of partners or collaborators including local, national government/government agencies, and international organizations. Leveraging these partnerships/collaborations in the study cases provided opportunities for access to resources (both local and non-local) which in turn contributed to building the beneficiaries/clients', and the opportunities to create social impact. This finding concurs with the emerging RSE literature regarding importance of leveraging these multi-level networks for accessing resources (Barraket et al., 2019; Richter et al., 2019).

*Building a sustainable resource base.* Under this theme, the synthesis shows RSE cases trying to achieve the provision of resources perpetually for the RSE itself and its beneficiaries/clients. This is observed in two forms as elaborated upon below:

**Sustainability of the natural resource base.** The RSEs with interventions based on natural resources build the capacity of the beneficiaries/clients to enable the continuity of the

resource on which the business models of the RSEs are based (e.g., cases 1,14, 15, 17, 23&26, ). For instance, case 14 encourages diffusion of low-cost technologies such as practices for the beekeepers to develop less environmentally damaging hive management and honey harvesting practices. Case 15 is involved in afforestation (encouraging craft producers/members to plant trees), sustainable use of natural resources for craft making and biomass energy intervention. Case 17 advocates for sustainability in the production, utilization and management of wood fuels as part of East Africa's renewable energy resources for instance through including a free tree seed balls packet with every purchased product and has established the woodlands 2000 trust for promoting dryland commercial agroforestry within Kenya and the rest of East-Africa. The SE also supports mobile kilns for home waste making of charcoal to reduce overdependence on traditional charcoal sources e.g., using maize cobs and coconut husks. Case 23 has a strong focus on environmental aspects (e.g.,10,370 hectares of wasteland have been regenerated for natural resources based livelihoods while as 54,571 families are with renewable energy sources for cooking (Gram Vikas, 2021). Case 26 trains the women her collectors to practice sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants. Indeed, biophysical assets/rural physical resources are vital in the emerging RSE literature (e.g., Barraket et al., 2019) and their access and sustainable use could indeed contribute to the achievement of positive social impacts as shown in those cases. In case 25 where it is not achieved, results are mixed regarding impacts achieved.

**Financial resource base sustainability.** Financial resource sustainability is key to all RSE successful interventions and every case in this study has partnerships/collaborations . Regarding financial resources, RSE cases conduct their own business activities that are diversified in nature and align with the specific RSE social mission (e.g., cases 14, 10, 15, 20&23). Although all the RSE cases receive funding from their partnerships/collaborations, these partners are aligned to the RSE social mission which might improve their capacity to

achieve their social impacts. Similarly, cases (e.g., 10, 14, 15, 20&23) have a diversified intervention portfolio integrated in their business models. All these factors contribute to building a sustainable resource base (both natural and financial) which can lead to achieving social impact.

*Innovating to create new opportunities.* This theme links to the RSE entrepreneurial orientation that is related to the rural social entrepreneurs' characteristics e.g., their risk-taking, proactiveness and competitive aggressiveness. This entrepreneurial orientation was identified in several RSE cases (e.g., 1, 2, 8, 10, 14, 16, 20, 21 & 26) which, at the same time, portrayed overall positive social impacts. Rural social entrepreneurs' characteristics such as business planning skills along with entrepreneurial orientation enable them to engage their RSEs and target beneficiaries/clients in fruitful innovation practices.

All cases in this study feature a form of frugal innovation that enables them to solve a social problem in their respective rural contexts by offering appropriate products/services. This condition has been reported as essential to the success of RSEs in the emerging RSE literatures (Baxter et al., 2020). Key innovative solution examples in this study include use of low cost transport systems for service delivery to rural clients; offering rural transport services to the elderly and terminally ill; a needs-based care model; appropriate packaging of products (e.g., honey in single units) for affordability and accessibility; and environmentally friendly technologies (e.g., beekeeping techniques, improved cooking stoves, water filters (e.g., cases 1,4,8,14,16,17,23 & 24).

### **How the Identified Factors Create Social Impact**

The rural contexts of RSEs across the cases studied are characterized by lack, or poor delivery of, services such as health, sanitation, energy, marketing, transport or skills development by governments, development agencies, or the private sector. Most (19) cases found in the literature review report positive social impacts of RSEs, mainly in terms of

wellbeing/livelihood improvement (e.g., improved health conditions, increased income, women's empowerment) or environmental improvement and sustainability (Table 7.2).

**Table 7. 2. Summary of Key Rural Social Enterprise Impacts of the Cases**

<b>Cases</b>	<b>RSE Intervention</b>	<b>RSE Intervention Impact</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>RSE Intervention</b>	<b>RSE Intervention Impact</b>
1	Community health improvement.	i) Wellbeing (improved health)	14	Economic and environment improvement	i) Community wellbeing improvement ii) Positive environmental practices
2	Different community interventions e.g., job creation, selling of local produce, local cohesion promotion, capacity building and environmental conservation	i) Economic resilience by generating economic income ii) Environmental sustainability	15	Economic and environment improvement	i) Increase in participants' income ii) Community wellbeing improvement and empowerment iii) Positive environmental practices
3	Local employment/job creation and capacity building through a hotel	i) Improved education outcomes for teachers and students	16	Literacy improvement for school children	i) Increase in participants' income ii) Community wellbeing improvement and empowerment iii) Positive environmental practices.
4	Community health (promotion of improved cookstoves and advanced water filters)	i) Increased adoption rates of improved cookstoves and water filters	17	Socio-economic and environment improvement	i) Increase in participants' income ii) Community wellbeing improvement and empowerment iii) Positive environmental practices.
5	Local capacity building (training to develop and sustain local businesses).	i) Minimal improvement in participants' subjective well-being scores	18	Socio-economic improvement and women empowerment	i) Improved livelihoods, ii) Increased knowledge of politics and policy
6	Local capacity building (training for employment integration).	i) Minimal improvement in participants' subjective well-being scores	19	Social economic improvement and women empowerment	i) Women empowerment
7	Local capacity building (training for integration into the community)	i) Minimal improvement in participants' subjective well-being scores	20	Community based tourism	i) Improved wellbeing ii) conservation of the environment and sustained cultural values
8	Alleviation of energy poverty	i) Improved community livelihoods ii) Improved education outcomes-school performance,	21	Agricultural development (to access speciality coffee markets)	i) Poverty reduction-increase in personal wealth and improved life quality ii) Reduction in conflicts

<b>Cases</b>	<b>RSE Intervention</b>	<b>RSE Intervention Impact</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>RSE Intervention</b>	<b>RSE Intervention Impact</b>
		iii) Improved environment			
9	Health improvement and work integration	i) Improved well-being	22	Different product distribution and employment of rural women	i) Livelihood improvement
10	Women empowerment and community development	i) Economic stability for the families in the community ii) Women empowerment	23	Health improvement ( water and sanitation)	i) Livelihood improvement-improved health and sanitation
11	Health improvement ( prevention of diarrhoea and pneumonia in children)	i) No impacts on health-childhood diarrhoea and pneumonia outcomes	24	Rural transport provision (for mainly elderly with movement impairments)	i) Increased independence of the participants, ii) Reduced isolation, ii) improved access to health and related care services
12	Socio-economic and environment improvement	i) Improved livelihoods ii) Environmental improvement	25	Community-based tourism and environment conservation	i) Improved community livelihoods during the intervention's active phase
13	Women empowerment and employment provision	i) Improved livelihoods of target stakeholders ii) Creation of networks and social relationships iii) Improved environmental conditions	26	Social-economic improvement and environment conservation	i) Improved livelihoods-increased income and savings ii) Women empowerment

Source: Compiled by Authors

To demonstrate how some of the above factors are involved in social impact creation and thus successes of the RSEs, cases 2 and 12 are explored in detail to show the ways some of the identified factors help create social impacts..

Case two examines Scottish RSEs (Steiner & Teasdale, 2019) and is a good example for portraying how the identified factors above are essential to success. Scotland has a favorable atmosphere for RSEs and offers a conducive environment for tackling social and economic issues. The study occurred in the Rural South of Scotland and in two local authorities (Dumfries and Galloway, and Scottish Borders). This context is important since these regions have a high proportion of deprived areas according to the Scotland's Index of Multiple Deprivation (Steiner & Teasdale,2019). Addressing socio-economic challenges through traditional public service delivery mechanisms is costly given their rurality/remoteness and high per capita costs. Thus, the regions face typical rural challenges. Following is a description of factors identified as contributing to the success of the RSEs.

The RSEs practice community engagement by offering support to vulnerable groups with employment opportunities and by creating community cohesion. They are thus committed to creating social value (impact) for the rural communities. The RSEs also exhibit entrepreneurial orientation i.e., they apply entrepreneurial approaches for creating opportunities for the rural communities. There is also co-ownership/shareholding of the RSE with clients/beneficiaries i.e., the RSEs are run by local people and for local people.

The RSEs also harness local human resources where they employ local people including their voluntary commitments which “makes rural social enterprises often able to operate at a low cost to maintain their services” (Steiner & Teasdale, 2019, p.148). The RSEs also build the capacity of their beneficiaries. In this case, the RSEs build local skills of

participants such as the youth who in turn gain practical experience that influences their future e.g., their economic and social status. The RSEs also conduct impact evaluation to enable their stakeholders to be “more confident and understand the value of their work” (p.149).

The RSEs exhibit partnership/collaborations that enable connections beyond rural areas to overcome rurality challenges e.g., “rural social enterprises could and should take advantage of urban markets to overcome challenges of low population rural customer base” (Ibid, p.149). The RSEs portray connective leadership skills of their board and staff through their ability to initiate, work with so many stakeholders.

Case 12 studies an Australian RSE case (Spencer et al., 2016). Australia is a developed country, but its indigenous population still suffers persistent disadvantages that hinder their development as compared to other Australians. Thus, “the Australian Government policy seeks to overcome persistent indigenous disadvantage by way of economic mainstreaming. Yet, policies targeting mainstream employment for indigenous Australians presume that people will migrate from home communities because of the lack of employment opportunities in remote regions” (p.398). Policies such as these might not align well with the indigenous people’s cultural goals and they might disrupt local efforts for building livelihoods that are economically sustainable and relevant to the culture.

Thus, pathways such as RSEs that occur outside the economic mainstream especially in rural/remote areas of Australia might “provide avenues for economic, political, and cultural participation of indigenous Australians” (p.398). The case, as described by the authors, has succeeded in its objective for the following reasons: The RSE does local capacity building when it engages in training youth and other local community members to build the capacity necessary for sustainable employment e.g., improving literacy, numeracy, and

financial management skills. It also ensures staff training in relevant job qualifications e.g., certificates in small engine operations and maintenance, money management, and conservation and land management. The RSE also harnesses local human resources where for instance, it employs many local Yolŋu staff.

With respect to partnership/collaborations, the RSE has built strong relationships with key local stakeholders e.g., primary, secondary schools, and the government. For example, it implements programs such as the Youth Corp and remote jobs and community programs that contribute directly and indirectly towards achieving its mission.. Connective leadership skills are also expressed by the board and staff since they can collaborate and obtain resources from various stakeholders.

Entrepreneurship orientation is shown by the RSE's involvement in contractual commercial and community services. Business planning skills are also demonstrated by the RSE. The RSEs also demonstrates financial resource sustainability when it receives funding from multiple sources e.g., its own commercial activities and contractual activities with local government and other local organizations.

These detailed cases report delivery of positive social impacts. These two examples and the discussion of the results in the previous section “Identified factors that affect Success of Rural Social Enterprises”, show that the identified factors which affect the creation of social impact are many. Thus, many success factors must be combined in order to generate social impact in a RSE.

### **Contribution and Future Research Prospects**

The case analysis in this study identifies three overarching themes under which 10 sub-themes are elaborated. Several interrelated factors are identified in the main themes organized under the adapted positive social change framework levers—MCO. The three overarching

themes capture RSE beneficiary/client motivation, capability development, and the creation of opportunities for maximizing social impact. The interdependent nature of these themes ensures that beneficiaries/clients' motivation leads to their active engagement and subsequent capability development, and willingness to build the RSE intervention capabilities and opportunities for creating (positive) social change.

The study contributes to the emerging rural entrepreneurship literature. To the authors' knowledge, it is the first qualitative meta-synthesis of RSE studies from disparate fields and countries, and thus leads to the accumulation of knowledge in an emerging specialization. It identifies factors that influence social impact in RSEs and elaborates further on these using social change levers - MCO - that point to a systematic understanding of how social impacts are created.

The analyses identify factors that influence the achievement of social impact by RSEs. They draw the attention of practitioners, policymakers, and scholars to the rural context that has been less studied, yet it disproportionately faces challenges related to rurality which have been worsened by the COVID Pandemic. The findings contribute to an 'actionable knowledge base' (cf; Denyer & Tranfield, 2006) to provide insights/guidance regarding factors relevant to the creation and support of effective and impactful RSEs that can help rural areas take advantage of opportunities, and become more attractive and vibrant places to live in the post COVID Pandemic environment future leading to the prosperity of rural communities.

The study also identifies opportunities for further theoretical and empirical research in rural social entrepreneurship especially an analysis of RSE effectiveness and design. To this end, the results indicate many factors contribute to social impact from each MOC lever. Both qualitative and quantitative research will be needed to unravel how these

factors interact to create positive social change —social impact. Such analyses will generate more contextually rich advice to rural social entrepreneurs, managers, supporters, policymakers, and researchers interested in RSE development.

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## EndNotes

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<sup>i</sup> Social entrepreneurship field still lacks a universally agreed upon definition of SEs (Chandra et al., 2021). Similarly, there is no agreed upon definition of RSEs. We conceptualise RSEs in this chapter as part of the broader rural entrepreneurship (Clausen, 2020; Korsgaard & Tanvig, 2015) and rural business (Bosworth, 2012; Bosworth et al., 2020) literatures. Based on the emerging rural social entrepreneurship literature (Baxter et al., 2020; Steiner et al., 2019; van Twuijver et al., 2020), we define RSEs as organizations/enterprises with a social mission/goal of improving the wellbeing/creating positive social change for rural communities in form of social impacts achieved through the use of entrepreneurial/market-based approaches.

<sup>ii</sup> For more information on different RSEs, their interventions and achievements, please visit Inspiralba Ltd has established a Rural Social Enterprise Hub that can be accessed here: <https://ruralsehub.net/>

<sup>iii</sup> “Qualitative meta-synthesis aims to synthesize qualitative literature to provide a new, more comprehensive interpretation of the findings that goes beyond the depth and breadth of the

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original studies and to broaden the range of concepts identified Hossain (Hossain et al., 2017, p. 2). In this chapter, the aim of the meta-synthesis was to synthesise the RSE case studies to identify factors that contributed to social impact creation.

<sup>iv</sup> There is no agreed upon definition of social impact in social entrepreneurship literature but we generally agree with Rawhouser et al.' (2019, p. 2) definition of social impact “as beneficial outcomes resulting from prosocial behavior that are enjoyed by the intended targets of that behavior and/or by the broader community of individuals, organizations, and/or environments”. Precisely for RSEs, these beneficial outcomes relate “to rural livelihood improvement i.e. wellbeing outcomes of the SEs’ target beneficiaries and/or clients”(Musinguzi et al., 2021, p. 4).