MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

From Aid to Agency: Empowerment through Social Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa
- A Case Study of the Social Innovation Academy -

verfasst von | submitted by

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" Wewabeerawo omwekanokano no kuyigirizibwa, abantu mukitundu bafuuka

bamanyi ekiletera enkulakulana mukitundu"

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(When people are empowered and treated equally, they collectively become stronger and
more capable of creating positive change)

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This Master's thesis examines the impact of community-based social entrepreneurship on the empowerment of marginalised communities and the promotion of self-determined, sustainable, bottom-up development. The case study of the Social Innovation Academy (SINA) in sub-Saharan Africa provides an illustrative example of this approach. The research challenges traditional, Western-centric development models by exploring alternative frameworks, including Ubuntu and Afrocentrism. The Social Innovation Academy (SINA) is addressing poverty, youth unemployment and failing education systems in sixteen communities across six countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Its framework employs a community-based, self-governed approach to empower disadvantaged youth to take ownership of their lives and transform their "challenges into opportunities" in the form of social enterprises.

A participatory action research approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. This included a survey of participants across five SINA communities in Uganda and Tanzania, as well as three semi-structured expert interviews. The findings demonstrate that SINA's empowerment framework, which incorporates tools such as *holacracy* and *freesponsibility,* effectively equips participants with the skills to create sustainable social enterprises in Sub-Saharan Africa, reinforcing local agency and self-reliance. This bottom-up approach is aligned with post-development theories, enabling vulnerable groups to proactively shape their futures. SINA's replication in 16 communities across six countries highlights the potential of locally adaptive, community-based initiatives to promote global equity and challenge traditional development paradigms.

Keywords: Social Innovation Academy, Social Entrepreneurship, Community-Based Organizations, Sub-Saharan Africa, Decoloniality, Post-Development, Afrocentrism, Ubuntu, Sustainable Development, Empowerment, Agency

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit befasst sich mit der Untersuchung der Auswirkungen von gemeinschaftsbasiertem sozialem Unternehmertum auf die Stärkung marginalisierter Gemeinschaften sowie der Förderung einer selbstbestimmten, nachhaltigen Entwicklung im Bottom-up-Ansatz. Die Fallstudie der Social Innovation Academy (SINA) in Subsahara-Afrika veranschaulicht diesen Ansatz in exemplarischer Weise. Diese Forschung hinterfragt traditionelle, westlich geprägte Entwicklungsmodelle, indem sie alternative Ansätze wie Ubuntu und Afrozentrismus beleuchtet. Die Social Innovation Academy (SINA) engagiert sich in sechzehn lokalen Gemeinschaften in sechs Ländern der afrikanischen Subsahara-Region. Ihr Ziel ist es, Armut, Jugendarbeitslosigkeit und das Versagen der lokalen Bildungssysteme zu bekämpfen. Der Ansatz der Organisation basiert auf gemeinschaftsbasierter Autonomie und Selbstverwaltung. Das Ziel besteht darin, benachteiligte Jugendliche aus ökonomisch und sozial marginalisierten Verhältnissen zu befähigen, ihr Leben selbstbestimmt zu gestalten und ihre "Herausforderungen in Chancen" in Form von Sozialunternehmen zu verwandeln.

Als Forschungsansatz wurde die Methode der partizipativen Aktionsforschung gewählt, welche eine Kombination von quantitativen und qualitativen Methoden beinhaltet. Die Datenerhebung erfolgte mittels einer Befragung der TeilnehmerInnen in fünf SINA-Gemeinschaften in Uganda und Tansania sowie drei semi-strukturierter Experteninterviews. Die Evaluierung der Ergebnisse zeigt, dass der Empowerment-Ansatz von SINA, der sich unter anderem Methoden wie *Holacracy* und *Freesponsibility* bedient, die Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer in hohem Maße dazu befähigt, nachhaltige soziale Unternehmen in Subsahara-Afrika zu gründen und dadurch die lokale Handlungsfähigkeit und Selbstverantwortung zu stärken. Dieser Bottom-up-Ansatz steht im Einklang mit Theorien der Post-Development und ermöglicht es vulnerablen Gruppen, ihre Zukunft aktiv zu gestalten. Die Replikation von SINA in 16 Gemeinden in sechs Ländern verdeutlicht das Potenzial lokal anpassungsfähiger, gemeinschaftsbasierter Initiativen zur Förderung globaler Gerechtigkeit und zur kritischen Hinterfragung traditioneller Entwicklungsparadigmen.

Schlagwörter: Social Innovation Academy, Soziales Unternehmertum, Community-Based Organizations, Subsahara-Afrika, Dekolonialität, Post- Development, Afrozentrismus, Ubuntu, nachhaltige Entwicklung, Selbstbestimmung, Handlungsfähigkeit

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Abbreviations

BMZ: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

CBO: Community-based Organisation

LDC: Least Developed Countries

NGO: Non- Governmental Organization

SSA: Sub-Sahara Africa

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

SINA: Social Innovation Academy

ODA: Official Development Assistance

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNIDO: United Nations Industrial Development Organization

1. Introduction: Agents of Change

> Our world is unequal and divided. Hunger and poverty are rife. The richest one per cent are responsible for the same quantity of planet-wrecking greenhouse gases as two-thirds of humanity. These are not natural facts. They are the result of humanity's choices. And we can decide to do things differently. We can choose to eradicate poverty. We can choose to end inequality. We can choose to transform the international economic and financial system in the name of equity. We can choose to fight racism, respect human rights, combat climate change, and create a world that works for all humanity. Every one of us can contribute – through actions large and small (Guterres, 2024).

We are in a time of intersecting and interdependent global crises. 2023 was the hottest year on record, we are experiencing an all-time high in state-based armed conflict (NOAA Climate.gov., 2024), (UCDP, 2024) and the number of forcibly displaced people has reached a record high of 120 million (UNHCR, 2024). The richest one per cent of the global population is not only responsible for more than twice the carbon emissions of the poorest 50 per cent, but also owns 43 per cent of the world's wealth, leading to even more inequality (Christensen et al., 2023, p. 7). Moreover, for the first time in 25 years, poverty has increased while the rich are getting dramatically richer (ibid.).Although progress has been made in some areas of poverty reduction, in others it has often come at the cost of even greater inequalities and irreparable environmental damage (Sachs, 2019, p. xii).

A look at global efforts and paradigms to drastically change this course, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reveals that we are more than halfway to 2030 and far off track: of the 36 goals set, only two have a realistic chance of being achieved, while some are even regressing. This shortfall is largely due to the fact that the various crises, including pandemics, natural disasters, inflation and the rise in conflicts and wars, are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, exacerbating global inequalities (GSDR, 2023, pp. 1–2).

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the concept of 'development' based on capitalism in the Global North has either directly caused or contributed to the current state of human and ecological crisis, and has resulted in the emergence of renewed dependencies. Post-development theorists have gone so far as to suggest that 'development' no longer implies progress, but rather "survival", leading them to say that "the Sustainable Development Goals should really be called SSGs - 'Sustainable Survival Goals'" (Sachs, 2019, p. xii).

This perspective underscores the inadequacies of traditional development paradigms and highlights the need for more holistic and context-specific approaches that actively break down barriers and hierarchies, especially for vulnerable and marginalised groups, in order to leverage synergies (GSDR, 2023, pp. 1–2).

In light of these compounding global challenges, maintaining a positive outlook or hope can be challenging, particularly when those most affected are denied agency and power. In this context, it is important to consider alternative approaches to top-down interventions such as adaptable, locally-led solutions created by and for people as empowered agents of change to address global inequalities and collectively create the inclusive and just future we all want and can live in. The Social Innovation Academy (SINA) in East Africa, is an example of such an approach in practice. SINA's mission is to empower disadvantaged youth from marginalised communities to become active drivers of their own futures, rather than passive recipients of aid, by creating their own sustainable solutions in line with the SDGs and beyond.

1.1.1 Research Topic and Interest

Therefore, this thesis examines the potential of social entrepreneurship to contribute to the overcoming of these challenges, with the Social Innovation Academy presented as a case study.

By analysing the theoretical frameworks and notions of post-development, dependency theory and alternative(s) (to) development through Ubuntu and Afrocentrism, the aim is to provide insights into alternative development models that promote the empowerment of marginalised communities and contribute to broader change practices in Sub-Sahara Africa.

Although my studies in International Development have provided me with a comprehensive understanding of global injustices and interdependencies, as well as the multi-layered complexity of 'development', I felt that my academic background lacked a more practical and solution-oriented approach to the future and the way forward in terms of development perspectives.

The inspiration for this research project stems from my engagement with the Social Innovation Academy in Uganda in 2022. During this period, I was able to observe the daily challenges faced by young people from marginalised backgrounds, including their struggles against social and economic inequalities and poverty. I was encouraged by the resilience of these individuals in the face of social injustice and their dedication to identifying creative and sustainable

community solutions to local issues. This experience gave me a sense of purpose and hope that there are alternative perspectives, one of which I would like to explore in this Master's thesis.

The Social Innovation Academy (SINA) is tackling poverty, youth unemployment and failing education systems in sixteen communities across six countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Its framework uses a community-based, self-governed approach to empower disadvantaged youth[1] from marginalised backgrounds to take ownership of their lives and turn their "challenges into opportunities" in the form of social enterprises (SINA, 2024b), (Sadiki & Schmid, 2023, p. 2).

1.1.2 Research Gap

There is a growing consensus that social entrepreneurship can serve as a viable approach to addressing socio-economic challenges (UNIDO, 2016), (Seelos & Mair, 2004, 2007), (Maseno & Wanyoike, 2022), (Ashoka, 2023). Some research highlights the importance of social entrepreneurship as a tool for poverty alleviation (Yunus, 2007; Miah et al., 2024) and social transformation (Maseno & Wanyoike, 2022). Mair and Martí (2006) explore the theoretical underpinnings of social entrepreneurship, while Phills et al. (2008) look at social innovation as a mechanism for change. Seelos and Mair (2007) highlight how social entrepreneurs enable human capabilities and drive development, while Nafukho and Muyia (2010) discuss the socio-economic impact of entrepreneurship in Africa.

However, these works primarily concentrate on theoretical contexts and implications and lack a broader framework and practical implementation for social entrepreneurship across different contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. It is therefore valuable to explore how these concepts can facilitate agency and empowerment among disadvantaged youth and communities. Furthermore, it is important to assess how they can be practically and holistically applied to address local challenges such as poverty, youth unemployment and education and to assess how they can be practically and holistically applied to address local challenges such as poverty, youth unemployment and education. Moreover, the aim is to examine whether these concepts can serve as decolonial, bottom-up, community-driven alternatives to traditional development approaches.

Despite the growth in research on social entrepreneurship, this field of study is predominantly situated within European contexts, which has resulted in a research gap in Sub-Saharan Africa

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[1] SINA uses the terms disadvantaged or marginalised youth to refer to its scholars who are mostly refugees, orphans, street children, former child soldiers, former inmates, former prostitutes or young people from other marginalised and poor backgrounds. Consequently, I will use the same terms and their meanings when referring to them.

and Asia (Miah et al., 2024, pp. 8, 11). Consequently, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on social entrepreneurship in Africa and tries to enhance African contributions to these issues, particularly through collaboration with the Social Innovation Academy. However, it is acknowledged that the knowledge barrier cannot be fully overcome due to the researcher's own position as a white European woman, a point that will be further elaborated in Chapter 4.2. Nevertheless, as proposed by Miah et al. (2024), Seelos and Mair (2007) and Ashoka (2023), there is a necessity for an intensification of collaboration between academics, international institutions and social enterprises to strengthen and widen their impact and visibility.

1.1.3 Research Question

In order to address the research gap and research interest outlined above, this thesis addresses the following central question:

"How does the Social Innovation Academy, as a community-based social entrepreneurship initiative, empower local communities in Sub-Saharan Africa and contribute to a more sustainable and decolonial development, particularly concerning the role of agency?"

The research question covers two different dimensions of social entrepreneurs and development paradigms. On the one hand, the theoretical level examines and contextualises the topic in a literature review within the overarching framework of development. On the other hand, the implementation, impact and challenges of Social Entrepreneur initiatives are explored at the practical level.

Theoretical Level:

This level of analysis examines the background and theoretical foundations of development, with a particular focus on decolonial and alternative development models, as well as post-development theory. It offers a contextual analysis of how these models can facilitate more equitable and participatory community development. This is addressed by the following subsequent question:

1. *What are the theoretical implications of embracing decolonial alternative(s) (to) traditional development models towards more equal and participatory, sustainable community-led development?*

Practical-Implementation Level:

The theoretical level's insights and conclusions are applied and related to practical implications and concepts based on the Social Innovation Academy, which will be explored with the following sub-question:

> 2. *How do social entrepreneurship initiatives like the Social Innovation Academy (SINA) contribute to agency and empowerment among marginalised communities in Sub-Sahara Africa and what challenges do they face in contributing to sustainable and decolonial development?*

The levels influence each other and only the consideration of both levels allows a complete overview of this topic area. Both a literature review and qualitative and quantitative research are essential for answering the research questions.

1.1.4 Research Objective

This Master's thesis aims to explore how community-based organisations using social innovation and entrepreneurship can empower marginalised groups and promote more long-lasting, sustainable, bottom-up development. This research seeks to understand the need for new approaches to address global inequalities and dependencies, and to foster new collaborations that contribute to a pluriversal dialogue on alternative development. By emphasising diverse perspectives, the research highlights the importance of local knowledge and experiences for inclusive, equitable and sustainable change. To achieve this, the thesis will contextualise social entrepreneurship within development cooperation through a literature review and practical insights, exploring opportunities, challenges and critical issues in community-based organisations and social innovation initiatives. Specifically, it aims to:

1. **Critically analyse development paradigms:**

Examining the limitations and critiques of various development theories and approaches, particularly through dependency theory, neo-colonialism and post-development critiques, to understand structural inequalities and power dynamics that necessitate alternative approaches (Chapter 2).

2. **Explore alternative approaches to development:**

Outlining frameworks such as delinking, degrowth and ubuntu, focusing on context-specific approaches that emphasise agency and ownership in sub-Saharan Africa (Chapter 3).

3. Assess the role of social innovation in development:

Highlighting the impact and value of social innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives, such as the Social Innovation Academy (SINA), by linking theoretical discussions with practical applications that embody alternative development principles and contribute to community empowerment (Chapter 5).

Figure 1: Thesis Structure

(Own Illustration)
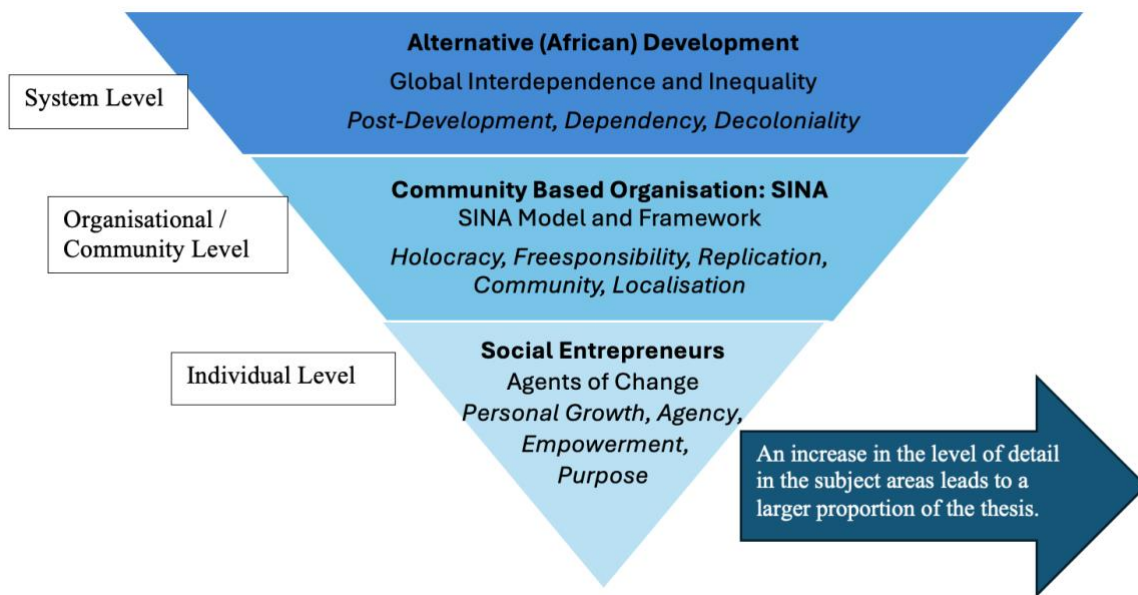
In order to provide a comprehensive overview, this work considers a range of perspectives, contexts and theoretical frameworks. The various relevant theoretical fields surrounding development studies, as well as those of critical sociology and political economy, demonstrate the complexity of the research problem. Consequently, an interdisciplinary approach is required to analyse the multiple dimensions of an initiative such as SINA, which is inherently complex. Furthermore, the application of an appropriate research methodology is essential. In this case, the methodology is based on the practical principles of activist research (see Chapter 4.3), which enables an understanding of the links between the different theoretical approaches and practice.

Following this introduction, the two key concepts of this thesis, namely 'development' and 'social entrepreneurship', are defined and analysed. This is then followed by the theoretical framework of the thesis, providing critical perspectives and background on post-development and decolonial theories. These include dependency theory, neo-colonialism, delinking, degrowth and decoloniality, as well as alternative development, and are based on the works of Ake (1996), Amin (1991), Nkrumah (1971), Gunder- Frank (1966), Mignolo (2007) and others.

The third chapter is focused on a more detailed exploration of the perspectives presented in the theoretical framework in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, which serves as the foundation for the analysis of the case study presented in the fifth chapter. The methodological approach employed in the case study is outlined in the fourth chapter. Lastly, the theoretical and practical findings are summarised in order to address the research question and propose potential recommendations for action.

1.2 Definitions

In order to analyse the concept of social entrepreneurship and its potential in the context of development paradigms, it is first necessary to outline different insights into both 'social entrepreneurship' and 'development'. This will provide the necessary background for all subsequent theories.

1.2.1 What is "Development'?

The concept of 'development' is multifaceted, encompassing economic, social, cultural and political dimensions. It therefore calls for a comprehensive approach that takes into account these different aspects. What follows is an attempt to provide a thematic and conceptual explanation and framework that covers the content and theoretical focus of this thesis.

From a theoretical perspective, 'development' entails grasping and examining the interconnections between socio-economic, environmental, technological, cultural and gender matters at global and local levels, while recognising their interdependence and intersubjectivity (EADI, 2017). It is a multidisciplinary concept that frequently encompasses economic growth, industrialisation, increased well-being, as well as political and social progress which often leads to tensions between the systemic structures and the actors involved (Menzel, 2010, p. 11).

The term 'development' is often used to describe a process of social change or transformation, as well as the deliberate initiation of such change. During the 20th century, the term came to be used more frequently in reference to societies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Ziai, 2014, pp. 11–12). "Development is inevitably treated as a normative concept, as almost a synonym for improvement" (Seers, 1969, p. 2). Fundamentally Seer sees 'development' as a strategy to reduce poverty, inequality and unemployment. This includes, among other things, education, political and economic independence and freedom of speech (p. 5). Menzel's (2010) contribution builds upon existing definitions with the introduction of the "hexagon of

development," which encompasses six key dimensions: political stability, economic capacity, social justice, ecological sustainability, cultural identity, and social participation. This approach places a greater emphasis on the normative elements (p. 14). Menzel (2010) places the individual at the centre of the concept of development, both within a social system and its environment, and on a larger global scale (p. 13).

From a more practical standpoint, this understanding can imply a range of interventions, actions, and processes, including economic growth, infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, institution and community building, and the transformation of societies and individuals as a whole (Bilgen et al., 2021, pp. 521–522). In more specific terms, it can signify the construction of dams, the introduction of high-yielding varieties in agriculture, the provision of primary schooling for girls, biodiversity conservation, population control and structural adjustment. Consequently, it is a highly interchangeable term, invariably linked to the realisation of a greater collective benefit (Ziai, 2016, p. 69). This in turn runs the risk of 'development' becoming an arbitrary term, to be used wherever and by whomever it suits. "By now development has become an amoebalike concept, shapeless but ineradicable. Its contours are so blurred that it denotes nothing – while it spreads everywhere because it connotes the best of intentions. (...) Though development has no content, it does possess one function: it allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher goal " (Sachs, 1992, p. 4).

The discourse has evolved over time, moving from a focus on 'development-as-growth' to a more nuanced approach that incorporates the concept of 'development-as-social policy'. The former is exemplified by institutions such as the World Bank or the WTO, while the latter is reflected in the work of NGOs or the UNDP (Sachs, 2019, p. xiii). Nevertheless, 'development' is often perceived as inherently positive and universally desirable, and has consequently been embodied at the institutional level in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) (p. xiii). As demonstrated above, the hegemonical and hierarchical approaches have frequently resulted in a lack of bottom-up participation and decision-making. It is therefore recommended that more inclusive, sustainable and participatory solutions and methods of addressing existing socio-economic and environmental inequalities be implemented.

1.2.2 Social Entrepreneurship – A Catalyst for Change?

"The fact that social entrepreneurs have direct ownership for development outcomes – and also the ability to experiment and learn in a local context – might point to essential success factors" *(Seelos & Mair, 2007, p. 278).*

The foundation of social entrepreneurship is the pursuit of innovative ideas, which originate from individuals who address social issues that have not been adequately addressed by traditional means. Social entrepreneurship covers a range of initiatives, both economic and non-economic, that may or may not be driven by a profit motive. This can be the provision of free medicines to those in need, or the establishment of a medical centre for profit in a much-needed area (Yunus, 2007, pp. 37–39).

Social entrepreneurship represents a relatively recent phenomenon in the field of economic activity that promises social added value and combines socio-ecological components with economic patterns of thought and action (Yunus 2010); (Yunus 2019); (Mair & Martí 2006). Through the implementation of innovative solutions that are tailored and adapted to the specific context and needs, it is possible to meet those needs at different levels. This can facilitate social and economic development, particularly in so-called low-income countries, and drive social change (Seelos & Mair, 2004, p. 1); (Mair & Martí, 2006, p. 1). Thus, social entrepreneurs can contribute to sustainable development by addressing the basic needs of individuals, communities and future generations (Seelos & Mair, 2007, p. 277).

In contrast to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or non-profit organisations, social enterprises are not entities that are primarily focused on charitable activities. Rather, they utilise a business model that prioritises social benefits over the maximisation of profits. Social businesses are characterised by an objective to address social issues such as poverty and social problems, to operate in a sustainable and environmentally responsible manner, and to reinvest all profits back into the business rather than distributing them to shareholders (Yunus, 2019).

A social enterprise or social business is a self-sustaining model that sells goods or services, but its primary objective is to empower and enhance the lives of those living in poverty (Mahfuz Ashraf et al., 2019, p. 1146). A comprehensive literature review by Mahfuz Ashraf et al. (2019) suggests that these social intervention models effectively address various social issues by focusing on the key themes of social impact and self-sustainability (p. 1153).

This study reaches the same conclusion as Yunus (2019), that alliances between NGOs and social businesses would be more effective overall, as they share similar goals and benefit from local and global cooperation to complement each other (Mahfuz Ashraf et al., 2019, p. 1155). It also suggests that rather than making beneficiaries mere recipients of donations or aid, Social Entrepreneurship is more likely to empower and engage them independently, even in the long term (p.1155).

Miah et al. (2024) argue, that the concept of social entrepreneurship can be a catalyst for positive social and economic change, particularly in addressing issues related to poverty. This can be achieved through the implementation of innovative solutions and the adoption of sustainable practices. In establishing enterprises that concentrate on social concerns at the community level and offer employment opportunities for marginalised communities, social entrepreneurs contribute to the alleviation of poverty and the empowerment of individuals with the tools and resources to improve their socio-economic status (p. 3, 20).

Moreover, the authors conclude that promoting more inclusive and equitable progress, particularly in low-income countries, can assist in achieving SDG 1 (no poverty) and other SDGs, including 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), and 8 (decent work and economic growth). This can be facilitated through four principal strategies: the empowerment of vulnerable groups, the promotion of sustainable innovation practices, the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems and the construction of sustainable and innovative business models (Miah et al., 2024, p. 21).

Rippon and Moodley (2012) indicate that the role of social entrepreneurs in driving social, economic, cultural and environmental progress is gaining recognition, particularly in light of criticism directed at international organisations for stifling change processes due to their bureaucratic nature (p. 82). The UNIDO report (2016) also identifies the potential of social entrepreneurship to reduce poverty and enhance social well-being. However, the report also indicates that a significant number of 'least-developed' countries (LDCs) have not incorporated entrepreneurship education into their strategies for poverty reduction. To address this gap, it is essential to promote social entrepreneurship educations, invest in local business-related skills, and foster partnerships that provide practical training alongside basic education. This will be discussed in more depth in the case study in chapter 5 (p.8).

2. Theoretical Framework: From Dependency to Decoloniality

This thesis is based on the theoretical assumption that imperialism, capitalism, colonial continuities and neo-colonialism maintain or reinforce existing systems of dependency for the so-called Global South or low-income countries. Reference is made to Andre Gunder Frank's (1966) dependency theory approach, which highlights economic dependencies and structural inequalities between 'developed and developing' nations and Samir Amin's (1990) further elaboration of this theory which seeks to delink from the Western capitalist system. These are based on Nkrumah's (1971) thoughts on neo-colonialism and will be examined in more detail below. The theories elucidate the enduring power structures and regional inequalities that persist under global capitalism. They are followed by insights from post-development theorists, such as Arturo Escobar (1995) and Gustavo Esteva (1985) who offer a radical critique of traditional development paradigms and propose alternatives to development. Furthermore, the concept of decoloniality is introduced as a framework for understanding and dismantling the colonial structures embedded within development discourses.

This theoretical framework explores various perspectives and critiques surrounding the concept of development, providing a comprehensive foundation for understanding its complexities and the necessity for alternatives to development which will be discussed more in detail in the following chapters.

2.1 Neocolonialism

To gain a deeper understanding of current patterns of dependency and global inequality, it is essential to consider the ideas of the pan-African politician and theorist Kwame Nkrumah.

Nkrumah (1971) argues that neo-colonialism has replaced colonialism as the primary instrument of imperialism, thus trapping post-colonial African states in a renewed state of dependency (p. ix). According to him, neo-colonial-dominated states are externally independent and sovereign, but internally, their economy and politics are influenced and controlled by the neo-colonial states (p. ix.). For instance, the 'former' colonial power exerts significant influence on governmental policy through subventions (ix-xii). „The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (Nkrumah, 1971, p. ix). The paradoxical antagonism between exploitation and supposed support for development reinforces global inequality and widens the gap between the

Global North and South. This is a clear example of how development can be used to perpetuate rather than reduce inequality. Nkrumah (1971) defines neo-colonialism as a form of imperialism that involves pure exploitation without compensation (ix-xiii). This carries the risk of renewed dependency through underlying influences such as financial or economic systems. This problem is also evident in development work, which is always conditional on the neo-colonialised state, allowing the neo-colonial state to maintain its power and influence (xv.).

> The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world. The struggle against neo-colonialism is not aimed at excluding the capital of the developed world from operating in less developed countries. It is aimed at preventing the financial power of the developed countries being used in such a way as to impoverish the less developed (Nkrumah, 1971, p. x).

Nkrumah's theory of a neo-colonial African state controlled by foreign powers is coherent with the premises of dependency studies and led to a shift in thinking that is reflected in these theories and will be discussed further below.

2.2 Dependency Theory

The central tenet of dependency theory is that global capitalism, as a polarising system, creates inequalities between different regions of the world while drastically limiting the untapped potential for progress of poorer, less industrialised countries (Kvangraven, 2021, p. 81). Dependency theory provided a theoretical framework for analysing the links between financial disadvantage, unequal exchange, exploitation of labour and agricultural goods, and technological development (by rich countries/metropolises), with a particular focus on the experiences of poorer countries (the periphery) and the need to challenge Eurocentric approaches (Antunes De Oliveira & Kvangraven, 2023, p. 1684).

The imposition of colonialism resulted in an unequal international division of labour, initially reducing peripheral regions to the status of raw material suppliers and subsequently integrating them into the global economy in a dependent manner. This integration saw them become locations for multinational corporations and sales markets and resulted in the emergence of a distinctive form of capitalism in the periphery, namely peripheral or dependent capitalism, which perpetuates itself through reliance on the centre. Hence, independent development is and always has been, an impossibility within a hierarchical global market; at best, only "dependent development" can occur (Fischer & Grandner, 2019, p. 149).

This imbalance can be attributed to the continuous appropriation and exploitation of surpluses from the least developed "satellite" regions in favour of the most advanced "metropolitan" centres of the former colonial powers (Smith & Lester, 2023, p. 199).

Another central aspect of dependency theory is its political advocacy. Notable dependency theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin were actively involved in struggles against colonial and neo-colonial structures, as well as against capitalist dictatorships in Latin America and Africa and will be discussed further in detail (Antunes De Oliveira & Kvangraven, 2023, p. 1684).

2.2.1 Andre Gunder Frank: the development of the underdevelopment

Dependency theory, as articulated by Frank, argues that the 'lack of development' in 'less-developed' countries cannot be attributed to their own people. Instead, Frank argues that Western nations such as the USA and UK, which form the elite 'metropolis', intentionally hindered the development of these countries and exploited the peripheral nations by keeping them in a state of dependency and underdevelopment (Gunder Frank, 1966, p. 7).

> We must conclude, in short, that underdevelopment is not due to the survival of archaic institutions and the existence of capital shortage in regions that have remained isolated from the stream of world history. On the contrary, underdevelopment was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself (Gunder Frank, 1966, p. 9).

Gunder Frank argues that Latin American countries (as illustrated by his case study) have been pushed to join or subordinate themselves to the capitalist world economic system, resulting in a lack of autonomy: "Each of these regions experienced what may have appeared as economic development during the period of its respective golden age. But it was a satellite development which was neither self-generating nor self-perpetuating" (Gunder Frank, 1966, p. 8). He proceeds to argue that this dependency has persisted into the twentieth century, due to the continued dominance of Western countries in international trade and the dependence of 'less developed' countries on Western aid (p.12-13).

2.2.2 Criticism of Dependency Theory

Nevertheless, dependency theories often simplify complex dependency relations and structures into two categories (periphery and metropolis). This dichotomy focuses too much on economic factors while neglecting other important elements such as regional differences, local dynamics,

and social, cultural, and environmental factors that also have a significant impact on the development and dependency of countries (Pimmer & Schmidt, 2015, p. 7). Schmidt and Pimmer (2015) also argue that the scientific field addressed is a paradigm whose coherence is not primarily determined by the different methodological approaches and theoretical points of reference, but rather by the common initial question of explaining underdevelopment (p. 5).

While some aspects of dependency theory are no longer considered relevant or too universal, many parts are still applicable or can be related to current dependency relations. For my decolonial line of argument, it is therefore important to take a closer look at approaches to 'delinking', focusing on the concepts of Samir Amin (1990) and Walter Mignolo (2007), which will be explored below.

2.3 Delinking

The dependency school proposes that a solution to 'underdevelopment' in low-income countries is complete *delinking* from international capitalism. This requires a radical social transformation that empowers 'developing' countries to take control of their own initiatives and decisions, free from dependence on the unjust international capitalist system (Erunke, 2009, p. 7). As Frank (1966) concludes, the most substantial industrial growth is achieved by satellite countries when their economic and political ties to developed nations are at their weakest:

> A second hypothesis is that the satellites experience their greatest economic development and especially their most classically capitalist industrial development if and when their ties to their metropolis are weakest. This hypothesis is almost diametrically opposed to the generally accepted thesis that development in the underdeveloped countries follows from the greatest degree of contact with and diffusion from the metropolitan developed countries. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by two kinds of relative isolation that Latin America has experienced in the course of its history (Gunder Frank, 1966, p. 10).

This suggests that reduced dependence fosters autonomous development. Although dependency theory is often associated with Latin American contexts, Samir Amin, a neo-Marxist and pan-African thinker, has made significant contributions to this tradition, emphasising its relevance for African 'development' (Kvangraven, 2020, p. 634). Amin's 'development' strategy of *delinking* (1990) and his views on imperialism, global capitalism, and the transition to socialism will be discussed in more detail.

In his 1990 book 'Delinking', Samir Amin argues that Africa and the so-called Global South need to decouple from the global capitalist system in order to promote economic development. He claims that economically poorer countries can progress economically without exactly replicating the production systems of richer nations. He advocates " (…) the strict subjection of external relations in all fields to the logic of internal choices without regard to the criteria of the world capitalist rationality" (Amin, 1990, p. 60) . By distancing themselves from the so-called developed countries and eliminating unequal exchange, peripheral nations can thrive and surpass capitalist economies (Gumede, 2023, p. 445). Amin emphasises the need for independence to build a socialist structure and a new world economic system, "(...) outside capitalism and in the long run - towards socialism", advocating self-sufficient, mass-oriented progress to build a national, independent economy (Amin, 1990, p. 55).

Accordingly, the concept of delinking proposed by Amin implies the creation of economic systems based on national values and needs - independent of the global capitalist system. In contrast to autonomy or self-sufficiency, delinking does not mean complete 'autarky' or withdrawal from international trade. Unlike autonomy or self-sufficiency, delinking does not mean complete 'autarky' or withdrawal from international trade. Rather, it is about organising economic activities in a way that benefits local societies and reduces dependence on the dominant global capitalist framework. This also requires the formation of political alliances between countries of the so-called Global South (Amin, 1990, p.62); (Gumede, 2023, p. 446).

Amin's idea suggests that countries should take a more assertive role and focus on shaping the global system to better serve their own needs. This would mean developing their own production systems and putting the interests of their citizens ahead of those of international capital (Kvangraven, 2020, p. 641). He goes on to argue that a new model of industrialisation is needed because most of Africa's population is dependent on agriculture, and therefore needs to break away from the imperatives of globalised capitalism and focus on non-capitalist forms of agriculture (Amin, 1990, pp. 63–64); (Kvangraven, 2020, p. 641).

Consequently, Amin advocated the existence of multiple systems 'in the hope of a polycentric world' and in favour of 'reciprocal adjustment' instead of 'weaker' nations having to adjust to the demands of stronger ones unilaterally (Amin, 1990, p. xii). He posed two questions, or rather proposals, as the 'real challenges of our time':

> Could what I call delinking be the means of reconstructing the world on the basis of a genuine polycentrism? Might it provide favourable conditions for a renaissance of a leftward evolution in the developed Western world, and thus lay the foundation for a renewal of internationalism of peoples and universalism? (Amin, 1990, p. ix).

He stressed that the historically determined inequalities between advanced and peripheral countries will persist unless peripheral economies are more equally integrated into the global system. Moreover, Amin argued that the challenges for the development of the periphery can only be fully understood through a political-economic and historical analysis of their history and integration into the international capitalist economy (Kvangraven, 2020, p. 201).

This concept of delinking is in line with decoloniality's goal of decoupling from Western forms of governance, capitalist accumulation and individualist ideologies. The aim is to escape imperial and colonial frameworks and move towards a pluriverse where multiple worlds coexist without hierarchies of knowledge (W. Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 2), (Amin 1990).

Although it seems logical to develop national production systems and prioritise the needs of one's own people, there are some challenges in implementing Amin's concept. It is particularly difficult because the economies of 'developing' countries are deeply integrated into global production and finance, making it difficult to establish their own national law of value (Kvangraven, 2020, p. 642). In addition, Smith and Lester argue, that Amin's delinking fails to account for the successful rise of East Asia and China under state capitalism, challenging the neo-Marxist view that capitalism prevents 'development' in the periphery (Smith & Lester, 2023, p. 202). In light of these critiques, it is necessary to broaden the concept of delinking beyond the economic and political dimensions to address the underlying epistemic structures that perpetuate global inequalities.

2.3.1 Epistemic delinking

Amin's concept focuses on economic and political decoupling, while Mignolo (2007) understands delinking on a more epistemic level:

> Without an epistemic delinking it is difficult to really delink from the modern notion of Totality. In the case of Amin, he was still caught in the mirage of Marxism and, therefore, of modernity. Thus, his delinking was proposed at the level of the content rather than at the epistemic level that sustain the logic of coloniality (W. D. Mignolo, 2007, p. 502).

Mignolo goes on to argue that Amin's delinking approach was not truly radical, but rather sought fundamental emancipation within the framework of modernity and colonial logic (W. D. Mignolo, 2007, pp. 461–462). "Delinking today shall be thought out and projected as a de-linking from the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality" and can therefore be understood as a decolonial epistemic shift that parallels to and complements Amin's delinking (pp. 453,463).

The author argues that decolonising knowledge and identity is a crucial step in freeing oneself from colonial structures. This involves challenging Eurocentric paradigms, eliminating colonial legacies in education, culture and social norms, and developing new ways of knowing and being that are not rooted in coloniality (Mignolo, 2007, p. 450). Furthermore, the promotion of plurality as advocated by Mignolo and Amin implies the inclusion of divergent perspectives and challenging the dominance of Western knowledge systems. This leads to a more inclusive and just global environment.

Ultimately, both authors suggest that the so-called Global South should decolonise from hegemonic Western-centric systems as a means of resisting the legacies of colonialism and promoting more independent and equitable trajectories. While Amin's work focuses on economic and political aspects with the aim of challenging global capitalism and promoting decolonisation from the central capitalist system towards Marxist socialist structures, Mignolo emphasises epistemological and cultural dimensions with the goal of adressing Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies.

2.3.2 Delinking and Degrowth

Another attempt to create more justice between the "Global North and South" is to end neo-colonial exploitation through *degrowth*:

> Degrowth calls for rich nations to scale down throughout to sustainable levels, reducing energy use to enable a sufficiently rapid transition to renewables, and reducing aggregate resource use to reverse ecological breakdown. This demand is not just about ecology, rather it is rooted in anti-colonial principles. Degrowth scholars and activists explicitly recognize the reality of ecological debt and call for an end to colonial patterns of appropriation that underpin Northern growth, in order to release the South from the grip of extractivism and a future of catastrophic climate breakdown. *Degrowth is, in other words, a demand for decolonization* [emphasis added] (Hickel, a, p. 1).

The overconsumption in the Global North is responsible for 92% of global CO2 emissions causing climate change impacts primarily in the South. In addition, high-income countries rely on significant resource appropriation from the South (Hickel, 2020, p. 403). Through this ongoing process of unequal exchange and net appropriation (of land, labour, resources and energy) from the South, high-income countries maintain their high levels of income and consumption. (Hickel 2021 a, p. 1110)

> Degrowth in the North creates space for Southern economies to shift away from their enforced role as exporters of cheap labour and raw materials, and to focus instead on developmentalist reforms: building economies focused on sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and human well-being (Hickel, 2021a, p. 1109).

Hickel (2021a) therefore suggests that the Global South should not wait for decolonisation to take place, but should take action by refusing to submit to the imperatives of Northern capital, in line with Samir Amin's 'delinking'. He argues that the governments of the Gobal South could organise collectively to reject the principles of neoliberal globalisation and focus on human well-being, achieving fair prices for labour and resources, demanding fair trade and financial conditions, as well as democratic representation in global governance p. 1110).

In a similar context, degrowth shares many of its intellectual foundations with post-development. In their shared critique of development ideologies and the neoliberal capitalist system of the Global North, degrowth and post-development overlap and complement each other. However, the degrowth discourse is also criticised for its European roots and the danger of universalism, which could exclude it from the plurality of alternative approaches (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019, p. 470). Nirmal and Rocheleau advise degrowth to become "radically situated", to be aware of its positionality as a discourse of relative privilege, and to place intersectionality at the centre of its analyses (2019, p.470). By aligning degrowth with the principles of decolonisation, the authors advocate for a transformation that challenges the dominance of Western paradigms: "a decolonial transition includes re-situating degrowth relative to the Global South and to Indigenous and other resistance movements". This 'de- and relinking' process promotes a more just and inclusive global future (p. 470-471).

In line with Amin (1990), Mignolo (2007) and Escobar (2018), moving towards a pluriversal world rather than a capitalist, colonialist one means recognising and valuing a diversity of ways of knowing and being, and promoting multiple approaches and alternatives to development. Moving away from hegemonic top-down models towards many different, culturally relevant

and context-specific models that respond to the needs and values of local communities is how post-development and degrowth can be decolonial (Escobar, 2018).

2.4 Decoloniality

> *"Like the dependency project, Decoloniality highlights the persisting inequality between regions under global capitalism and maintains that development will remain stunted unless there is a fundamental change in the global power structure"* (Smith & Lester, 2023, p. 203)

Decolonial thinkers, including Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, 2021a, 2021b) and Walter Mignolo (2007, 2018, 2020), offer important critiques of the dependency tradition as well as post-development and political economy approaches more broadly.According to them, decoloniality places knowledge and culture above all social relations and actions. Eurocentric forms of knowledge are rejected because they are seen as the root of colonialism, imperialism and underdevelopment.

Thus, from a decolonial perspective, the world is an "epistemic creation" - a product of these dominant knowledge systems. "What matters is not economics, or politics, or history, but knowledge. Better yet, what matters is history, politics, economics, race, gender, sexuality, but it is above all the knowledge that is intertwined in all these praxical spheres (…) "(W. Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 135).

Additionally, Decolonizing is a process, or rather a vision, of liberation from systems of oppression and exploitation, such as capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy, through different perspectives and multifaceted paths (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021, p. 60). Decoloniality is not intended as a universal concept, but rather as a practical way of living. It focuses on delinking from the interdependence between rationality, modernity and coloniality, and ultimately from any form of power that does not result from the free choices of free individuals (Mignolo, 2020, p. 615) This means, decoloniality is and must work only from the bottom up (Mignolo, 2007, p. 492). Therefore genuine decolonisation efforts must be based on the experiences, needs and actions of the people most affected by colonial structures, not on what is imposed by external forces or standardised models. In addition, Mignolo (2007) states, that decolonisation projects need to be carried out with a full understanding of their place within the complex power dynamics shaped by the historical inequalities of imperialism and colonialism (p. 498).

While decoloniality has many important intersections, the theory often runs the risk of equating modernity with coloniality and oppression, thus tending towards culturalism and idealism (Smith & Lester, 2023, pp. 197, 212). Moreover, the theory focuses mainly on epistemic concerns such as knowledge and culture, whereas a holistic and integrated approach should also include economic and political perspectives in order to effectively address global inequalities and power hierarchies (pp.197, 212). This is where the concepts of decolonial critique and post-development, along with alternative approaches to development, become relevant.

This chapter has examined a range of theoretical perspectives on the various criticisms of the development approach to identify the most prevalent issues. One potential response to this criticism is a shift towards more decolonial post-development approaches, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

2.5 Post-Development: A Decolonial Criticism of 'Development'

As shown in the first chapter, the concept of 'development' is inherently linked to notions of progress and improvement and therefore always has an ambiguous or contradictory meaning.

> Development cannot delink itself from the words with which it was formed – growth, evolution, maturation. (...)The word always implies a favourable change, a step from the simple to the complex, from the inferior to the superior, from worse to better. (...) But for two-thirds of the people on earth, this positive meaning of the word "development" (...) is a reminder of *what they are not*. It is a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition (Esteva, 2019, p. 6).

The starting point or era of 'development' is often associated with Truman's inaugural speech (1949) in which he used the term 'underdeveloped' to describe economically vulnerable countries and framed 'development' as a global mission to improve living standards through technological and industrial progress:

> Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. (...])Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas (Truman, 1949).

As post-development theorist Esteva emphasises: "Underdevelopment began, then, on 20 January 1949. On that day, 2 billion people became underdeveloped" (Esteva, 2019, p. 2). By

this, Esteva is referring to the way people perceive themselves and each other, being divided into two categories - 'developed' and 'underdeveloped':

> In a real sense, from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others' reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity, which is really that of a heterogeneous and diverse majority, simply in the terms of a homogenising and narrow minority (Esteva, 2019, p. 2).

Post-development theorists criticise the assumption that the solution to political or social inequalities, failures and shortcomings is simply to make, what has been decided over other people's heads, more effective, inclusive, equitable, participatory and sustainable in order for it to work, rather than engaging in fundamental critical debates (Bilgen et al., 2021, p. 522). Ziai (2014) suggests that post-development should be understood as a critique of ideology or a sociology of knowledge of development theory, questioning the historical and political "essence" of the discipline as well as its power relations. He concludes that a sensible consequence of the post-development debate would be to abandon the term "development" altogether (Ziai, 2014, p. 29)[2]. He further proposes that rather than labeling initiatives aimed at women's empowerment, income-generating opportunities or social change practices as 'development projects', these initiatives should be named according to their specific aims and objectives (Ziai, 2014, p. 115). "And when it comes to overarching normative models that guide our commitment, we can speak much more clearly about solidarity, justice or democracy instead of repeatedly using the term "development" with all its Eurocentric, depoliticizing and authoritarian implications." (Ziai, 2014, p. 115).

2.5.1 Why we need Post-'Development'

Post- and decolonial work addresses the colonial continuities of 'development' and the power dynamics and hierarchies that it creates. It deconstructs 'development' as a hegemonic, Western discourse that intervenes in people's lives, often without their consent (Bilgen et al., 2021, p. 522). This externalised form of paternalism leads to the creation or perpetuation of a new power imbalance between the 'Global North and Global South' and reinforces existing inequalities.

The most prominent post-development theorists, such as Gustavo Esteva (1995), Arturo Escobar (1995) and Wolfgang Sachs (1992) question the positive impact of foreign aid and call for its abolition, not only because of its ineffectiveness but also because they reject the goal of

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[2] This thesis critically engages with the concepts of 'development', 'Global South' and 'developing countries'. Given the lack of consensus on alternative terminology, I use these terms to ensure clarity and better understanding. However, this does not imply uncritical acceptance of these terms.

'development' itself. From their perspective, 'development' is seen as an empty promise of the post-Cold War era, when the West used financial aid as a geopolitical tool that led to environmental devastation through the imposition of its social and economic models. Instead, they are seeking viable alternatives in local communities and social movements that resist the global economy and state structures while affirming their cultural identities. This shift emphasises the promotion of 'agency and empowerment' over traditional ideas of 'development' (Ziai, 2014, p. 26).

Ziai (2014) criticises the concept of 'development' as Eurocentric, depoliticising and authoritarian because it sees the progress of Western industrial societies as universal and non-Western societies as 'underdeveloped', thus perpetuating Eurocentric and colonial hegemony. It also neglects power asymmetries and conflicts of interest by portraying a country as a homogeneous unit, thus depoliticising it. Furthermore, it implies that external actors are allowed to change the way of life of others without their consent, which implicates an authoritarian approach (Ziai, 2014, pp. 110–111). Under the guise of social transformation, it is presented as "something that benefits everyone and therefore that no one can object to (Ziai, 2017, p. 2551)". Consequently, without the explicit initiative and participation of those affected, the approach risks being both disempowering and authoritarian. As such it is often perceived as a failed project that attempted to universalise the way of life of the 'developed' world on a global scale, resulting in a "progressive modernisation of poverty" for the vast majority of people affected (Esteva, 1985, pp. 78–79) .

"Development was— and continues to be for the most part— a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of 'progress' " (Escobar, 1995, p. 44). This universal approach of "technical interventions" of 'development' tends to exclude the diversity of (indigenous, non-western) knowledge, cultures and peoples (ibid.). "Development has relied exclusively on one knowledge system, namely, the modern Western one. The dominance of this knowledge system has dictated the marginalisation and disqualification of non-Western knowledge systems" (Escobar, 1995, p. 13). Dismantling existing Eurocentric/Western knowledge hierarchies or preventing their re-emergence is thus also an attempt to deconstruct development. Following this critique, post-development theorists argue for the need for alternatives to development, which will be discussed below.

2.5.2 Alternatives to 'Development'

Escobar and Esteva (2017) argue that the need for 'Alternatives to Development' is higher than ever as, "we can no longer argue seriously that development may bring justice, sustainability, dignity or a good life, or that eliminates hunger and misery; that it is a tide raising all vessels" (Esteva & Escobar, 2017, p. 2570). Accordingly, the fundamental critique of post-development scholarship is the rejection of 'development' in favour of 'alternatives to development' rather than 'alternative development', which focuses more on grassroots and social movements as well as local and indigenous knowledge systems (Escobar, 1995, p. 215).

Rather than adopting Western ways of life, the post-development school argues that the real alternatives to 'development' are for grassroots movements and communities to take back control of their own lives by exercising influence over politics, economics and knowledge systems. The post-development school maintains that real alternatives to 'development' involve grassroots movements and communities taking back control of their own lives by exercising control and influence over politics, economics and knowledge systems, rather than adopting Western ways of life. These alternatives refuse the notion that non-Western societies are 'underdeveloped' and instead focus on creating community-based approaches that reflect local values, cultures and contexts. By rejecting state-centred politics, capitalist economics and Western scientific paradigms, these communities can chart new, more autonomous and self-determined paths that better suit their needs and aspirations (Ziai, 2016, pp. 47–75).

However, post-development also runs the risk of romanticising local communities and cultural traditions, ignoring the positive and emancipatory aspects of modernity, practising political abstinence, legitimising oppressive conditions through cultural relativism, and telling people in the Global South how they should live - namely sustainably and without mass consumer goods, in harmony with cultural traditions and in subsistence communities (Ziai, 2014, p. 107).

2.6 Theoretical Framework: Conclusion

Development practice, policy and research need to integrate insights from different theoretical and practical perspectives, recognising the complexity and diversity of global inequalities discussed in the previous chapter. This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive overview by covering a range of approaches and theories. However, due to limited capacity, it cannot delve deeply into all relevant areas, theories and further research.

In summary, this theoretical framework has provided a nuanced understanding of the different perspectives and critiques of 'development' and its underlying implications. The examination of dependency theory has highlighted the structural inequalities and economic dependencies that characterise the relationship between 'developed and developing countries'. Key concepts such as neo-colonialism, delinking and degrowth have been discussed to illustrate the continued economic exploitation of 'developing' countries and to propose strategies for achieving economic independence and epistemic emancipation from the dominant global powers. Meanwhile, post-development theories have provided a radical critique of the 'development' paradigm itself, arguing for a decolonial approach and alternative ways of conceptualising social progress. These are characterised by local and grassroots initiatives that focus on agency, autonomy and self-reliance, which will be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

Finally, the concept of decoloniality was introduced, providing a lens through which to understand and dismantle the colonial structures embedded within the 'development discourse', in line with the aim of this thesis. This theoretical analysis provided a comprehensive basis and framework for a deeper analysis and focus on alternative(s) (to) development in sub-Saharan Africa, based on the case study of the Social Innovation Academy. In order to better contextualise the case study, the following chapter looks at African alternatives to development. This includes an examination of post-colonial challenges, decolonisation efforts and innovative approaches within Africa. The theories presented in this theoretical chapter will be used as a basis and applied to the African context.

3. African Alternative(s) (to) Development

"African people are today entangled, woven and entrapped in the colonial matrix of power underpinning the asymmetrically structured global social order" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 158).

This chapter therefore examines alternative approaches proposed by African scholars and theorists in development studies, stressing the importance of the agency of African and other nations in shaping their development trajectories. It aims to address the first sub-question of the research: "*What are the theoretical implications of embracing decolonial alternative(s) (to) traditional development models towards more equal and participatory, sustainable community-led development?"*

By highlighting different authors and their perspectives on the implementation of 'development' strategies in African countries, this chapter aims to critically assess the theoretical underpinnings of African approaches to 'development' and their implications for empowerment and agency, drawing on the insights of Claude Ake (1996), Amartya Sen (1999) and other scholars. It also explores the concept of Ubuntu as an alternative Afrocentric 'development' paradigm, arguing that African-centred approaches to 'development' through agency and empowerment are both theoretically and methodologically relevant.

Perspectives on 'development' in Africa vary, ranging from radical to liberal. Scholars such as Ake (1996), Amin (1990) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a, 2013b, 2021) attribute 'development' struggles to colonial and imperial influences that create new dependencies, and argue for a delinking from the global capitalist system. More liberal scholars such as Nyerere (1965) and Mkandawire (2011), as well as Amin and Ake, criticise post-colonial African leaders for using the state for personal interests and while some emphasise the need for African identity and freedom from neo-colonial forces, others question the focus on catching up with the West.

3.1 Postcolonial Africa

> In politics, particularly the adoption and practice of neoliberal democracy, and most of the continent's economic policies, but also in security, military, culture, religion, sexuality, aesthetics, knowledge production and a host of other areas, the invincible, crisscrossing hands of the Western idea of modernity are present in postcolonial Africa. The Western influence reduces, silences, dominates, oppresses, exploits and overshadows postcolonial Africa's agency (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 5).

This further demonstrates the cycle of dependency experienced by post-colonial African countries, which remain economically and politically tied to the West and are now reliant on foreign aid. These continued dependencies highlight a broader issue, as many scholars claim that Africa's current challenges are still a consequence of the lingering effects of colonialism. Claude Ake (1992, 1996), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 2012) and Nkrumah (1971) argue that Africa remains trapped in a post-colonial and neo-colonial world where decolonisation has yet to be achieved as external power structures persist much as they did during the colonial period (Nkrumah, 1971, p. 65), (Ake, 1992, p. 35).

> To recapitulate, at independence the form and function of the state in Africa did not change much for most countries in Africa. State power remained essentially the same: immense, arbitrary, often violent, always threatening. (…) politics remained a zero-sum game; power was sought by all means and

maintained by all means. Colonial rule left most of Africa a legacy of intense and lawless political competition amidst an ideological void and arising tide of disenchantment with the expectation of a better life." (Ake, 1996, p. 6).

Claude Ake (1996) argues that colonialism made the post-colonial state a powerful and unjust entity, which led to conflict with its people from the very beginning. In essence, independence only changed who was in charge, not how the state operated. The state remained a violent and oppressive institution, disconnected from society and relying on force rather than the support of its citizens. Gumede (2018), like Ake, argues that the lack of implementing an African agenda is a failure of African leaders who are "externally oriented" to the "dictates of the West" are "caged by neo-imperial designs" and the desire to maintain their power and influence (p. 133). "With few exceptions, the gaining of independence (…) was a matter of the colonizers' accepting the inevitable and orchestrating a handover of government to their chosen African successors, successors who could be trusted to share their values and be attentive to their interests." (Ake, 1996, p. 3).

The impact of colonialism on African political and economic structures created post-colonial challenges, as nations inherited systems and leaders chosen by the colonial powers. This led to a constant struggle for power in which control of the state became the primary goal, undermining genuine efforts at 'development'. As a result, African leaders replaced the ideology of independence with that of 'development', leading to further dependence on foreign aid. (ibid.p.9) Ake also highlights the arbitrary nature of colonial rule, emphasising how colonial powers determined the production and trade patterns of African nations, often at the expense of local economies, - undermining the self-sufficiency and agency of the African people (Ake, 1996, pp. 3–5). Thus, the post-colonial state continues to pursue its imperial agenda with the neo-liberal economic and political policies of colonialism, which are harmful to the African people in the long run (Fasakin, 2021, p. 916). Ndlovu-Gatsheni concludes:

> Coloniality of power articulates continuities of colonial mentalities, psychologies and world- views into the so-called 'postcolonial era' and highlights the social hierarchical relationships of exploitation and domination between Westerners and Africans that has its roots in centuries of European colonial expansion but currently continuing through cultural, social and political power relations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 8).

In Uganda for example, the legacy of colonialism continues through neoliberal policies and economic programmes, with severe consequences for the population. Leaders such as President Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power for over three decades, maintain their positions with

Western support, despite human rights concerns, and receive substantial aid, such as over two billion dollars in 2022 (World Bank Group, 2024). This support illustrates how post-colonial African elites act as agents of coloniality, imposing rules that deprive their people of agency (Fasakin, 2021, p. 908). Therefore, true decolonisation (in Uganda) requires addressing these structural continuities, transforming leadership mindsets, and developing alternative economic strategies that prioritise citizen freedom and empowerment (p. 908).

(failed) decolonisation in Africa?

Still, Ndlovu-Gatsheni claims "(…) that a postcolonial world was never born; rather what decolonisation facilitated is better described as a 'postcolonial neocolonized world'"(Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 1). He argues that in the face of these complex challenges, decolonisation processes and efforts such as genuine political and economic empowerment and self-determination for Africans remain scarce and continue to be entangled within 'colonial matrices of power' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012, p. 72). Since the "(…) coloniality of power is invariably tangible in almost all of Africa (…)", he suggests that there is a need for complete liberation from these paradigms in order to truly build a new African society and social structures as envisioned by Frantz Fanon (1968) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012, pp. 72, 76). What is important in this case is a process that is not led by African elites, but by 'ordinary citizens', which requires a bottom-up approach, as Ake (1996) suggests (p. 79). Decolonisation efforts should therefore focus on alternative and more autonomous 'development', which will be discussed further below.

3.2 Rethinking 'Development' in Africa

In light of the contradictions inherent in the political economy of post-independence Africa, in particularly the failures of leadership and the missed opportunities for socio-economic transformation, traditional 'development' discourses tend to focus on the transformation of Africa to replicate Western economic, political and social models.

Hence, the emancipation from existing development frameworks is crucial given the failure of common economic paradigms, which necessitates "rethinking and reclaiming development in Africa". Gudeme (2018) argues, that rather than conforming to externally imposed market-driven models, genuine African development should prioritise spiritual, social, political and economic freedoms (p. 133). Although Africa has developed its own strategies, such as the Lagos Plan of Action, the New Partnership for Africa's Development or the African Alternative

to the Structural Adjustment Programme, most socio-economic 'development' strategies have been imposed from outside (Gumede, 2018, p. 130).

Mkandawire suggests that "African-centred development" should not only focus on ideas from abroad but also look inward and at its own weaknesses and capabilities:

> 'Catching up' requires that countries know themselves and their own history that has set the 'initial conditions' for any future progress. They need a deep understanding of their culture not only for self-reaffirmation but in order to capture the strong points of their culture and institutions that will see their societies through rapid social change (Mkandawire, 2011, p. 13).

Ake also recognises the static structures of dominant development paradigms and emphasises the need for innovative, bottom-up approaches that prioritise the agency of Africans in the shaping of their own development path (Ake, 1996, p. 126). Rather than relying on external aid, 'development' should be people-centred and come from within. Ake argues that it is the people who must take responsibility for their own development, with the help of others as facilitators: "Therefore, people should be the end, the means and the agent of development" (Ake, 1996, pp.140-142). Ake concludes that African development should be done by Africans, for Africans, and based on the reality of the continent rather than an idealised version of it. "Africa must be seen as it is, not as it should be" (pp. 140-142).

As shown above, external intervention, such as foreign aid, has at times disrupted African democracies. External actors have often prioritised their interests ahead of African sovereignty and self-determination, which has affected the course of democratic development (Ake, 1996, p.139).

> The idea that foreign aid can remedy poverty has dominated the theory of economic development and thinking in many international aid agencies and governments since the 1950s. What is perplexing though is how some African countries have been recipients of foreign assistance since their independence, yet also remain the poorest countries on the planet (...). It is clear that interventions by foreign powers that are supposed to bring about remedy are actually compounding political weakness, stifling enterprise, and making African states less accountable to their citizens (Buba, 2019, p. 131).

In line with this, the late Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere criticised dependence on foreign aid in the 'Arusha Declaration' of 1967, arguing that it undermined Tanzania's sovereignty and perpetuated a cycle of dependency (Nyerere, 1967). Nyerere, along with Ake and other scholars, believed that foreign aid often came with conditions that imposed Western ideologies

and priorities on African nations, hindering their ability to pursue independent development paths. Nyerere advocated self-reliance and self-sufficiency, encouraging Tanzanians to take control of their own development process and reduce dependence on external actors (Nyerere, 1967).

Like Ake, Nyerere also emphasised the need for grassroots mobilisation, community participation, and empowerment of 'ordinary' citizens to take matters into their own hands, especially in the case of agricultural development, as the majority of people were dependent on it. Both Nyerere and Ake stressed the importance of agricultural development reforms and community-driven/participatory development initiatives that prioritised the needs of rural people (Ake, 1996:142). Ake argues, that if people are the agents of development, then development should focus on agricultural activity, as 70% of people in Africa depend on it (p. 142). He appeals for a strategy that encourages and empowers farmers to work with their existing skills, not just for profit (p.143). This requires self-reliant development and would strengthen the concept of participation that Ake calls for, but which is still limited. In his example of agricultural development, this would mean putting the farmer at the centre, i.e. in charge. This is in line with his idea that people should be the agents, means and the end of development (pp. 142-145). Restraints on rural development such as the lack of clean water, education, health or skills development, which he summarises as "human resource development", should therefore form the basis of any form of 'development ' (p. 46).

This echoes the post-development theorists mentioned above, such as Gustavo Esteva, who argues for a shift towards local and context-specific approaches that prioritise people's autonomy, self-reliance and "(…) the recovery of their own definition of needs, dismantled by development in perception or in practice" (Esteva, 2019, p. 19). He argues for the decentralisation of 'development' processes in order to empower communities to regain agency over their own lives and environments while rejecting the Eurocentric and dominant paradigms of economic growth and modernisation (pp. 18-22).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) touches on this by suggesting that Africa needs to move towards Afrocentric development, which involves breaking away from the dominant logic of classical economic thinking and capitalist paradigms that have historically marginalised the continent. He argues that there is a need to imagine new development alternatives that are suited to African realities and experiences and that prioritise African agency and self-determination, rather than

aligning African economies solely with the demands and requirements of the international economic order (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 20). Therefore, the authors' concept of Afrocentric development calls for a shift towards economic models and ideas rooted in African realities and experiences, rather than being dictated by external economic influences (p.20).

Adding to the points made by Nyerere, Ake, Esteva and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, philosopher Amartya Sen offers a broader framework that prioritises human capabilities, freedoms and equity as central to development. To enhance individual capabilities and promote substantive freedoms, Sen calls for investment in education, health and social protection "Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency" (Sen, 1999, p. xii). Sen defines the factors that restrict freedom as: "poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states" (Sen 1999:1). Thus, while Ake and Nyerere focus more on economic, agrarian reforms, Sen's 'agency' approach embraces the social, political and cultural dimensions of development, offering a more holistic perspective on development that will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.3 Agency and Empowerment in African Development

In *Development as Freedom* (1999), Sen explores the critical role of Agency in global development, stressing that "individual agency is, ultimately, central to addressing these deprivations"(Sen, 1999, pp. xi–xii).

He highlights the interplay between individual agency and the social, political and economic opportunities available, and emphasises the elimination of unfreedoms as an integral part of development. "The freedom of agency that we individually have, is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political, and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements" (Sen 1999, pp. xi–xii). Moreover, it depends on opportunities and access, as well as on "human capacity", by which he means the actual "ability - the substantive freedom - of people" to lead their lives, given the actual choices and opportunities they have (Sen, 1999, pp. 291–293).

Sen (1999) defines an agent as someone "someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives" (p.19). The author emphasises the importance of individual autonomy in determining values and goals, ideally free from environmental constraints.

The concept of agency is defined as the ability of individuals to engage and act in political, social and economic matters, with freedom influenced by cultural, social, economic and political affairs. However, this implies that the degree of freedom in this agency role depends on the said contexts to which the individual is exposed (p.19).

Sen's concept of "agency freedom" is highly relevant to the development sector as it emphasises the importance of empowering individuals and communities to pursue their own goals and values. Claude Ake (1996) also suggests, in line with the notion of agency freedom, that development initiatives need to prioritise local agency and participation (Ake,1996, p. 127). "A major asset to democratization in Africa is the growing realization that there is no alternative to participative development " (p.134).

Ake argues that development should be seen as a process driven by the people themselves, who are the 'end, means and agents of development' (see above). Thus, individuals and communities actively shape their own development process based on their choices and values, rather than being influenced by external factors (Ake, 1996, p.140-142). "As noted, the process of owning development is an important aspect of what it means to be developing" (p.145). This form of self-empowerment is consistent with Sen's (1999) mentioned perspective on agency, which emphasises the need and ability of individuals to act and achieve self-determined goals in order to achieve development on their own terms.

Empowerment Processes in African Development

Narayan's (2002) concept also underlines the centrality of agency in empowerment concepts and its role in expanding individuals' freedom of choice and action in shaping their lives. The relationship between agency and empowerment is complex and closely intertwined, with different approaches to understanding it. However, as Narayan (2002) puts it "agency is at the heart of many conceptualizations of empowerment" (Narayan, 2002, pp. 72–73). She goes on to argue that "among the various concepts and terms (...) agency probably comes closest to capturing what the majority of writers see as the essence of empowerment" (pp.72-73).

While agency is essential to empowerment, Alsop et al. (2006) say that it is only part of the puzzle. Individuals may have opportunities to make choices, but they may not always be able to use them effectively (p. 10).

> Agency is defined as an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices—that is, the actor is able to envisage and purposively choose options. In terms of both measurement of and action to enhance

empowerment, a person or group's agency can be largely predicted by their asset endowment (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 11).

This underlines the idea that agency implies the ability of individuals or groups to make conscious choices and act on them. It also suggests that the degree of agency is strongly related to the resources and assets available to these individuals, thus highlighting the importance of considering the broader contexts and backgrounds. According to Alsop et al. (2006), and in line with Sen's thinking, agency refers to the ability to make meaningful choices, but not necessarily the ability to put this freedom into practice.

However, it is important to note, that agency can also have negative implications, particularly in relation to power dynamics. Kabeer (1999) argues that agency can have both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, it can empower individuals to make their own choices and pursue their goals, even in the face of resistance. On the other hand, agency can also be expressed as power over others through the use of 'force, threats, coercion' and the suppression of the agency of others (p. 483). It is also important to adopt this critical perspective in order to create a more balanced picture of 'agency' and avoid any potential bias.

However, the literature reviewed illustrates the central role that agency should play, particularly in empowerment processes related to African development. It highlights the need for a paradigm shift away from outdated and generalised approaches towards recognising the agency of individuals and communities in determining their own development paths. As the discourse on agency and empowerment evolves, it is clear that the consideration of diverse perspectives and methodologies is crucial for inclusive, equitable, culturally sensitive and effective development approaches.

While agency and empowerment are more related to practical implementation which will be discussed in Chapter 5, a truly holistic approach requires theory and methodology. This is where the concept of 'Afrocentrism' can complement the aspects already described.

3.4 Towards Afrocentric Development

Moving from discussions of agency and empowerment to the concept of Afrocentrism provides a deeper theoretical lens through which to understand and approach African development. While agency and empowerment emphasise the practical aspects of development processes,

Afrocentrism delves into the theoretical and methodological foundations necessary for a comprehensive understanding of African contexts.

Thandika Mkandawire emphasises the importance of agency and innovative ideas from an Afrocentric and pan-African perspective. For a true "African Renaissance", it is crucial for Africans to define their own identity through their own historical experiences (Mkandawire in Gumede, 2018, p. 133). As a cultural and intellectual movement, *Afrocentrism* seeks to "reclaim and celebrate African history, culture and achievements". *Pan-Africanism*, on the other hand, is "primarily a political and social movement that seeks to unite people of African descent globally for liberation and empowerment" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c, p. 341).

Afrocentrism thus provides a theoretical framework for placing African ideals, values and history at the centre of discourse on African peoples and cultures. Scholars such as Flannery (2022) and Schreiber (2000) argue that Afrocentric methodology offers a viable alternative to the Eurocentric epistemology that has historically dominated academic discourse, which will be discussed in more detail below (Schreiber, 2000, p. 652), (Flannery, 2022, p. 28).

Often referred to as the 'father' of Afrocentrism (Schreiber, 2000), Asante in various works (Asante, 1980, 1998) highlights the ethnocentric bias in intercultural communication research, arguing that Eurocentric approaches are often favoured and universally applied, which he and Afrocentric scholars challenge (Schreiber, 2000, p. 654).
These scholars reject this Eurocentric particularism as universal, emphasising that such elitism objectifies non-European cultures, marginalising their discourses, perspectives, social conditions and historical realities. In the context of this thesis, Afrocentric research rejects abstract scientific descriptions and seeks to create an open and flexible dialogue that actively encourages engagement with the 'subjects' of research in order to link theory and practice for empowerment and agency and to reduce hierarchies (Schreiber, 2000, p. 654).

This research strategy is an attempt to reduce the power distance between dominant (researcher) and subordinate (participant) positions. Researchers could further reverse the typical power structure by positioning themselves as students rather than experts and inviting participants to actively participate in the design, conduct, analysis, dissemination and application of research, as elaborated in the methodological framework (Chapter 4) (Schreiber, 2000, p.661). This participatory approach can be implemented in both theoretical frameworks and practical

applications to enhance the participation of individuals and research 'subjects' in development processes, empowering them to take an active role while addressing the local concerns of a researched or affected community.

While Afrocentrism aims to challenge Eurocentric practices and offer a more balanced perspective, some intellectual criticisms of Afrocentrism voiced by scholars relate to essentialism or oversimplification of complex historical and cultural realities (Schreiber, 2000, pp. 652-654). Afrocentric paradigms run the risk of being exclusionary and generalising, and with this comes the problem of presenting Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism as competing paradigms, rather than recognising their potential interdependence and complementarity (Schreiber, 2000, p. 659). It is therefore important to promote the use of multiple paradigms and methodological approaches in cross-cultural research on African development (p.660). Despite these critiques, Eurocentric scholars often still fail to acknowledge African contributions to research, making the emancipation and liberation from Eurocentric domination of research through an Afrocentric approach crucial (Flannery, 2022, p. 29).

As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), argues "both Africans and Westerners have to decolonize their minds and their practices if another world is to emerge" (p.350). In essence, Afrocentrism can be seen as a tool for decolonising knowledge production, fostering a more inclusive research process and providing a crucial basis for presenting Africa-centred approaches to development. Given the urgent need for decolonisation, the restoration of African agency and the dismantling of entrenched colonial structures, it is clear that traditional models of 'development' are inadequate to address Africa's multiple challenges. The persistence of Western paradigms has often marginalised African narratives and hindered genuine self-determination. It is therefore essential to explore alternative frameworks that resonate with African values and realities. One such model is Ubuntu, a philosophy deeply embedded in African culture that emphasises community, compassion and interconnectedness as a holistic approach. Ubuntu offers a vision of 'development' that is more authentically African, centred on human dignity and communal well-being, and is explored in more detail below.

3.5 Ubuntu: An African Alternative to Development

The call for alternative approaches to 'development' in Africa highlights the inadequacies and failures of conventional development models. As shown in the theoretical framework, these models often perpetuate inequalities, exploit resources and impose Western ideologies on non-

Western societies, resulting in increased inequalities, cultural homogenisation and environmental degradation (Matthews, 2004, p. 377). Not adapting to these cultural differences has contributed to the failure of many development projects (p. 379). Therefore solutions to societal challenges should emerge from within communities rather than be imposed from the outside, requiring a diversity of approaches to address social issues in a context-specific manner that respects cultural diversity and local autonomy, moving away from a one-size-fits-all development model (p.374).

Africa's diverse perspectives and ways of being offer valuable insights for anyone, African or non-African, who questions these models and seeks alternative solutions to the problems they seek to address, adapted to the way of life of African cultures and norms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b, p. 341).:

> Africa is not against development. It dreams of other things than the expansion of a culture of death or an alienating modernity that destroys the fundamental values so dear to Africans...Africa sees further than an all-embracing world of material things and the dictatorship of the here and now, that insists on trying to persuade us that the only valid motto is 'I sell, therefore I am'. In a world often devoid of meaning, Africa is a reminder that there are other ways of being (Jean-Marc Ela in Matthews, 2004, pp. 381–382).

Thus, Ubuntu, rooted in African traditions, offers an alternative approach that aligns 'development' practices with indigenous knowledge and cultural relevance, and emphasises collective well-being, with the community at the centre and individuals contributing to collective prosperity. Ubuntu is based on values such as "love, care, compassion, responsibility, honesty, cooperation and reciprocity"(Balyejjusa et al., 2023, p. 125). By embracing Ubuntu, African communities can address vulnerabilities and improve lives by promoting a more horizontal leadership model that puts the community before individual leaders (Van Norren, 2022, p. 2806)

> These are the manifestations of the life force that make us. If we can see ourselves in this way we will grasp the key insight in the African idea of persons: persons exist only in relation to other persons. The human self is not something that exists on its own and then enters into relationships with its surroundings. It exists only in relationship to its surroundings: these relationships are what it is. The most important of these are the relationships we have with other persons. This is why, in all African languages, there is the local variant of the Zulu saying umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (a person is a person through persons). As African philosophers are fond of saying, *I' am because we are* [emphasis added]. This is the most important consequence of seeing ourselves as living centres of vital form (Shutte in Murove, 2009, p. 90-91).

This philosophy lays the foundation for communities and societies, as it is already deeply rooted in Africans. Therefore, according to Ubuntu, cooperation between people and compassion are the keys to healthy communities: "If you have humanity, humanity will bring to you people, and the people will give you wealth" (Balyejjusa et al., 2023, p. 121)

An integral part of the African identity is that of relationships, in contrast to the individualism that is more prevalent in European cultures (Chilisa et al., 2016, p. 318) "The African way is living through feeling (engagement with others), while the Western way is focused on doing (what is good for oneself and, by consequence, others)" (p. 318). This collective way of acting and thinking is in line with Ake's notion of 'for the people, by the people', and complements Sen's concept of agency with the dimension of community.

Ubuntu emphasises the importance of inclusivity within a community and its responsibility towards others, while also considering the well-being of future generations (Balyejjusa et al., 2023, p. 125). "Holistic approaches of interdependence like Ubuntu", with their focus on human relationships, well-being, participation and collective capacity within autonomous communities, can therefore be seen as an alternative approach to 'development' in Africa and should be the basis for all 'development' (Van Norren, 2022, p. 2792, 2799).

Moreover, Ubuntu can also be seen as an important addition to the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), as it recognises the culture and identity of 'indigenous' peoples, and therefore demonstrates a more spiritual dimension that focuses on a sense of unity and interconnectedness with each other and their natural environment (Norren, 2022, p. 2799). "Ubuntu represents a binding morality refraining from concepts of growth and improvement. Instead, it infuses humans with a consciousness of wholeness and interdependence, on each other and their natural surroundings, recognising a spiritual level of being" (Van Norren, 2014, p. 264).

In line with the theoretical framework of this paper, post-development scholars are highly critical of Eurocentric, static and hierarchical models of development, such as those underlying the SDGs. These models emphasise growth and are goal-oriented, whereas Ubuntu is more process-oriented. Such paradigms often promote a hierarchical relationship between people and their environment, underpinned by empirical and rational knowledge systems, and thus exclude alternative ways of seeing the world (Van Norren, 2022, pp. 2805–2806). The notion of "social

justice, equality, equity and sharing", rather than growth, competition and profit, reflects the idea of being part of a larger whole (p. 2793). It also promotes a more horizontal model of leadership in which leaders and community members empower each other. In this approach, the community takes priority over the leader, as opposed to a top-down system of leadership (Van Norren, 2022, p. 2806).

As illustrated, Ubuntu emphasises collective capacity and the value of self-help, in which the community is the central entity and individuals should care for and contribute to the well-being of the community (Van Norren, 2022, p. 2801). African communities have untapped potential to solve their own socio-economic challenges, and by embracing Ubuntu they can mitigate various vulnerabilities and significantly improve their lives (Balyejjusa et al., 2023, p. 121, 125). Ultimately, it is also important to note that there is not one homogenised African Ubuntu identity, but rather that each community interprets and translates the philosophy into its local context. (Van Norren, 2014, p. 258) In practice, this means that 'development' projects should be implemented and evaluated from an African perspective. This approach takes into account the values and norms of different cultures and communities, conceptualises the realities they face, uses indigenous knowledge systems, sees people as agents of change and prioritises their well-being (Chilisa et al., 2016, p. 318).

In summary, Ubuntu aligns with the critical perspectives of post-development theories and advocates for a decolonial, holistic and community-based approach to 'development'. By integrating Ubuntu into development practice, there is potential to move towards more equitable, sustainable and culturally relevant development models that truly reflect the diverse realities of global communities.

4. Methodology

In this chapter I will outline the methodological considerations for my research design. In order to gather and understand the multifaceted perspectives, experiences and beliefs of the participants regarding their empowerment journeys, challenges and successes in the discourse of social innovation and entrepreneurship, I conducted guided expert interviews, surveys with post-survey in-depth discussions with SINA scholars[3] and founders, and complement these with

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[3] SINA refers to its participants as "Scholars," as they receive a scholarship to participate in the SINA programme.

a literature review. This will allow for the collection of a variety of data with different emphases, which will be discussed in more detail below.

4.1 Research Approach: Mixed Methods

A mixed methods approach was used to address the research question, as this provides greater proximity to the participants and their responses than a singular research approach. Integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis allows the researcher to remain open to new insights in the field of study and to gain a more concrete and vivid picture of the respondents' work and the underlying issues, while at the same time ensuring a fluid and transparent research approach. (Flick et al. 2008: 17). Mixed methods, often referred to as 'triangulation', allow the collection of quantitative data to measure dimensions and qualitative data to explore contexts and meanings to complement each other, facilitating a deeper understanding of the dynamics within marginalised subcultures (Kelle in Baur & Blasius, 2014, p. 164).

Triangulation of Methods

Triangulation of data, while time-consuming, is a more holistic approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data in ways that integrate and complement each other. „Afrocentrists, like many intercultural scholars, advocate the need for triangulation in research in order to come to a closer approximation of the "truth" and a deeper understanding of intercultural interaction" (Schreiber, 2000, p. 661).

Therefore, this intercultural research project uses a variety of methods to ensure the validity of the findings using a triangulation approach. According to Flick (2007), triangulation involves taking different perspectives on a research question by combining several types of data with the theoretical perspectives applied to them (p. 41). To achieve this, I have chosen to combine qualitative methods, including a literature review and expert-led interviews, with a quantitative survey. This combination aims to generate an empirical database that is then analysed using the theoretical perspectives outlined in the theoretical framework.

In addition, the proposed research project is based on the core ethical principles of qualitative research, which include respect, concern for welfare, confidentiality, anonymity and privacy (Orb et al., 2001, pp. 94–95). These principles were explained to participants in advance so that they can give their informed consent to take part in the survey and interviews - especially the

voice recording that will be made during the interview. This is to avoid any behavior that could harm or negatively affect the participants as well as any form of paternalism (pp. 94–95).

4.2 Decolonial Perspective and the Role of Positionality

> If Marxism offered us the most useful science and methodology predicated on a materialist conception of history for understanding capitalism, then the decoloniality (decolonisation of the 21st century) with its three units of analysis (being, knowledge, and power) offers us the best science and methodology to understand contemporary replications of racism and colonial matrices of power at a world scale from a global South perspective (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021: 51).

Adopting a decolonial perspective aligns with my research interest in exploring African development paradigms, Afrocentrism, and the concepts of agency and empowerment. By focusing on African academics and scholars, I aim to mitigate Eurocentric biases and hierarchies. As a European researcher, it is crucial to avoid reproducing neocolonial structures and to position myself reflexively. I intend to contribute to the SINA community by using my privileged position to amplify the voices of the people involved with my thesis.

> The positionalities in understanding knowledge production in the field of development studies by emphasizing the need for reflexivity and socio-political consciousness in research practices is significant. Therefore researchers must critically examine how, why, and by whom and for what purpose the research is conducted to uncover power dynamics and hierarchies that influence knowledge production (Bilgen et al., 2021, pp. 521–522).

I acknowledge that my analysis is inevitably subjective, shaped by my positionalities in terms of race, gender, class, education and upbringing in different social, geographical and political contexts. My findings, drawn from the literature review and my own research, should be seen as contributions or impulses to pluriversal dialogues rather than universal solutions. Applying a subjective lens can help to dismantle the myths of neutral and objective knowledge production in relation to 'development' (Bilgen et al., 2021, p. 521).

Drawing on Linda Tuhiwai Smith's concept of relational accountability, I consider whose interests the research serves and how its findings are distributed with these questions in mind :

> Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated? (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 10).

By involving participants as co-researchers and writing in clear, accessible language, the objective is to break down traditional hierarchies and foster a pluriversal dialogue that respects

and recognises diversity. I aim to provide SINA and its community members with valuable data and insights while appreciating that this focus also serves my academic interests. To ensure that the research is in line with SINA's needs, I first sought feedback from the community on how I could support them and shaped my questions (survey and interview) accordingly. Encouraged by many community members to generate more visibility for the issues being researched, I need to reflect on my motives and approach constantly. This allows for an open and flexible research process as I navigate the ethical complexities and power dynamics involved. To address power imbalances, I will ensure free access to my findings on the SINA website, with summaries in accessible language, and distribute the findings to each community involved.

In my approach, I aim to highlight global and intersectional power dynamics related to development by emphasising the experiences and needs of marginalised communities with whom I have worked. Ethical considerations are key, recognising that the term 'marginalised' is adapted from the SINA framework and refers to disadvantaged young people, often including refugees, orphans, street children and those born into poverty as shown in Chapter 1. My research would not have been possible without the opportunity to work with SINA in 2022, which provided this thesis with multifaceted insights upon which I could build my research. The sensitive and sometimes divisive issues require intercultural sensitivity and reflexivity, taking into account the diversity, perceptions and experiences of each individual, which cannot be generalised, while at the same time deriving insights to paint a bigger picture. I do not intend to speak on behalf of anyone, but rather to serve as a platform for their voices. The decolonial approach I seek does not exclude traditional knowledge but acknowledges the complexity of issues such as racism, gender inequality and class.

Afrocentrist lense?

Building on Reviere's (2021) critique that traditional Eurocentric research standards of objectivity, reliability, and validity are insufficient and inappropriate for studies involving human experiences, I advocate for the adoption of alternative research paradigms through using a wide range of methodologies and theories in order to deeply understand ones research topic. (Reviere, 2001, pp. 709, 716)

This aligns with the Afrocentric approach, which challenges the dominance of ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives within social sciences (Schreiber, 2000, p. 654). It requires researchers to position themselves among the people, their worldviews, knowledge systems, and values as the foundation for understanding the particular cultural context, which is especially important for qualitative research (Schreiber, 2000, p. 655)

In the context of writing about East Africa/ Sub-Sahara Africa, choosing an Afrocentric lense is an attempt to break out of recurring paradigms and standardised epistemological approaches by critically evaluating and adapting methodologies to suit my research interests. This includes prioritising African experiences and perspectives, and seeking to understand and interpret data in the context of African communities and cultures. Therefore, I actively seek input from the communities being 'researched' and allow their narratives to shape my research (Flannery, 2022, p. 30). Afrocentric research rejects abstract academic descriptions and promotes open and flexible dialogue, actively encouraging engagement with research participants to link theory and practice for empowerment and agency, thereby reducing hierarchies (Schreiber, 2000, p. 652,661). However, it is important to consider the risk of unintentionally perpetuating cultural insensitivity or misunderstanding due to differences in cultural context, norms and values, which can lead to biased or inaccurate representations (Schreiber, 2000, p. 656). Using an Afrocentric participatory action research approach, I aim to minimise power imbalances between myself as the researcher and the participants by actively involving them in different stages of the research and positioning myself as a student rather than an expert (Schreiber, 2000, p. 661).

Having lived in Uganda and Tanzania for three months prior to my research trip gave me a broader understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and political contexts, which helped to deepen my knowledge and understanding during my research and allowed me to adapt accordingly in different situations. Being part of the community and its programmes allowed me to gain different insights and co-produce knowledge by taking an active role as more than 'just' a researcher, in my case as a friend, colleague and volunteer of the organisation. I aim to gain a deeper understanding of participants' behaviors, beliefs and practices by actively participating in the social environment I am studying, immersing myself in the culture and lifestyle while observing and interacting with participants (Johnson et al., 2006, pp. 112–113). This ethnographic field research approach allows me to collect data through a combination of methods such as interviews, surveys, field notes and daily observations, which provide an in-depth understanding of the cultural norms, values, beliefs and practices of the groups and communities being studied. Through this approach, I aim to take a more holistic view by considering the interconnectedness of different aspects of culture and society (pp. 3-4).

Finally, following Paolo Freire's (2014) notion of dialogue, I prioritise open communication with members of the SINA community, treating them as co-researchers through regular discussions, feedback sessions and shared decision-making. I continually reflect on my own

positionality and biases in order to minimise my own influence and maximise the agency of the community.

4.3 Participatory Action Research

I was integrated as a member of the community and had the opportunity to meet many people and hear their stories, often related to traumatic experiences of displacement, poverty, unemployment and oppression. It was therefore very important for me to be sensitive and to understand how best to conduct my research. To this end, I designed my entire research process to be as inclusive and transparent as possible.

In line with Paulo Freire's approach, which favours emancipatory and self-reflexive knowledge (Freire, 2014), I engaged directly with the community and actively participated in their programmes for this research project. Therefore, I initially designed my study according to the ideas of 'participatory action research' as proposed by Freire (Chilisa et al., 2016), (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) or Charles Hale's (2001) 'activist research' methodology.

Participatory Action Research is an example "(…) of methodologies that have been created as research tools that work with marginalized communities, that facilitate the expression of marginalized voices, and that attempt to represent the experience of marginalization in genuine and authentic ways" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 205).

Freire's emancipatory understanding of participatory research and reflective knowledge production, and its democratic nature, is essential to my research as a tool for highlighting the role of structural change in promoting social transformation (Freire, 2014, pp. vii–viii). Contrary to mainstream academic notions of objectivity, activist researchers argue that it is necessary to take a political stance and acknowledge subjective judgements. In my ethnographic research I recognise the importance of reflecting on my own background, role and position in the research process. This reflection includes considerations of research ethics and how my beliefs influence my understanding of the research problem (Hale, 2001, p. 14).

4.4 Semi-Structured Expert Interviews

In order to get as differentiated a picture as possible, the interviews will be guided interviews with open questions. This type of questioning opens up the possibility of reporting on aspects and experiences that were previously unknown to me and that would not come up in a questionnaire with predetermined answer options and questions (Dannecker & Englert, 2014,

pp. 185, 160). The interviewer allows the interviewee to elaborate and explain issues through open-ended questions (p.185).

The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they allow the researcher to focus on the topic under discussion, while providing more depth and information than purely structured interviews, by constantly adapting the questions to the issues that the interviewees consider most relevant to them. Moreover, they allow for open-ended questions while having pre-structured topic categories (Dannecker & Englert, 2014, pp. 185,160). The previous literature review and the information gathered from my deeper engagement with the topic, as well as the experience from my previous work with SINA, helped me to develop the lead questions based on my research. Prior to conducting the interviews, I worked with several community members to identify themes that would highlight their perspectives, and from which I derived the questions and developed an interview guide (see Appendix 8.1).

To understand SINA's impact within the broader social entrepreneurship and foreign aid ecosystem, I conducted semi structured, guideline-based expert interviews with three members in different roles[4]:

- The co-founder to gain insights into SINA's purpose, goals, and history.
- A replicator to understand the model, framework, and scalability as they implement it in a new Ugandan community.
- A former member and social business founder, now an advisor to SINA Global, to learn about social entrepreneurship, youth empowerment and the impact of SINA on the ecosystem.

The expert interviews took place between February and March 2024 in Uganda and were conducted using an open, structured guide, as this has the advantage of better comparability with the literature and also allows the interviewees to be as free as possible in their storytelling. I prepared extensively for the interviews and went through the guide again to avoid difficulties. Before the interview began, I asked the interviewees for their permission to record the interview. The interviewees were given the option of being quoted anonymously. However, they made it clear that they wanted to be named to provide them with visibility and recognition. The interviewees were left room for free narrative to allow the "unfolding of the subjective meaning" (p. 573) of their stories. In this way, I wanted to avoid answers that echoed formulated

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[4] My aim was to achieve gender balance in my interviews, but due to constraints of time, place and resources this aim could not be fully realised.

questions (Helfferich, 2014, p. 566ff). I therefore began the interview with an open-ended narrative prompt to briefly introduce myself and my research interest, before moving on to the semi-structured guiding questions. To evaluate and analyse over 40 pages of interview transcripts. Mayring's (2010) qualitative content analysis was used to structure the material through a set of codes (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Codemap Interview Transcripts

(Own Illustration)
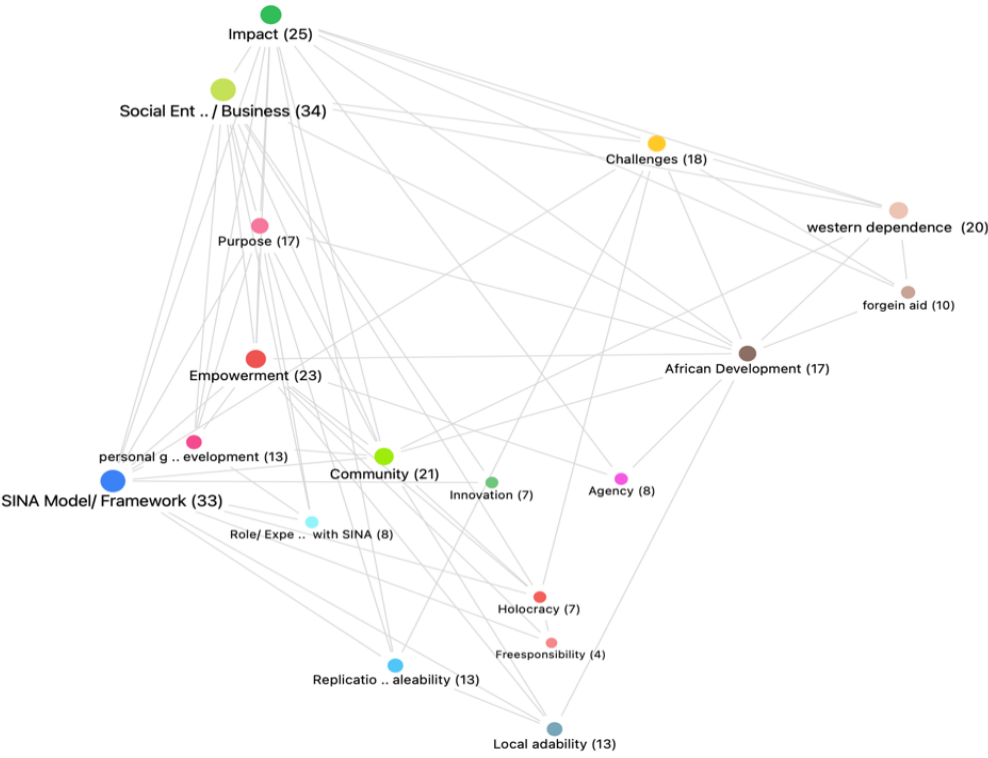
4.5 Survey Structure and Approach

In addition to conducting expert interviews, I used a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of SINA's impact. This approach involved travelling to five different SINA communities to gather insights from scholars and participants within the organisation. Through the use of surveys, I seek to capture the experiences, personal growth and business development of youth within the SINA framework, focusing on their empowerment processes and the broader impact of SINA.

While these surveys provide valuable personal perspectives, it is important to note that the findings cannot be generalized, due to the limited number of participants and their individual experiences. Nevertheless, the inclusion of subjective data is particularly important in

decolonial and Afrocentric research as it highlights the lived experiences and voices of marginalised communities. By capturing more personal narratives, I acknowledge the complexity and diversity of individual experiences, which is essential for a more accurate and inclusive understanding of development processes:

> (…) contextualized and culturally appropriate evaluation should be African-people centred, and should value culturally relevant and indigenized evaluation processes and methodologies that are predominantly informed by African world views and paradigms (Chilisa et al., 2016, p. 316).

Decolonising evaluation therefore involves restructuring power relations to ensure that African people are actively involved in determining the focus, timing and methodology of evaluations and research. Thus, in my research, I adopted a participatory approach by working with community members to develop and refine the survey through several discussions. To avoid bias, those involved in designing the questionnaires were not interviewed. This ensured that the evaluation was relevant and useful to them, in line with an African relational paradigm that emphasises interconnectedness and communal knowledge production (Chilisa et al., 2016, pp. 316–317).

Questionnaire Development

For the survey, I chose a 4-point Likert scale with options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," and included an "I don't know" option to mitigate bias and accommodate participants without a definitive opinion (Baur & Blasius, 2014, p. 1054). For the survey, I chose a 4-point Likert scale with options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and included an "I don't know" option to reduce bias and accommodate participants without a clear opinion (Baur & Blasius, 2014, p. 1054). The middle option of the original scale, "somewhat agree," was removed to avoid confusion, especially since the survey was often completed on mobile devices.

Participants were informed in writing and verbally about the purpose and objectives of the survey, their rights and the survey procedure. They were given the option to skip questions, ask for help, or not participate. After the introduction and collection of demographic data, the survey was divided into six thematic areas: Personal Growth, Education/Empowerment, Community/Agency, Challenges, Project Impact and Community Impact. Each section aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of SINA and to assess the development of the scholars from different perspectives. Prior to conducting the survey, pilot tests were conducted with various community members to ensure that the questions were easy to

understand and could be answered in a 'closed-ended' manner. These tests also helped to identify any issues or problems with the questions, which were then adapted to fit the SINA framework.

To gain a diverse range of insights from scholars situated in different life circumstances and settings, I conducted the surveys research in four SINA communities in Uganda and one in Tanzania. At each of the five survey sessions, I introduced the research and emphasised that participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous. I facilitated the survey, checking with each participant to see if they had any questions, and then led open discussion sessions to gather additional background information and address any questions or language barriers.

The survey aimed to understand the successes, challenges, progress and areas for improvement of SINA and its scholars. It also sought to provide an opportunity for the scholars to share and reflect on their personal development, experiences and projects. The survey results were analysed with the respective communities and shared with the different SINA's so that they could respond to the needs of scholars and use the impact data. This participatory evaluation process reflects the principles of co-production of knowledge and fosters a respectful relationship rather than a hierarchical power dynamic (Chilisa et al., 2016, p. 323).

Survey Distribution and Response Rate

A total of 212 individuals from five SINA communities accessed the questionnaire link, with 160 beginning to fill it out. However, a significant number of respondents did not complete the survey, often due to interruptions caused primarily by internet connection issues. As participants moved through the questionnaire, the number of completions declined from page to page. Ultimately, 95 participants submitted the survey. However, following data cleansing for missing values, lack of consent, and incomplete responses, only 61 valid cases remained, where participants had fully completed the survey. These 61 cases form the basis for the subsequent analysis.

Sample Description

The final sample consisted of 61 participants, with a gender distribution of 24 female (39%), 36 male (59%), and one participant identifying as diverse (2%). No participants selected the option "I prefer not to say." Furthermore, a notable proportion of respondents (72%) identified as belonging to a marginalised group, while 47.5% indicated that they were refugees.

Figure 3 illustrates the diverse backgrounds of the participants. This demographic breakdown highlights the diversity of the SINA community, which is crucial for understanding the context in which the Social Innovation Academy operates.

Figure 3: Background of Survey Participants

(Own Illustration)

Survey Participants

- Uganda 48%
- Tanzania 15%
- South Sudan 21%
- DRC 16%
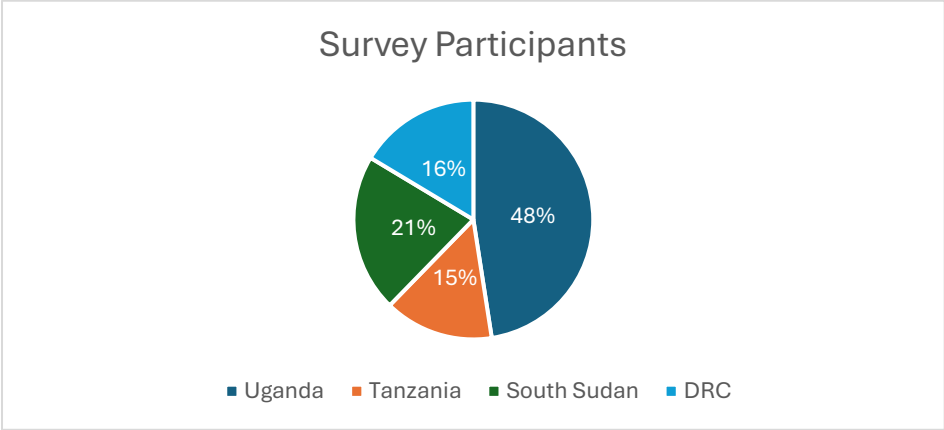
4.6. Research Reflections

Planning and conducting my interviews and surveys took a considerable amount of time. I had to readjust and adapt my research plan almost daily due to unforeseen circumstances, such as political instability in certain regions. Weather conditions, including muddy roads, flooding, power cuts and network problems were also some of the challenges I faced. In particular, my research trips to the SINA communities 'Arise' and 'Loketa', which are located in refugee camps, were time-consuming to plan, sometimes involving over 30 hours of travel time, and required substantial support, including contacts, transport and accommodation, which would not have been possible without the company of a SINA staff member.

An important aspect of my research was that in every community I visited, I was integrated into the community and seen as part of it. These visits were never just for research purposes, as I participated in programmes, met different people and became part of the community, which ultimately led to a better understanding of each community, but also took up much more time than expected. Nevertheless, the intercultural dialogues with various community members, encompassing different values, cultures and backgrounds, were essential, especially for the personal discussions with the scholars. Communication was sometimes difficult due to the organisational model of 'holacracy' which does not have clear hierarchies and structures. This

required adaptations in the research process and complicated some procedures as it was often unclear who to talk to about my research stays.

Conducting the survey proved challenging due to many unforeseen difficulties, community activities and the availability of scholars. The surveys were originally designed to take 20 minutes. However, they often took up to 2 hours due to internet, network or power problems. In SINA Loketa, for example, researchers used the organisation's computers as personal mobile phones were in short supply, causing additional delays. In other cases, researchers shared phones to complete the survey. While I provided a hotspot to ensure that no one had to use their own mobile data, I did not anticipate the difficulty in accessing computers and phones, as I was told otherwise at the beginning.

Although the questions were generally well understood, some required further explanation. Understanding the questions was more difficult in SINA Arise, where most of the scholars were Congolese refugees and English was not their first language. The scholars often needed clarification while also supporting each other in understanding the questions. This highlighted the importance of the presence of the researcher to minimise communication barriers. Due to limited resources, it was not possible to translate the survey into French, Kiswahili or the Ugandan dialect 'Luganda'. Therefore, I tried to keep the questions as clear and simple as possible. After the surveys, I asked about the scholars' experiences and collected feedback. Most participants had no difficulties and found the questions helpful and interesting. Some commented that the survey had given them an opportunity to reflect on their own journey and share their experiences. The ease of use of the survey and the visible progress bar and comment sections were particularly appreciated.

4.7 Limitations of the Research

While my case study of SINA may not provide precise instructions for other programmes or social entrepreneurship initiatives, it does highlight specific struggles and successes. These insights may be valuable to other organisations and contribute to broader 'development' discourses and scenarios, even if extensive empirical evidence is limited. The literature underpinning my analysis suggests that insights from individual case studies can be useful in other contexts, as they are tailored to local needs and aligned with decolonial and Afrocentric perspectives.

However, as each community is highly context-specific, with its own scholars, experiences, challenges and processes, it is questionable whether any case study can produce universally applicable findings. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. The rapidly changing environment and the diversity of the communities and their members may limit the applicability of the research findings. While the interdisciplinary design of this thesis has enriched the findings, it also limits the depth of analysis of certain issues.

In the last chapter of this thesis, the relationship between locally-led, community-based social entrepreneurship initiatives and elements of the Ubuntu philosophy as well as agency and empowerment will be linked through the analysis of the Social Innovation Academy to provide a different perspective on possible alternatives to conventional 'development' approaches.

5. Case Study: The Social Innovation Academy – Agency and Empowerment through Social Entrepreneurship in Sub-Sahara Africa

„The problems we face in the 21st century are of an unprecedented scale; they are multifaceted, interconnected, quickly evolving, and fundamentally systemic. For solutions to outpace challenges, it requires local changemakers and leaders to realize innovation at scale" (Egwaoje et al., 2023, p. 2).

This chapter completes the thesis by examining the impact and value of the Social Innovation Academy (SINA)[5] as a community-based organisation working to empower disadvantaged youth in various African countries. In particular, it focuses on SINA's empowerment model and the resulting projects that drive social, sustainable and economic change within marginalised communities. The chapter also critically reflects on the challenges and opportunities of SINA's empowerment approach, organisational model and social entrepreneurship in the wider ecosystem, within the context of development.

With Africa's population set to double from 1.5 billion in 2023 to 2.5 billion by 2050, the continent faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of its youth demographic. By 2050, more than 20 per cent of the population - almost 300 million people - will be between the ages

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[5] The framework and approach of the SINA vary according to context, country and community. This chapter provides an overview of SINA's work; however, the depth of the organisation's approach cannot be fully captured. For a more comprehensive understanding of SINA's approach, it is recommended to refer to the framework, which can be found in the bibliography.

of 15 and 24. Currently, more than 72 million young people in Africa are not in education, employment or training, with young women making up the majority of this group. In addition, a very high proportion of these young people earn less than two dollars a day (ILO, 2023). Tackling youth unemployment, poverty, lack of education and gender inequalities is therefore essential. High rates of youth poverty and unemployment, especially among young women and rural youth, have a long-term negative impact on their future opportunities and contribute to instability in fragile states. Hence, young people's participation in decision-making is crucial to their employment prospects and peacebuilding in sub-Saharan Africa, yet their voices are often underrepresented and unheard (ILO, 2023; UNIDO, 2016). The Social Innovation Academy was founded to address these complex, interrelated issues.

5.1 Introduction to the Social Innovation Academy

The organisation was initially established in Uganda in 2014 with the objective of providing a compensatory alternative to the inadequate and outdated colonial education system, which was "neither geared towards innovation nor the development of new solutions to old problems" (Salborn, 2014, p. 18), resulting in high levels of youth unemployment. In addition to its socio-political and environmental mission to combat youth unemployment and excessive population growth, SINA also aims to provide young people between the ages of 18 and 35 from marginalised backgrounds, such as refugees, orphans, street children or those born into poverty, with the practical tools to transform their own challenges into social and sustainable solutions. By equipping them with entrepreneurial skills and practical empowerment tools for personal growth, SINA enables them to live their lives consciously, with purpose and intention, while creating meaningful work within their communities (SINA, 2023b, 2023c).

> The SINA model is creating resilient and self-reliant communities establishing their own solutions instead of waiting for support from the outside. Since the solutions become social enterprises, they are independent of donations and often tackle challenges at their roots (SINA, 2024b).

The SINA model addresses environmental and social issues within communities at a local level. It provides a space for participants, called scholars, to learn, fail, ideate and discover purpose and meaning for their own lives. This enables them to develop the capacity and agency to become sustainably self-sufficient (SINA, 2023c). The SINA framework is designed to be resilient, circular, and regenerative to plant the seed of social entrepreneurship. When new scholars join, some stay for months or years to fill various roles within the community and to "unleash their potential" before eventually leaving with their own social enterprises, making

space for new scholars. While not everyone becomes an entrepreneur after completing the SINA Empowerment Program - which isn't a realistic goal for all - many find meaningful employment and purpose (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024).

Rather than dictating what is right or wrong, SINA creates a space for individuals "to grow, to make their mistakes, to learn from it, to hold each other accountable" and find their own solutions through experiential learning, unleashing their potential and empowering them to "become the change they want to see in the world" (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024). This social innovation approach through social entrepreneurship can serve as the basis for understanding and creating long-lasting social change within communities and is described as follows: "A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals" (Phills Jr. et al., 2008).

5.2 Community of Communities

SINA describes itself as a "Community of Communities". Since its founding, the initiative has successfully scaled its model to other local contexts, increasing the number of communities and expanding into neighbouring countries in sub-Saharan Africa. To date, 16 SINA communities have been established in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cape Verde and Zimbabwe, from which 81 social enterprises have emerged, creating more than 973 jobs (SINA, 2024a).

SINA communities don't have a single, standardised solution. Instead, they adapt to local conditions and allow for different approaches. The communities learn from each other's best practices and support each other, continuously improving the model without a predetermined endpoint. To achieve a greater collective impact than they could individually, all SINAs work together as regenerative communities. They view themselves as a living, evolving system that is constantly changing and adapting to respond to reality, rather than trying to predict and control. Each local SINA community is an independently registered, self-organised entity, owned and operated by local actors. By decentralising and distributing authority, they aim to continuously enhance well-being, learning and collective progress (SINA, 2023c, p. 3 b), (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024).

The expansion of SINA to create new communities is not a top-down process. Decisions are made in a self-organised and autonomous way, with many former SINA scholars replicating the SINA model in their own communities and adapting it to different contexts. This approach to scaling SINA is focused on replicating multiple communities to expand the organisation's impact, rather than creating a single large organisation (Sadiki & Schmid, 2023, pp. 19–20), (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024).

To ensure that the new SINA communities are self-sustaining, locally owned and independent communities, team leaders called "Replicators" go through a twelve-month replication journey at SINA Mpigi in Uganda. This intensive programme enables participants to become fully integrated into the SINA culture, learn essential self-management skills and gain a deep understanding of the five-step empowerment framework (SINA, 2023b). After completing the replication journey, Replicators return to their local community, establish independently registered organisations and implement the SINA framework. In 2024, youth from Nigeria, Nepal, Rwanda, Mityana and the Palabek refugee camp in Uganda participate in this programme to create their own SINA community in their respective countries (SINA, 2024a), (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024). This demonstrates the adaptability of the SINA framework to various vulnerable young people, despite their differences in culture and environment (Sadiki & Schmid, 2023, pp. 20).

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Figure 4: SINA Communities as of 2023

(SINA, 2023a, p. 3)

SINA and its social enterprises have received several awards for their impact on refugees and youth empowerment as well as their contribution to the achievement of the SDGs (SDG1 No poverty, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure and SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals). Some of the awards include the Ockenden International Prize in 2022, the Engagement Prize in 2022, the Tony Hsieh Award in 2022, the Modern Work Award in 2022, the Pan-African Award for Entrepreneurship in Education in 2019 and the UNHCR NGO Innovation Award in 2018 (SINA, 2024b).

5.3 Context-specific Community Approach

The community pillar of SINA is based on shared values, spaces and activities that foster a supportive environment for learning and living, which are also inherent in the values of Ubuntu. Each SINA community strives to create a positive and open learning environment with several common areas and transparent learning spaces, fostering a sense of community and a "safe space without fear or blame" (Salborn, 2014, p. 69). For instance, the majority of structures on SINA campuses are constructed from recycled materials, including old car tyres, bamboo and other sustainable materials, such as houses made from plastic bottles. Community gardens and waste separation systems, along with weekly community clean-ups, promote a more sustainable and respectful coexistence (Sadiki & Schmid, 2023, p. 13), (own observations).

SINA's community culture is aligned with Freire's approaches to education and empowerment. Freire advocates a dialogical and participatory approach that encourages critical thinking and active participation, emphasising community and collective action to achieve critical consciousness and social transformation (Freire, 2014, pp. 71, 90, 92). Similarly, the scholars work on collective missions for local socio-environmental and economic change through a community-based approach.

SINA provides a platform for young people to create value in their communities, with members supporting each other's growth and personal development (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024). „I really had the zeal and passion to support my community because I can literally say I'm what I am, 90% because of the community"(C. Kamya, personal communication, 2024). This method of empowering vulnerable youth by integrating local initiatives through collective community action is in line with Freire's principle that community development should be part of a larger, holistic transformation:

(...) the development of the local community cannot occur except in the total context of which it is a part, in interaction with other parts. This requirement implies the consciousness of unity in diversification, of organization which channels forces in dispersion, and a clear awareness of the necessity to transform reality (Freire, 2014, p. 142).

This approach encourages a critical mindset that enables scholars to tackle local issues while maintaining an awareness of the wider social, environmental and economic context of systemic change. In addition, Freire's concept of true dialogue, "Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialogues is the logical consequence" (Freire, 2014, p.91), is reflected in SINA's practice of daily community meetings, non-violent communication, conflict management and weekly peer-to-peer sessions (own observations). Each community member has a constant confidant with whom they reflect on their challenges and growth. This is in alignment with the principles of Ubuntu, which recognise the interconnectedness of individuals and the belief that "I am because we are" and will be discussed more in detail in Chapter 5.5.1. This interconnectedness is reflected in SINA's context-specific community approach, as E. Niwamanya notes. Whilst scholars become more empowered, the community also benefits:

SINA has had impact for me in very many forms. So, at the basic of levels is the community, the community around Mpigi. So SINA has provided a platform for young people within the Mpigi community to compete and find a space where they can create value in their communities. So we have scholars that have started social enterprises that have come from the Mpigi community, and this scholars have gone on to become a beacon of hope for this community. And for me. That is what SINA does. It gets young people, trains them, throws them back into the world to be the change and inspire positive action. So that is one of the impacts for the SINA community, but then also on the individuals. As in personal development, so people live more goal oriented and purpose driven (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024).

In this way, SINA's model aims to foster both individual and communal empowerment, thereby creating a cycle of positive change that resonates throughout the entire community.

5.4 SINAS Empowerment Framework

5.4.1 Holacracy

Unlike many development organisations, which have been criticised by post-development scholars for their hierarchical systems, SINA adopts a model that promotes agency and

autonomy at both personal and systemic levels through *Holacracy,* a management system created by Brian Robertson in 2009 to break down strong hierarchies in organisations (Holacracy, 2024). Through horizontal leadership, holacracy enables scholars to take ownership of their own growth by giving them equal authority and responsibility for fulfilling specific roles within the community. At the same time, they are free to decide what and how they want to learn, leaving room for creativity (SINA, 2023b).

> To transform a community, culture needs to be defined and needs to be changed, transformed or evolved, right? There are so many things about the traditional African culture, both the amazing things and then weaknesses, right? And even when we look at the global level, there are so many systems that are favouring the few and those that are favouring the many. So, for example, one of them is the hierarchy. So hierarchies are good to provide structure and work very effectively in settings like the army, right? But then they are also limiting because someone expects you to give them a command in order to do something but limits a lot of creativity, agency and freedom (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024).

This purpose-driven approach of holacracy can promote transparency and actively break down hierarchies, embodying the communal and inclusive spirit of Ubuntu, in line with the demands of the aforementioned African theorists to enhance more participation and agency. Holacracy can therefore serve as an alternative tool for organisations wishing to adopt a more inclusive approach and implement a bottom-up methodology. This model places people at the centre and distributes responsibilities more evenly within an organisation or community, where one person can take on one or more roles with different tasks and responsibilities (Holacracy, 2024).

5.4.2 Freesponsibility

As discussed in the theoretical chapters, Sen (1999) emphasises the importance of individuals taking responsibility for the opportunities available to them. This approach promotes agency and a personal sense of freedom through proactive engagement with one's circumstances. This aligns with Freire's idea of the role of education in fostering autonomy and self-actualisation as "Freedom would require them to eject this image [of being oppressed] and replace it with autonomy and responsibility" (Freire, 2014, p. 47).

SINA's *'Freesponsibility'* approach is described as follows:

> Freesponsibility integrates freedom and responsibility in a way that one is aware of the effects—positive and negative—the execution of personal freedoms have on others, while understanding and fully respecting their feelings and needs. Taking responsibility is the basis for personal growth and personal development (Salborn, 2014, p. 69).

Individuals need to be mindful of their actions and the impact of their choices on others. A community and environment based on trust, honesty, self-awareness and self-reflection provides the basis for mutual respect and empathy, which align with the core values of SINA on which its empowerment programme is built (Salborn, 2014, p. 118).

> So structures like self-organization and holacracy are meant to first empower the people. And when people are empowered, it does not go away. Right. you are building the capacity of the people. (…)They become someone who can achieve anything and that is what freesponsibility, the freedom to use your responsibility in a way that does not negatively impact others, but then also that helps you thrive in your own skin. That's the beautiful blend of holacracy or self-organization that gives power not to people, but to roles. So this freedom just empowers the people to become independent, to become responsible, and to become accountable (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024).

This can also have a positive impact on mental health and self-esteem, particularly among vulnerable young people (Schimanek, 2023, p. 18).

5.4. 3 Empowerment Program

SINA's vision is to transform the education system and the way people think by moving away from traditional top-down instructional models that are no longer fit for purpose. These models, which have their roots in the colonial era, focus on memorisation and exams rather than fostering sustainable learning and life skills (C. Kamya & E. Salborn, personal communication). "That's why SINA's approach focuses on personal development and experiential learning to help scholars become more self-driven, critical thinkers, and able to answer questions about their purpose" (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024). This decolonial shift is crucial in empowering scholars to challenge and 'unlearn' limiting beliefs, transforming the way people think and learn towards more independent, creative and adaptable learning. Furthermore, it aligns with the calls to decolonise the mind put forth by Mignolo, Matthews and Ndlovu-Gatsheni in the theoretical chapter (Chapter 2).

SINA's empowerment program combines tools such as holacracy and freesponsibility to create an educational environment based on experiential learning and growth, replacing hierarchical control with internal motivation and full ownership. Through five different stages of empowerment, SINA aims to foster growth and capacity building for scholars to unleash their full potential and achieve personal and professional growth. The process is designed to be flexible to accommodate the different backgrounds and needs of the scholars.

It can therefore take up to two years for anyone to gain the personal and professional skills and experience needed to create social change through social entrepreneurship (SINA, 2023b), (E. Niwamanya & E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024). The empowerment stages focus on three key elements: the individual, social entrepreneurship and the community.

Figure 5: SINA's Empowerment Model

(SINA, 2023b)
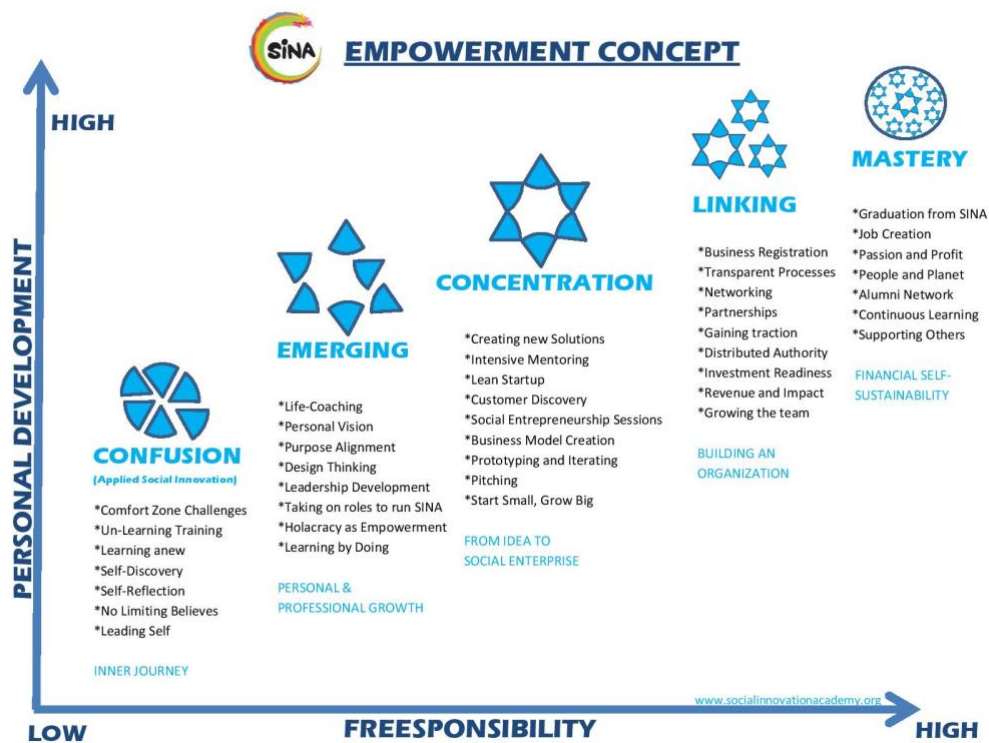
Empowerment Stages [6]

- **Applied (Confusion) Social Innovation Stage:** In this first stage, scholars leave their familiar reality and immerse themselves in SINA's environment. This stage focuses on personal growth, such as 'unlearning' limiting beliefs, creating self-awareness, pushing comfort zones and discovering one's potential. Key activities include problem-solving sessions, identifying life purposes, learning clear and non-violent communication and finding and creating their space in the community.

- **Emerging Stage:** Scholars take on more responsibilities and engage in self-organised, experience-based learning, supported by mentors and accountability partners. This stage also includes an apprenticeship programme and an intensive bootcamp, which focus on developing practical skills for running a social enterprise and understanding and implementing holacracy as a management tool. To identify problems within the

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[6] https://socialinnovationacademy.org/playbook/

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communities or environments they are connected to, they form teams with other scholars, and develop solutions to the issues identified that align with their previous experiences as well as several of the SDGs.

- **Concentration Stage:** This stage involves prototyping, testing and refining solutions with potential customers. The teams that are formed undergo intensive training which enables them to gain a deeper understanding of their proposed solution, target audience, and market. They test their project or product, try to generate revenue from target customers and secure stakeholder support for their solutions.

- **Linking Stage:** In this final empowerment stage, the formed teams transition into social enterprises by establishing the necessary structures and processes, including legal registration, opening a bank account, ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, and creating their own jobs.

- **Mastery Stage:** Scholars continue to develop their social enterprises and become fully independent, graduating and moving outside the SINA campuses to expand their impact and growth. However, the Mastery Stage represents an ongoing learning process with no endpoint. Alumni receive ongoing support in the form of mentorships, business training and continued connection to the international SINA network (SINA, 2023b).

The overall aim of these stages is to transform scholars mindsets toward self-organisation and entrepreneurial development while promoting integrity and purpose (SINA, 2023b). Furthermore, the empowerment programme provides the professional skills needed to start a social enterprise and fosters decision-making and problem-solving skills:

> SINA provided me the platform to connect with people, to learn from them, to learn about myself, and most importantly, to find purpose and vision, and to pursue an endeavour bigger than myself, to create a better world. So, in short, SINA has prepared me to be the kind of person that can achieve anything, but then also, most importantly, something that adds value not only to me, but to the world as well. And for me, that's social entrepreneurship (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024).

This approach helps scholars cultivate self-governance, agency as well as independency, making it easier for them to adapt to the social and economic demands of the labour market (Schenk, 2022, p. 83).

Figure 6: Scholar's Educational Empowerment
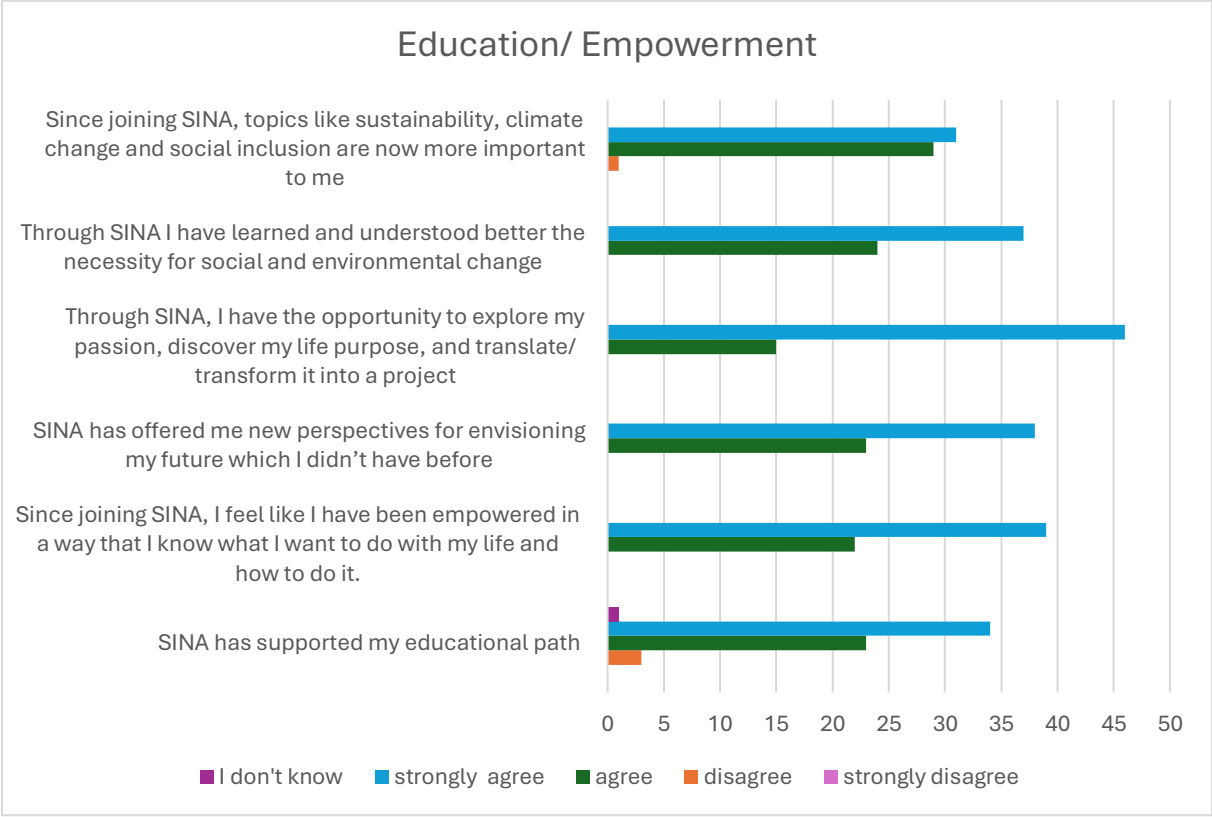
(Own Illustration)

Figure 6 illustrates the survey results regarding SINA's educational empowerment approach and the broadening of scholars' perspectives on issues such as sustainability, climate change and social inclusion. This is an important foundation for building a sustainable social enterprise, as a deeper critical understanding of these global issues is the basis for placing and understanding one's project in a bigger picture for lasting and social change.

The survey results show that SINA has opened up new alternative perspectives for the scholars, leading to greater ownership of their lives as they are given the opportunity to explore their passions and purpose, empowering them to be more determined and intentional about how they want to live and contribute to society.

Figure 7: Purpose and Personal Growth Journey

(Own Illustration)
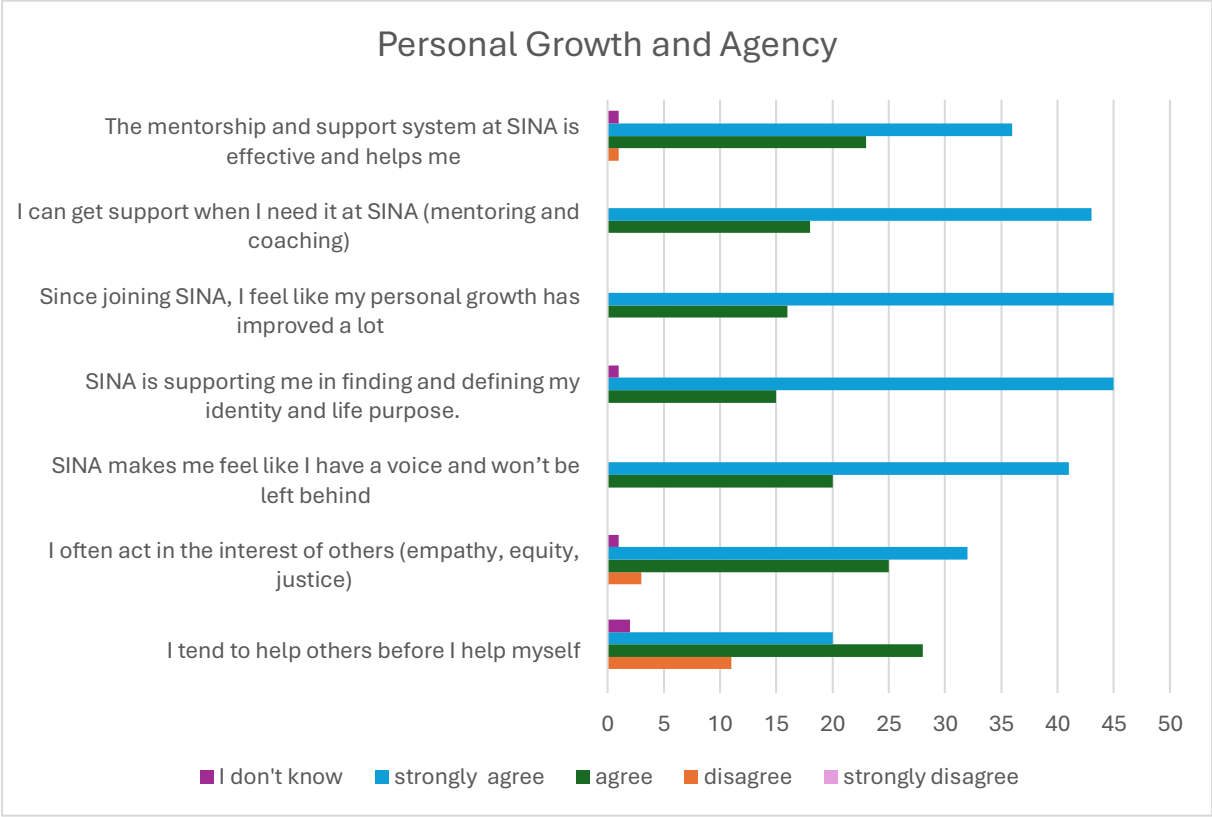
The personal growth and identity formation resulting from SINA's supportive environment is highlighted in Figure 7. The overwhelming agreement that participants have experienced significant personal growth and that SINA has supported them in finding and defining their identity and purpose in life reflects the impact of SINA's empowerment framework, which also suggests that social entrepreneurship can go beyond mere business skills. A deeper sense of self and purpose, as well as a tendency to help and support others first, is essential for sustainable empowerment and community building. The data also shows that participants feel they have a voice and won't be left behind, highlighting SINA's role in building agency and confidence while valuing each individual's contribution to a community. This is also illustrated by the high level of agreement with SINA's support on their growth journeys, underlining the importance of mentorship as a supportive environment as a fundamental element in fostering empowerment and agency.

5.4.4 Agency and Ownership

Agency, as discussed in the theoretical chapter, is about enhancing people's ability to be agents of change, which is essential for human well-being (Hoff & Demeritt, 2023, pp. 185–187).

However, half of the world's population report having little or no control over their lives, indicating a significant lack of agency and freedom (UNDP, 2024, p. 7).

Consequently, individuals' ability to determine their own concept of a fulfilling life, including their responsibilities towards others and the environment, has been undermined in several ways. International cooperation has become increasingly politicised and polarised, contributing to a loss of trust in governments and institutions. As a result, agency has been largely neglected in development agendas, a pattern that is evident in traditional foreign aid and often fails to reach its intended recipients and limits individual agency (UNDP, 2024, pp. 5–6). Demmeritt and Hoff (2023) view agency as an important tool for breaking the cycles of oppression and poverty. To address these issues, it is essential to ensure active participation in decision-making and in public discourse (Hoff & Demeritt, 2023, p. 185).

The Human Development Report 2024 outlines three key requirements to reduce agency gaps and promote a more equitable and inclusive future. These are: making institutions more people-centred, co-owned and future-oriented (UNDP, 2024, pp. 8). Community-based organisations such as SINA reflect those demands for narrowing agency gaps in their communal and collective empowerment model.

1. **People-Centred:** The report emphasises the need to prioritise human development and security, recognising the interconnected relationship between humanity and the planet. SINA intends this through its sustainable community-based approaches and the "freesponsible" empowerment model.

2. **Co-Owned:** Co-ownership is a collaborative approach that involves sharing authority, responsibility and results in a fair and equitable manner. It fosters social norms that value collective effort and collaboration, and is based on the principle of setting common goals and pursuing them together. SINA's holacracy system intends to treat everyone equally and empowers them to contribute to decision-making, ensuring that all members are actively involved in shaping the community's path.

3. **Future-Oriented:** The report suggests that institutions prioritise collaborative creation and innovation to address challenges. SINA's approach to solving local problems through collective action for socio-economic and environmental change, by creating sustainable jobs, innovating education and the promotion of meaning and hope, takes into account future-oriented perspectives.

SINA's community culture and empowerment model responds to these demands by promoting opportunity, autonomy, purpose and support, thus fostering a transformative and regenerative educational system for increased agency, as advocated by Freire (Sadiki & Schmid, 2023, pp. 21–22), (Freire 2014). *"As a result, [of SINA's activities] the role of disadvantaged youth is reversed from passive recipients of aid to active drivers of their own future, one community at a time"* (SINA, 2023a, p. 7).

This approach challenges the traditional Western aid model, demonstrates deep respect for African values, gives priority to local solutions over foreign intervention, and empowers young people to take charge of their future. It shows how a shift from dependency to self-reliance and agency can be achieved (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024). As such, it respects and does not interfere with the existing norms and cultural settings of the communities it serves, empowering people as they are.

> The SINA model empowers everyone, regardless of their backgrounds, regardless of which culture you're coming from, regardless of which community you're coming from, regardless of what education level you have achieved. And it does not erase the community setting. Let's say, for example, a different community is following a particular norm or a different culture, it does not interfere with these things. And for me, that is what makes it beautiful, that it empowers you as a person the way you are (C. Kamya, personal communication, 2024).

SINAs scholar selection[7] welcomes participants regardless of their business experience or academic background, focusing on abilities, passion, and leadership skills rather than educational qualifications. This inclusive approach ensures that individuals with the potential to bring positive change to their communities are given the opportunities (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024). This low-barrier entry empowers people to take ownership as:

> "The *localization of solutions breeds independence, independence of mind* (emphasis added). And when people are independent, they can think on their own. They do not need to be begging, they do not need to be seeking support, because they can support themselves" (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024).

Furthermore, C. Kayma notes that some scholars are initially sceptical about the impact of SINA as there is no direct payment or financial assistance. Instead, the programme's objective

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[7] SINA's scholar selection process takes place two to three times a year, during which individuals have the opportunity to apply for the SINA programme.

is to foster long-term sustainability and benefits such as self-reliance and ownership, rather than relying on external support.

> If you told someone about the SINA program that it takes maybe one and a half years, they would first of all ask you in these one and a half years, how much am I going to earn? Are they going to be paying? But remember, this is something that is supporting you to structure the future of your life, the next future for the next generations. Your children, your grandchildren, and also the community members. So someone will first ask that question, even when you tell them that this is something that you're only sacrificing for one and a half years. But then after the one and a half years, you live a sustainable life and you'll not be a beggar, you not be dependent on other people. So this thing of unlearning limiting beliefs of the scholars is really is a big challenge to SINA (C. Kamya, personal communication, 2024)

SINA targets this mindset by encouraging its scholars to embrace the idea that true empowerment comes from within, through gaining the skills, knowledge and confidence to shape their own futures and lay the foundations for generational change. Moreover, Agency is rooted in critical consciousness, a socio-political educational tool that engages learners in questioning and transforming their historical and social circumstances in search of purpose (Freire, 2014, pp. 61, 67, 73). For vulnerable young people, this means addressing disempowering backgrounds, circumstances, and past experiences that have diminished their agency, often leading to a lack of self-worth and hope (Sadiki & Schmid, 2023, p. 12).

SINA's empowerment framework helps to restore their belief in their ability to make choices and achieve their goals (Schenk, 2022, pp. 47, 83). "In line with this integrative approach to (refugee) autonomy, SINA affirms refugees [and other vulnerable youth] as agents with the capacity to make decisions, to take up actions, and to effect change" (Sadiki & Schmid, 2023, p. 12). Much like Amartya Sen's (1999) and Claude Ake's (1996) call to enhance people's capability to help themselves and act as agents of change, SINA's emancipatory vision aims to enhance agency, human development and sustainability for collective action, highlighted in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Participants Perceptions of Challenges and Opportunities
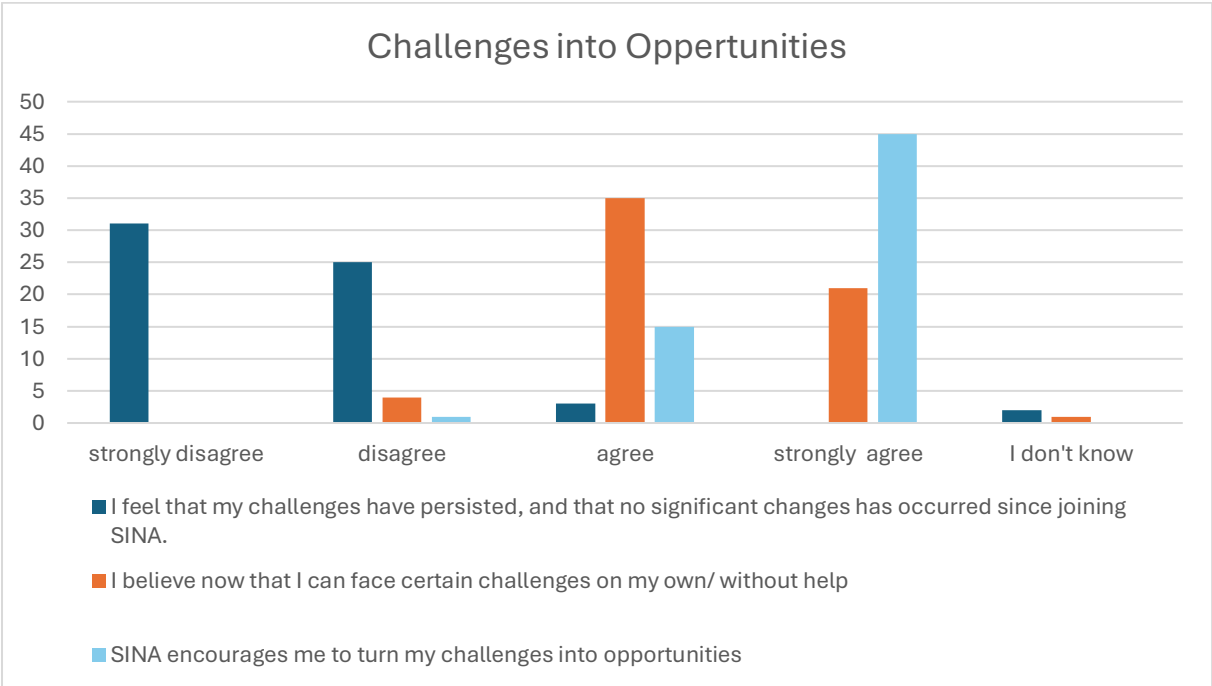
(Own Illustration)

Figure 8 demonstrates that scholars now believe they are capable of addressing certain challenges independently, indicating that SINA's training and support is effective not only in addressing immediate challenges but also in fostering long-term self-sufficiency and confidence in participants while promoting agency and self-sufficiency. This is underlined by the perception of the majority of scholars that they have undergone significant changes since joining SINA, while acknowledging that some challenges remain that may be beyond the scope of SINA's influence or impact.

5.5 Social Entrepreneurship as an Empowerment Tool

SINA's problem-solving-oriented model emphasises social entrepreneurship as a sustainable and empowering approach for individuals, as the solutions developed are owned by the people and can be financially self-sustaining, as opposed to solution-oriented, top-down approaches. Scholars are inspired by their own experiences and address issues they have personally faced. SINA helps them bring these underlying challenges to the surface and transform them into positive outcomes through the creation of social enterprises (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024). These social enterprises are aligned with the SDGs and often address multiple goals.

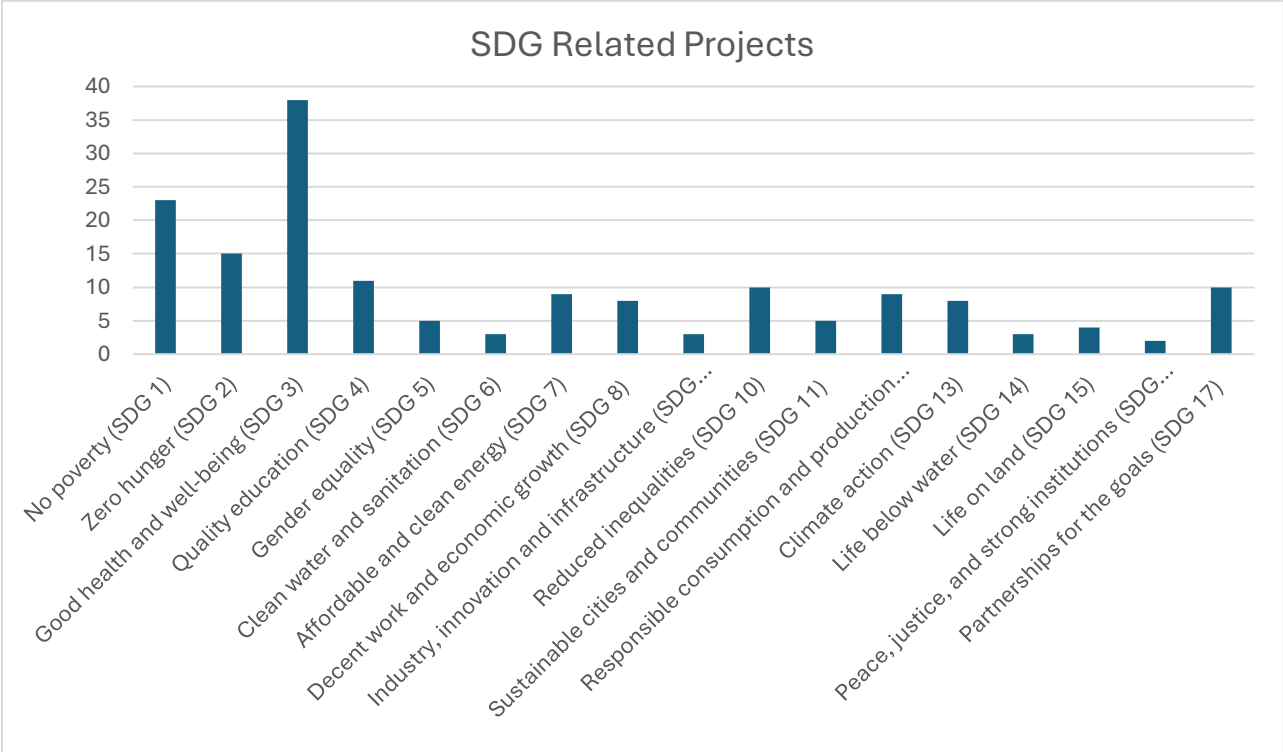**Figure 9: Social Enterprises related to the SDGs**

(Own Illustration)

Figure 9 illustrates that the majority of participants are working on projects related to SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), representing 22.89% of the total. This indicates a prioritisation of community well-being and a focus on community-related issues. In line with the approach outlined by C. Kamya, the SINA programme is designed to create value for all generations. This is reflected in the projects and aspirations of scholars. The results demonstrate that scholars are empowered to address pressing needs in their communities and reflect the values of Ubuntu in their solutions. Furthermore, 13.8% of projects are aligned with SDG 1 (No Poverty), and 9% with SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). These figures demonstrate the participants' commitment to addressing the most fundamental needs, such as poverty alleviation and food security, within their communities, which are their primary concerns.

To date, over 80 independent social enterprises[8] have been created by SINA scholars. These enterprises focus on sustainability and social and environmental issues, including agriculture, upcycling and recycling, and women's and refugee empowerment. They also support local communities and employ people from various marginalised groups (SINA, 2024c, 2024a).

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[8] The following Social Enterprises can be found on SINA's Website: https://socialinnovationacademy.org/impact/enterprises/

For instance, the founder of *Kimuli Collections*, driven by the victimisation of disability, created a social enterprise that employs and empowers people with disabilities by producing clothing and accessories from upcycled African textiles and waste materials, and has upcycled 9,000 products and employed 130 people. *Pendeza Shelters*, inspired by the founder's experiences with plastic waste and flooding, addresses the lack of affordable housing in Uganda, especially for refugees, by building eco-friendly homes from recycled plastic bottles, providing shelter for over 300 households and training disadvantaged youth in sustainable construction techniques. The *Gejja Women Foundation*, motivated by the founder's own experience of teenage pregnancy and menstrual taboos, empowers marginalised women and girls through the production of sustainable sanitary pads and skills training. *Totya Platform* supports women who have experienced sexual abuse. The founder, a survivor herself, has used her SINA training to support over 10,000 survivors in their journey of recovery. Inspired by her family's struggle with expensive traditional fuels and lung diseases caused by smoke, the founder of *Smart Kitchen Solutions* produces eco-friendly briquettes from organic waste. These briquettes provide a sustainable alternative to charcoal and firewood, reducing deforestation and providing a longer-burning, cleaner cooking solution. *Uganics* produces mosquito repellent soap, employs over 48 people and has led to an 88% reduction in malaria cases in 200 Ugandan households using the soap, motivated by the co-founder's painful experience with malaria. Finally, *Tusafishe* is addressing the lack of safe drinking water in Africa by producing bio-sand filters that provide clean water to over 300,000 users, mainly in schools and refugee camps, leading to a significant reduction in water-borne diseases (SINA, 2023c, 2024c).

As E. Niwamanya points out, social entrepreneurship is frequently undervalued and underestimated, despite its significant potential to address major societal challenges. He argues that history has demonstrated the necessity for new approaches that reflect current realities. Social entrepreneurship can play a valuable role in this regard. By continually finding new ways to make social entrepreneurship more impactful, it can become the core of sustainable development (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024).

Figure 10: Project Success and Community Impact
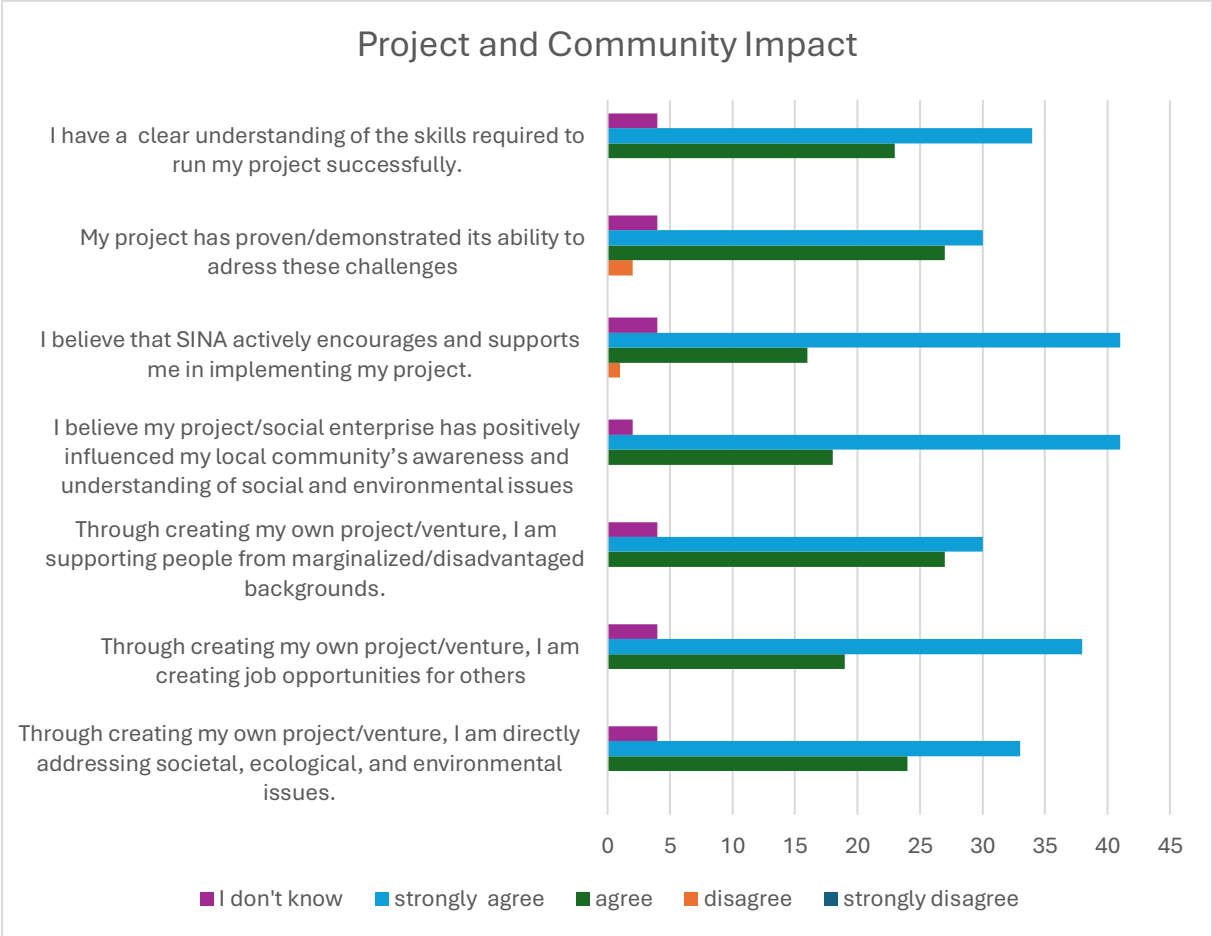
(Own Illustration)

Figure 10 shows that respondents have a clear understanding of the skills required to run their projects and validate its impact. This indicates that SINA's educational model and support successfully equips participants with the necessary skills to create social enterprises, while reinforcing the concept of local agency and self-reliance. When asked about the effectiveness and impact of the participants' projects, scholars noted that they positively influence community awareness of social and environmental issues, create job opportunities for marginalised groups, and address societal, ecological, and environmental issues. This supports the results from Figure 8 and 9 and highlights the effectiveness of locally-driven solutions that address the specific challenges faced by African communities. However, there is some disagreement, particularly regarding the success of projects in fully addressing challenges and creating impact. The inherent challenges of social entrepreneurship, will be further examined in Chapter 5.5.3. It may also identify areas where SINA could improve its support or where external factors are limiting the implementation and impact of social enterprises.

5.5.1 SINAs Ubuntu Approach

SINA's approach to social entrepreneurship aligns with the Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasises community collaboration and collective problem-solving.

> Social entrepreneurship is not foreign in Africa because with the Ubuntu culture, we believe in doing good for the betterment, not of yourself, but of your community. So initiatives like that have always been there at the smallest of scale, without name or title (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024).

This philosophy promotes love, care, respect and trust, and fosters collaboration and partnerships within the African business community. Entrepreneurs share resources, knowledge and market ideas, thereby fostering community transformation. These African Ubuntu values of reciprocity and inclusion contrast with the Western tendency towards more individualistic views of entrepreneurship (Du Toit, 2021, p. 17). The SINA model reflects the idea that many of the socio-economic problems facing African communities cannot be alleviated by money alone, but through collective action, Ubuntu and social entrepreneurship, which improve the collective well-being of a community (Balyejjusa et al., 2023, p. 126) (Du Toit, 2021, p. 12). "Encouraging a spirit of 'Ubuntu' and unleashing a spirit of social entrepreneurship focusing on Africa's youth is critical for future training and development" (Rippon & Moodley, 2012, p. 94). Therefore, SINA takes a more value- and purpose-driven, community-focused approach to social entrepreneurship, focusing first on individual growth and well-being to build the foundation for a larger community ecosystem that enables vulnerable and disadvantaged people to participate.

This can also be seen in Figure 11, where the high levels of agreement with statements such as "I feel connected to a larger community with a shared mission beyond my immediate SINA community" and "SINA makes me feel valued and recognised as a member of the community" indicate that SINA can foster a strong sense of belonging among its scholars. This underlines the importance of community well-being and collective agency, which are core principles of Ubuntu. Furthermore, the empowerment of participants to contribute to the well-being of their community demonstrates SINA's success in empowering individuals to become active agents of change. The positive responses in terms of increased awareness of larger political and social issues affecting the scholars' communities also reflect SINA's commitment to fostering critical consciousness and reflective thinking, in line with Freire's (2014) pedagogical approach.

Figure 11: SINA's Community Relation

(Own Illustration)
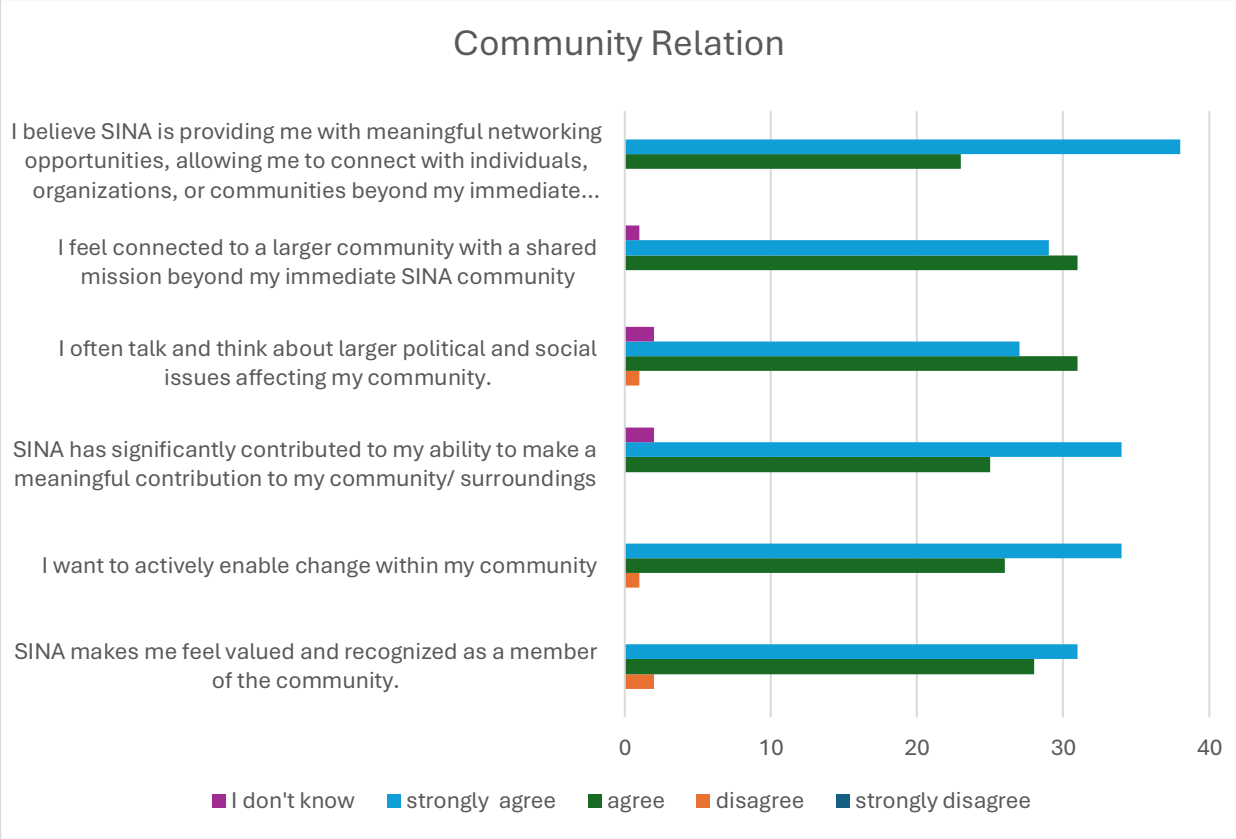
5.5.2 SINA and the Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

Few organisations in Uganda or East Africa focus specifically on social entrepreneurship, as most deal with general business development without an emphasis on social impact. In countries such as Uganda, social enterprises have more opportunities to address basic needs such as water, education and healthcare, allowing for trial and error in their approaches. Conversely, social enterprises in developed countries need to find specific, unaddressed niches.

While access to funding is helpful, it is not the most important challenge as social enterprises often start with minimal resources and grow gradually, focusing first on impact and then on income (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024). In the long run, the ultimate goal of a social enterprise in sub-Saharan Africa, as SINA co-founder Etienne suggests:

> Should also be to become obsolete, to not be needed anymore because it has solved the problem (…). So no uncontrolled growth, like cancer that will kill everything, but very specific growth that has a limit when the problem is solved (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024).

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This can be seen as a form of "green growth" that gradually moves towards "degrowth" because once the problem has been solved, the projects would no longer needed, even if this is often unrealistic to achieve (E. Niwamanya, E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024).

SINA aims to ensure that supported enterprises balance financial success with the well-being of workers and the environment, and prioritises environmentally and socially responsible practices. By emphasising self-sustainability, SINA encourages enterprises to become independent of external support. According to the interviewees, this holistic approach to entrepreneurship is unique in Uganda, combining profit with social and environmental responsibility.

5.5.3 Challenges for Social Businesses in the Ecosystem

Nevertheless, social enterprises in Africa and Uganda face significant challenges due to the lingering effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism. These historical influences have created a mindset among social entrepreneurs to seek funding and resources from the 'West', as local funding is more difficult to access. This reliance on external funding creates an unhealthy cycle of dependence on foreign sources, which often come with their own agendas (E. Niwamanya, personal communication, 2024). As a result, entrepreneurs often face challenges related to limited financial resources, access to capital and funding opportunities, especially from within their respective countries, and lack of participation in decision-making processes (Katzenstein & Chrispin, 2011, pp. 90–91). Decision-making in many development organisations remains centralised, with decisions made far from the local context. As E. Salborn noted, "decisions are made not by or for the people that are being affected, but in offices thousands of kilometres away, by people that don't understand the local context very well" (Personal Communication, 2024).

C. Kayma shares his experiences with other organizations, noting a tendency for projects to be designated for a limited time frame and then left to the responsibility of the individuals involved. At SINA, however, he observes that the knowledge and skills gained support Scholars in their future careers, whether in the employment sector or through the self-esteem and capability to act that they have gained.

> And then I've also witnessed some organization, organizations that also come up with half baked projects. For example, someone comes from the western world with the passion, the zeal to support and work on something, and then they team up with the indigenous people. And then in the end, so many things happen.

> They have seen embezzlement of funding. I have seen someone just withdraw from nowhere, even without a reason. And then, you know, everything goes amiss. And remember, if something is half baked, then you, you really haven't done anything. But when someone acquires a skill [such as with SINA], it is a lifetime and it will keep on sustaining (C. Kamya, personal communication, 2024).

In addition, western-owned companies often crowd out locally-owned or social enterprises, with foreign investment favouring these large, western-oriented companies. Locally produced products also face significant marketing challenges in Uganda. There is a strong consumer preference for foreign products, driven by prejudices that equate whiteness with superiority and the perception that Western goods are better (C. Kamya, personal communication, 2024).

> I think that has also brought in a challenge, and I can also connect it to the brainwashing, where at some point, people believe everything that is, that has a connection, for example, to whiteness is the best, and anything that has a connection to blackness is the worst (…). This narrative has a strong connection to colonialism (C. Kamya, personal communication, 2024).

Furthermore, high taxes on local companies further hinder their ability to compete with imported products, which are often sold at similar prices.

> People really want to consume what is not produced from within the country. I don't know, but I think it is because of the so many inequalities that come along sometimes because of the taxes here in Uganda or the taxes on the indigenous companies or enterprises, are so high, to the point that when someone exports, for example, from Germany, they'll be selling almost at the same price. So it is really a big challenge (C. Kamya, personal communication, 2024).

SINA aims to create a 'fertile soil' for grassroots initiatives without imposing or expecting unrealistic results from the outset, as it takes time for anything to grow and develop. For this reason, SINA's funding comes primarily from purpose-driven supporters rather than traditional development agencies. However, their first project with the German BMZ in 2024 has highlighted challenges such as bureaucratic inflexibility and the need for precise future projections. The rigid structure of traditional development aid makes it difficult for SINA to adapt plans to changing circumstances, particularly in politically unstable areas such as refugee camps. For example, while construction projects with clear requirements are suitable for traditional funding, community wellbeing initiatives such as SINA do not fit well with traditional development agencies. These organisations struggle to understand the SINA framework and model, making it difficult to identify appropriate improvements from a distance (E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024).

This difficulty is reinforced by the broader issue highlighted in the theoretical section, namely that in many cases, Official Development Assistance (ODA) rarely reaches the intended beneficiaries. This is particularly evident in contexts such as Uganda, where the post-colonial state often fails to act in the public interest, resulting in significant mismanagement of funds. In addition, measuring the impact of social enterprises and organisations in concrete numbers can be challenging because they often focus on the long-term outcomes and sustainability of their activities, such as community empowerment, education, poverty alleviation and job creation. In contrast, traditional development agencies often measure their success based on their immediate activities and short-term results, such as the number of children vaccinated (Katzenstein & Chrispin, 2011, p. 89).

SINA and other social enterprises face many challenges, as the economies of many so-called developing countries are still very much based on agriculture, and the aforementioned lack of education in the necessary skills for the labour market or effective entrepreneurship hinders their development. Many small and social enterprises operate informally to avoid the high cost of taxes and regulatory hurdles that stifle business development. In addition, barriers to entering the formal economy, such as corruption, bribery and a lack of support services for small businesses, further complicate the process (UNIDO, 2016, p. 8) (Katzenstein & Chrispin, 2011, p. 88).

Despite a trend towards more local ownership among development organisations, the centralised decision-making and bureaucratic rigidity of traditional development aid continue to hinder genuine local empowerment and effective interventions. SINA's approach, which emphasises grassroots initiatives and purpose-aligned funding, contrasts with these traditional methods and aims to achieve sustainable, long-term impact through localised solutions, participation and community ownership. This model demonstrates the importance of bottom-up approaches and empowers communities to develop and own solutions tailored to their specific needs, ultimately promoting independence and self-reliance, although there are still many obstacles and improvements to be made.

Social entrepreneurship can bridge and leverage these gaps and effectively channel foreign aid to address socio-economic needs, focusing on African values and grassroots processes (Katzenstein & Chrispin, 2011, p. 101). However, the global aid system remains outdated, with less than 1% of official development assistance reaching local civil society or community-based

organisations (OECD, 2024). Social entrepreneurs, on the other hand, can bring expertise, cultural understanding and financial sustainability to create locally-driven solutions and work with international organisations to tackle complex and intersecting problems. Their flexible, innovative and experimental approach can increase aid effectiveness while creating decolonial collaborations that allow for more (African) agency (Ashoka, 2023, p. 6).

6. Conclusion

6.1 Critical Evaluation of SINA

The Social Innovation Academy's (SINA) dedication to empowering marginalised communities through social entrepreneurship has resulted in enhanced agency and self-confidence among respondents, as well as a strong sense of belonging and connection to a larger community of changemakers, as highlighted in the survey results. However, there are areas where improvements could further strengthen SINA's valuable impact and sustainability.

While SINA focuses on "unlearning limiting belief systems" in its empowerment stages, it could further critically examine colonial history or neo-colonial dependencies. This would help to create a more Afrocentric value system to foster a stronger sense of identity and self-reliance, reducing the tendency to feel the need to seek external support and conform to Western ideals. Another challenge observed is that social enterprises emerging from SINA often struggle with sustainability and longevity. To address this, SINA could offer a 'fast-track' reassessment process. This would allow SINA Enterprises to return to one of the empowerment stages for a short, intensive bootcamp that could help them redefine their problems and develop new strategies to overcome them. But again, this is a question of money and limited resources. Finally, to ensure a better gender balance among the scholars, efforts should be made to address any barriers to gender equality, for example in the selection of the scholars within each community, and to integrate these considerations into the SINA framework. Nevertheless, SINA is constantly working to improve its framework and to evaluate and monitor its processes and impact (E. Niwamanya & E. Salborn, personal communication, 2024). As mentioned above, funding and recognition remain the biggest challenges for the scaling process of SINA. Therefore, fostering collaborative networks to encourage partnerships between social entrepreneurs, local communities, government agencies, and international organisations could provide crucial support in terms of funding, mentorship, and market access.

6.2 Discussion of the Research Outcomes

The research has shown that traditional development paradigms often limit the agency of individuals and communities. Community-based social entrepreneurship initiatives can fill that gap by offering a bottom-up approach that empowers individuals and communities to create their own solutions.

The analysis of the empirical findings from the interviews and surveys, combined with the discussion of the theoretical concepts drawn from the literature review, demonstrated that community-based organisations such as SINA, which adopt a horizontal organisational model (holacracy) to distribute authority, foster more equal relationships that enable their scholars to realise their full potential. By allowing each member to exercise freedom and take responsibility (freesponsibility) for their choices, a sense of ownership is fostered, empowering them to define their purpose in life. Such a bottom-up method of empowerment encourages young people to trust themselves and take control of their own emancipation without relying upon external support, in line with Sen's (1999) ideas of freedom. However, as illustrated in Chapter 3, the level of agency depends on the resources available. SINA instils this created agency by providing scholars with the opportunity to set up their own projects through knowledge and practical skills training.

SINA's empowerment framework enables scholars to change their mindsets by unlearning limiting beliefs and forming more critical opinions, thereby increasing their autonomy and ability to support themselves. This model allows for scholars to become both leaders and active participants in their own development. These decolonial approaches, particularly in the epistemological and educational fields as recommended by Mignolo, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Matthews, but also Freire, form the foundation for empowerment. As Ake and Sen argue, in order to create a democratic, participatory and more inclusive Africa, people must have the agency to decide on their own lives and on whether and how development should take place, so that they can free themselves from colonial continuities and limitations.

Additionally, Amin's references to delinking can be seen throughout SINA, where social enterprises and projects develop innovative community-driven solutions to local problems. They serve African or local markets with products and services such as malaria prevention soap, sustainable charcoal alternatives, and houses made from plastic bottles. These ventures prioritise community well-being and improvement over profit maximisation, embodying the

values of Ubuntu and the importance of collaboration. These aspects are also inherent in the overarching "community of communities" of the various SINAs, which enable continental cooperation at eye level and constant exchange, thus promoting local African development. The high adaptability of SINA's low-hierarchy, flexible framework across different (African) contexts and regions allows for low-barrier participation and self-interpretation in order to act as context-specific as possible.

In conclusion, SINA's approach aligns with the post-development school's call for a more autonomous and self-determined community development process that reflects the needs and priorities of the community. This, in turn, counters the criticism directed at post-development approaches, which tend to romanticise grassroots organisations and deny them the prospect for "economic development". SINA incorporates positive elements of postmodernity, such as technological innovation and entrepreneurship, into its framework without diminishing its commitment to local agency and cultural relevance.

This research has demonstrated the crucial role that community-based social entrepreneurship initiatives like SINA play in empowering marginalised groups. By integrating agency and local ownership, SINA's approach has significantly enhanced scholars' capacity to drive their own futures and contribute to a more equitable and humanitarian world. Initiatives such as SINA can therefore be seen as examples of an alternative development model, as proposed by post-development theorists, or as potential alternatives to traditional development models. As social entrepreneurship is designed to make long-term, local, socio-ecological contributions to the greater good, it does not necessarily align with or 'subordinate' itself to the Western capitalist system.

The SINA case study demonstrates the vital role that social entrepreneurs play in developing and implementing innovative solutions within their communities. Their proximity to these communities gives them unique expertise and connectivity, enabling them to develop effective solutions tailored to local contexts. The results of the survey show that the majority of social enterprises, such as those originating from SINA, are primarily focused on addressing immediate, community-related issues, including food sovereignty, employment, and poverty reduction. This validates that social enterprises are ideally positioned to meet the immediate and practical needs of local communities, making them well-suited to addressing these specific SDGs. In contrast, international agencies and institutions may be better placed to address SDGs

that require systemic interventions, such as peacebuilding, infrastructure development and environmental sustainability. These different focus areas imply a complementary relationship between local social enterprises and global organisations, where each can leverage their respective strengths to achieve the SDGs in a more co-created and inclusive manner.

Nevertheless, despite their efficacy in addressing local needs, social enterprises often face challenges in terms of resilience, resources and the financial support necessary to facilitate the scaling and replication of their solutions. It is therefore recommended that international organisations and NGOs collaborate with initiatives such as SINA, which support social entrepreneurs, in order to drive the international development sector towards more decentralised, localised and people-centred practices. This would facilitate the redirection of international funding to local organisations, with the objective of dismantling colonial structures and dependencies in aid and development practices. However, the realisation of sustainable and integrative development is reliant upon the politicisation of this area, both in terms of social policy and education, which could be enforced through collaboration between diverse actors and stakeholders.

6.3 The Way Forward: Building Bridges

1. Structural Change and Decentralized Empowerment

Hence, this thesis suggests, that sustainable and inclusive development in SSA necessitates a significant transformation towards structural changes that facilitate autonomy, decentralised organisational models and localised solutions. Embracing decentralised structures allows local communities and social entrepreneurs to take risks, be creative and co-create innovative solutions that are tailored to their unique contexts. This bottom-up approach is essential for effecting long-term, impactful change and fostering agency and self-sustainability.

2. Dialogue, Partnerships, and Strategic Alliances

Fostering dialogue and embracing diverse perspectives are crucial for creating partnerships that drive decolonial empowerment and systemic change. Collaboration between diverse initiatives—such as grassroots projects, CBOs, NGOs, social entrepreneurship ventures, and international organisations—can create powerful synergies. These partnerships should be based on equality and mutual respect, where all groups contribute to and benefit from shared goals. Governments have a important role to play in supporting and legitimising these collaborations,

ensuring that they align with national interests and contribute to broader social and economic development. This would facilitate greater visibility and recognition of social innovation and social entrepreneurship, as collective power is a key factor in challenging colonial narratives. To increase the collective impact of numerous small organisations and communities and to facilitate knowledge exchange, best practices and collaboration, the creation of an umbrella network for these different organisations and their social entrepreneurs as well as international Agencies could be beneficial.

3. Purpose-Aligned Funding and Direct Support for CBOs

One of the major barriers to inclusive and sustainable development intention is the misalignment of funding structures. As highlighted in the research, international organisations often fail to provide purpose-aligned funding that directly supports the needs of grassroots initiatives. To enhance the impact of CBOs, it is essential to shift funding structures so that resources are channelled directly to these local partners and organisations. This approach would allow local communities to have greater control over how funds are used, ensuring that the solutions developed are contextually relevant and effective. Avoiding intermediary organisations and working directly with localised CBOs, collectives, or cooperatives could significantly improve the effectiveness of international aid and development efforts. The results of the surveys and the post-survey discussions have revealed that a significant number of social entrepreneurs encounter difficulties in accessing local and international grants and funding. The creation of a low-barrier, comprehensive platform for the exchange of knowledge and resources, as well as an overview of many funding opportunities, would be a valuable addition to this process. Such a platform could also facilitate partnerships and exchanges between different social enterprises.

Limitation and Further Research

Despite the limitations of this thesis scope, further interdisciplinary participatory action research could greatly benefit both researchers and local initiatives. Extending the research to other communities and other similar social entrepreneurship initiatives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of different empowerment and social entrepreneurship programmes in sub-Saharan Africa and could help identify best practices. Further research into the long-term impact of SINA could provide additional insights into the sustainability, longevity and scalability of such initiatives. The findings of this thesis can also inform future research that compares SINA with other development projects to more closely analyse possible alternative approaches, exploring their social dynamics and opportunities for collaboration.

Similarly, exploring possible collaborations between international NGOs, foreign aid agencies and community-based organisations to break down Eurocentric power structures and inequalities remains a relevant area for further study.

Outlook

This thesis has examined the potential of social entrepreneurship as an effective approach to addressing socio-economic challenges in sub-Saharan Africa, with a particular focus on the work of the Social Innovation Academy (SINA). This work has demonstrated the transformative impact of community-driven initiatives by integrating post-development and decolonial theories with a practical case study. When social entrepreneurship is based on local contexts and guided by principles of agency and empowerment, it can act as a catalyst for sustainable and inclusive development. While initiatives like SINA may not provide a panacea for the complex socio-economic, ecological and political challenges we face, they demonstrate the importance of creating space for pilot projects and a gradual approach to development. The ability of small-scale initiatives to allow for trial and error means they can facilitate impactful and long-term transformations which, in turn, can contribute to larger systemic change.

To achieve this potential fully, a more collaborative approach on a larger scale is essential. It is imperative that governments, businesses and communities across the continent join efforts to establish inclusive development partnerships. As Antonio Guterres has emphasised, each of us has the potential to drive the systemic changes necessary for a more equitable and sustainable future. SINA demonstrates how local actions can have a significant impact on global challenges, in line with Guterres's vision of collective responsibility.

In reimagining development through the lens of local agency and empowerment, initiatives and models like SINA offer a promising path toward addressing some of the world's most pressing challenges. Placing social entrepreneurs and local changemakers at the core of the international development system is crucial to reshaping international development and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more inclusively. Strengthening their agency and capacity to influence global change is key to creating a world that works for all.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Interview Guide

Introduction and Background:

- What is your Role at SINA/ how did you join SINA?
- Can you provide an overview SINA, What is its mission and objectives?
- Can you walk me through the process of developing an Organization like SINA?
- How did you identify the needs or gaps that SINA addresses in the Ecosystem?

SINA Empowerment Model and Framework:

- How does SINA's model and empowerment program differ from other development projects and entrepreneurship initiatives?
- How does the Model of SINA differ from other organisations you have worked with?
- Can you summaries how SINA's Framework and Model work?
- What are your thoughts on the scalability of SINA, particularly regarding the replication of its model in different contexts?
- How do you think SINA can contribute to more Afrocentric development?
- In what way do you think SINA embodies a bottom-up approach, and how does it empower local communities?

Impact and Challenges:

- How does SINA ensure its empowerment strategies are effective and sustainable?
- What are in your opinion some outcomes/successes or impacts SINA has achieved or created so far?
- What are the main challenges SINA is currently facing?
- What aspects do you think are missing in SINA's approach, and how could they be addressed
- What limitations and hurdles does SINA encounter in its operations and expansion?
- What are the main challenges and limitations faced by social entrepreneurship initiatives/ projects in African countries?

- How do historical legacies, power dynamics, and colonial structures impact the work of social entrepreneurs and SE initiatives in Africa?
- How is Social Entrepreneurship perceived in African Countries and how has it changed over the last years?

8.2 Survey Questionnaire

PQ02

Welcome to this Survey about SINA's Impact

Thank you so much for participating in my survey for my Master's Thesis on Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship in East Africa, aimed at measuring the impact of the Social Innovation Academy (SINA) Communities.

Your responses will help SINA in better supporting you and justifying your needs. ALL information you provide me will be kept PRIVATE and confidential as this survey is ANONYMOUS, so the answers you give cannot be tracked back to you.

This is not an exam and there are no right or wrong answers. Additionally, none of your responses will disadvantage you or affect your participation in any way so please be as HONEST as possible.

Participation is voluntary, and you can skip questions or stop at any time. Feel free to ask any questions during the survey. The survey takes about 20-25 minutes, covering topics related to your personality, projects, ventures, and SINA experience. Your input is valuable and helps shape our understanding of SINA's impact.

Please note: There is no monetary reward for participation. However, your insights can indirectly support the SINA community by better articulating its impact.

Thank you for your contribution.

1. What is your gender identity?

- ⭕ Male
- ⭕ Female
- ⭕ Non-binary
- ⭕ Prefer not to say

2. What is your current age range?

- ⭕ 15-18
- ⭕ 19-23
- ⭕ 24-30
- ⭕ 31+

3. In which East African country were you born?

- ⭕ South Sudan
- ⭕ Sudan
- ⭕ DRC
- ⭕ Uganda
- ⭕ Rwanda
- ⭕ Tanzania
- ⭕ Other (please specify)

4. What is your highest level of education completed?

PQ03

○ Primary

○ Secondary

○ Higher education (vocational training)

○ University

Other (please specify)
○

_____

5. How would you describe your current employment status?

PQ04

○ Employed full-time

○ Employed part-time

○ Self-employed/Entrepreneur

○ Unemployed

○ Student

Other (please specify)
○

_____

6. Which SINA Community are you part of/ in which SINA Community do you live? `PQQ6`

When I refer to SINA I mean the SINA Community you are in

- ◯ Jangu International
- ◯ Lazima Nipate Academy
- ◯ SINA Loketa
- ◯ Youth Innovation Hub (YINNOH), Uganda
- ◯ Arise Youth Foundation,
- ◯ Njombe Innovation Academy (NIA), Tanzania
- ◯ Ubunifu Academy, Tanzania
- ◯ other (please specify)

　

7. In which SINA Stage are you: `PQ07`

- ◯ Applied
- ◯ Emerging
- ◯ Concentration
- ◯ Linking
- ◯ Mastery
- ◯ I am a member of the SINA Community (Coach, Mentor or else)

8. How long have you been actively involved with SINA?

○ Less than 6 months

○ 6 months to 1 year

○ 1-2 years

○ More than 2 years

9. When did you start your own project / venture?

○ within the last 3 months

○ within the last 6 months

○ within the last 9 months

○ within the last 12 months

○ more than 1 year ago

○ more than 2 years ago

○ more than 2+ years ago

○ I haven't started a project yet

10. Do you consider yourself to be from a marginalized or disadvantaged background?

PQ11

- ◯ yes
- ◯ no
- ◯ don't want to answer

11. Do you consider yourself a refugee?

PQ12

This is a sensitive question you don't have to answer but it is important to messaure which people SINA reaches

- ◯ yes
- ◯ no
- ◯ don't want to answer

12. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with SINA? (Experience, Sessions, Initiatives)

PQ10

Whenever I refer to SINA I mean the SINA Community you are in (Loketa, Jangu....)

- ◯ Not satisfied at all
- ◯ Slightly satisfied
- ◯ Moderately satisfied
- ◯ Very satisfied
- ◯ Extremely satisfied

13. Personal Growth

Please rate the following statements regarding your personal growth

	strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree	don't know
I tend to help others before I help myself	○	○	○	○	○
I often act in the interest of others (empathy, equity, justice)	○	○	○	○	○
SINA makes me feel like I have a voice and won't be left behind	○	○	○	○	○
SINA is supporting me in finding and defining my identity and life purpose.	○	○	○	○	○
Since joining SINA, I feel like my personal growth has improved a lot	○	○	○	○	○
I can get support when I need it at SINA (mentoring and coaching)	○	○	○	○	○
The mentorship and support system at SINA is effective and helps me	○	○	○	○	○

14. How would you rate the availability and effectiveness of mentors SM92 **and support systems within SINA during your time here?**

○ Extremely effective

○ Very effective

○ Moderately effective

○ Slightly effective

○ Not effective at all

○ don't know

15. Education/ Empowerment

SM03

Please rate the following statements regarding various forms of empowerment and life purpose

	strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree	don't know
SINA has supported my educational path	○	○	○	○	○
Since joining SINA, I feel like I have been empowered in a way that I know what I want to do with my life and how to do it.	○	○	○	○	○
SINA has offered me new perspectives for	○	○	○	○	○

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envisioning my
future which I
didn't have before

Through SINA, I
have the
opportunity to
explore my
passion, discover
my life purpose,
and translate/
transform it into a
project

Through SINA I
have learned and
understood better
the necessity for
social and
environmental
change

Since joining
SINA, topics like
sustainability,
climate change
and social
inclusion are now
more important to
me

SM04

16. Community /Agency

Please rate the following statements regarding your experiences within certain
communities

strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree	don't know

SINA makes me feel valued and recognized as a member of the community.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I want to actively enable change within my community	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
SINA has significantly contributed to my ability to make a meaningful contribution to my community/ surroundings	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I often talk and think about larger political and social issues affecting my community.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I feel connected to a larger community with a shared mission beyond my immediate SINA community	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I believe SINA is providing me with meaningful networking opportunities, allowing me to connect with individuals, organizations, or communities beyond my	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

immediate SINA
community

17. Challenges

SM05

Please rate the following statements regarding your challenges you have faced

	strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree	don't know
I feel that my challenges have persisted, and that no significant changes has occurred since joining SINA.	○	○	○	○	○
I believe now that I can face certain challenges on my own/ without help	○	○	○	○	○
SINA encourages me to turn my challenges into opportunities	○	○	○	○	○

18. Can you identify any specific challenges you have faced during your SM06
time at SINA? If yes, please briefly describe them. If not just answer
"no".

19. Which of the following SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) does your project cover?

SM07

choose up to three

☐ No poverty (SDG 1)

☐ Zero hunger (SDG 2)

☐ Good health and well-being (SDG 3)

☐ Quality education (SDG 4)

☐ Gender equality (SDG 5)

☐ Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6)

☐ Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7)

☐ Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8)

☐ Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9)

☐ Reduced inequalities (SDG 10)

☐ Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11)

☐ Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12)

☐ Climate action (SDG 13)

☐ Life below water (SDG 14)

☐ Life on land (SDG 15)

☐ Peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16)

☐ Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17)

☐ don't know

20. Project Impact

SM08

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Please rate the following statements regarding your own project/ social business and it's impact

	strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree	don't know
I believe that SINA actively encourages and supports me in implementing my project.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
During my time at SINA, I have gained a deep understanding of how my product/service can address social or environmental challenges.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My project has proven/demonstrated its ability to address these challenges.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I have identified a strong, viable business model to generate long-term income for my project	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I have a deep understanding of how I will sell my product/service to the target group.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
I have a clear	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

understanding of
the skills required
to run my project
successfully.

I can get support
when I need it at
SINA (mentoring
and coaching)

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

My team and I
have a shared
understanding of
commitment,
roles, and
responsibilities for
our project.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

21. Community Impact

SM09

Please rate the following statements regarding your project and it's impact on
your community

	strongly disagree	disagree	agree	strongly agree	don't know
Through creating my own project/venture, I am directly addressing societal, ecological, and environmental issues.	○	○	○	○	○
Through creating my own	○	○	○	○	○

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project/venture, I am creating job opportunities for others.					
Through creating my own project/venture, I am supporting people from marginalized/disadvantaged backgrounds.	○	○	○	○	○
I believe my project/social enterprise has positively influenced my local community's awareness and understanding of social and environmental issues	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend SINA to a friend (to participate within SINA)	○	○	○	○	○

22. Is there anything you want to add? If not just write no

SM10

23. Is there anything you would wish SINA to improve on?

SM11

24. How can SINA support and empower you better?

SM12

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

We would like to thank you very much for helping us.

Your answers were transmitted, you may close the browser window or tab now.