

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Organisational Capacity to Community Resilience: Social Enterprises and Non-Profits in Urban Johannesburg

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Abstract

Social enterprises and non-profit organisations are seen as beneficial for sustainable urban development in African mega-cities. How exactly they contribute to the communities they operate in by providing social services or by promoting participation and integration, is, however, not fully understood. Aiming for a better understanding, we conducted qualitative case studies of four different social enterprises/non-profit organisations active in Soweto, Johannesburg. Each case study comprises interviews with different stakeholders and internal and/or published documents. Analysis and interpretation were inspired by Grounded Theory methodology and undertaken first on case, then on a cross-case level. Our findings show the importance of organizational resilience as a precondition and enabler for community resilience. We highlight six themes of relevance for both organisational and community resilience, that shed light on the kind of contribution social enterprises and non-profit organisations can make to local community development. This study demonstrates its originality by addressing a gap in scholarly understanding of how social enterprises organizational resilience act as a precursor and enabler of community resilience thereby opening unexplored research avenues within the emerging domain of social entrepreneurship for resilience.

Keywords: South Africa; Community Resilience; Social Enterprises; Non-profit Organisations; Organisational Resilience

1. Introduction

Social enterprises (SEs) and non-profit organizations (NPOs) are increasingly recognized for their vital role in enhancing community resilience, particularly in socio-economically marginalized urban areas. These organizations contribute to community resilience in various ways, including providing essential social services, fostering community engagement, and promoting participation among residents.

Despite the recognized importance of SEs and NPOs in promoting community resilience, significant gaps remain in the scholarly understanding of the mechanisms through which these organizations operate. Existing literature often treats organizational resilience and community resilience as separate entities, failing to explore their interdependence. While studies have

documented various resilience strategies employed by SEs and NPOs, there is limited research on how these strategies collectively contribute to community resilience, particularly in the context of African megacities. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the specific organizational features that enable SEs and NPOs to foster community resilience, highlighting the importance of integrating these two concepts in resilience literature.

This research focuses on Johannesburg, South Africa, with a particular emphasis on the neighbourhoods of Soweto and Diepsloot. These areas have experienced rapid urbanization and significant socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, limited access to services, and pervasive inequality. The choice of Johannesburg is motivated by its status as a major urban centre in Africa, where the complexities of urban life present both challenges and opportunities for SEs and NPOs. As of 2021, Gauteng's population is approximately 15.8 million, with many residents living in townships and informal settlements. This dense population has led to significant socio-economic challenges, including limited access to services, education, and employment. In response to these challenges, various social entrepreneurs (SEs) have emerged, finding innovative ways to generate income while addressing social issues. Historically, SEs played a crucial role in resisting apartheid and have since contributed to community development, especially in the context of ongoing poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The South African government recognizes that it cannot tackle these issues alone and has encouraged active citizenship to help address these challenges (Baron et al., 2023). Understanding the dynamics within this context is essential for uncovering how SEs and NPOs contribute to community resilience.

The existing body of literature has identified various organizational resilience practices and strategies employed by social enterprises in times of uncertainty (Plaček et al., 2025; Cheruiyot & Venter, 2024; Fagbemi et al., 2024; Zhu, 2024; 2020; Singh et al., 2023; Hati & Indraswari, 2022, Harrison, & Kipkorir, 2022; Littlewood & Holdt, 2018) while other literature have focused on different strategies and practices employed by social enterprise in contributing to community resilience (Mogotsi & Baron, 2025; Stăiculescu, 2024; Aziz, & Zulkifle, 2022; Apostolopoulos et al., 2019; Morrison et al., 2017). This fragmentation, polar opposite and binary approach to resilience in social entrepreneurship research represents a missed opportunity and a glaring research gap of combining organizational and community resilience as reinforcing elements required in the social entrepreneurial resilience and community literature. In doing this, the study brings a holistic understanding important in guiding SEs/NPOs in selecting organizational resilience strategies that align with their compelling social mission of creating community resilience.

The manuscript is structured as follows: After this introduction, the literature review will explore the theoretical frameworks surrounding community and organizational resilience, highlighting existing research and identifying critical gaps. The methodology section will outline the qualitative case study approach employed in this research, detailing the data collection and analysis processes. The findings will present the key themes identified through the research, followed by a discussion that contextualizes these findings within the broader literature. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the study's contributions, implications for practice and policy, acknowledge limitations, and suggest directions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Community resilience, organizational resilience, and marginalized urban spaces*

Resilience in urban communities, particularly in socio-economically marginalized communities, has become increasingly critical amid intersecting crises of climate change, migration, and digital inequality. The City of Johannesburg, like other similar cities, portray other char-

acteristics influencing resilience, including colonial legacies, informal urban processes, large vulnerable populations, and informal work, and it prioritises land transformation over industrialisation (Parida & Agrawal, 2023). Understanding the significance of resilient communities in marginalised urban spaces calls for a conceptualisation and operationalization of the concept of resilience both at the community and organizational level.

According to Linnenluecke (2017), how the term resilience is conceptualised and operationalized differ(s) across studies. Building on Wildavsky's (1991, p.77) foundational concept of resilience as the capacity to "bounce back," while contemporary scholarship emphasizes the notions of adaptative and anticipative organization (Duchek, 2020). Building on these foundations, (Matarrita-Cascante & Trejos, 2013, p. 1390) advance our understanding by framing community resilience as "the capacity of a community to reorganize itself to steer away from disruption, chaos, and disorganization." This perspective proves particularly relevant in Johannesburg's townships, where historical spatial inequalities and contemporary urban pressures create unique vulnerabilities (Ziervogel et al., 2016). Organizational resilience, defined as an entity's capacity to anticipate, adapt to, and recover from disruptions while maintaining core functions (Linnenluecke, 2017; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011), proves particularly vital in these contexts. For SEs and NPOs, resilience is mission-driven, combining financial stability, participatory governance, and skills diffusion (Giderler & Vanclay, 2024; Littlewood & Holt, 2018; Matarrita-Cascante & Trejos, 2013) to sustain operations. This organizational resilience directly enables community resilience by maintaining critical services during crises, fostering economic stability through employment, strengthening trust-based networks, localized innovation in resource utilization, and maintaining strong ties with the community they serve (Cheruiyot & Venter, 2024; Chilufya et al., 2023; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Berkes & Ross, 2013). As vital intermediaries, resilient SEs/NPOs thus translate institutional adaptability into community-level recovery, embodying what is termed "vital communities", (Scott, 2010; Dale et al., 2010), those capable of withstanding shocks while maintaining stable living conditions (Nguyen & Akerkar, 2020). Evaluating the resilience of megacities and identifying influencing factors is crucial for enhancing their adaptive capacities in the face of various challenges, including economic shifts and environmental pressures (Wang et al., 2023). Studies show that communities that are resilient to external challenges, innovative, and adaptive are recognized as vital communities (Scott, 2010; Dale et al., 2010; Samanta et al., 2025). This is because community resilience provides preparedness against hazards, protection against risks, and the ability to recover to stable living conditions (Nguyen & Akerkar, 2020).

2.2 The role of SEs and NPOs in building community resilience

SEs and NPOs are increasingly recognized for their roles in enhancing resilience, particularly in underserved and fragile communities (UNDP, 2018; Seelos et al., 2010). As hybrid entities that blend social missions with business strategies, social enterprises fill critical gaps in product and service delivery, enhancing resilience through innovation, economic inclusion, and strengthened community identity (Nyssens & Petrella, 2015; Santos, 2012). Their intermediary function connects marginalized groups with formal institutions, such as governments, investors, and corporations, facilitating access to resources, amplifying local voices, and enhancing territorial connectivity (Olmedo et al., 2019; Jenner, 2016).

By employing models such as direct employment, market intermediation, and capacity building, social enterprises foster economic stability and reduce disparities, as seen in Zambia, where they have improved employability, health, and food security (Chilufya et al., 2023). Financial diversification strategies enable sustained impact (Alabi, 2014). While traditional resilience literature emphasizes resource stockpiling (Aldrich, 2012), SEs/NPOs demonstrate innovative approaches, blending grants with earned income (Jenner, 2016), developing comple-

mentary service lines (Rahman, 2014), and cultivating cross-sector partnerships (Xing et al., 2018). Skills development emerges as another key resilience pathway. SEs/NPOs address capability gaps through peer-to-peer training models that create multiplier effects in communities (Matarrita-Cascante & Trejos, 2013). As demonstrated by (Bvuma & Marnewick, 2020), these programs not only improve employability but also foster social cohesion by creating networks of mutual support, which (Prasad et al., 2015) term as knowledge-based social capital.

A key strength of SEs and NPOs lies in their deep community embeddedness, which enables them to tailor solutions to local needs while fostering trust and cooperative networks essential for adaptive resilience (Hazenberg et al., 2016; Seelos et al., 2011). Their emphasis on community engagement and co-creation ensures long-term viability through community-centric practices (Cheruiyot & Venter, 2024), while their localized engagement allows them to act as cultural translators, aligning interventions with community values and priorities (Mair et al., 2012). Their proximity to grassroots realities also facilitates rapid adaptation to shocks, reinforcing social capital and collective problem-solving capacities (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). This localized approach allows them to translate top-down policies into practical, community-centred strategies, ensuring responsiveness to systemic vulnerabilities (TechnoServe et al., 2023).

Beyond immediate economic benefits, they drive systemic change by promoting sustainable production and consumption, influencing regulatory landscapes, and enhancing citizen participation in governance (Pestoff & Hulgård, 2016; Battilana & Lee, 2014). Their legitimacy is further reinforced through inclusive stakeholder engagement, ensuring that community needs remain central to their operations (Giderler & Vanclay, 2024). Ultimately, SEs and NPOs empower marginalized communities by integrating social equity, environmental stewardship, and economic stability into their models. By combining entrepreneurial innovation with grassroots connectivity, they create resilient ecosystems that adapt to evolving challenges while sustaining long-term development (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). Understanding these dimensions in marginalised urban communities of Johannesburg can provide valuable insights into how these organisations can be supported and scaled to enhance their impact, ultimately leading to stronger, more resilient communities.

2.3 Theoretical Gaps in literature

The literature review reveals critical theoretical gaps in the SE and NPO literature, particularly regarding their role in fostering community resilience. While prior research has examined organizational resilience and community resilience separately, this study demonstrates their interdependence, a linkage previously underexplored (Littlewood & Holt, 2017; Mogotsi & Baron, 2025). Furthermore, critical theoretical gaps remain in understanding the mechanisms through which these organizations operate in marginalized urban contexts. Much of the research has focused on either institutional linkages or grassroots embeddedness but rarely integrates both perspectives into a cohesive framework (TechnoServe et al., 2023; Hazenberg et al., 2016). Additionally, while studies acknowledge SEs and NPOs as resilience builders, few examine how their social missions, operational models, and community ties collectively shape resilience outcomes in high-density, resource-scarce environments like Johannesburg's townships. Understanding these dimensions in marginalised urban communities of Johannesburg can provide valuable insights into how these organisations can be supported and scaled to enhance their impact, ultimately leading to stronger, more resilient communities.

3. Methodology

This study follows a qualitative approach grounded theory in the constructivist paradigm, which allows for the exploration of multiple realities shaped by social interactions (Thietart, 2001, p.

24). The research design aimed to provide first-hand insights into how social enterprises (SEs) and non-profit organizations (NPOs) contribute to community resilience in African megacities.

Our research design aimed at a fundamental understanding of the most salient constructions by different stakeholders for each organisation as to how it achieves organisational resilience, which will be shown to be a prerequisite of contributions to community resilience, or even directly related to community resilience. As community resilience might or might not result from local embeddedness, the research sampling purposely included both, organizations founded from within the community and others, which were not, but even hailed from a different cultural background. Grounded Theory

A grounded theory approach was employed to guide the research process. Grounded theory is a systematic methodology that involves generating theory from data systematically gathered and analyzed (Glaser, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). In this study, grounded theory facilitated the comparison of empirical indicators from collected data, both from interviews and documents. The analysis began with open coding, followed by axial coding to identify relationships between categories, and finally, selective coding to develop a coherent narrative that explains how organizational resilience contributes to community resilience. This methodology aligns with the study's aim to uncover the mechanisms through which SEs and NPOs operate within their communities.

3.1

Sampling The sampling procedure employed in this study was purposive, focusing on specific criteria that align with the research objectives. Purposive sampling, also known as non-probability sampling, is particularly effective in qualitative research where the goal is to gain in-depth understanding rather than generalizability to a larger population (Patton, 2002). The study specifically targeted mature social enterprises (SEs) and non-profit organizations (NPOs) that have been operational for more than five years. Organizations that have been established for a longer duration are likely to have developed robust operational frameworks and resilience strategies. This stability enables them to provide richer insights into their contributions to community resilience.

Our research consisted of a qualitative case study approach in organisational research, forming an in-depth analysis of four mature SEs/NPOs operating in deficient ecosystems. They were purposefully chosen because they had been in existence for more than five years (founded 1998 (SoS and HR), 2012 (SG), 2016 (PiF) respectively) as well as on account of coming from different sectors and operating through diverse business models, thus one each being active in labour market integration in gardening and parks maintenance, labour market integration in the textile industry, social counselling and awareness building, and provision of good quality, affordable healthcare. These four cases also differed in legal form and size. Including organizations from various sectors allowed for a more holistic understanding of how different types of SEs and NPOs contribute to community resilience. Each sector employs unique strategies and face distinct challenges, enriching the overall analysis. By examining different models and approaches, the study was able to identify common themes and variations in how organizations operate, providing a nuanced perspective on the role of SEs and NPOs in fostering resilience.

The selection of case organizations located in Johannesburg, particularly in neighbourhoods like Soweto and Diepsloot, was intentional and context-specific. Johannesburg is a major urban centre in Africa characterized by significant socio-economic challenges. Focusing on organizations within this context allows for an exploration of resilience strategies that are particularly relevant to urban environments facing rapid change and inequality. Additionally, Soweto, as a historically significant area, provides a rich backdrop for understanding the socio-

political dynamics that influence community resilience. The organizations operating here are deeply embedded in the local community, enhancing the relevance of their insights. For each organization, interviews were conducted with the CEO first. This then indicated the next stakeholder to be interviewed and so on, in an iterative manner, until saturation was reached. In the end, narrative interviews were conducted with the CEO, founder(s), manager(s), Board member(s), employee(s), volunteer(s) and community member(s) of each organization plus selected external stakeholders which each organization identified to have been most critical for organizational resilience.

3.2 Data Collection

All in all, 22 interviews were conducted and each interview ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. The research data was obtained within a multifaceted network of interconnected relationships and “we construct(ed) research processes and products, but these constructions occur(ed) under pre-existing conditions, arose in emergent situations, and were influenced by the researcher’s perspectives, privileges, positions, interactions and geographical locations” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 240).

In this study, the data was collected through narrative/open interviews initiated with a prompt common to all interviews and agreed upon by the research team before two pre-test interviews were conducted. The researchers only asked few immanent questions during the narration and a limited number of exmanent questions after the natural flow of narration had ended. Before, during and after each interview, the research team engaged in observation within the organisation. Before and after each interview, the research team individually memo’d their thoughts and experiences. The interviews and memos were then transcribed and corrected. Secondary documents were obtained from the organisations and from public sources. The researchers explained the research process to the participants and ensured that consent was gained before the data collection process. The organisational names were pseudonymized, and those of the interviewees’ data anonymised by means of roles (CEO, founder, manager, board member, employee, volunteer, community member) to protect the confidentiality of the individuals and organisations studied. If more than one person of a stakeholder group gave answers these were numbered. As in three of the four organisations the staff interviewed also represented community members, there is an overlap of roles here.

3.3 Data Analysis

The interview material obtained was analysed ethnographically. Atlas.ti was used to code the data coming up with themes through reading the collected data. This was augmented by document analysis and participatory observation. Secondary data analysis involved an examination of both data from the organisations as well as from government agencies and public third-party data (for a methodological reasoning, see Mazhar et al., 2021 and Harvey, 2015). Finally, an element of action research was also introduced. Action research holds that complex social phenomena are comprehended best when interventions into said phenomena are made and observed (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006). This validates the study findings, as a form of member checking (Harvey, 2015), and also connects research and practice (Baum et al., 2006).

4. Findings

The study explores the role of social enterprises and non-profit organisations in contributing to the community resilience. Through a reflexive sense making process (Littlewood & Holt, 2015) the current study identified six overarching themes that have shown to be of high relevance in all cases, with particular focus on cross case analysis that includes identifying commonalities

and differences between the cases and then gradually sharpened to organisational resilience, on the one hand, and the organisations contribution to community resilience on the other hand. Meaning the research demonstrates a direct link between organizational resilience and community resilience.

Findings are structured according to emergent overarching themes which shed light on the kind of contribution social enterprises and non-profit organisations can make to local community resilience.

4.1 Social ties and embeddedness within the community

The research findings indicate strong social ties and community embeddedness, meaning, a total immersion and focusing in the community where they are operating. Indeed, unlike traditional commercial businesses, social enterprises are embedded in local communities as they endeavour to address societal challenges by serving their own communities (Seelos et al., 2011). This can be witnessed through SoS, SG, and PiF distribution of their services, sourcing of skills and collaboration partners within the community. This is in line with literature that social connections and relationships are built based on physical proximity to each other (Bradshaw, 2008; Maré & Poland, 2005; Schultz, 2014).

The other form of community displayed in the research is strong social ties or community of interest, which refers to people who share the same interests, experience or identity. SoS focuses on females who have experienced or are experiencing GBV, an experience shared by staff and volunteers either personally or through friends and family. Similarly, PiF is an organisation run primarily by women and focuses on single mothers, aiming to enable better parenting and community life through female empowerment both economically and psychologically.

“...if we can help these women to become better parents, better mothers, then we’ve done a good job...we’ve helped rebuild a family then, but also a community” (Founder, L 41-43).

Through their work they have formed a cohesive group based on their common interest or experience (Bradshaw, 2008) which is a clear demonstration that the sense of identity and belonging has been leveraged as a positive force for good within the community (Charness & Chen, 2020).

In an attempt to have a deeper understanding of the different forms and shape, the strong social ties and community embeddedness takes, the research shows this through important factors that directly link organizational, and community resilience.

4.1.1 Community-centred social conscience

Research findings revealed that these organizations are community-centred and driven by social conscience of primarily wanting to have a positive impact within their communities. For example, SoS is truly focused on eradication of all forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and promoting empowerment and respect for women, while also encouraging their participation in the community.

“To help in the eradication of gender related social ills through the creation of an enabling environment to improve the quality of lives of all Soweto residents” Facebook post, 2020.

This is in line with social identity theory which suggests that the inherent value humans place on social group memberships which influences their intergroup behaviour and intergroup communication, and their desire to view their specific social groups in a positive light (Harwood, 2020). Community-centred social conscience has led to growing legitimacy and the buy-in within the community, which in turn they see as important pre-conditions for

organisational flexibility and resilience, especially where it enables non-monetary reciprocity (e.g. for borrowing money and sharing tools in the case of SG, ability to engage volunteers in the case of SoS) and but also in terms of community resilience. This has been argued by Spanuth and Urbano (2023) that the reason social enterprises pursue legitimacy is mainly to acquire tangible (financial and material) and intangible (community support and trust) resources to help overcome institutional challenges and gain organizational resilience and in turn to create social impact and resilience.

4.1.2 *Employment creation*

The organisations in this research recruit from the communities they operate in. For example, the mission statements of PiF and SG are centrally related to employment creation, and evidence does show that they have created a significant amount of employment for the communities around them.

“To run a Successful and Economically active Co-operative that is sustainable and create jobs for the communities” (Company Statutes 1).

Organisations create secondary employment effects as well by giving skills training to community members beyond their staff, encouraging staff to pass on their knowledge outside the organisation and giving their staff a choice whether they want to be employed by the organisation or become self-employed (PiF).

4.1.3 *Relationship building and trust*

The organisations interrelate in the community through building various relationships with other local residents and community agents. Apart from engaging with client communities all four cases also engage with community leaders like political ward counsellors who are elected representatives of the communities, indunas, and other community-based organisations such as the taxi association.

“We had to start making relations with what they call them indunas, chiefs, the hospitals... we had to also get their buy in, which was not easy” (11, L 452-453).

Client communities have also been engaged in meetings and trainings so that they get to understand the mission of the organisations. For example, in the case of SoS, the communities were also engaged on co-opting men into issues related to GBV.

“We also work and help men who were abusers to reconcile with the community and also help victims through counselling. ‘Men in our society have lost their identity and only men can regain it by showing action,’ (Newspaper article 3, 2017).

PiF has continuous informal meetings with (former) staff from communities, and school employees as well as a local councillor to exchange information on client’s employment and the community’s product needs. In general, these relationship building activities are seen by interviewees to have resulted in improved transparency, credibility and trust.

“Because we have been doing it for a long time, most people know us, it means we are becoming more and more known by the community” (14, L 68-70). “...We ensure we establish a relationship and trust with the victim. We take it upon ourselves to keep their information confidential because they trust us (Newspaper article 1, 2022).”

This is in line with Seelos et al. (2010) argument that community embeddedness allows SEs to build social networks that are trustworthy and mutually beneficial between the organisation and the community. The development of strong networks and relationships facilitates the development of both organisational and community resilience (Littlewood & Holt, 2017).

4.1.4 *Involvement of the community in governance issues*

To involve community members in one way or the other formally in the organisation's governance is an even more advanced step in the direction of community embeddedness. Three cases in our research have at least one or several board members who hail from the community. For SG, which is a cooperative, the board members are actually equal in number to the founding members, with three of them being kin, while the other two also stem from the community. For SoS all the board members are also community members, while HR in addition to one space on the Board for a community member has also installed a Community Advisory Board.

"We have social workers in the board. We have an IT specialist, we have a finance person. And we have community workers activists in our board" (I1, L 129-130)

This has helped the organisations in their plans to diversify, as they better understand the needs and expectations of the community they operate in. According to the literature, community embeddedness refers to the integration of social enterprises and non-profit organisations in the communities within which they operate. Such embeddedness allows them to effectively achieve their social missions (Corrêa et al., 2022; Seelos et al., 2010). Through community embeddedness, social entrepreneurs get a competitive advantage as community integration allows them to align with the specific needs of the communities (Jack & Anderson, 2002). This demonstrates that indeed, organizational resilience can be a source of competitiveness (Lee et al., 2013). Therefore, an organisation that is embedded in the community shapes its mechanisms and policies in a way that effectively resolves community challenges through enhanced cooperation thereby contributing to organisational and community resilience (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020; Kummitha, 2017; Richter, 2019).

4.2 *Empowerment and Skills Training*

The case analysis unveils a broad range of common topics which were raised unanimously by all interview perspectives and are grouped into one dimension of "Empowerment and skills training". Empowerment is understood as the growth of personal competencies while for the purpose of this analysis, skills are taken to mean functional capabilities. Both terms are seen to also include new knowledge. The following section looks at these facets in regard to the specific contribution to community resilience which SEs and NPOs efforts towards empowerment and skills training might have.

An emphasis on skills training is obvious in all four cases. This is not so surprising in Soweto as part of the township environment, where unemployment is high and lack of educational facilities with possibilities to acquire skills very scarce (Bvuma & Marnewick, 2020; Myres et al., 2022). What is remarkable however, is that all four organisations give clients full freedom to use their newly won skills and personal competencies, not only by encouraging them to apply these to their work within the organisation, but also in order to seek employment elsewhere; start their own enterprises most relevant in terms of contribution to community resilience, in the community.

"I'm forever grateful to mum (founder) and to Pay it Forward for the skills they gave to me, I was able to get a proper job...and I still work for Pay it Forward also, sewing in the evenings and on weekends" (Trainee 2, L 20-22).

From the interviews with volunteers, trainees and staff it becomes apparent that the (on-job-) training results in various forms of personal empowerment, with the growth of self-confidence being mentioned by virtually all.

“It gave me the confidence, you know, to know I could do something for my family, I could make money and look after them” (Trainee 1, L 18-19).

Board members and CEOs of all organisations underline that apart from creating household earnings this is their key contribution to community development. Interviewees from three of the organisations witness across the spectrum of their perspectives that staff is prepared to pass on competences and skills sets to wider circles in the community and to less experienced clients. For instance in the case of PiF the structure of the organisation is such that experienced trainees become future trainers, and that stronger sewers are paired with weaker ones as part of Pay it Forward’s capacity-building approach. This also demonstrates the spirit of Pay it Forward in that the camaraderie developed can be seen within the message of:

“Each one, teach one” (Trainee 2, L 10) or “each one, help one” (Trainee 1, L 14).

Indeed, PiF and SG elaborate on their structured efforts in ‘peer-to-peer on-the-job training’ where employees are made to assist clients in their personal empowerment and the recognition they get by the community as empowerment agents for their clients. Indeed, personal empowerment is an important contributor to personal resilience and to thrive in the face of adversity (O’ Leary & Ickovics, 1995), similarly community empowerment is indeed a contributor to community resilience.

Skills training and empowerment of staff and clients has been found to associate significantly with organisational resilience (Ateke & Nwulu, 2018) and in turn has a multiplier effect in community resilience. Furthermore, personal empowerment increases personal resilience. Personal empowerment and personal resilience are seen as an important contributor to community resilience where community resilience is seen “as the capacity of a community to reorganize itself to steer away from disruption, chaos, and disorganization” (Matarrita-Cascante & Trejos, 2013, p. 1390).

4.2.1 Mission and Organisational Trajectory

Across all of the four cases, the evidence indicates a very strong, clear, and compelling social mission. The social mission was the determining factor for starting, with the mission originating from the community. For example, SoS, mission originated from the surrounding community, as the organisation was initiated by nurses who were noticing a need within the community for more broader GBV services, as opposed to only physical healthcare.

“The objective of the organisation is to create a society free from all forms of GBV” (Newspaper article 1, 2022).

Indeed, with SoS, the community continues to play a role in determining the organisational trajectory and the community were directly involved in transforming the organisation from a focus purely on women and children, so-called victims of GBV, to include men, the so-called perpetrators of such. While PiF’s social mission is derived from the guiding philosophy of ‘paying it forward’ as well as the dictum ‘each one teaching one’ has steered the organisation since its initiation. Similarly, HR’s social mission originates from the healthcare worker community and linked to social transformation and a desire to change the health system as a whole from initiation. The social mission is therefore, transmitted into organisational procedural means

and this enables the organisations to ensure their social mission and societal impact are aligned. Indeed, all four cases have demonstrated passion and commitment to societal change through each organisation's respective social mission. Therefore, unwavering commitment to societal change becomes the driving force that keeps an organisation focused, inspired, and committed to the social mission (Littlewood & Holt, 2017).

All four cases had managed to survive for between seven and twenty-five years, and all interviewees from each of the organisations unanimously maintained that it was their social mission and purpose orientation that allowed them to survive many crises to keep delivering to their beneficiaries. Linnenluecke (2017) conducted a review of resilience research within the business and management areas and found the following five central areas: (1) resilience as an organisational response to an external threat; (2) resilience as organisational reliability; (3) resilience through staff strengths; (4) resilience as business model adaptability; and (5) resilience through design by decreasing supply chain weaknesses and interruptions (Linnenluecke, 2017; Littlewood & Holt, 2017). The cases studied demonstrated organisational resilience in relation to all five areas, such as all the cases developing resilience in relation to the external threat of COVID-19; and all demonstrating resilience through community reliability; SoS and HR developing resilience through building staff strengths; PiF and HR building resilience through being able to adapt their business models; and SG and PiF building resilience through design. Finding meaning through shared values and a common belief in the mission, together with an ability to combine passion and mission with realism, therefore, proved to be key factors in driving both organisational and community resilience (Littlewood & Holt, 2017). Indeed, a shared understanding and a strong sense of social mission is a tie that binds the community and helps organisations meet new challenges and transform their organisations (EY Beacon Institute, 2016).

4.3 Diversification

There are ample indications of the importance many interviewees give to diversification in terms of the financial stability and sustainability of the organisation, thus for organisational resilience. Especially product diversification was mentioned in all cases. This kind of diversification refers to broadening the variety of products or services, in order to reach different customers as well as clients, leading to increased revenue. Research findings further indicates that product or service diversification can also be as a reaction to crises in the ecosystem, such as during COVID induced lock downs. For example, PiF had to find means to produce outdoors and in a case of SoS where they had to find new sources of finance when the Department did not pay salaries. Furthermore, in all four cases the diversification in product/service provision is closely linked to the overarching social mission of creating positive impact within a community. PiF product and service diversification was more driven by the wish to widely serve its constituents, meaning give work to more mothers. Thus, all the product diversification efforts made can well be seen as contributing to community resilience (Jha et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2023) as much as it does contribute to organisational resilience (Littlewood & Holt, 2017).

Since organisational resilience is a prerequisite for contributions to community resilience, a closer look at the motivations involved for product or service diversification is as a result of reaction to changing environment and demand and to ensure the organization is insulated to this changing environment and remain resilient as organizations. Three cases shows that organisations product diversification seems to have been driven by the need to improve cash flow and changing perceptions of local demand. Similarly, SG diversification is driven from the reduction of risks particularly in liquidity, volumes, and finances. The risk of relying on one single product for revenue generation seems to be high in its business model, where there is one dominant customer for the core product – horticultural and landscaping services. To

include carpentry and tiling might serve as compensation for underperforming products (Jha et al., 2021), here the lack of volume of horticultural and landscaping work despite a “container”-contract with the Department. The same can be said for SoS, which diversified into educational, training and awareness-building services for customers other than the Department of Social Development in order to reduce financial risks.

Without wanting to ignore that SoS has also grown in size, HR and PiF are interesting cases showing particular propensity to expand their markets, another driving force behind diversification well recognised by literature (e.g. Tasavori et al., 2019). Another type of diversification seems to play a big role in three of the organisations, namely conscious efforts to attract additional revenue from donations, subsidies or winning competitions. This is a diversification of funding modes and sources unrelated to sales. Through diversifying such revenue streams, SoS, PiF and SG managed to overcome challenges of donor dependency and varying sales volumes. These funds being used for training in the case of PiF or diversification of services and the accomplishment of the transformative mission in the case of SoS. Scholars have reiterated, that having multiple sources of funds like government contracts and corporate tenders enable a business to avoid dependence on single revenue sources, thereby steadying their financial position (Cornforth, 2014; Frumkin & Keating, 2011; Yan et al., 2023). Diversification is likely to have contributed to organisational resilience and growth in both these cases while simultaneously contributing to community resilience and sustainability. Indeed, SEs and orNPOs organizational resilience has a direct impact in the speed and success with which community revival and resilience happens (McManus et al., 2008), since the primary purpose of organizational resilience in SE/NPO sector is community resilience (Dalziell & McManus 2004).

4.4 Collaboration

Research findings indicate collaboration as a key factor both in developing organisational resilience as a stand-alone and in developing community resilience, and the interaction between the two types of resilience. In this research collaboration is understood as working together with partners outside the immediate geographical or community of interest, to co-create a new reality, and the cooperation between and relationships developed with governments, private sector donors, sponsors or project partners outside the immediate community.

Some of the cases co-create and collaborate more closely with clients and communities, as seen within their community embeddedness section above, whereas others collaborate more closely with other stakeholders. All four cases demonstrated a working relationship with local, provincial and national government, which resulted in co-creation, such as SoS relying on the provincial Department of Social Development to provide social worker salaries and viewing this relationship with government as both a source of organisational and community resilience. HR, which works closely with in local government facilities, capacitates local government staff and then hands services back to local government, as well as in joint responsive programme to crises, such as COVID-19. Similarly, PiF, enters the community via local schools and recruit clients and beneficiaries through the schools, which provide spaces for working, and access to markets, such as through the manufacture and sale of school uniforms. Indeed, collaboration is the means through which citizens, government agencies, organisations, and businesses make official commitments, typically through contractual arrangements, to work collaboratively together (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). “Local collaborative actions that bring together residents, government agencies and other stakeholders to design and implement interventions hold potential to raise community resilience through several channels” (Jensen & Ong, 2020, p. 1). These include expanding the community’s understanding of the issue/s at hand so that they can individually make better decisions; aiding in the improvement of a common perception of a multifaceted

and uncertain community difficulty; resulting in opportunities for community members to produce social capital, which assists communities in fighting shocks, recovering from disasters, and developing community resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Jensen & Ong, 2020). While it also helps non-profit organizations with stability, resources, expertise, and compassion to overcome organizational challenges and remain a resilient organization (Waerder et al., 2022).

4.5 Lack of Reserves

The other important characteristic and feature that transpired as being common amongst the cases is the clear lack of surplus or unattached funds which can be held in reserves. This is in line with a study by Saungweme (2014) that has found local NPOs in Zimbabwe are not financially sustainable and had no reserve funds as they are more depended on external donor fund. The other challenge faced by these organizations is unlike their entrepreneurial counterpart they lack access to financial markets or formal financing institutions for loans and this produces a shortage of liquidity.

Findings further reveal that the lack of unattached funds and reserves has hindered the organisations from fulfilling their organisational purpose to the full and also from better contributing to community resilience in several ways. For example, lack of unattached funding is held responsible for employing on product delivered basis, offering short term contract and paying low wages which lead to competition with other employers who are on the lookout for skilled personnel. Furthermore, this challenge has led to a high turnover rate among employees, resulting in challenges of skills shortage within the organisation and the perpetual aspirations for continuous development of skills sets required to remain societally competitive. The data also shows that the lack of reserves decreases the organisation's ability to accept bigger orders (SoS, SG) or lance product innovations (PiF) that would enlarge their potential to upskill and employ more people. According to Booth et al. (2014), building of reserves is a necessary condition for the financial sustainability of SEs and NPOs to hedge uncertainty, protect and deliver on the mission.

In order to overcome this challenge and improving their organizational resilience capability, which is "the ability to effectively absorb, develop situation-specific responses to, and ultimately engage in transformative activities to capitalize on disruptive surprises that potentially threaten organization survival" (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011, p. 244). Findings suggests that some of this organizations seem to be successful in diversifying sources of grants revenue and donor funding, thus achieving better levels of financial resilience. For example, PiF is able to use such unattached funding to support the clients cum workers through subsidising equipment that they could not have afforded otherwise. In the other case, the organisation is able to pay compensation to and absorb volunteers, sometimes even employing them on limited contracts as staff members (SoS). This has contributed not only to organisational resilience but has resulted in customers and staff as well as the community perceiving them as reliable employers, service providers, and/or suppliers over time. These surplus funds have also been used to be competitive in the job market by being able to compete with for-profit companies in attracting qualified and skilled personnel including board members, which leads to further professionalisation in the social sector organisation. What these organisations have managed to achieve as a result of having financial reserves is in line with literature, which indicates that financial reserves within SEs/NPOs are a significant indicator of organisational purpose and effectiveness (Booth et al., 2014) thus organizational resilience. In order to achieve this, it all depends on the capability to attract ongoing financial reserves that play a role in building financial sustainability for SEs/NPOs (Weerawardena et al., 2010; Besel et al., 2011; Bingham & Walters, 2013), which, by their nature, are unable to access capital markets (Feenstra & van Helden, 2003).

4.6 Lack of measurement of social impact

The research findings suggest that there is still a struggle among organizations to measure societal impact. For example, SoS also shows recognition of a lack of social impact measurement tools, and in particular the difficulty the organisation has in measuring impact of its programmes. Here the need was expressed to have skilled personnel such as researchers to help the organisation devise an impact assessment system in order to ensure programmes are indeed geared towards getting the intended impact. For HR impact monitoring is pursued, and target milestones are evaluated in order to keep strategic track of the desired balance between growth and social impact. Since its mission is based on achieving changes in the health service system, indicators currently are the numbers of people reached, the nature and quality of services offered, and the savings visited upon the health system due to HR's interventions. This finding is in line with the literature that has argued that measurement, control and accountability are major challenges facing social sector organizations (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2010, Ebrahim, 2010) and in general social impact measurement is a difficult and hotly debated issue altogether (Bassi, 2022; Argiolas et al., 2024). The challenge of lack of impact measurement threatens organizational resilience and in turn, community resilience. Therefore, there is a need to invest in the development of measurement tools to evaluate the effectiveness of organizational resilience strategies in order to understand their resilience strengths and weaknesses (Lee et al., 2013).

5. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore the role of social enterprises and non-profit organisations in contributing to the community resilience. The research further explored the role of organizational resilience in contributing to community resilience, meaning, the link between organizational resilience and community resilience. This study demonstrated its originality by addressing a gap in scholarly understanding of how social enterprises organizational resilience act as a precursor and enabler of community resilience thereby opening unexplored research avenues within the emerging domain of social entrepreneurship for resilience.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The research makes few contributions: First, the research demonstrated through the findings the link between organizational resilience and community resilience. Therefore, through demonstrating how organizational resilience forms and informs community resilience, the research makes major contribution to the literature on social entrepreneurship. Indeed, SEs and NPOs need to be resilient themselves to contribute to community resilience. Through demonstrating this link between organizational and community resilience the study makes theoretical contribution.

5.2 Policy Implications

The current study suggest that government policies need to be geared towards creating enabling and a supportive environment. This could be done through ensuring that SEs/NPOs are supported through access to finance and resources such as grants funding, skills development, management skills and financial literacy and management. Indeed, creating enabling and supportive policies that ensure SE/NPOs organizational resilience by extension enable community resilience as both concepts are interrelated and interdependent (Lee et al., 2013).

5.3 Limitations

The current qualitative case study research intention was to provide reach insights in order to gain deeper understanding of the lived experience of social actors and not theoretical transfer-

ability. Therefore, the study acknowledges that the findings are not generalizable. The focus of the study was strictly on the role of organizations and not on the role and behaviour of the individual organisational leaders and individual social entrepreneurs. Even though this research cannot provide “proof” of whether or not SEs/NPOs active in a community truly improve community resilience. However, there is ample evidence in our research that the creation of common goods does create extra costs (creating personal resilience with staff, volunteers and clients, developing pools of skills, sharing power (governance) even over assets, building up financial reserves. Indeed, the focus of the study was not to conclusively measure impact as represented by community resilience.

5.4 Scope for further research

The current study would implore further research focus on quantitative techniques to ensure generalizability of the research findings. The research implores further research to focus on the role of individual leaders such as social entrepreneurs an individual. The study would further implore further research focus on measurement of impact in order to make conclusive arguments that indeed organizational resilience led to a measurable community resilience.

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Conflict of interest

We declare that we do not have any conflict-of-interest issues in this project and manuscript.

Ethical approval

The project whose data are used in the current paper was granted ethics clearance by the University of the Witwatersrand’s Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) with protocol number H22//04/04 on 22 April 2022. The study strictly followed all research ethical procedures.

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