Chapter 55

Women as Social Entrepreneurs in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship has been an attractive topic for scholars over several decades. However, social entrepreneurship has remained relatively understudied in scale and scope. More specifically, the aspect of women in entrepreneurship is mostly untouched. Therefore, this chapter aims to examine the role of women in social entrepreneurship in an emerging economy such as Turkey. This research provides literature on definitions of social entrepreneurship and the differences between social entrepreneurship and business entrepreneurship by taking the historical development of entrepreneurship into account. Secondary data of four difference-maker women entrepreneurs are demonstrated through analyzing videos, newspapers, websites, and interviews of the entrepreneurs. Four different life stories of social entrepreneurs suggest that Turkish women social entrepreneurs face many challenges from their environment. The life stories indicate that they touched women’s lives by improving their social status as well as economic conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has been an attractive topic for scholars over the several decades (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Low & MacMillan 1988). Scholars from diverse backgrounds e.g. management, economics, sociology and psychology have attempted to define and examine this concept within distinct contexts. These scholars (Yunus, 1999, 2010; Dees, 1998; Mair and Marti, 2004; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum & Shulman, 2009 among others) have looked at entrepreneurship from various angles, one aspect is business entrepreneurship which is defined as “the activity of setting up a business or businesses, taking on financial risks in the hope of profit” (Oxford dictionaries, n.d.).

According to prominent figures in this field (e.g. Yunus, 2010; Dees, 1998), social entrepreneurship is a burgeoning area within the entrepreneurship literature. Thus, there is no consensus about the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8182-6.ch055
boundaries and definitions of social entrepreneurship due to the concentration on different aspects of social entrepreneurship. Therefore, there are several meaningful gaps in literature in regards to the role of social entrepreneurship to be filled (Seelos & Mair, 2005).

First and foremost, over the last a few decades the concept of entrepreneurship has been captured attention of scholars and practitioners (Bornstein, 2004; Chell, 2007; Dees, 1996); however, social entrepreneurship literature remained relatively untouched comparing to general entrepreneurship literature (Miller, Grimes, McMullen & Vogus, 2012; Harding, 2004). Second, having reviewed the research on social entrepreneurship suggests that this is a growing literature (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009), yet the aspect of women social entrepreneurs have been mostly ignored. Third, while there is a substantial literature concerned with social entrepreneurship in developed countries (Mair & Marti, 2009; Bhawe, Jain & Gupta, 2006), research from emerging economies especially from a developing context such as Turkey, which has cultural influences from both Western and Eastern cultures, still requires more studies to delineate this phenomenon as social entrepreneurship emerges with unique local roots and dynamics in Turkey (Yetim, 2008). Thus, there has been a relatively limited amount of research completed within the Turkish context that concentrates on the role of social women entrepreneurs.

This chapter aims to provide a systematic literature on growing concept of social entrepreneurship with a special emphasis on women social entrepreneurs to fill the identified gaps. In this regard, we will focus on the differences between social entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs and examples of social entrepreneurship as well as the contribution of four women entrepreneurs in Turkey to highlight the impact of women on social entrepreneurship.

We first start with the definitions and historical development of social entrepreneurship, and its characteristics before talking about the traits of social entrepreneurs. We then highlight the differences between social entrepreneurship and business entrepreneurship. After that, we demonstrate four life stories of Turkish social entrepreneurs after describing our methodology.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Covering a wide-ranging area, social entrepreneurship is a concept focused on social purposes (Peredo & McLean, 2006: 59; Dees, 1996; Chell, 2007). Although there has been significant progress in social entrepreneurship education and research, there is no absolute agreement about the definition of the concept in the literature. Some academics have attempted to explain social entrepreneurship within the scope of non-profit organizations, e.g. social organizations and associations (Weeawadena, 2006: 22). The researchers, e.g. Dees, (1998; 2006); Yunus, (2010); Zahra et al., (2009), on the one hand have drawn attention to the inclusion of social entrepreneurship in commercial activities, through entrepreneurial practices of the non-profit sector. On the other hand, another group of researchers have addressed social entrepreneurship within the world of entrepreneurship (Peredo and McLean, 2006: 57), and indicated that it was specific to only non-profit organizations, but that social entrepreneurship was also a part of the sector where for-profit enterprises exist (Austin et al., 2006; Naumes et al., 2002; Thompson, 2002). These researchers’ attempt to attribute a social identity to entrepreneurship or to approach the matter as a type of entrepreneurship has led to the increase of the entrepreneurship content in theories and definitions made in relation to this matter (Sullivan Mort et al., 2003: 79). However, both approaches agree on the fact that social entrepreneurship, at its core, is about providing benefit to society.