

# Artisan social enterprises in Zambia: women leveraging purpose to scale impact

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140

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to provide a contextualized look at the artisan sector in Zambia and asks: What factors contribute to scaling positive impact in artisan ventures in Zambia, and how can these factors be leveraged to promote positive economic, social and environmental outcomes for women and their communities.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study uses an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach to gain a multi-layered understanding of artisan craft social enterprises in Zambia.

**Findings** – Purpose is found to be the primary driver of social and environmental impact in artisan social enterprises in Zambia, with female leadership a critical factor. Access to finance, markets and resources are also essential to help these organizations achieve their social missions.

**Research limitations/implications** – While this study provides valuable insights into the artisan sector, its scope was limited to the Zambian context, making the generalizability of the findings to other geographies uncertain.

**Originality/value** – This research makes a valuable contribution to the literature on social enterprises by highlighting the critical role of female leadership and purpose in driving positive impact in artisan businesses in Zambia. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which artisan social enterprises create positive change. The study highlights the importance of artisan craft employment for women in Zambia and illustrates the impact of Zambian artisan ventures, both formal social enterprises and informal businesses, on creating positive social and environmental impacts in the country.

**Keywords** Zambia, Social enterprise, Women entrepreneurs, Social impact, Artisan economy, Scaling impact

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Women drive the global artisan craft sector, the second-largest employer in developing countries (Chappe and Lawson Jaramillo, 2020). Still, few studies are found in the literature on the benefits of artisan entrepreneurship for women (Vedula *et al.*, 2019) or on artisan craft social enterprises more generally. While the economic impact of artisan craft work is approaching a critical threshold (Kroezen *et al.*, 2021; Bell and Vachhani, 2020), demonstrated by the success of platforms like Etsy.com (Kuhn and Galloway, 2015) and the commitment of brands like West Elm which recently pledged to purchase \$50m in crafts



certified with the Nest Seal of Ethical Handcraft (Nest, *n.d.*), little is known about the factors that enable social enterprises in developing countries, artisan or other, to scale the social and environmental impacts they create (Ciambotti *et al.*, 2022; Steiner and Teasdale, 2019). Studies on social enterprises in African environments are also limited (Littlewood and Holt, 2018) and rarely focus on the artisan sector. Moreover, research on the motivations of social entrepreneurs in developing economies is lacking (Wanyoike and Maseno, 2021; Ghalwash *et al.*, 2017; Boluk and Mottiar, 2014). However, as society grapples with the effects of climate change and rising inequity, artisans are leading from the bottom up with their work demonstrating an alternative approach to production and consumption that prioritizes the people creating the products, protects the planet and derives meaning for both makers and consumers (Kroezen *et al.*, 2021; Bell and Vachhani, 2020; Suddaby *et al.*, 2017).

This study aims to fill these gaps in the literature by exploring the factors contributing to scaling positive impact in artisan social enterprises in Zambia and how these factors can be leveraged to promote positive economic, social and environmental outcomes for women and their communities globally. It outlines two types of Zambian artisan ventures, formally registered craft-based social enterprises and informal micro-businesses led by necessity entrepreneurs that also act as social enterprises in preserving art and culture while creating opportunities for income generation. Oftentimes in resource-constrained communities with high levels of poverty, the greatest social impact is simply income generation. The definition of social enterprise is widely debated among scholars (Defourny and Nyssens, 2017) and seen as either highly contextual (Kerlin, 2017, 2013; Sengupta *et al.*, 2015) or broadly applicable (Saebi *et al.*, 2019). This study defines social enterprise in the broadest of terms as an entrepreneurial venture that aims to create a positive social, cultural or environmental impact (Davies *et al.*, 2019), while highlighting the contextual nuances of local and grassroots artisan ventures, which are often overlooked in the social enterprise literature. These grassroots artisan social enterprises, rarely identified as such in the literature, are creating a positive influence locally and globally, which deserves exploration.

This research provides a contextualized look at the artisan sector in Zambia and uses an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach to explore the unique ability of artisan ventures to create positive change, especially for women. It seeks to answer the research question:

*RQ1.* What factors contribute to scaling positive impact in artisan ventures in Zambia, and how can these factors be leveraged to promote positive economic, social and environmental outcomes for women and their communities?

This paper proceeds in four sections: a literature review, methods, findings and a concluding discussion of the collective implications, limitations and contributions of this research. The findings detail how a potent combination of female leadership and purpose positively impacts artisans' businesses across Zambia.

## Literature review

### *Women-led Zambian artisan ventures*

Globally, an estimated 300 million people, predominately women, earn their living in the artisan craft sector, contributing more than 500 billion to the global economy (Alexander *et al.*, 2020; van Bergen, 2019). Artisan entrepreneurship is traditionally situated within the cultural entrepreneurship field and considered part of the creative economy (Pret and Cogan, 2019). Broadly defined, artisan craft is the creation of unique and useful goods, handmade using heritage skills and embodying artisans' personalities and cultures (Garavaglia and Mussini, 2020; Abisuga-Oyekunle and Fillis, 2017).

Craft employment in Africa is thought to be largely informal and therefore insecure (Hadisi and Snowball, 2022), but artisan social enterprises help move necessity entrepreneurs into formal employment providing increased market access, reliable wages and social support programs (Mastracci and Edgar, 2020). Social entrepreneurs and their organizations create value for and with marginalized populations (Ciambotti and Pedrini, 2021) and while their activities involve creating economic means, these organizations prioritize nonfinancial outcomes including social and environmental impacts (Ruskin *et al.*, 2016; Dees, 2012). Thus, artisan social enterprises serve as a bridge connecting communities, craft, economics and impact, creating a radically different paradigm than traditional market logic in defining how value is generated (Khaire, 2019).

In Zambia, a disproportionate number of women are employed informally without access to social protections from economic, health, climate or lifecycle-related shocks (Simuchimba *et al.*, 2020; Ulrichs, 2023). The informal economy or informal sector are terms used to describe insecure employment in developing countries, including self-employment, smallholder farming, family-run micro-businesses, day laborers, sub-contracted pieceworkers, as well as employment without formal registration where the employer does not provide appropriate social protections (Chen, 2013; Henley *et al.*, 2009). Zambian women and girls face tremendous barriers to formal employment including early marriage, teen pregnancy, gender-based violence, HIV, lack of access to education, lack of secure formal jobs available in the country and a discriminatory customary legal system (Evans, 2018). Poverty rates in Zambia are also stubbornly high with an estimated 60% of Zambians living in poverty, and over 40% experiencing extreme poverty (Gashongore, 2019), which the World Bank defines as living on less than \$1.90 per day (Sullivan and Hickel, 2023).

Many women artisans in Zambia are necessity entrepreneurs, generally defined as individuals engaged in “entrepreneurial activity arising out of need due to a lack of employment alternatives” (Dencker *et al.*, 2021). Craft work can offer low barrier to entry for women working informally while still allowing for creativity and the use of heritage handwork skills, which have often been passed down through generations of crafting women. Thus, craft work has the potential to provide meaningful work among the informal employment choices available to Zambian women. Still, necessity entrepreneurs lack access to markets, capital, business training and often face bureaucratic business registration systems that range from difficult to impossible to navigate (De Soto, 2000). In addition, women face engrained gender norms that disadvantage them based solely on their sex (Silungwe and Silungwe, 2020).

#### *Artisan social enterprises*

Social enterprises have gained widespread recognition as powerful tools for addressing pressing social and environmental issues (Wry and York, 2017; Mair and Marti, 2009). A social enterprise is an entrepreneurial organization focused on achieving positive social, environmental or community impact (Davies *et al.*, 2019). One social enterprise typology, the macro-institutional social enterprise (MISE) framework (Kerlin, 2017), examines how contextual factors such as culture, political context, economic situation, civil society and international influences shape social enterprise models. Chilufya and Kerlin (2017) studied rural social enterprises in Zambia, exploring how these organizations leveraged resources in their operations, including natural and cultural resources. By investigating these dynamics, the authors provide insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by rural social enterprises and highlight the importance of understanding the specific contextual factors that shape their operations. Further, research suggests that women-led social enterprises are uniquely characterized by collectivism, a sense of mission and often

prioritize positive impact over company financial returns which deserves further exploration (Lundgaard Andersen and Banerjee, 2019; Kerlin, 2012).

Artisan social enterprises provide critical income for women in places where employment opportunities are scarce, which is essential to reducing poverty in marginalized communities (Kabeer, 2020). However these enterprises go beyond income generation, implementing programs and practices that create social or environmental value for their stakeholders (Hota *et al.*, 2023; Kerlin, 2012). To that end, these organizations often provide training, health care, educational support, childcare, group savings programs, emergency relief and a host of other social and environmental impact programs for the individuals, families and communities whose lives they touch (Edgar, 2011).

Social enterprises are often started by proximate leaders driven by a bottom-up desire to bring sustainable change (Gramescu, 2016). Across Africa, social enterprises empower “the people affected by poverty directly by giving them the opportunities for income generation” (Rametse and Shah, 2012). Artisan ventures, particularly those in developing countries, are providing nontrivial solutions to societal problems, including poverty (Chappe and Lawson Jaramillo, 2020; Edgar, 2011), gender equality (Embry *et al.*, 2022), environmental sustainability (Sikavica and Pozner, 2013), as well as pathways to sustainable livelihoods and entrepreneurial opportunities (Kuhn and Galloway, 2015).

Artisan social enterprises uniquely contribute to their communities by using cultural heritage craft skills and indigenous knowledge, empowering individual artisans, fostering community resilience and providing income generation and social value (DiBella *et al.*, 2023). They provide formal jobs with reliable paychecks and social protections, but they also provide access to new markets for informal artisans through piece work. While the social entrepreneurship literature has focused on how to scale businesses, less is known about how social enterprises scale their positive impacts.

#### *Scaling positive social and environmental impact*

Scaling a business is most often thought of as the process of growing a company’s sales, revenue, market share and staff, yet scaling a social enterprise is rooted in growing the firm’s impact on the social concern it seeks to address (Han and Shah, 2020). Dees explained social impact scaling as “increasing the impact a social-purpose organization produces to better match the magnitude of the social need or problem it seeks to address” (Dees, 2008, p. 16). For social enterprises, value creation goes beyond company size or financial returns, instead focusing on positively impacting lives, livelihoods, the environment and the communities they serve. Still, scaling social impact is considered one of the most challenging tasks for an organization to execute (Han and Shah, 2020).

Scaling social impact has been divided into two categories: breadth and depth (Desa and Koch, 2014). Social enterprises focused on scaling the breadth of their impact seek to increase the number of people impacted, their geographic coverage or their working budgets to create “economies of scale” (Desa and Koch, 2014; Prahalad and Fruehauf, 2005). While those focused on depth work to expand the number and type of impact practices, programs or services they provide to stakeholders (Desa and Koch, 2014; Praszkiel and Nowak, 2011). Community-based and grassroots social enterprises more frequently focus on expanding the depth of their impact due to the deep relational aspect of their work and the desire to “serve people well” in their home communities (Islam, 2020; Desa and Koch, 2014). Artisan social enterprises in Zambia are primarily community/grassroots-based and strive to create deep impact for the artisans and communities they serve. Still, women-led artisan enterprises in Africa, like the majority in this study, face additional societal constraints based on inequitable gender norms and a lack of equal rights (Cuya-Velásquez *et al.*, 2023).

## Methods

To gain a multi-layered understanding this unique sector, this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study began with a quantitative descriptive and correlative analysis of survey responses from 81 Zambian artisan businesses. This was followed by a deeper qualitative analysis of 66 semi-structured, in-person interviews with artisans and artisan business leaders in Zambia. In these two phases, mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2021; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009), Phase 1 asks:

- Who makes up the artisan enterprises operating in Zambia?
- How many social and environmental impact efforts are they engaged in?
- What resources drive or prohibit the positive economic, social and environmental impact of artisan ventures?

The purpose of Phase 1 was to examine who makes up the artisan ventures operating in Zambia, the scope of their economic, social and environmental impact and the drivers of that impact. Phase 1 used a quantitative, nonexperimental descriptive design based on survey research. Nonexperimental, quantitative research can provide important descriptive and correlational results (Sousa *et al.*, 2007). While unable to make claims of causality, nonexperimental research designs are still able to generalize and provide strong external validity when the accessible population is representative of the theoretical population (Morgan *et al.*, 2019).

Phase 2 used qualitative thematic analysis. Qualitative methods help to contextualize the quantitative findings from Phase 1 and provide a deeper understanding of nuance and meaning. Data were analyzed using deductive codes informed by the quantitative findings in Phase 1, including access to resources, access to markets and positive impacts, particularly for women. Inductive codes were created from the qualitative data as they emerged. To gain deeper insight drawn from participants' lived experiences in the artisan sector, Phase 2 asks:

- How do artisan enterprises perceive their ability to make a social and environmental impact on the community?

Together, these questions help answer the overarching research question: What factors contribute to scaling positive impact in artisan ventures in Zambia, and how can these factors be leveraged to promote positive economic, social and environmental outcomes for women and their communities.

### *Sample and data collection*

Data for Phase 1 were generated from the survey responses of artisan enterprises in Zambia as part of a value chain assessment of the artisan sector throughout the country (Mastracci and Edgar, 2020). The value chain assessment identified 266 artisan enterprises with a social, environmental or cultural mission. The artisan ventures were invited to participate in the survey with a response rate of 30% of the total population surveyed, resulting in a convenience sample of 81 respondents. Sixty-five of the 81 surveys returned were completed in their entirety.

For Phase 2, artisans in six provinces of Zambia were contacted for in-person interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was developed, and two Zambian residents were trained as research assistants traveling to conduct in-person interviews. In total, interviews took place with 66 artisan ventures, which comprise a convenience sample in this study. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription by the author.

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Data were gathered during August and September of 2020. While the data used is considered secondary data in this study, the original research received IRB approval for human subjects research by the author and followed all research protocols outlined in the approved proposal for both the survey and the interviews.

### *Data analysis*

The survey data were de-identified and analyzed using IBM SPSS software. The sample population was stratified in four ways for statistical analysis. First, the sample was divided by men and women, and also by Zambian-owned and non-Zambian-owned ventures to learn who makes up and leads the artisan enterprises operating in Zambia. Second, the data were examined based on company fiscal size determined by their 2019 revenue. Thus, the respondents were divided into two categories, including those who made over 90,000 ZK annually (approximately US\$3,800) and those making under 90,000 ZK. To add perspective to the impact of the income artisan businesses generate, the 2019 Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in Zambia was \$1,450, meaning on average Zambian citizens earned \$1,450 annually compared to a GNI per capita of \$65,760 in the USA (GNI per Capita, 2019). Zambia's World Bank Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality in a nation with a score of 0 indicating perfect equality and 1 indicating perfect inequality, is one of the highest in the world at 0.69, demonstrating extreme income disparities between citizens (Gashongore, 2019). Artisan businesses earning above \$3,800 are making over two and a half times that of the average individual, but even the average individual income in GNI is positively skewed toward high-income earners due to income inequality in the country.

Ventures were further classified by business type, whether formal social enterprises or informal businesses. Zambia does not have a specific social enterprise registration designation for entities, so those businesses formed with a social mission that are registering with the government must choose between registering as a sole proprietor, private unlimited liability company, private limited liability company, public company or company limited by guarantee which is considered a not-for-profit organization (*Zambian Development Agency, n.d.*). For the purpose of this study, formal social enterprises are defined as those businesses with a social, environmental or cultural mission that are in compliance with Zambian registration and taxation policies, meaning that their companies are formally registered with the government and they are paying applicable taxes to the Zambian Revenue Authority, no matter which type of business entity type they are registered under. Informal businesses are those that operate informally without government registration, taxation or the benefits of government social protection. Those unregistered artisan businesses with a social, environmental or cultural mission are defined here as informal social enterprises. Descriptive and correlational statistics were generated.

The data from 66 interviews were transcribed verbatim, and coded and analyzed using MAXQDA qualitative software. The data were coded using deductive themes generated by the quantitative findings in Phase 1, as well as inductive themes as they emerged from the qualitative data to better understand the meanings the participants assigned to their experiences (Tuffour, 2017). Two cycles of coding were used to validate and provide granularity through descriptive coding (Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). This study used a qualitative research audit trail to provide trustworthiness (Rogers *et al.*, 2000).

### *Phase 1 quantitative findings*

Of the 81 Zambian artisan enterprises surveyed, 77.3% were owned and operated by women. Over 57% of companies employed 50% or more women as artisan producers, with 24 companies employing 100% women. In a country with high informality, an impressive



65.4% of craft companies were formally registered with the government, while 34.6% operated informally. Zambian nationals owned two-thirds of artisan enterprises at 64.2%, while 35.8% were owned by non-Zambians.

Over half of the artisan enterprises surveyed (56.1%) had been in business for three years or more, but 54.3% were very small, employing less than three people. Only 5.7% of artisan ventures, all formal social enterprises, had 50 or more employees. Still, in 2019, 52.4% of businesses earned over \$3,800 which is over twice the Zambian GNI. A  $2 \times 2$  crosstabulation was run to see if formally registered social enterprises differed from informal social enterprises in whether they had 2019 annual sales over \$3,800. As expected, the analysis found that of the companies that made over US\$3,800 in 2019, only 16.7% were informal companies while 83.3% were formally registered. This comparison is not intended to discredit the value of informal artisan work but instead to set a baseline of the gaps between formal and informal ventures' incomes that inform capacity building initiatives and policy efforts to bridge these gaps where possible.

*Social and environmental impacts.* Still, despite earnings or whether formal or informal social enterprises, over 85% of companies provided at least one social impact program and at least one environmental sustainability effort in addition to income generation with a mean of 2.72 and a range of 0–9 social impact programs. Impact programs cited included childcare, savings schemes, education, health care, wellness programming, providing sanitary pads, skills training, entrepreneurship training, water projects and women's empowerment projects. For environmental sustainability efforts, companies provide a mean of 1.84 and a range of 0–6 environmental impact efforts including environmental practices and certifications (organic, forest friendly, wildlife conservation), low to zero waste projects, recycling and upcycling and ethically sourcing natural materials. While 15% of artisan social enterprises did not have additional programming beyond employment, these companies considered income generation as their primary source of social impact due to the high levels of poverty in the country. This is why all businesses in this study are considered formal or informal social enterprises. Formal social enterprises were found to offer more social impact programming with a median of three programs per company and a range of nine programs, while informal social enterprises median offering is two programs with a range of 5. Still, it is important to note that informal businesses appear to value creating impact despite being unregistered with the government and operating on a smaller scale.

*Impact drivers.* Access to resources is thought to be drivers of social and environmental impact for artisan enterprises. To investigate the artisan enterprises' access to key resources, the companies were asked a series of questions about resource access. Starting with financial resources, companies were asked if access to finance and access to markets were challenges for their businesses. Sixty-nine percent of businesses said that access to finance was a challenge and only 54.9% of companies had bank accounts. Additionally, 76.9% said they had a challenge accessing markets. Just over 30% said that they operate a local retail location and 41.5% sell online, primarily through local Zambian online marketplaces. The majority of companies, 59.8%, had no export experience and 8.5% had only regional export experience to surrounding countries in the Southern African region.

A correlation matrix was conducted to learn if there is an association between business type (formal vs informal), challenge in access to finance, challenge in access to markets and the social impact programs these artisan ventures provided. [Table 1](#) shows that two of the six pairs of variables were significantly correlated. Spearman's rho statistics were computed to examine the intercorrelations of the variables. The strongest positive correlation was between challenge in access to finance and challenge to access in markets  $r_s(63) = 0.58, p < 0.01$ , which is a larger than typical effect size. This means that businesses who had

challenges in access to finance were likely to also have a challenge in accessing markets. Business type, formal or informal, was also positively correlated with the social impact programs a business provided  $r_s(79) = 0.38, p < 0.01$ , which is considered a medium or typical effect size.

Looking at exports to international markets as a possible impact driver, simultaneous multiple regression was conducted to investigate the best prediction of companies providing social impact programs. The combination of variables business type, average export order size and export experience to predict social impact programs provided was statistically significant,  $F(3,77) = 9.83, p < 0.001$  (Table 2). Note that business type and average export order significantly predict social impact programs provided. The adjusted  $R^2$  value was 0.249, indicating that 25% of the variance in social impact programs provided was explained by the model, which is a medium to large effect size.

*Summary of quantitative findings.* From these descriptive and correlational statistics, themes emerge that require deeper understanding. First, it appears women are the dominant actors in the craft sector in Zambia, reinforcing the importance of this sector for women. Women are both the majority owners and the majority artisan employees in Zambia’s craft sector, so it is important to understand their motivation as well as the particular impact this sector has on women. Artisan ventures in Zambia were more likely to be formal social enterprises than informal social businesses, which was surprising considering the country’s high rates of informality generally. This indicates that artisan work can be a pathway to formal, secure employment even in places where formal jobs are scarce. Whether formal or informal, the majority of Zambian artisan ventures purposefully incorporate social impact or environmental programs and practices into the fabric of their organizations alongside income generation. For all artisan ventures, resources, especially access to finance, are vital to scaling impact and for accessing markets. Access to markets is essential, with those

**Table 1.** Intercorrelations for variables formal vs informal business, challenge in access to finance, challenge in access to markets and social impact programs provided

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Challenge access to finance	–	0.58**	–0.00	0.09
2. Challenge access to markets	–	–	–0.14	0.05
3. Social impact programs provided	–	–	–	0.38**
4. Formal vs informal business	–	–	–	–

**Note:** \*\* $p < 0.01$   
**Source:** Author’s own work

**Table 2.** Simultaneous multiple regression analysis summary for business type, average export order and export experience predicting social impact programs provided ( $n = 81$ )

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		<i>p</i>
			LL	UL	
Constant	1.25	0.43			
Business type (formal/informal)	1.12	0.45	0.23	2.01	0.004
Average export order	0.38	0.18	0.02	0.74	0.037
Export experience	0.19	0.19	–0.19	0.58	0.315

**Notes:**  $R^2 = 0.28; F(3,77) = 9.83, p < 0.001$   
**Source:** Author’s own work



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ventures able to export to international markets found to create greater levels of social impact. Access to finance and access to markets were challenges found in the majority of survey participants. These key themes warrant deeper exploration and understanding, in the way they manifest in the lived experiences of artisans and their artisan ventures.

*Phase 2 qualitative findings*

In Phase 2, the deductive code framework determined by the findings from Phase 1 included the category codes: social impact (including the specific impact on women), environmental impact and the possible drivers of impact including access to resources and access to markets. Additionally, a dominant category level code emerged from the data through inductive coding which was the concept of purpose. While participants noted many challenges in access to resources and access to markets, purpose appeared to be the key driver of scaling impact in Zambian artisan ventures and emerged from the data as the leading code throughout the interviews.

*Purpose.* The concept purpose was the most frequently occurring category code across all of the data. This inductive code was widespread throughout the interviews and demonstrated that artisan work has motivations beyond income generation that are tied to using human creativity through creating beautiful and useful goods, creating opportunities for empowerment and connection, and more generally creating positive impact in the lives of others. Purpose is the “why” for artisan ventures, including why they were formed, what inspires them and why they persist. A more granular look at purpose found that the participants identified elements of purpose through their mission, impact aspirations and creative motivations. In the code book, mission was defined as the artisan ventures’ reason for starting and maintaining in the craft sector. Their impact aspirations were the ways that they hoped to make a positive impact in the future. Creative motivations were the ways that art, artistry and creativity inspired their actions. To provide a more in-depth look at the coded data under purpose, [Table 3](#) provides key quotes that reveal social purpose at the heart of the craft sector across Zambian artisan ventures. It also highlights how creativity drives these ventures.

*Social and environmental impacts.* Building on the concept of purpose, artisan ventures provided details on the type of social impact that they made. These positive impacts ranged from providing employment opportunities and business-related impact like skills training and capacity building to supporting education for the artisans or their children, providing group savings schemes and pension funds, helping artisans acquire land or property, making and distributing reusable sanitary napkins for women and girls, creating clean drinking water projects, providing health clinics or health access, growing food for the community and even providing families with bee hives and the training to harvest honey and beeswax.

Income generation was unanimously cited as the first and most important social impact. The economic benefit of artisan work among rural artisans was of particular importance in meeting families’ basic needs. Education was the second most common social impact cited. Participants mentioned supporting local schools, running their own schools, funding school fees for artisans’ children, as well as providing educational and literacy programming to the artisans themselves. Group savings schemes were organized to help artisans save for larger expenses or protect them from economic shocks. Most of these programs were comprised of women and were started or encouraged by the venture, but ownership and governance of the savings fund was done by the group members. Many also mentioned empowerment. Empowerment was thought to be conveyed through income generation, training, social support, encouraging heritage skills, employing creativity or through personal agency

Code	Key quotes
Mission	<p>Primary focus is a school provide excellent free education up to Grade 9</p> <p>Making myself is not the focus, rather supplying is the primary focus. The main focus is to empower other people to be able to make</p> <p>I define success as making a profit but more than that for me it is seeing other people be able to start their little businesses and provide others with a source of income. For me, that is the best</p> <p>To share with others. Keep fluid and adaptable</p> <p>To provide small-scale arts and craft producers with the opportunity to make a livelihood from their handicrafts through the creation of a platform where Zambians can sell their products 6 days a week</p> <p>To empower the handmade sector of Zambia because we believe that creative communities matter and they are crucial to Zambia's future</p> <p>Creating employment is definitely our focus</p> <p>Creating employment and preserving the environment. Educate children, football every evening, practice every afternoon</p> <p>We create employment, conserve the environment and increase income</p> <p>Making money not just for self-benefit</p> <p>To help my brothers and sisters and the community in the village where I came from</p> <p>Our soul focus is not the shop, rather our wider project and work. Success for us on the staff side includes empowering them and delivering skills that they can take elsewhere if they so choose</p> <p>Uniquely, we are a charity organization first and a shop second. We have really given the team a platform to raise them up and give them new opportunities and skills</p> <p>We use little equipment as we are all about handmade, I do not want to mechanize because there are too many people who need work</p>
Impact aspirations	<p>I want my business to become big so I can employ many people</p> <p>The goal is to make a living and create employment</p> <p>I want to grow. Grow the number of youths involved, number of products, number of markets. I also want to own a building</p> <p>We need to offer the kids something so they can learn, a trade</p> <p>I wish whatever was produced could be sold and bring an income to the school</p> <p>We hope to be sustainable and to uplift the community</p> <p>Would like to teach computers</p> <p>We would like everyone to be financially stable</p> <p>We want to support the older people and we are kind of doing that through the baskets now and we want to do some conservation education at the school</p> <p>I want to have transferred skills to the team and see them grow and develop</p> <p>Want to be able to grow the team and grow orders to bring more people on board</p> <p>I would not like to get to the point where our production is stretched where we were spending so much time on the products that we are not able to do the pads [sanitary pad for local use by women]</p> <p>The artisans are identified as rising stars</p>
Creative motivation	<p>We want people to buy from us because we are making things that are unique because they come from within us</p> <p>It is because of this foundation that I feel like I am living. Without art, I am not myself</p> <p>If I see someone on a bicycle carrying something I will design that. This is real life</p> <p>It all starts from my mind</p> <p>Everything is made completely from scratch, every item</p> <p>The women are far more skilled than us, we just do the design</p> <p>It starts with a gemstone, which is most unusual, I let the gemstone talk to me and it literally just comes out of my head</p> <p>Everything we make is bespoke so there is really no multiples, it is all original</p> <p>I doodle a lot. I am a very fidgety person, constantly doodling and drawing</p> <p>Our product itself is unique, the neutral colors are not typical in Africa, so it stands out</p> <p>No technology is used in the design process just imagination</p> <p>When people come here to buy, they are buying a memory or experience</p>

**Table 3.**  
Purpose: mission, impact aspirations and creative motivation

Source: Author's own work

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gained generally by engaging in the craft sector. Advancement in the profession and socially in society was also mentioned.

Notably, the impact of the craft sector on women specifically surfaced in over half of the interviews. Women's empowerment and creating sustainable livelihoods for women were the codes that emerged under this category and were equally represented across the data. Many of the key quotes about women's employment and empowerment also link to some artisan venture's statements of their mission or purpose.

Like social impact, many artisan ventures consider environmental impact as part of their core values. This is mostly demonstrated through their sourcing and use of environmentally friendly materials. Participants cited using both natural and recycled materials, and most commonly sourced those materials by hand or through local partners in the community. Natural materials included clay, natural fibers from grasses and reeds, natural dyes and bee products. Recyclable materials included glass, fabric remnants and reclaimed wood. These items were upcycled into new craft products. One organization even used fabric scraps as packing materials. Another built shipping crates from local wood scraps and handmade sisal rope. Keeping material sourcing proximate reduced the environmental footprint of these goods, although exporting the final products negates some of those carbon-neutral gains. [Table 4](#) highlights key quotes about impact.

*Access to resources and markets.* Phase 1 of this study identified access to resources as a driver of positive impact and highlighted access to finance particularly. The participant interviews drilled down further on what resources artisan ventures felt were related to scaling their impact. Access to training as access to equipment, and government support were identified in addition to access to finance. Many were either wary of banks and bank loans or shared that they could not access formal banking channels. While some ventures were completely self-funded, others were funded by safari lodges or animal sanctuaries and parks, with the former adding to safari tourists' cultural experiences and the latter done to lessen human-animal conflict and promote animal conservation. Still, others had received small grants for training or equipment but relied primarily on the sales of their products to fund their operations.

Equipment emerged as a resource many ventures noted. While equipment may not seem directly tied to impact, Phase 1 demonstrated that increased earnings was correlated with increased impact among *Zambian* artisan ventures. Artisan ventures felt that not having access to the right equipment held their organizations back from their full earning potential. Many ventures said that they needed more access to training. Artisans noted that they were self-taught and had received no training from anyone on craft or on running a business. One interviewee summed up the sentiment of many by stating that artisans are "hungry for knowledge and learning." While many did not feel that they needed any training around craft skills, the need for business skills including accounting and finance management, understanding certification standards, product development and design, marketing and creating an online presence.

Numerous study participants stated that they had received no support from the government, including getting no information, training, funding or business registration assistance. Even when they tried to engage the government to gain information, they had no response. As far as *Zambian* Government agencies, some artisan businesses had interacted with the Ministry of Tourism who they said appreciated the artisans' work, yet the ministry had not provided any of the support that the artisans were hoping to gain.

The tourist market in *Zambia* was identified as the most important market for artisans and craft-based social enterprises. Tourism sales included sales directly to tourists but also sales to safari lodges serving the tourist market. One handmade soap artisan organization

Code	Key quotes
Social impact	<p>The most important areas of impact we are creating is employment, and preserving the environment, but the priority is creating employment</p> <p>We pay school fees</p> <p>I have supported the artisan’s families for the past 20 years. We have helped them to buy land so they can build their own houses</p> <p>We provide a pension and money saving scheme for our employees because a lot of them do not have bank accounts</p> <p>Fund the community school and promote education</p> <p>We organize cervical cancer screenings and community health programs</p> <p>Fairtrade employment, environmental practices, a percentage of profits going back to school, flexible working hours and we work with the team for skills development and training</p> <p>We run a preschool and do a little bit of farming to support the community</p> <p>Initially, our focus was education, building schools and infrastructure and that sort of stuff. That grew and expanded, and we started taking a bigger stance on gender and offered a safe space for girls clubs to meet and talk about important things such as consent</p> <p>We focus on working with vulnerable women – young mothers and child brides</p> <p>The original idea was to take vulnerable women in the community and bring them into offer them skills and train them up so that they could start their own businesses. That initial group is now the backbone of the workshop</p> <p>The focus is to make sure that the women are happy and sustained</p> <p>The original vision is to empower women in low-income areas that lack education and skills that can bring them regular income. Particularly urban and peri urban women</p> <p>Success means creating something that is sustainable and empowering. Empowering women is the main drive</p> <p>We did research on the best kinds of reusable, washable pads and created that. We now have a workshop where we make the pads</p>
Environmental impact	<p>We go big for environmental responsibility</p> <p>We recycled everything we possibly can</p> <p>It is an ethical, all round, business practice that leans toward supporting vendors who practice upcycling to minimize their environmental impact</p> <p>Our beehive project started small. Give a family a beehive, teach how to care and use and harvest, now they can get work managing other hives and earn some additional income. Also, for hives you need trees, and this helps with conservation</p> <p>Use natural dyes and produce our own fabrics to reduce our carbon footprint</p> <p>There is a fund (our sales contribute to) called the Luangwa Community and Conservation Fund and 50% of that goes back into conservation</p> <p>We focus on biodiversity conservation</p> <p>(We use) fallen trees, no cutting</p> <p>The project uses upcycled materials such as fabric scraps, damaged cloth or clothes, VHS tapes, cardboard boxes, magazines, sale flyers and bottle caps</p>

**Table 4.**  
Social and environmental impacts

Source: Author’s own work

was able to secure an order for 5,000 soap bars and spa products annually purchased by a safari lodge, and another was able to provide textiles and natural grass décor for several lodges. Lodge gift shops were the most common retail outlet supporting artisans by offering a wide variety of handmade goods.

This speaks to why many artisans cited “conscious consumers” who cared about the product story and about buying eco-friendly goods as their target customer. Many pointed to the potential opportunities for growth if they expand to the USA and UK markets. While

several participants had experimented in or wanted to participate in international markets, only a few ventures had found success. Those who had were either part of the 5.7% of ventures using over 50 artisans or companies that had exported on a small scale through online channels or through partners who helped sell their products in the USA, like friends and missionaries through local sales and home parties. A few noted selling on Etsy.com and Facebook Marketplace, but many found online marketing and payment processing a barrier. Finding a consistent market was a challenge. Additionally, shipping was a tremendous barrier to exporting.

Artisan businesses exporting to wholesale customers acquired the majority of those wholesale importers by exhibiting at international tradeshows abroad. They note the value in trade shows for accessing international markets, but also felt that trade shows were expensive and risky endeavors if they did not acquire a volume buyer.

In addition to tourist and export markets, artisans identified the local Zambian market as both important and growing. However, artisans had mixed experiences selling to local Zambians. While some ventures felt that the local market supported and appreciated handmade goods, noting success selling in local shops, farmer's markets, Green Market and at the annual ZADs artisan show, others thought the local market was very limited. Several shared the sentiment that Zambians had "small pockets" and while Zambians admired the products, they wanted things at a cheap price, and only some valued handmade goods over mass-produced merchandise.

### **Discussion**

This study fills a significant gap in the literature by examining the positive social and environmental impacts of artisan social enterprises in developing countries and the drivers behind their ability to scale these impacts. The findings demonstrate that artisan ventures, both formally registered artisan businesses and informal necessity artisan entrepreneurs, should be counted among Zambia's social enterprises, as they are actively serving as a force for positive change. Still, the findings show that women can derive greater value from their craft skills working in formalized artisan social enterprises that aim to provide sustainable wages as well as social impact programming to improve artisans' lives and livelihoods. Following in the tradition of the MISE framework (Kerlin, 2017), this study emphasizes the importance of context in determining both the role, evolution and contributions of social enterprises, particularly in the artisan sector in Zambia. Most notably, the findings highlight the significance of purpose and women as the key drivers of impact in artisan enterprises across Zambia.

Social entrepreneurial motivation was a key factor in why Zambian artisan businesses are creating positive social and environmental impact in the country. The deep sense of purpose exhibited by Zambian artisan ventures propels their commitment to generating positive outcomes in their communities and local ecology. These under-resourced organizations display remarkable creativity in effecting change. The importance of purpose as the primary driver of social and environmental impact is supported by the qualitative phase of this study. The exploration of the "mission motivation" and "impact aspiration motivation" within the context of purpose reveals how artisans in Zambia are driven by a deep sense of purpose to create positive change despite resource constraints. The "creative motivation" demonstrates how much artisans value using creativity, design and imagination in their work to create new products that further art and culture in their communities.

The Zambian artisan sector serves as a promising avenue for women's employment and empowerment. With 77.3% of companies being women-owned and 57% employing 50% or

more women, the artisan sector presents significant opportunities for women in Zambia. It is ripe for programming that builds capacity, provides access to resources and creates opportunities for women artisans. In a context where informality is prevalent and social protection programs are limited, formal artisan social enterprises generate direct social impact through income generation. Creating pathways to formal sector work is essential, as formal jobs offer more predictable wages, benefits and social protection compared to informal sector jobs (Chen, 2008). Both formal and informal artisan social enterprises in Zambia are making commendable efforts to provide social impact and environmental programming aimed at alleviating poverty, promoting sustainable environmental practices and generating vital employment. Hence, public and private investments should be directed toward supporting the growth of these enterprises.

Access to finance and markets is crucial for organizations to fulfill their social missions. Formal artisan social enterprises demonstrate better utilization of these factors, resulting in increased employment opportunities, access to export markets and higher revenues. These organizational efforts have significant social impacts, including income generation, social support, education, health promotion and women's empowerment. Policies and programs that incentivize formal registration can create an enabling environment for market access, which, in turn, facilitates the scaling of social impact (Han and Shah, 2020). Additionally, access to loans and formal banking channels play a vital role in overcoming resource and capital barriers.

Moreover, increased annual revenue allows for greater depth in social impact programming, particularly for companies engaged in international craft exports. Artisan social enterprises in Zambia leverage revenue growth to scale the depth of their social impact programming, aligning financial and social goals to benefit stakeholders. Access to export markets emerges as a critical factor, with a combination of formality, export experience and average export order size predicting a significant portion of the variance in social impact programming among artisan businesses.

### **Limitations and the need for further research**

This study was specific to businesses in Zambia and limited to the artisan sector. While several factors of impact growth were identified, more research is necessary to test the universality of these impact factors as in the artisan sector across different geographies as well as in other developing country social enterprises beyond artisan craft. Despite the ability of Zambian artisan ventures to scale their impact on many levels, the qualitative data also found barriers to accessing resources and markets which impeded the businesses in achieving their full social and environmental missions. More research is needed to understand the best interventions to mitigate these challenges and how investment, regulation, training, information and resource allocation can improve outcomes. Further research is also necessary to test the universality of purpose, which includes mission, impact aspirations and creativity, as the motivator for artisan ventures in other geographies.

### **Conclusion**

The powerful combination of female leadership and purpose drives positive impact in artisan businesses across Zambia. By addressing the research question to discover which factors contributed to scaling positive impact in artisan ventures, this research contributes significantly to the literature on social enterprises by emphasizing the critical role of female leadership and purpose, including creative motivation, in generating positive impact in artisan businesses in Zambia. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which artisan social enterprises create positive



change and the factors that enable the scaling of their social and environmental impacts. It also contributes to the literature on social enterprises, particularly confirming the importance of context in defining and studying women-led social enterprises and those in developing economies. These insights inform investment, policy and practice for building the capacity of these organizations.

Artisan social enterprises play a vital role in job creation, provide social protections and play a critical role in the economic and social development of communities grappling with poverty and the effects of climate change. Once these social enterprises are recognized, supported through investment and connected to broader networks, they offer immense opportunities for job creation, income generation, social and environmental impact for women, their families and their communities.

For countries and development agencies, aligning investments, regulations and resource allocation with the social and environmental missions of these enterprises can foster inclusive economic development and social change in resource-constrained communities. The research findings contribute to the special issue topics on the importance of social enterprises in culture and the arts by highlighting the interconnectedness of cultural craft artisans to purpose, creative motivation and social and environmental goals. By understanding the motivations and experiences of artisans, entrepreneurs, policymakers and investors can make informed decisions to support with resources and build the capacity of these organizations through policies and programming.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the factors driving positive impact for artisan social enterprises in Zambia. By examining the gaps in knowledge, future research can further explore the potential of artisan social enterprises and their contributions to positive economic, social and environmental outcomes. By leveraging purpose, female leadership and available resources, these enterprises can continue to use culture and art to create transformative social and environmental outcomes in resource-constrained communities.

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