

BUSINESS MODELS OF SOCIAL SOLAR ENTERPRISES: AN APPROACH TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC SOLUTION

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Abstract: *The aim of this research was to get clear understanding of the specific traits of successful business model of solar energy based social enterprises in India. The method involved extensive review of literature followed by case study of three social enterprises that have created significant social impact and achieved sustainability. Osterwalder (2010) nine blocks business model canvas was used to compare and contrast different components of these social enterprises in solar energy sector. Interviews were conducted to get insights from the industry experts. The focus of the research was more on gathering information and developing propositions than on the need of hypothesis testing. The three cases concluded that the social innovation and flexibility are the core competencies for success of any social enterprise. The research also found that proactive and long term relationship developments with customer are important characteristic of any social business. In case of social enterprises the value proposition delivered is both social and economic value. Research Limitations The research faced time limits and financial constraints so, the sample size was limited to three cases only. Further empirical testing can be done to test its relevance and validity. This paper is first of its kind exploring constructs of the business model in case of Social enterprises operating in a particular sector. The study will help budding and existing social entrepreneurs; get an insight in the business model of sustainable enterprises.*

Keywords: *Business Model, Innovation, Social Profit, etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is often seen as a way to alleviate the economic condition of a country through growth and development. In case of developing economies, high level of economic growth can be achieved through high number of opportunity driven entrepreneurial activities.(Naude, 2009). Many of the developing economies face low levels of entrepreneurial activity due to institutional breakdown or government failures. In such cases, the social enterprises may play a key role in creating social values.(Mair & Marti, 2009).

Dr. Yunus pioneer of social business emphasizes that a business model for social enterprises has the potential of converting entrepreneurial inputs into social and

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economic value for an inclusive society, including the last person down the line to receive the benefits of the social activity. Moreover, the themes that have evolved through Business model literature suggest that Business models can explicitly or implicitly be used as a new analysis unit for firm. (Zott *et al.*, 2011).

Social entrepreneurship leads to social value creation and human development which further leads to development of economy. The human development indicators like income, infant mortality and life expectancy are highly correlated to access towards power. The Solar energy sector, although still in its infancy has huge potential in India with varied uses across homes and industries. From its use in cooking to industrial uses like in dairy, pharmaceutical, chemicals and foodprocessing. (Anon., October–December 2016).

This study provides an outline for social entrepreneurial business models that can further be used to develop social entrepreneurship in the solar energy sector of India. The research question is “What is the suitable business model for social enterprises in the Indian Solar Energy Sector?”. In order to answer this, the research focused on finding whether the social enterprises operating in Solar Energy Sector follow a similar business model.

Social enterprises embrace both social and environmental values. The integration of renewable energy with social enterprises provides an excellent opportunity for tackling needs like fuel and poverty. There is a market opportunity for social enterprises in the renewable energy sector. Many Social enterprises have an edge over private enterprises in providing the socio-technical innovation required in Renewable energy. (Horst, 2008). As the solar industry grew and matured, certain business models have evolved in due course. When solar energy companies adopt a social entrepreneurial perspective, the business model further evolves to adopt the double bottom line perspective.

The article is organized as follows: The initial three parts focus on the energy deficit in India and state of solar energy generation in India, literature review of social entrepreneurship in developing economies followed by the business modeling literature, case studies, analysis and conclusion.

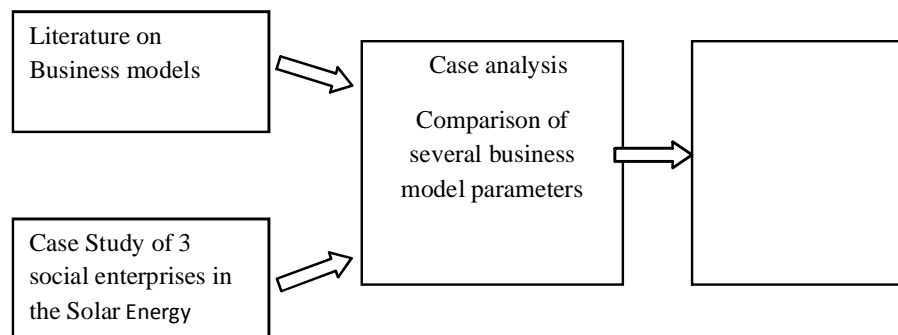


Figure 1: Research Framework

Source: (Anon., n.d.)

SOLAR ENERGY IN INDIA

Solar power is being seen an omnipresent solution to all energy woes of India. The government of India has taken initiative to install 100,000 MW of solar power by 2022. The biggest hurdle that they are facing is non competitiveness of domestic solar industry (Devendranath, 2016). Although India has been able to reduce power deficit to 0.6% in the year 2016 but the rural electrification is still a challenge in India. The states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Uttaranchal, and Madhya Pradesh are some Indian states where at least 10% of the villages still need to be electrified. (Anon., n.d.)

Table 1
Electrification in India

No. of Villages in India (1991 Census)	593732
Villages Electrified till 31/08/2010	503924
Electrification of Villages achieved in %	84.9 %

Source: (Indian Power sector)

There is a huge population in Indian towns and villages which is not able to get benefits of electricity. Electrification is directly proportional to growth and development. The solar energy social enterprises work in direction to fill this gap by providing solar energy to villages which are still not electrified.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN DEVELOPING WORLD

In the past decade social entrepreneurship has been widely accepted as a new and innovative way of social and financial value creation. Social entrepreneurship is defined as the process of modifying a non-profit organization into a profit oriented organization. (Dees & Anderson., 2003). While other researchers suggest that social entrepreneurship is the process of integrating social values in the business operations. (Sagawa & Segal, 2000).

Austin *et al.* (2006) say that Social Entrepreneurship mostly begin as non-profit organizations;(Dees & Anderson., 2003) define Social Entrepreneurship as a process that transforms non-profit organization into profit oriented, whereas Sagawa and E, Segal (2000) state that social entrepreneurship is the process that helps in integration of social responsibility into their operation. A social enterprise needs to embrace opportunities and work towards social change as primary goal and economic value creation as secondary goal of the enterprise. (Mair & Marti, 2006). The social enterprises and their commercial counterparts differ on the basis of objectives; the social enterprise has the major objective of social value creation, while the commercial enterprise focuses on wealth maximization and share holder profit generation. (Murphy & Coombes, 2009).

In case of developing economies like India often government institutions fail in creation of social institutions for public welfare due to lack of infrastructural facilities, such government failures generate scope for social entrepreneurship.(Mair & Marti, 2009).

The social enterprises in the developing economy face several challenges due to lack of resources and lack of institutional structures. As the developing economies are unable to fulfil these requirements, social enterprises tend to develop innovative approaches to fulfil their mission.

BUSINESS MODELS

Although Business models have been constituent of trading practices since prehistoric times but advent of the internet or dot com era helped in gaining moment around the concept. (Teece, 2010). Business models research has surged in last few years but researchers are not yet able to define a common universal definition of the concept. Researchers tend to define business model based on their domain of research and their needs. It has been defined as per the need of the researcher Business models have been referred as a statement, a model or a framework, structural template, architecture and a representation.

Business model term has been used to understand and explain basically three processes

- E businesses or IT usage
- Strategic matters like value creation, performance etc
- Innovation management. (Zott *et al.*, 2011)

A business model provides a simplified view of a complex business situation. It eliminates the redundancy and makes us focus on the important aspects at onetime. The business model is centre point of conducting business and facilitates discussion for improvement. The purpose of Business model is to:

1. To provide better understanding of the key mechanism of business.
2. To provide a framework for further improvement
3. To provide insights into new business models used by other competitors.
4. To find outsourcing opportunities. (Eriksson & Penker, n.d.)

Various researchers have defined business models as strategy, activities involved and business concept. (Zott *et al.*, 2011), But some emphasize on the difference stating the hierarchy of Business models, strategy and tactics . Business Model is developed first, strategy is founded on a business model and tactics is founded on strategy. (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2009). Business models combine a firm's value proposition, its revenue model and value network. The business model construct is theoretically different from that of strategy (Markides, 2015). Business models are like stories that explain how enterprises work with emphasis on customer identification, customer requirement, and revenue generation. (Margaretta, 2002).

From the large no. of business model definitions, it is found that three elements are essentially present in a Business model:

1. The value being offered to the consumer
2. The way the company plans to deliver its offering i.e. its product or service.
3. The model adopted for revenue generation

From the perspective of designing Business models, it must specify the what, for whom and how of Production.

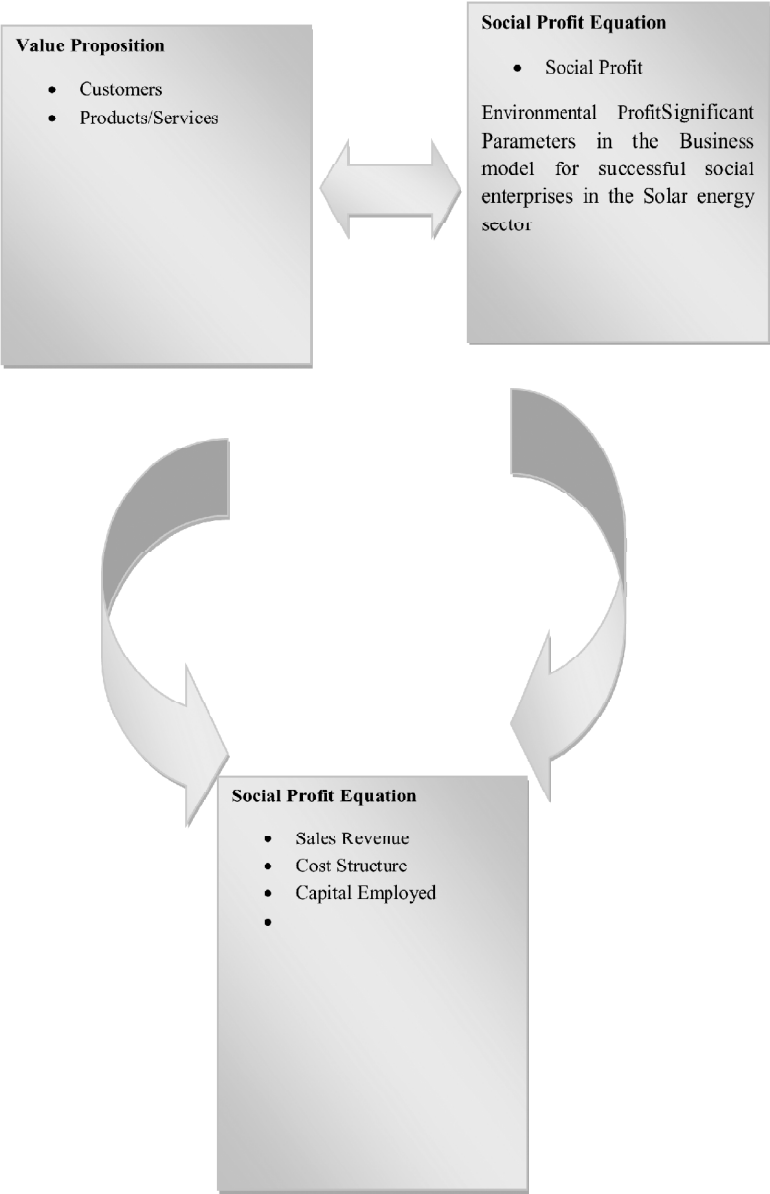


Figure 2: Components of A Business Model (Yunuset al., 2010)

Business Models In Social Enterprise Sector:

The successful social enterprises focus on creation of value network which ideally comprises of other organizations/institutions who share similar values and social vision. These social enterprises proactively work to evolve resource strategies as an integral part of their business model and make the target population as an integral part of value network(Mair & Schoen, 2005). Drawing valuable inferences from their work at the Wharton societal wealth program, the researchers identified certain prerequisites for a successful application of Business model in the social enterprise sector i.e defining the boundaries, identification of key stakeholders, mechanism or activities to achieve the end goal, anticipation of unanticipated sequences. learning and discovering to be prioritized over profits. (Thompson & Macmillan, 2010).

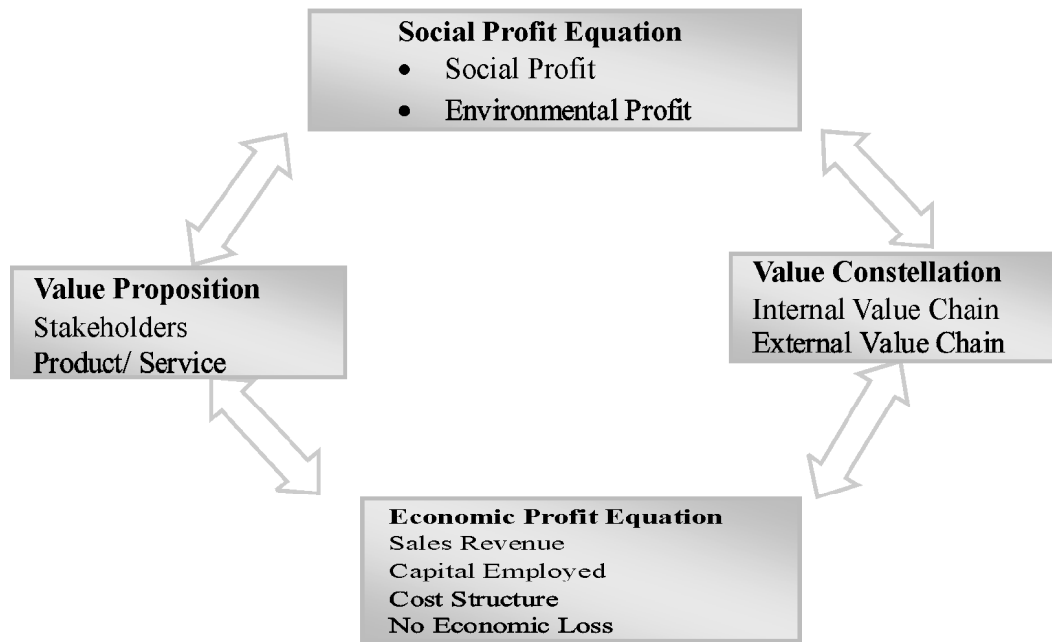


Figure 3: Social Business Model components (Yunus *et al.*, 2010)

There are certain changes made to the Business model for social businesses:-

1. The value proposition is not just limited to the customers; it is further expanded to accommodate the stakeholders.
2. Addition of the social profit equation.
3. The Economic profit equation is altered to suit the needs of social businesses. The aim is not to maximize profit for shareholders. The economic equation targets only full recovery of investments.

Business models have emerged as a systematic and holistic approach towards the knowledge that how firms do business. They tend to explain the process of value creation not only the process of capturing it. (Zott *et al.*, 2011).

METHOD

As there is limited knowledge on the subject, an exploratory research approach was used. Data from various sources, including published and unpublished articles, case studies, personal interviews and internet sources was collected. It also involved development of case study using the secondary data and interviews. Through content analysis of the available secondary data, certain constructs were identified. Case study based research involving past study, allows in-depth investigation and understanding of various complex issues. (Zainal, 2007). One of the drawbacks of the case study method is that it is not representative but this issue can be countered by taking multiple cases and through similarities and comparisons viable and representative results can be achieved. (Burton, 2000). The selected organization should be widely recognized as successful and should have successfully transitioned from venture stage to that of self-sustained phase. The Solar energy companies studied were Selcosolar; Earthen Glow and Simpa Network. 9 block business model canvas was used to specify different components of their business models. The business model canvas can also be applied to startup business in addition to any for Profit Corporation. It can be used as a conceptual and architectural blueprint with value dimensions like value proposition, value creation, value delivery and value capture. (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The research focused more on gathering information and developing propositions than on the need of hypothesis testing.

ANALYSIS

The social program of these social enterprises is embedded in the organization creating value through its activities. They provide access to the products and services that increase the clients' health, quality of Life, education and opportunities. The revenue is generated through sales of services which are further used to cover the operating, marketing and manufacturing costs if any. Social enterprises tend to use several Business models based on different combinations of activities and resources. Nine fundamental type of businesses models exist which are feasible and are widely implemented. (Alter, 2007).

It is interesting to note that these all social enterprises operate as For-Profit enterprises as their revenue model involves sales of goods and services to the Low income clients. They are not dependent on any external donations or grants; they have achieved the sustainability through consistent entrepreneurship skills. SELCo broke even in 2001 and also made a profit of US \$ 88,380 by March 2005. Simpa claims that they are scaling up as a commercial solution provider to a socio-economic problem.

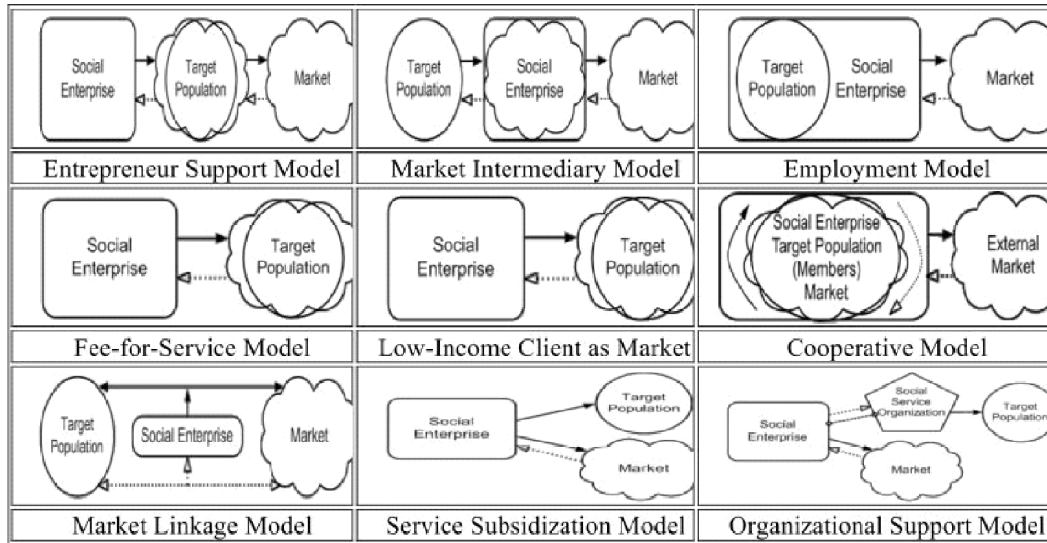


Figure 4: Social Entrepreneurial Typology (Alter, 2007)

From table 2 examining the characteristics of these organizations, it is understood that the most popular model being used by Social enterprises in the solar energy sector is Low Income Client Business Model. The low income client model comprises bottom of the Pyramid. The term BOP was coined by Prahalad and Hammond to describe the segment with Purchasing power parity of less than USD 3000 annually. BOP operates and does its transactions in the informal economy (Hart & London, 2005). There is need to focus on affordability, accessibility, availability and acceptability, while designing the products and services for the BOP segment. (Goyal *et al.*, June 2014). BOP segment differs from the Non BOP segment in terms of inability to make payments, market unawareness, lack of Information. The segment suffers due to market imperfections like fragmented markets, weak legal structures, scarce resources and poverty Penalty. (Kapoor *et al.*, 2012).

VALUE PROPOSITION – SEGMENTING THE MARKET

The Entrepreneurs were asked that “what are the various characteristics that make them a social enterprise”. As told by Mitali Sahnifrom Simpa Networks

“Simpa’s unique proposition is the integration of energy and financing at the point of sale into one simple solution for the customer. Underpinning this unique proposition are two innovations: 1) our technology-enabled ‘Progressive Purchase’ pay-as-you-go model; and 2) our operating model, where we develop and work through local Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) for on-field delivery of our proposition to our customers. These activities are beneficial for the people residing in rural areas, providing them with easy financing options for electricity access

and also creating livelihoods. These unique features of our business model make us a social enterprise.”

Earthen glow conducted a research on solar energy technologies and came up to the conclusion that it had huge potential to enhance the quality of life of Bottom of Pyramid by providing them clean energy applications.

SELCO provides innovative financial solutions to increase affordability and innovative business delivery models for migrant labourers, street vendors, tribal communities and urban slums. SELCO’s mission is based on the idea that economic condition of people can be substantially improved if they are turned productive. (Mukherji, 2011).

These enterprises are committed to enhance quality of life for the BOP through social and economic upliftment of the bottom of the pyramid both in the urban demography and rural demography. In order to create easy accessibility and affordability of their products, financial support is also integrated in the value proposition.

But it is also evident from the cases that they do not stop at satisfying the energy needs. Through their services they extend support for economic value creation also. The beneficiaries relate to the experience as how energy need satisfaction has led to betterment in life quotient and also how it has enhanced their valuable working hours leading to better economic condition. The social objectives are clearly elicited in case of these social enterprises. The same proposition has been supported by other researchers who suggest that in order to survive in the BOP market, the enterprises should not only focus on social value creation but also on economic value. (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Proposition 1: The social enterprises in the solar energy sector typically emphasize on creation of Social value and extending support for economic value creation.

Innovation, Constant Experimentation as a Core Competency for Process Innovation in SES

All the studied social enterprises focus on the need of Innovation as a means to address the social issues. Simpa network focuses on innovations and radical thinking to lead the solar revolution in India. As an innovative approach to deliver its services, Simpa worked on its distribution system by patenting a pre paid metering and control technology.

As an innovative solution earthen glow provides every rural household with “solar gas Station”. This enables the small households to get energy without the trouble of wiring throughout the house. The devices can be charged by connecting them to the solar gas station without any hassle.

Selco works on user need based model, assessing needs of the user and integrating it in the product to create value for the customer. They have a strong

presales team that visits households and assesses their needs, based on these needs the products are configured. Absence of homogeneity in the BOP segment occurring due to socio economic and cultural variations leads to the conclusion that the needs of the segment vary widely. (Goyal *et al.*, 2017). In order to satisfy needs of this varied customer base, these enterprises need to assess the requirement of people and propose solutions based on that.

These enterprises assess end to end customer needs and satisfy that through their innovative customized solutions. The flow of the activity begins with end to end need assessment followed by constantly Innovating and experimenting leading to creation of cost efficient solution.

Proposition 2: Innovating with constant experimentation are core competencies of social enterprises in the Solar energy sector.

VALUE NETWORK COMPOSITION / APPROPRIATE PARTNER NETWORK CREATION

Simpa, Earthen Glow and Selco all have proactively been creating network. They have set up network with MFIs, Banks, NGOs and other social enterprises. These value networks have helped these organizations by making its products accessible to the consumer. These networks provide financial assistance to the consumer and also educate them for acceptance of the innovative products. Selco has along with the external stake holders, they also engage the local community in the value creation process. Simpa sells its energy packs through Village level entrepreneurs. Selco focuses on local capacity building through local engagement for connecting with rural households for awareness generation support and delivery service. (Goyal *et al.*, 2017). Researchers have also identified necessity of local resources for meaningful problem redressal like collaboration of MNEs with NGOs. (Dahan *et al.*, 2010).

These partners also help them in assessing valuable resources by providing them with credibility in the market space. Like SELCO got its first conditional loan US AID with help of its partner US-based non- profit organization Winrock international. (Mukherji, 2011).

Proposition 3: Social enterprises pro-actively create value networks to eliminate market challenges like awareness, accessibility and availability.

The logical structure of a social relations in social enterprise in solar energy, $H(x,y,L)$, x = social enterprise, y = Underprivileged group , L = Clean energy (Grassl, 2012). But on detailed observation, it can be seen that it's not only the product that is an essential component of the social relation but also the partnerships/Value Networks and Innovative integration of solar energy with the specific needs of the beneficiary. Other researchers have also suggested importance of long term relationships with investors and suppliers to ensure availability of funds and resources (Goyal *et al.*, June 2014). Even when business models are defined as "A

group of specific activities that need to be conducted in order to satisfy the market need and should include the partner specification who participate in the value creation” (Amit & Zott, July-2010), specific impact is given to the need of Partner specification.

FINDINGS

The social enterprises in the solar energy sector were analysed based on 9 block business canvas model and certain commonalities emerged among the three social entrepreneurial case studies in terms of the value proposition offered, the value network and core competency.

1. The offering is not only the physical product but social and economic value in the lives of their customers. They seek long term relationship development through financial assisting and mentoring the constituents at the bottom of pyramid.
2. These enterprises invariably try to create a better ecosystem for accessing the products unlike their commercial counterparts; they rely heavily on creating a value network through integrating other social enterprises, MFIs and Banks.
3. Analyzing and integrating the needs of the customers in the products. The enterprises need to be highly innovative and flexible in their activities to develop products based on individual need analysis.
4. The social relation of these solar energy social enterprises should not only concentrate on the entrepreneur, constituent/beneficiary and Product but should also include additional parameter for value network.

CONCLUSION

Social solar enterprises operating in the markets rely on Bottom of Pyramid for their revenue generation. These organizations operate in the Market and adopt a triple bottom line approach for fulfilling their mission, the multiple values offered through innovative solution, enhanced process management and integrated relationship management is the essence of social enterprise operation in the solar energy sector. The research findings will not only help the prospective entrepreneurs seeking to create a social enterprise in the solar energy sector but also to existing businesses.

Case Studies

SELCO Solar Power

Selco solar is a solar enterprise with its corporate office based in the city of Bengaluru. It was established in 1995 with the mission to enhance the quality of life of underserved households through sustainable energy solutions. It was

commonly believed that the poor people cannot afford sustainable energy and cannot even maintain these energy sources. Selco was started to counter this belief Selco interventions are in form of solar home lights, solar inverters, DC TV, solar pumps, digital education tools.

Social Innovation

Selco believed that the bottom of the pyramid needs innovation as the only solution to its multiple no. of social and economic problems. Selco provides innovative financial solutions to increase affordability and innovative business delivery models for migrant laborers, street vendors, tribal communities and urban slums. Selco provides complete solution to its consumers with an integrated package of financial assistance, product and services. Selco has used Indian rural banking institutions to finance sustainable energy systems for poor rural households. They forged relationships with regional banks, NGOs, commercial banks and rural farmer cooperatives. Selco has successfully empowered individuals by providing solar power solutions for their businesses.

Table 3
Social Impact of SELCO

<i>Milestones</i>	<i>Number</i>
Population reach	1.2 million
No. of households reached through energy interventions	2,00,000
Total number non household customers	5000
No. of school reached-light and digital education	500
No. students reached	40000
No. of financial partners	30
No. of community partners	25
No. of states reached	6
No. of branches	45
No. of employee	375

Source: Selco at a glance (<http://www.selco-india.com/>)

Selco served several segments like urban and rural household, home based livelihood businesses like tailoring, leaf plate making, poultry, flour mills, incense making. They also serve the small and medium industries like sericulture, poultry, agriculture etc.

Outreach

The table 3 depicts that Selco have a population reach of 1.2 million and 200,000 households, while the no. of non-households or institutions was 5000. They have 375 employees working in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar and Tamil Nadu across with forty five of their energy service stations.

It took 5 years for Selco to provide solar lighting to 500 households. For them creating awareness regarding the company was not a challenge but generating an understanding about it as a better source of unreliable lighting proved to be a big channel. Their reliable after sales service was helpful in sustaining the consumer's faith in an unfamiliar technology. Selcworks as a need based service provider. By linking the economic activities with the solar energy, they have been able to improve the lives of large no. of people. They do so by providing product customized to the needs of the user. Market linkage with economic activity has altogether increased affordability of end user.

In 2008 Selco started a rural innovation centre and called it as Selco labs. The aim of its creation was to improve energy accessibility for the rural poor. In 2010 Selco Foundation an independent non-profit organization was created. Selco labs were then renamed as Rural Labs and began working under its aegis. The foundation works to eradicate poverty by providing energy solutions by collaborating with financial institutions, NGOs, education institutions etc. (Anon., n.d.)

Earthen Glow

Earthen glow provides clean energy solutions to facilitate clean lighting and water to rural off grid locations in Africa, India and South Eastern Asia. They work with the Vision of delivering clean light and water to millions of deprived people without access to the energy. Their Mission is to build "affordable & sustainable clean energy technologies that leverage Solar energy, Light Emitting Diodes (LED) and Low Energy Consuming Devices to improve the quality of rural households".

The intervention consists of integrated aSolar energy and LED engines for providing lighting and smart energy solutions for rural and urban landscape. They conducted research on rural lighting in over a hundred Indian villages. Through their research they found that Solar energy had a lot more potential than just providing lighting. The Solar energy had huge potential to enhance the quality of life of Bottom of Pyramid by providing them clean energy applications

Social Innovation

As an innovative solution earthen glow provides every rural household with "solar gas Station". All Earthen glow appliances like solar light, fans, phone charger do not need to be wired to the energy harvester. The gas station is used only when the appliances run out of stored energy in form of gas. So, there is no need of wiring within the small household. Once connected to the energy harvester and charged appliances work for 6-8 Hours. This makes these appliances convenient to use.

Earthen glow's product line has been designing with a holistic view that ensures that the clean energy initiative can be successfully extended to clean water, security and agriculture. They felt street lighting to be an integral part of clean energy lighting initiative. Solar street lights benefit the entire village by increasing security and vision during night hours. Earthen Glow through all its initiatives has been

able to make a substantial change in the lifestyle of rural poor by providing them clean energy that has helped them earn livelihood, better homes, better neighbourhoods and overall a better life style. (Anon., n.d.).

Simpa Networks

India's energy needs are highly unfulfilled, with a huge rural population who has no access to electricity. The government and private sector have invested in several renewable energy projects. The insufficient rural infrastructure and poverty pose major threats to development of sustainable electricity source in the villages. Lack of electricity poses threat to productivity of the people, limiting their working hours to daylight only. This creates a vicious circle of poverty and non-productivity.

Simpa Networks was founded by Paul Needham in his pursuit to provide clean energy solution to the rural India. "We make clean energy simple, affordable and accessible to everyone". In July 2016 Simpa networks received India Today Make in India award for its contributions in the Indian renewable energy sector. The organization claims to provide a commercial solution to the socio economic problem of electricity in India.

The company focuses on innovations and radical thinking to lead the solar revolution in India. Simpa Networks have reached 376,168 individuals, generated 1,003,357 KWh of clean power energy. It sells solar power on financing to households and small shops in rural India.

Social Innovation

As an innovative approach to deliver its services, Simpa patented its pre-paid metering and control technology. The customer pays a small amount at the time of the installation. After installation the customers buys top up energy days from the local agents. Once the customer is economically able to buy out, the entire sum is paid out and the system unlocks permanently to provide continuous energy. They recently launched a 100 + channel Pay as you go satellite TV. It is based on smart panel technology, the CEO Piyush Mathur sees the roof top solar as an important role player in both off grid and on grid areas. These activities are beneficial for the people residing in rural areas, providing them with easy financing options for electricity access and also creating livelihoods. These unique features of their business model make them a social enterprise.

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