

Becoming social entrepreneur, or the sweetness of solidarity

by Eduardo Missoni

If I say “chocolate” most of you will think of Switzerland, Belgium or some other European country competing for the quality of “their” sweet food produced from the seed of the tropical cacao tree.

Few would think of Western Africa where roughly two-thirds of the entire world's cocoa is produced, or Mexico, Central and South America where cacao has been cultivated for at least three millennia, with its earliest documented use around 1100 BC.¹ In fact, Africa has no premium chocolate brand worth remembering its name.

Cacao, just as coffee, sugar and other basic ingredients for desserts of well-off people all around the world, are rather linked to centuries of slavery and exploitation of poorer countries whose economies were organized, mainly by colonial powers, around monoculture, i.e. the production of one single crop, for export purposes. Local populations became dependent on cash to import the food and other basic products they could not produce anymore.

Now a young woman decided to play the game the other way round, and transform African development with chocolate.

In Cape Town, where I recently participated to the 4th annual Global Business School Network (GBSN) Conference, I met Nontwehne Mchunu, and could taste her Ezulwini Chocolate. Ezulwini means “heaven” in Zulu language, but is also linked to the name of Prince Dabulamazi of the kaMpande Royal House, of whom Nontwehne - “Non” for her friends – is a descendant.

Non was barely twenty years old when she started a very small home based business in Kwazulu Natal which would lead to the success story of her “heavenly chocolate”.

If the largest percentage of cacao is grown in Africa, why shouldn't Africa be also the best producer of the sweet end-product? Non decided to take up the challenge and create Africa's first prestigious, world class chocolate brand. However Non told me that she has not only business in mind, but **sustainable change** and **solidarity**. Her ambition is to build a successful business that may help to create jobs in the townships of South Africa (where unemployment is as high as 40%) and expand access to vocational education for many youth through her business. She is now also looking to additional possibilities to use her network and success for the development and well being of poorer communities in her native province of Kwazulu-Natal.

She is **acting locally, but with global issues in mind**: she wants to use only cocoa and other ingredients from sustainable African sources. Her success is evidently based on her **vision**, her **passion**, her **entrepreneur spirit** and **perseverance**, however she also had the opportunity – still a privilege for most African youth – to access to education and proceed in her studies up to graduating in the prestigious Raymond Ackermann Academy at Africa's leading business school. This also gave her access to a significant number of people relevant to her project, and **networking** was another key to her success, since helped her to secure opportunities to travel to Europe where she visited highest rated food institutes in the UK, and learned and worked with the world finest chocolate maker in Switzerland.

Non is a perfect example of the potential of courageous and determined individuals struggling to improve quality of life of their societies. Nevertheless, there is one aspect that needs further thoughts: Non had access to formal education and even to higher education. In fact, there is a strong

correlation between business success and access to higher education.ⁱⁱ

Education for all is among the Millennium Development Goals adopted at world level in the year 2000, and to be attained by 2015. But even if basic education will be offered to most young people in Africa, and in most part of the continent the target is still very far to be reached, quality of education remains a serious problem, not least in basic numeracy and literacy.

Non formal education, offering opportunities to learn life-skills and forging young people character, may represent an important complement and help entrepreneurial talent to surface. A huge number of young workers throughout sub-Saharan Africa acquire skills through apprenticeships in the informal economy; orienting that learning experience through appropriate mentoring and tools may make the difference.

In any case, whether formal or non-formal education is considered, a fundamental methodological shift must take place. Traditionally education has been promoting competition among students, and this competitive spirit has been translated into society. The success of single individuals has been praised and brought as an example to follow, rather than the success of his or her community, with the result that for each individual success story, hundreds of fellow young women and men, shift directly from education into unemployment, or into highly insecure jobs and social exclusion.

Some hundred years ago, a great educator, the founder of the Scout Movement, Robert Baden-Powell, wrote: "Cooperation is the only way if we mean to win success".ⁱⁱⁱ Cooperation is indeed the multiplier factor that we need in education, as well in society, if we want to effectively face today's local and global challenges. Social change is intimately linked to the capacity of talented individuals to involve others in their success and share its benefits. In the words of a famous Brazilian bishop, Helder Camara "who receives more, receives on behalf of others; he is not greater, nor better than another fellow: he only has greater responsibilities. He must serve more. Live to serve."^{iv} Here is the key to social entrepreneurship and business models caring for a better world. Entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs both seek opportunities and take risks, but the difference resides in the quest for systemic change in organizational structures. One of the difficulties often faced with the development of entrepreneurial talent is that of preserving the value within communities once skills and success have been achieved. Social enterprises, which are cooperative and community-based are an important means of promoting decent jobs for young people and can provide an opportunity to learn how to become an entrepreneur and collectively accumulate the financial, social and human resources necessary to create employment. Social entrepreneurs create businesses that contribute to change, not only for the individuals concerned, but also for the community at large.^v

If Non will keep up to the social component of her ambitious project, the best result of Ezulwini Chocolate will be the heaven of decent life conditions for the poorest communities of Kwazulu-Natal experiencing the sweetness of her solidarity.

- i Wikipedia, “Chocolate”
- ii The Evian Group, Mhtente, The challenges of youth in the 21st Century. Africa – creating opportunities through entrepreneurship and education, Garnet IV capacity building workshop, University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, 26-28 November 2008
- iii Baden-Powell, R.S., Head Quarters Gazette, May 1910, quoted in: Sica, M. (Compiler and Editor) “Footspes of the Founder”, Fiordaliso, 2006
- iv Camara, H., Le désert est fertile, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1971
- v The Evian Group, Mhtente, *op. cit.*