The idea of bringing in the best possible tools to solve the most pressing problems is as ancient as humanity. However, at some point, we started drifting apart from that very reasonable intuition to “box” tools in specific sectors: Financial planning belongs to the private sector; tracking impact belongs to the third; and delivering services belongs to the public sector. With some paradigmatic exceptions, most of us fell in that trap and many remain in it. Not social entrepreneurs.

Social Entrepreneurship is a field that has been practicing and generating frameworks to continue to bring the best possible tools, regardless of the sector that created them, to solve the most pressing problems.

The seeds of social enterprise originated in different ways across the globe simultaneously: in Europe with cooperatives and then work integration schemes; in Bangladesh in the 1970s with microfinance; in Africa with ubuntu and afrocapitalism; in Latin America with renowned examples of social...
entrepreneurship, such as digital social currency; in the United States with innovative individuals in the 1980s. With a long trajectory to back it up, social entrepreneurship has never been more relevant for the world than it is today. At this point in history, faced with the double whammy of global pandemic and climate crisis, humankind has no choice but become more creative, innovative, and collaborative in how we organise ourselves. In terms of impact on the natural environment, business-as-usual was already broken. And then, with one third of the globe’s population in some form of lockdown, business ground almost to a halt. Amidst the calls to get the economy back up and running, there are also calls to rebuild differently – greener and with greater equality for all. While the pandemic is dreadful, it also brings opportunity for change.

THE NEED TO REFRAME ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

In this published booklet, the authors invite us to consider the importance of accelerating change towards Capitalism 4.0, creating societies and economies capable of solving problems for everyone, at scale. This requires reframing the roles and relationships of all actors in society, including companies, public administrations, NGOs and civil society. In reinventing ourselves and how we relate to each other, we need to consider how to adapt this new model to each context. Social entrepreneurship has already proven to be relevant across the globe and capable of adapting to the needs of each region. The authors walk you through examples coming from North Africa, Ireland, Japan, Brazil, Italy, Malawi, Bangladesh, Pakistan, UK, Spain among others. Not only has social entrepreneurship proven capable of adapting geographically, but it has also taken various forms that have made it all the more relevant. The articles in the booklet present examples of startups and big corporations, NGOs and Cooperatives, ephemeral organizations and others that are built primarily to address social and environmental challenges in a sustainable way. And they present us with some of the tools and frameworks developed in the field of social entrepreneurship, such as microfinance, triple bottom line, and crowdfunding, that other areas might benefit from.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: USEFUL, TIMELY AND UNIVERSAL

Social enterprise is particularly useful and timely today because it cuts across left-right politics. Following the cold war, the ideas and practice of free-markets swept across the globe as the winning ideology of the time. This is evident in the trend of the nonprofit and public sectors becoming more business-like – part of the social enterprise story. Since then, there have been growing calls for businesses to become more social. We soon realised that free-markets were not a panacea. And the concept of social business and corporate sustainability emerged as another strand of the social enterprise story. The solidarity economy moves us beyond the dichotomy of left-right politics that holds so much conflict and division and creates a space where we can rebuild together using the best possible tools, irrespective of where they come from. As we strive to build a world in which we would rather live during the most challenging crises our generation has ever experienced, let us take advantage of so much that the field of social entrepreneurship has to offer.