

Interview with the Social Entrepreneur Marianne Izaaks

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1. Introduction

The Usakos Needy Children Support Organization (UNCSCO), founded in 2004 by Marianne Izaaks in Usakos, Namibia, is an organization helping children, who live in the informal settlement of Hakhaseb, to get out of poverty through education. Marianne Izaaks studied at the UNISA (University of South Africa) and worked at NamPost until 2008 before fully committing her life to UNCSCO. The main hobby of Mrs. Izaaks is working on her farm as well as looking after the “UNCSCO children” families in her leisure time.

The main motivation of Mrs Izaaks to found UNCSCO was to help needy children whose families do not have the financial resources to sufficiently fend their children. Mrs Izaaks tackles this problem since 2004 by fully dedicating her life to improve the children’s current situation of living and to provide them with a future. Generally speaking, Mrs Izaaks is the founder of the project and hence project leader, whereas she also takes the role of a social worker.

The organisation is located in the school building of the primary school of Hakhaseb and therefore, operates directly where help is needed the most. The 40 selected children come to the “UNCSCO Centre” every day after school to be provided with a meal, to do sports, to get help with their homework and to be educated in terms of hygiene and AIDS prevention.

Through being highly present and building up strong relationships with the school and UNCSCO’s supporters, Mrs Izaaks is the person of trust and the face of UNCSCO. Nonetheless, she gets help by two more local women and usually eight international volunteers.

2. Research Methodology

Mrs Izaaks can be considered as a social entrepreneur because of her intention to change social problems in her closer environment with the vision to constantly let the foundation grow and help more children to get out of poverty through education. Through UNCSCO, Mrs Izaaks tries to create social value for the kids of the township and hereby takes a strong leadership role.

Thus, the research question ‘What are the main forces leading an individual to become a social entrepreneur, what kind of barriers are present during the exploitation of the idea and how does an entrepreneur respond to them?’ is built. Hence, the focal point of the interview and the following analysis is on the main motivations of the interviewee. Carter & Jones-Evans mention in their book ‘Enterprise and small business’ (2012) several factors why someone chooses to become an entrepreneur and explain the opportunity recognition process. The goal is now to link the theory to practice and to ask Marianne Izaaks what her main motivations were to start her particular business and become a social entrepreneur. Analyzing the main barriers and risks for Marianne Izaaks in her everyday life as well as her solutions for coping with them should give a general impression about

difficulties for social entrepreneurs. With the help of the literature from Shane & Venkataraman (2000) and Carter & Jones-Evans (2012) and especially their chapters about Entrepreneurial opportunities and the psychology of the entrepreneur, the questions are set. Those chapters present interesting background information and the relevant theory for conducting the interview and for focusing on the focal point motivation.

Because Marianne Izaaks is in Namibia, the interview was conducted over Skype and the conversation lasted one hour. Mrs Izaaks is a very charismatic and confident woman which is a significant reason of what she is doing now and is her engine to continue. This also represents a great lesson learned for the interviewers; one needs to be strong and confident and one has to have trust in oneself in order to succeed with the business idea. Besides some questions concerning growth, which Marianne Izaaks could not answer because she does not have the plan to expand the business, the whole interview passed without difficulties.

3. Main findings, contradictions and recommendations with regard to the theory

Mrs Izaaks' vision is to support children in terms of their education. Many children in Namibia do not have the chance to go to school as families lack financial resources. To finance her vision, the foundation is dependent on private or institutional donation. Social issues are getting increased attention from private people and institutions (Carter & Jones-Evans, 2012) which is helping UNCISO to reach the target support.

The founder of UNCISO considers her roles as being the organizer of the staff as well as cooperator with local institutions such as schools and universities. Her roles apparently need a sound level of characteristics. In their book, Carter & Jones-Evans (2012) describe characteristics of a successful entrepreneur, namely personality, intrinsic motivation and knowledge. Personality goes along with need for achievement, self-confidence, and creativity. Mrs Izaaks considers herself as a person that definitely touches upon these characteristics. Moreover, her intrinsic motivation is one of the main drivers that keeps her up accomplishing the task in a passionate way. The literature suggests knowledge as an important feature of a successful business. This is contradicting to Mrs Izaaks as she had never run her own business, nevertheless she benefited from the experiences made during her life in Namibia. For managing the daily operations, UNCISO is dependent on volunteers. Further problems may occur when volunteers are not skilled enough to teach in general as volunteers usually are young and inexperienced.

Concerning a business' marketing strategy, Carter & Jones-Evans (2012) state that having a unique marketing strategy is a good way to success. UNCISO does have some kind of marketing channels, like a website, cooperation with universities, charity concerts, and a collaboration with the DNG - 'Deutsch - Namibische Gesellschaft'. However, social entrepreneurs apparently have a low budget as they operate as a not-for-profit

organization. They cannot provide enough money to create awareness worldwide. Their most effective way of marketing is the word-of-mouth strategy, where former volunteers talk about their experiences in the project.

Other main findings focus on risk propensity. Mrs Izaaks' largest risk is not being able to find an appropriate person who would take over her position one day. Furthermore, she is concerned about getting too few volunteers for the project. However, the founder is not afraid of failing. Carter & Jones-Evans (2012) depict with the graph of the CAPM model that the higher the risk, the higher will be the return. This fact cannot apparently be applied to a not-for-profit organization. As a social entrepreneur, one tries to be risk averse to a certain extent in order not to harm other people. On the other hand, the literature supports Mrs Izaaks' way of thinking that she is not afraid to fail. A successful entrepreneur should not be pessimistic but rather optimistic and try to be a model for other people.

Looking into the future, the founder wants to stay in the business as long as possible and tries to help as many children as possible. Carter & Jones-Evans (2012) characterize a small business as a fast growing enterprise. However, in terms of growth, Mrs Izaaks wants to keep the current size of her project. This finding contradicts again with the literature which defines growth as an important next step for entrepreneurs. Investigating this characteristic, the founder might be afraid of losing control over UNCISO as she would need more supervisors. Moreover, it is difficult to attract volunteers to work in a project like UNCISO due to the high amount of social projects worldwide, especially in Africa, which are constantly looking for volunteers. Therefore, the interviewers recommend Mrs Izaaks to partner up with more non-profit organizations such as for instance AFS, Weltwärts, etc. in order to not only receive support in finding volunteers but also in training and providing workshops in their home country.

4. Conclusion

Throughout the interview with Marianne Izaaks it became clear that one of the main forces leading an individual to become a social entrepreneur is embedded in the experiences made in life. Those circumstances lead people to recognize opportunities, such as Mrs Izaaks recognized the need to help financially constrained kids with their education. However, theory and practice are contradicting regarding several aspects as for instance regarding barriers. Literature clearly points out that entrepreneurs are financially constrained. Although Mrs Izaaks does not benefit from a high budget, she is not trying to get more support and she makes the best out of her constraints. A very important finding is that social entrepreneurs really live for their idea, are self-confident and never lose their optimism. This presents one strong characteristic of how they respond to barriers. Moreover, the interview shows that entrepreneurs don't follow a clear business plan. They rather count on flexibility to

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adapt to changes in the environment and they often start their business without having clear guidelines for the future.

Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the theory to more real life situations in order to give students and potential entrepreneurs a valuable overview.

5. Appendix

5.1 List of references

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5.2 Interview Marianne Izaaks Usakakos Needy Children Support Organisation (UNCSO)

1. Please present yourself

- Marianne Izaaks, Namibian, married, 2 sons and one daughter
- UNISA- The university of South Africa
- Founder of the local initiative UNCSCO and project manager
- Worked for NamPost until 2008
- After 2008 solely working non-profit as project manager for UNCSCO in the informal town Hakhaseb
- Hobbies: Farming

2. When did you come up with the idea of starting your project?

- Wish to help orphans and needy children, whose families do not have the financial resources and the sense of responsibility to look after their children

How long did the starting / implementation phase last?

- Start 2004 with 5 children with private financial resources
- In 2006 UNCSCO was transformed into an official NGO

Tell us about the starting phase!

- Through constant presence and the profound honest willingness to help, great trust could be built up with the families of the township Hakhaseb
- the cook Lena already supported the initiative since the beginning and since then she is a steady companion
- in 2006 a more professional way was taken through the transformation into a NGO and since 2009 the first volunteers came to support the education of the children
- this starting phase was not without failures and powerful actions had to be taken

What was your vision / biggest goal?

- Helping as many kids as possible with their education and to support them during their whole primary school education
- We don't want that the children have to face their fate alone, but to get them through continuous educational support out of poverty
- Through the great help of the volunteers, the children have the chance to escape this vicious circle and to get the chance to get into high school

- One of the most important things of the project is to preserve and convey the namibian culture and values

How and where did you get the initial budget from?

- Out of private donations

What is your role in the project?

- Organisation of the supervision for the needy children
- Organisation of the sewing studio
- Active Supervision: psychosocial supervision of AIDS orphans, needy children and their parents, homework supervision and creation of leisure activities
- Monthly home visits at the parents' place of the children in Hakhaseb
- Supervision of the volunteers from Germany
- Cooperation with the schools
- Cooperation with the community
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Volunteer reports
- Contracts between UNCISO and the universities of the volunteers

3. The project:

What is the project about?

- Extra help with homework, educational support
- The children in the center have a big shortfall in education, love, care, welfare and in good breeding. UNCISO wants to ensure that the kids get enough attention and get a chance to go to high school

How did the collaboration with the school work?

- The volunteers are presented to the school administrators because they wish that the volunteers collaborate with the class teachers. The rooms are provided by the school.

How did you get the place and the rooms?

- Intensive contact with the school administrators
- Trying to show them the indigence of the kids

Who is working with you?

- Cook, sewer, school administrators, volunteers, contact persons

What is your typical daily schedule?

- 10:00 – 12:00 Preparation of the daily activities
- 12:00 – 13:00 Kids are out of school and come to the centre to have lunch
- 13:30 – ca. 15:00 Volunteers help with homework
- 15:00 – 16:00 Volunteers play with the kids outside
- 16:00 – 17:00 Reflection of the day and maybe preparation for the next day

What specific situations / achievements were the most important for you?

- Seeing the children learning and moving forward everyday.

4. The kids:

Under which criteria do you choose the kids who can participate?

- The kids are chosen out of their neediness but also under the expected academic work

How old are the kids?

- Between 6 and 15 years old
- What are you doing with them?

How are the family conditions of the kids?

- The kids are coming out of the poorest families of the township. They are not only not provided with enough food, but also there is no decent education provided by the parents. If the parents are dead the kids are living with their grandparents or any other relative who are very often unable to take care of the children because of alcoholism, illness, poverty, shortage of space and lack of prospects

5. The volunteers:

How many volunteers work for you?

- 24 volunteers a year; one cook and one sewer

How do the workers get compensated?

- Volunteers are not compensated; Cook/sewer are compensated

How do you recruit the volunteers/workers?

- Application via e-mail to Mrs. Izaaks or Mrs. Pfannkuchen
- Most of the time for the volunteer positions teaching/psychology/social work students and high-school graduates apply (18-30 years old)
- Joint decision of Mrs. Izaaks and Mrs. Pfannkuchen who is going to participate as a volunteer
- Procurement of project information and eligibility requirements as well as the assistance in the lead time are taken care of by Mrs. Pfannkuchen

How and where do you get the budget for the daily work from?

- Private donations
- Selling of the products out of the sewing studio

What are the tasks of the volunteers?

- Distribution of the meals
- Assistance with homework
- Editing of exercises with the kids created by themselves
- Organization of leisure time
- Home visits
- Cooperation with the local schools
- Inclusion of the parents
- Cultural exchange in matters of the Namibian culture
- Organization of “Hygiene days” (Shower, brushing teeth, washing clothes)
- HIV prevention

How do you do the transition for new volunteers? – How do you prepare them? What kind of problems are arising during that process?

- Preparation through Mrs. Pfannkuchen and the website <http://www.praktikum-namibia.de/teamwork/>
- In the project with Mrs. Izaaks
- Problems: Interplay of the cultures, which should be characterized by patience, empathy, cooperation, communication and understanding. This however, give rise to problems. The volunteers, nevertheless, see reason that they are guest in a foreign country and therefore, have to get into the culture and accept the differences.

6. Promotion:

How do you do promotion / create awareness?

- Website, flyer, cooperation with universities, charity concerts, newspaper articles, sending newsletters to sponsors, Deutsch-Namibischen Gesellschaft e.V. (DNG)

How do you find sponsors?

- With the help of the volunteers
- With the DNG e.V.

- Website
- Mouth-to-mouth

How do you keep in contact with them?

- Sending out newsletters (3x a year)

What do you offer them in return (newsletter etc.)?

- Visiting the project
- Sending out newsletters

7. Risks:

What are the biggest risks of the project?

- To find a voluntary follower
- Not enough applications for the volunteer positions

How do you handle the negative sides and situations during your daily work?

- Discussion in the team

Are you afraid of failure? – please elaborate on that!

- No I love the work together with volunteers for the kids

What would you do if people stop investing?

- Handle the cash reserves economically
- I would find a way to handle this shortage as I did in 2004 at the beginning of the project where I had way less financial resources

What would you do if you don't find any volunteers anymore?

- To ask the academic exchange offices, with whom we cooperate, for help and to advertise new collaborations
- Advertise on Facebook
- Advertise with the help of former volunteers

Aren't you sometimes distracted by opportunity costs (another job etc.)

- No

8. Future:

How do you see YOUR future?

- I would like to work as long as possible for the initiative and as the project manager. And in due time to find an adequate follower

How do you see the future of the project?

- Sustaining of the project and enhancements

Do you want to increase the size of the project?

- No

What are your greatest wishes for the project?

- More financial support to assist the social operations done by UNCSO to help the kids building up a better future
- Sufficient number of volunteers

What is your vision for the future?

- Helping more kids to go to secondary school
- To continue our work in the school building
- Enhancement of the sewing studio