

# EXPLORING SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A CASE-BASED STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE FOUNDER OF BEAD & PROCEED LIMITED

Lane Graves Perry, III, Western Carolina University  
Robert J. Lahm, Jr., Western Carolina University  
Bridget Williams, Bead & Proceed Limited

## ABSTRACT

*A substantive policy encouraging sustainable entrepreneurship globally is represented in the United Nations plan of action as expressed in its publication, Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development.<sup>2</sup> The agenda is operationalized through its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Articulation of the UN's agenda has led to increased support efforts for companies across sectors, regions, and nations to develop and implement sustainable entrepreneurship initiatives. A case-based example of a sustainable entrepreneurship venture in Christchurch, New Zealand, called Bead & Proceed Limited (Bead & Proceed), is presented. Through the development of Bead & Proceed, founder and chief executive officer, Bridget Williams launched this organization in 2019 with a dual-purpose mission. Bead & Proceed's mission is to educate and inspire action towards the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through creativity-inspired activities, while concurrently the venture itself is built to be sustainable in its own business practices, decisions, and operations. Bead & Proceed offers a range of SDG engagement and education tools for all industries to increase awareness of SDGs and learn how to put them into action at individual, community, corporate, and governmental levels. A discussion of sustainable entrepreneurship and the UN's SDGs describes what a sustainable entrepreneurial venture that focuses on operationalizing the SDGs (in practice and mission) looks like and offers transferable insights from an entrepreneur who has built a sustainable enterprise.*

**Keywords:** *United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, New Zealand, youth entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneur, experiential learning and teaching*

---

<sup>2</sup> Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. (2015).  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

## INTRODUCTION

As noted in the Institute for Global Business Research's call for papers in this special issue, "entrepreneurs today are being increasingly challenged to look beyond short-term profits to consider the long-term well-being of people, the environment, and the planet" (Sohmen, 2023, p. 1). This observation extends the idea of financial viability and positive social and environmental impact and shifts it to being not only short-term or even near-term focused, but long-term focused as well. This means that true sustainable entrepreneurship is a key resource to the longevity of our communities. Moreover, this aligns with the most widely accepted definition of sustainable development from the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland et al., 1987), i.e., "development that meets the need of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 16, listed item number 27).

Sustainable entrepreneurship strives to achieve a delicate balance across three primary factors. These include creating value and increasing the quality of life for society and the environment (through a mission-driven focus); generating financial returns to the business and entrepreneur (actors); and leveraging of innovative business models (Barnardo et al., 2021; Rosário et al., 2022), to improve products, services, production processes, techniques, and/or organizational modes (Schaltegger, 2013). Barnardo et al. (2021) further emphasized the importance of making a positive impact on society and the environment while maintaining financial viability and success. Accordingly, this tripartite balance hinges on an intentional effort on the entrepreneur to leverage resources in innovative ways with the ultimate goal of financial sustainability, without negative impact or consequence on the environment or society in the short-, medium-, and long-run. Abstract definitions and conceptualized practices help to clarify what is meant by sustainable entrepreneurship. Though, concrete examples help to challenge and advance abstraction through realized practices. When these practices are presented by the entrepreneurs doing this work on the ground, transferable lessons can be gleaned and shared. The case-based example provided here is very much intended to bridge theory with practice. The venture, Bead & Proceed Limited (Bead & Proceed), has been methodically built to be sustainable in its operations, but then the purpose (mission) of the venture is to help address environmental issues through education and action (framed by the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals).

## SUSTAINABILITY

### United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations was founded in 1945 on the heels of the resolution of World War II. This adaptive organization is currently made up of 193 Member States and serves to foster a level and accessible playing field where issues that are being faced regionally, nationally, and globally can be democratically discussed, and shared solutions can be adopted for the benefit of

all humanity.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, a concerted effort of UN Member States led to the development of a shared blueprint focused on prosperity for people, peace for nations, partnerships, and sustainability for the planet. The (resulting) 2030 Development Agenda, is practically operationalized by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as depicted on the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development, website (*The 17 goals*, 2023), as well as graphically, in Figure 1, below.

**Figure 1**  
**United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals.**



Terán-Yépez, et al. (2020) explicitly cited the UN's effort as a practical way that sustainable entrepreneurship is being operationalized through policy in a global way. Schaltegger Beckmann, and Hockerts (2018) identified the UN's agenda and SDGs as applicable frameworks for partnership, collaboration, and sustained cooperation among countries, sectors, and governance levels on a global scale. Additionally, they suggested that the UN agenda has led to an increase in support programs for companies to develop and implement sustainable entrepreneurship initiatives. It seems that SDGs are informing and inspiring practice and action at the government, corporate, and nation state levels. Another symbolic indication of the influence and value of the SDGs to the business education community came recently, when one of the authors of this present paper received an advertisement (via mail) for a new textbook, *Introduction to Business* (Neck et al., 2023). This advertisement for the book, along with the aesthetics of its cover artwork, included a similar periodic table of SDGs that had originally

<sup>3</sup> *United Nations: About us.* (2023). United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us>

inspired the founder of *Bead & Proceed* (the focused case of this paper). In fact, the textbook integrates the SDGs as a lens through which one may think critically, as a sustainable entrepreneur, about the challenges, problems, and opportunities that exist for the global community today.

### **Sustainability as a Multifaceted Cause**

The extensive permeation of the SDGs across countries (all 193 UN Member States have adopted them), cultures and languages, communities, and corporations demonstrates the universal language the framework represents. Additionally, it frames sustainability as a multifaceted cause that is interrelated to economic, environmental, and social issues and demonstrates the interconnectivity across (and among) the 17 SDGs. These 17 SDGs, problematized within the context of entrepreneurship, essentially serve as a repository framing the most pressing challenges of our time. To these ends, it is important to note that nearly every entrepreneurship education pedagogy, curriculum, and best practices, point towards identifying a problem first and working to solve that problem thereafter, e.g., “Idea Generation vs. Problem Generation” (Wilcox, 2017); “Design Thinking” (Gasparini, 2015); and “Entrepreneurial Alertness” (Tang et al., 2012). Awareness of the problem (or problems), as articulated and framed by the 17 SDG’s are a precursor to developing interventions to address them. This suggests that in general the field of business is at least acknowledging and stepping in the direction of sustainable entrepreneurship practices. To these ends, sustainable entrepreneurship is among the best vehicles for operationalizing the 17 SDGs. Concomitantly, the SDGs were the catalyst to the business that is featured in our case.

### **Sustainable Entrepreneurship: From Abstractions to Concrete Realizations**

Esteves et al. (2021) presented four case studies from four different nation states’ initiatives (i.e., United Kingdom, Portugal, Senegal, & Brazil), focused specifically on the relationship between sustainable entrepreneurship and the SDGs. Interestingly, while each case focused on a different aspect of sustainable entrepreneurship and development, all four case studies shared various conceptualizations of the value of community relationships (and networks), among other themes. The first case referenced the importance of social capital; the next identified nested communality; the third noted mobilizational citizenship; and the last referenced sharing knowledge and experiences through an action learning commons as “the key self-regenerative dynamic” (p. 1431). This fourth case study noted the value of sharing knowledge, experience, and skills across people involved in operationalizing sustainable entrepreneurial ventures as the source for establishing a rich body of collective wisdom. Social capital theory focuses on socially derived resources (e.g., tangible – public spaces; intangible – people) embedded in and developed through relationships as catalysts for social action and influence (Bourdieu, 1986).

Nested layers of communality are built on relationships and promoting the linkages across networks, which spreads innovation (Esteves et al., 2021). Adding to this, Escoffier

(2018) suggested a mobilization of citizenship to build autonomous local empowerment across people (relationships). These observations point to the value and importance of building like-minded communities of people from different backgrounds with the greater purpose of strengthening social capital, aligning values, and operationalizing skills and expertise in a way that frames and extends the work of a sustainable entrepreneur. The SDGs seem to have served as a binding agent for collaboratively advancing this work. To these ends, much like the work of Esteves et al. (2021), this paper hopes to move the topic of sustainable entrepreneurship from definitional abstractions as Muñoz et al. (2018) also observed, to concrete realizations manifested in the actualized practice of sustainable entrepreneurship. This present case on a founder's journey from inspiration to action and from action to sustained impact can help clarify the idea of sustainable entrepreneurship in a practical way. Additionally, the example chronicled here can serve as a teaching case for other developing sustainable entrepreneurs.

### **METHOD: CASE-BASED EXAMPLE**

Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) determined that actors (and/or their companies) who contribute through practice, mission, and core business pursuits to sustainable development can be called sustainable entrepreneurs. Bridget Williams is a sustainable entrepreneur, a co-author of this paper, and the founder and chief executive officer of the mission-driven social venture, Bead & Proceed. Bead & Proceed exists to educate and inspire action towards the 17 SDGs through creativity.<sup>4</sup> This paper adopts research methodology that is exploratory by design due to the emergent and evolving nature of the study of sustainability (and the pursuit of it) within the entrepreneurship context. Contextualizing the exploration is accomplished through further analysis of narratives from the sustainable entrepreneur by co-authors (researchers). Like Guskey (2022), this qualitative approach will adopt inferential research and develop a reflective analysis featuring a sustainable entrepreneurship initiative from the perspective of the founder, but with additional inputs. The purpose is to identify lessons learned, takeaways, and transferable concepts that can better illuminate the intentionality that goes into the development of a sustainable entrepreneurship business model in alignment with the thinking (sustainable entrepreneurship mindset) that underpins this branch of entrepreneurship.

Case study methodology is qualitative and involves investigation and illumination of a single case or small number of cases (Yin, 2014), with the goal of gaining comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon, e.g., an event, organization, program, or person (Stake, 1995). In the context of business research methods, Bryman and Bell (2011) identified content analysis, inference, and coding as fitting approaches to determining emergent themes and findings. This study will adopt an inclusive approach to case study methodology whereby, a key participant will also serve as a co-author to more intentionally inform the narrative associated with an exploratory investigation. In this case, we collaboratively collect, analyze, and weave the narrative and emergent themes from the transferable lessons associated with the founding of a sustainable entrepreneurship venture focused on education and SDGs.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Bead & Proceed: About.* (2023). Bead & Proceed Limited. <https://beadandproceed.com/about>

## **Collaborative Autoethnography**

In the discussion of methods above, some additional terms are available to be even more precise as to both rationale and approaches. As observed by Gant et al., (2019) autoethnography can be regarded as both a research method and a methodology, and is qualitative in nature. Further elaboration would describe autoethnography as both a process and a product (Ellis et al., 2011). It could be suggested that authors' own experiences may serve to extend understanding of a given phenomenon (Holt, 2003). However, to do so, data is to be analyzed critically (Chang, 2016). As for collaboration, one co-author here is an active sustainable entrepreneur; and others have been significantly involved with social entrepreneurship ventures (we submit this is relatable to some sustainable entrepreneurship endeavors), and overall authors have a blend of experiences as current or previous entrepreneurship practitioners, academics, and scholarly researchers. While it is suspected that many researchers collaborate as they are members of a given discipline (and their relative contributions may be bounded by this), collaborative autoethnography, as a method, methodology, process, et cetera, would hold that: "The interactive nature of (particularly collaborative) autoethnography strengthens ways to explore the relevance and impact of broader socio-cultural experiences with others, expanding these in terms of both breadth and depth" (Gant et al., 2019, p. 3).

### **INSIDE A SUSTAINBLE ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURE: BEAD & PROCEED LIMITED**

In this section a case focused on a sustainable entrepreneurial venture (Bead & Proceed) is presented in collaboration with the key participant (founder, Bridget Williams) who also serves as a co-author. As such, it begins with its founder's direct account of Bead & Proceed's inception (founder's story). An introduction to the social venture, its legal status, mission, and product/service offerings is given.

### **A SUSTAINBLE ENTREPRENEUR INCEPTION STORY**

#### **"Ready or not, your strengths will come a-knock-in!" – Bridget Williams**

*I studied at University of Canterbury working towards a law and arts degree and got involved in a range of leadership positions including the Student Volunteer Army and Emerging Leaders Development Program. These experiences inspired me to understand the importance of active citizenship and contributing to the community in a positive way. Although law didn't come naturally to me, I pushed through and graduated with an LLB and BA, sought a graduation position, completed my professionals, and started practicing in 2016. However, as the years went by, I noticed my passion and spirit dwindling. After a particularly bad day in court, I felt frustrated by the negativity around me and felt the pull to reignite my creativity... so I made a necklace.*

*Creativity has always been a part of my identity but in my law job, it wasn't given space nor attention and painting and creating this necklace felt like reconnecting with an old friend. It also made me realize how we don't make time for creativity anymore. I wore the necklace to work the next day, received some complements and thought – perhaps this could be developed into a business? Could people make and paint their own necklaces and tap into their creative side? Almost the next day, I was flipping through an Australian magazine called Peppermint (which focuses on lifestyle and sustainability) and I was struck by this colorful image called the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

*These goals address the biggest issues facing our society from climate action to poverty to gender equality and each goal had a corresponding color. Then it hit me! What if I could create an environment where people could come together to paint a five beaded necklace or keyring in the colors of the top five SDGs they felt called and then put them into action! While painting, people could ideate and brainstorm ways to act upon their chosen goals and the beads would serve as a conversation starter to help spread awareness of the framework and it would serve as a physical reminder on their commitment; thus Bead & Proceed was born!*

### **Mission Driven with a Clear Purpose**

A sustainable entrepreneurial venture must have a clearly articulated purpose and mission. Located in Christchurch, New Zealand, Bead & Proceed is a for-profit social enterprise that exists to educate people on the 17 United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and inspire action towards them through creativity. Like many social ventures led by sustainable entrepreneurs, Bead & Proceed adopts the heart of a charity with the mind of a business. Bead & Proceed offers a range of experiences and services to engage people to help them tap into their values, skill sets, and creativity and connect with the top five SDGs they personally feel called to put into action. All products are ethically and sustainably sourced to operationalize Bead & Proceed's mission and purpose. Another key part of Bead & Proceed is its one-for-one model, for every kit purchased, another is donated to either a low decile school<sup>5</sup> or a deserving community organization. This aligns to the mission of [UN] Agenda 2030, which is to "leave no one behind." Therefore Bead & Proceed wants to be accessible to everyone and ensure all can participate in understanding and acting upon the goals, which is an essential component of the business model.

Operationalizing the business model is centered on two sub-themes that capture some of the nuance around sustainable business strategy (*Building in Purpose* and *Diversify Your Impact and Income*). Regarding *Building in Purpose*, as noted in the founder's opening vignette the original problem being solved was not about how to address the SDGs, it was about figuring out a way to feel like she was using her strengths and doing good in the world. The original problem experienced was having a bad day in court, which intensified self-reflection about an unmet need. Frustrations led to actions allowing this soon-to-be sustainable entrepreneur/founder to

---

<sup>5</sup> "A school's decile measures the extent to which the school's students live in low socio-economic or poorer communities" *Schooling in NZ: Ministry funding deciles*. (2022, May 19). New Zealand Ministry of Education. <https://parents.education.govt.nz/primary-school/schooling-in-nz/ministry-funding-deciles/>

reconnect with creativity-oriented endeavors (a personal passion), that also were associated with purpose:

*I needed to escape the negativity of the law environment. The initial business idea was about bringing people together to connect to their creativity and through further investigation, the SDGs (these massive global problems) were built into the business – now creativity wasn't the solution, it was a tool to come up with solutions to address the SDGs. This taught me an important lesson: sometimes it's okay to focus on your strengths first then consider how you can use them to make sustainable impact. It's your strengths that add unique value to a business and I believe it's our moral responsibility to create a business that values people and planet.*

Regarding an overarching sustainable business strategy for operationalizing Bead & Proceed's mission, the mantra that as a sustainable entrepreneur you are not trying to find the dollar, you are trying to stack pennies, has been adopted. This references the sub-theme intended to capture the effort to *Diversify Your Impact and Income*:

*It's about finding different platforms and ways to grow the businesses through a range of services, products, or offerings. You can start with a simple product and then add a workshop experience to it. Doing this isn't just about growing financially, it also improves the customer experience and impact (as a facilitated workshop is more engaging than working through a self-directed roadmap, similarly, a three-month one-on-one coaching program, is more powerful than attending a one-off workshop). The important point is, my mission and purpose, hasn't changed, I've just added more ways to engage and connect with people.*

As depicted in Table 1, the following Bead & Proceed's offerings expanded from the initial bead painting gatherings (tied to UN SDG's) to numerous other formats, including services, consulting, and bead kits, following the guidance, *Diversify Your Impact and Income*.

**Table 1**  
**Bead & Proceed product and service offerings, description, and market.**

<b>Offering</b>	<b>Product &amp;/or Service</b>	<b>Key Partner</b>	<b>Description</b>
Bead & Proceed (EPIC)	Product & Service	Businesses & Organizations (Schools, Governments, Non-Profits, etc.)	Includes a 3-hour fully facilitated workshop that presents an introduction to the SDG framework, a Bead & Proceed activity whereby participants individually identify the top five SDGs they connect with, and select and paint the color of the corresponding SDGs they plan to action, and generates a follow-up report where all SDG themes, ideas, and findings from the workshop are documented and shared with the business to help align relevant SDGs and targets.
Bead & Proceed (IMPACT)	Product & Service	Conferences & Summits (regional, national, international)	Includes a keynote introduction to the SDG framework that is connected to the event theme, a Bead & Proceed Creativity Station where event attendees can paint in the color of the SDG most important to them, resulting in a commemorative beaded mural that serves as visual data and a symbol of weaving together collective actions to make change.
Bead & Proceed (PROCEED)	Service	Individual Leaders & Managers	A 3-month online coaching program designed to upskill leaders to understand the SDGs and other sustainable and impact frameworks. Helping individuals to harness their unique creative potential to make positive sustainable impact through their leadership.
Bead & Proceed Kit	Product	Individuals	The Bead & Proceed kit has the necessary supplies for 7 people to paint and make their own necklace or bracelet to action and includes an accompanying roadmap and proprietary SDG booklet to learn about and select the most relevant SDGs to them.

### **Sustainable Decision Making and Mindset**

As a sustainable entrepreneurial venture, every decision that is made is a business decision, a sustainability decision, or both. Most of these decisions fall into the latter category; meaning, that nearly every decision a sustainable entrepreneurial venture must make involves its viability as a business, but also is a decision about fulfilling the mission and purpose of a sustainable venture. While this can liberate decision making in some cases, it can also complicate trade-offs, efficiencies, and impacts of the venture. In this context, sustainable decision-making focuses on creating a world that operates respecting and nurturing the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental (Rosário et al., 2022; Zhang & Swanson,

2014). By continually asking, “what’s the next right thing,” or “how can I do this better,” social entrepreneurs strive to leave the world a little better than before. These questions help inform the entrepreneur’s sustainability mindset (Agu, 2021; Neck et al., 2019; Truong et al., 2022) and help keep them accountable to make decisions that align to maximize impact at every decision point.

To demonstrate this sustainability mindset in action, decisions about who to partner with as suppliers, logistics and optics around shipping, how to reinvest profits based on the revenue model, and how to operationalize value in the business model are critical. Simply stated, sustainable entrepreneurial ventures do not accidentally work with just any partner or make convenient decisions. These decisions are intentional and typically bounded by being both business and sustainability decisions. Every decision can have a positive impact and advance or fulfill the venture’s social mission and purpose. For example, partnering and collaborating with other social enterprises that share the same values can compound impact in context of the SDGs. This is captured by the concept of nested layers of communality Esteves et al. (2021), which are built on relationships and developed linkages across networks, which has been recognized as a contributor to innovation and diffusion (Dodgson, 2011; Moya-Clemente et al., 2021; Tello & Yoon, 2008).

In the case of Bead & Proceed, one key partner that prepares the Bead & Proceed beads employs artisans who have hearing, speaking, and other physical disabilities and are often a group marginalized in the work force. In addition to deliberately providing a living wage, Bead & Proceed ensures recycled material is used in all components of the necklace and bracelet kits it sells (e.g., beads from recycled wood, recycled material for instructions and boxes, etc.). Another key partner offers paint products that are free of toxins and for every square meter of paint purchased, the organization saves a square meter of the Amazon Rain Forest. This theme points to a sort of nuanced sustainability ecosystem that has elements that are specific to social ventures. While sustainable decision making is important it should not be paralyzing. Meaning, it is unnecessary to put pressure on oneself (as a sustainable entrepreneur) or the business to get it perfectly right the first time around. An example to capture the essence of this concept is offered in the following:

*If a business is not in a financial position to invest in the most sustainable outcome and it must first take smaller steps to get to the goal, we should still recognize that direction. A common mistake that businesses make is they think they must commit to being ‘Zero Positive’ straight away or be 100% waste free. Celebrating only the big audacious goals runs the risk of glorifying sustainable perfection. So long as your mindset is committed to continual growth, that’s better than feeling overwhelmed by the need to get it perfectly right the first time and therefore, run the risk of not making any change in case of falling short of this sustainable perfection. This perfection also, doesn’t exist as humans are constantly learning and the world of sustainable impact is changing fast. It is the idea that the longer you are in business (sustained), the more opportunities you will have to improve and impact sustainability.*

## Social Value Proposition and Delivery for Impact

Another evident hallmark (and emergent theme) of sustainable entrepreneurship is represented in the concept of social value creation, which is concerned with solving social problems or resolving social issues and having the agency to develop ideas for how to address them (Singh, 2016). This theme complements the sustainability mindset and sustainable decision approach adopted by sustainable entrepreneurs (as noted in the previous theme). The work of Bead & Proceed aligns with Escoffier's (2018) conceptualization of mobilization citizenship which focuses on building autonomous local empowerment across people in context of relationships, but also helps extend this idea into an organizational setting. As an example, Bead & Proceed is hyperaware of its social value proposition, which hinges on the following idea and vision:

*To help participants develop a deep understanding of how interconnected the social, environmental, and economic issues of today truly are. As everyone understands this connection, there is a profound respect for each other and the planet and this is actioned through conscious choices, knowing our decisions make impact. However, with everyone selecting only five SDGs [about which] they personally feel called to action, there would be a sense of focus, knowing you have "permission" to simply work on your five goals – you don't have to try and solve all 17 and this would reduce the "where to start" issue. Bead & Proceed envisions people connecting with each other over the same goals they have chosen, and the SDGs would be a common language throughout schools, councils, organizations, public and private sectors.*

Operationalizing the social value proposition in practice and measuring the impact is an imperative for sustainable entrepreneurial ventures. There is a great concern with determining impact of vision in practice as well. This catalyst point – converting the mission and social value proposition into action – is an important factor in shaping the culture of a sustainable entrepreneurial venture. With Bead & Proceed as an example, the throughline from mission to proposition, proposition to decision making, and decision making into informed action is evident. One key outcome of Bead & Proceed efforts for its business and organization customers is focused on helping people identify what (in the context of SDGs) they care about, and this gives space for a business or organization to understand what motivates its employees and what they individually value. This is where the follow up-report (mentioned in Table 1 – part of Bead & Proceed's event service, "EPIC") provides insight by identifying employees' greatest areas of concern. This process is designed to democratize the SDG alignment process and give direction as to where the business/organization should seek to make its impact, while subtly highlighting the internal challenges (culture) through a safe space (the workshop). A brief vignette featuring a few concrete examples demonstrates this concept from social value proposition to realized impact, which is an imperative for a sustainable entrepreneurial venture:

*I workshopped with a business that had a strong water and environmental focus. The manager was thrilled to see almost all the staff selected SDGs in their top five relating to climate, water, and the environment (e.g., SDG 6, SDG 13, SDG 14). The manager was thrilled to know*

*they had a team who was personally passionate about the work they do! However, SDG five (Gender Equality) was the most selected goal overall, and this prompted management to think “what are we doing to address gender equality?” as this is clearly something their staff cared about. This made management reflect and they noticed all their breakout and meeting room spaces were named after male scientists. Within a few days, they had changed the names of the rooms to female scientists to celebrate and recognize the contribution of females in the field. It was a small but mighty gesture. I also collaborated with another business customer who developed and introduced a monthly reward and recognition program called SDG Champions, which celebrated staff who embodied and actioned the SDGs in their workplace. Finally, I worked with other business customers, and they adopted more sustainable procurement practices and sought new partnerships with suppliers who were more eco-friendly and environmentally conscious in their business practices (e.g., helped promote more sustainable decision making). This ranged from simple everyday purchasing decisions (e.g., swapping out cleaning products for more eco-friendly options or changing the coffee being brewed to a fair-trade option) to larger-scale more impactful efforts (e.g., upgrading combustion vehicles to an all-electric fleet).*

### **Informed Future Action and Power Lessons**

While sustainable entrepreneurial ventures are concerned about the environmental future, it seems that they are also (rightly) concerned with their longevity as a business. The longer they are functioning and the larger the scale, the greater the potential for doing good in their communities. It seems that a clear purpose and a focused vision of the future helps inform present decisions. Bead & Proceed’s future focus has had a ripple effect on its business customers. For example, the businesses and organizations it works with are encouraged to explore other frameworks that articulate collective values through the lens of SDGs. Some businesses have set the goal to pursue a B Corp Certification, become a certified Ākina Impact Supplier (impact-led organizations that trade with other businesses and/or government and want to demonstrate that they make a positive impact)<sup>6</sup> and explore other social enterprise models (e.g., Fair Trade, AsureQuality certification, BioGro certification, etc.). In addition, government and non-profit customers are using SDGs to explain and structure their annual and long(er) term plans. Through the facilitation of 100’s of Bead & Proceed workshops with over 10,000 participants, numerous companies (~50), communities, and countries, the following Power Lessons for sustainable entrepreneurship in context of the SDGs are offered:

*It has been apparent how many people feel a sense of helplessness about where to start making impact – it seems there is this sense of feeling like they are just a drop in the ocean. Workshopping with people has made me see and realize how many people feel this sense of “what’s the point” and impending doom. Reflecting and discussing this with peers and colleagues has seemed to help reframe the bigger issue of where to start with a more action-oriented focus on how to start. To these ends, clarity, direction, and self-reflection are the first steps needed to make impact – the rest can fall into place thereafter.*

---

<sup>6</sup> Impact certification. (2022). Ākina Foundation. <https://www.akina.org.nz/social-enterprises/impact-certification>

*The SDG that is least selected is SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The misconception here is that money (in context of economic growth) is evil, and people feel reluctant to choose it for that reason. It is important to recognize that sustainable entrepreneurship is about the environment, communities, and citizens in balance with the economy, work force, and supply/demand.*

*The SDG most often selected is SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities with SDG 13: Climate Action and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production close behind. What is most interesting is how the most popular goal(s) tend to shift depending on what's happening in the world. For example, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being has grown in selection through COVID-19 (people recognized and appreciated the need and access to standard healthcare and how being in isolation and lockdown impacted mental health) and SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions have grown in popularity with the war in Ukraine.*

*I have come to recognize that workplaces are yearning for a safe space to feel heard, connect with colleagues and desire to tap into raw, messy creativity in ways they are not typically engaged. There is a misconception that problems can only be solved behind a computer screen and through this we have lost touch with our inner child (a place where creativity is a currency). I think we need to reconnect with this inner child because these times demand us to be fearless to imagine the impossible and approach these challenges with a sense of optimism and a "what if it does work" approach.*

An emergent framework derived from this research can now be presented, which identifies key themes that have arisen as discerned through Bead & Proceed's operational experiences. A Sustainable Entrepreneur Enterprise Framework includes the following dynamic themes: Mission Driven with a Clear Purpose; Sustainable Decision Making & Mindset; Social Value Proposition & Delivery for Impact; and Informed Future Action.

**Figure 2**  
**Sustainable entrepreneur enterprise framework and corresponding themes.<sup>7</sup>**



## CONCLUSION

The UN, by way of its 2030 Development Agenda and SDGs recognizes that “ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests” (*The 17 goals*, 2023). Numerous sustainable entrepreneurship initiatives (i.e., policies and practices) across many sectors, e.g., agribusiness, energy, construction, health care, education, are being deployed globally and locally to achieve these goals (Terán-Yépez et al., 2020). This serves as a testament to the ways that policy and programs, deployed at a global level, have shaped regional and local businesses and communities, and have started to develop impacts on the wider SDGs in observable ways.

Muñoz and Cohen (2018) focus on the development and implementation of business models designed with the intention to create value for society (without negative impact to the

<sup>7</sup> Inner framework depiction developed by the authors; outer color wheel from United Nation’s Sustainable Development website at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/>

environment), but with a clear economic value for the entrepreneur. Balancing a venture's mission-driven focus by creating value and improving the quality of society and environment, generating financial returns, and developing innovative business models, offerings, processes, and/or approaches represents the tripartite purpose of sustainable entrepreneurship. Sustainable entrepreneurship entails establishing sustainable business models supporting financial stability, while also existing (as mission-driven entities) to mitigate environmental impact or advance environmentally conscious production, distribution, education, consumption, and disposal. The best-test for sustainability is to accomplish this task by fostering a future that allows the generations beyond, to not only meet their needs but thrive in their environment.

As a social enterprise business, Bead & Proceed has dedicated itself to sustainable entrepreneurial practices. An additional dynamic Bead & Proceed exemplifies is through its mission to inform, educate, and operationalize the SDGs across the communities it serves through government, non-profit, and educational customers, and across economies through businesses and other organizations. Bead & Proceed represents a sustainable entrepreneurial venture with a bipartite impact that illuminates relevant, transferable lessons. These may be applicable to both existing and future emerging entities that want to integrate the SDG framework into their problem-solving approaches and the impact they have. As well, scholars who are concerned with developing a better understanding of sustainable entrepreneurship may be further informed by the practitioner experiences and insights presented in this present research and encouraged to seek more through further research.

An overarching observation that is relevant and perhaps inspiring to future sustainable entrepreneurs is that one should not dismiss or otherwise underestimate the potential power of a small and simple idea. It is these simple ideas that can have the biggest impact as they do not get lost in translation across people, organizations, governments, and communities. To these ends, when it comes to the sustainability of the planet, we do not need one really great world changing idea, we need thousands of small, impactful, and considerate community changing ideas across a range of people, entrepreneurs, organizations, and communities.

## REFERENCES

- The 17 goals. (2023). United Nations. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Agu, A. G. (2021). A survey of business and science students' intentions to engage in sustainable entrepreneurship. *Small Enterprise Research*, 28(2), 206-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13215906.2021.1919914>
- Barnardo, C., Reyneke, M., Ferreira, C., & Robertson, J. (2021). GrowBox: The reality of growth challenges for a social entrepreneur in Cape Town. *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/EEMCS-03-2020-0060>
- Bead & Proceed: About. (2023). Bead & Proceed Limited. <https://beadandproceed.com/about>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Greenwood Press.
- Brundtland, G. H., Khalid, M., Agnelli, S., Al-Athel, S. A., Chidzero, B., Fadika, L., Hauff, V., Lang, I., Ma, S., & Botero, M. M. d. (1987, March 20). *Report of the world commission on environment and development: Our common future*. United Nations. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Chang, H. (2016). *Autoethnography as method* (Vol. 1). Routledge.

- Dodgson, M. (2011). Exploring new combinations in innovation and entrepreneurship: social networks, Schumpeter, and the case of Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795). *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 20(4), 1119-1151. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dtr021>
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical social research/Historische sozialforschung*, 36(4), 273-290. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294>
- Escoffier, S. (2018). Mobilisational citizenship: Sustainable collective action in underprivileged urban Chile. *Citizenship Studies*, 22(7), 769-790.
- Esteves, A. M., Genus, A., Henfrey, T., Penha-Lopes, G., & East, M. (2021). Sustainable entrepreneurship and the Sustainable Development Goals: Community-led initiatives, the social solidarity economy and commons ecologies. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 30(3), 1423-1435. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2706>
- Gant, V., Cheatham, L., Di Vito, H., Offei, E., Williams, G., & Yatosenge, N. (2019). Social work through collaborative autoethnography. *Social Work Education*, 38(6), 707-720.
- Gasparini, A. (2015). Perspective and use of empathy in design thinking. ACHI, the eight international conference on advances in computer-human interactions, Lisbon, Portugal.
- Guskey, A. (2022). Diary of a senior marketing professor: Advice on how to get the most from student projects. *Global Journal of Business Pedagogy*, 6(1), 75. [https://www.igbr.org/wp-content/Journals/2022/GJBP\\_Vol\\_6\\_No\\_1\\_2022.pdf#page=79](https://www.igbr.org/wp-content/Journals/2022/GJBP_Vol_6_No_1_2022.pdf#page=79)
- Holt, N. L. (2003). Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 2(1), 18-28. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/160940690300200102>
- Impact certification. (2022). Ākina Foundation. <https://www.akina.org.nz/social-enterprises/impact-certification>
- Moya-Clemente, I., Ribes-Giner, G., & Chaves-Vargas, J. C. (2021). Sustainable entrepreneurship: An approach from bibliometric analysis. *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, 22(2), 297-319. <https://doi.org/10.3846/jbem.2021.13934>
- Muñoz, P., & Cohen, B. (2018). Sustainable entrepreneurship research: Taking stock and looking ahead. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 27(3), 300-322.
- Muñoz, P., Janssen, F., Nicolopoulou, K., & Hockerts, K. (2018). Advancing sustainable entrepreneurship through substantive research. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 24(2), 322-332. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEER-03-2018-427>
- Neck, H. M., Neck, C. P., & Murray, E. L. (2019). *Entrepreneurship: The practice and mindset* (2 ed.). Sage publications.
- Neck, H. M., Neck, C. P., & Murray, E. L. (2023). *Introduction to business* (1 ed.). Sage Publications.
- Rosário, A., Raimundo, R., & Cruz, S. (2022). Sustainable Entrepreneurship: A Literature Review. *Sustainability*, 14(9), 5556. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14095556>
- Schaltegger, S., Beckmann, M., & Hockerts, K. (2018). Collaborative entrepreneurship for sustainability. Creating solutions in light of the UN sustainable development goals. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing*, 10(2), 131-152. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEV.2018.092709>
- Schaltegger, S., & Wagner, M. (2011). Sustainable entrepreneurship and sustainability innovation: categories and interactions. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 20(4), 222-237. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.682>
- Schooling in NZ: Ministry funding deciles. (2022, May 19). New Zealand Ministry of Education. <https://parents.education.govt.nz/primary-school/schooling-in-nz/ministry-funding-deciles/>
- Singh, A. (2016). The concepts of 'Social Value Creation' and 'Social Value'. In *The Process of Social Value Creation*. Springer (India) Private Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-81-322-2827-1\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-81-322-2827-1_5)
- Sohmen, V. S. (2023, January 28). *Special issue of the Global Journal of Entrepreneurship: Sustainable entrepreneurship: Building resilience for the economy, business, society, and the environment [Call for papers]*. Institute for Global Business Research. <https://www.igbr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/GJE-Special-Edition-2023-Call-for-Papers.pdf>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.
- Tang, J., Kacmar, K. M., & Busenitz, L. (2012). Entrepreneurial alertness in the pursuit of new opportunities. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 27(1), 77-94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2010.07.001>
- Tello, S. F., & Yoon, E. (2008). Examining drivers of sustainable innovation. *Journal of International Business Strategy*, 8(3), 164-169. <http://O-search.ebscohost.com.wncln.wncln.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=35637674&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

- Terán-Yépez, E., Marín-Carrillo, G. M., Casado-Belmonte, M. d. P., & Capobianco-Uriarte, M. d. I. M. (2020). Sustainable entrepreneurship: Review of its evolution and new trends. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 252, 119742. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.119742>
- Truong, H. T., Le, T. P., Pham, H. T. T., Do, D. A., & Pham, T. T. (2022). A mixed approach to understanding sustainable entrepreneurial intention. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 20(3), 100731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2022.100731>
- United Nations: About us. (2023). United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us>
- Wilcox, J. (2017, March 24). *Idea generation vs problem generation*. TeachingEntrepreneurship.org. <https://www.teachingentrepreneurship.org/idea-problem-generation/>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Fifth ed.). Sage Publications. <https://go.exlibris.link/YZrpl3wR>
- Zhang, D. D., & Swanson, L. A. (2014). Linking social entrepreneurship and sustainability [Article]. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 5(2), 175-191.