

## 2026 DIANA INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Transforming Futures: Women and Social Entrepreneurship in a Digital Age

June 26–29, 2026

Johannesburg, South Africa



**BABSON COLLEGE**  
| Diana International Research Institute



**Gordon Institute  
of Business Science**  
University of Pretoria

## Call for Papers Diana International Research Institute Annual Conference

Submissions due: December 9, 2025

Submit here: <https://bit.ly/2026DIRC>

We are pleased to announce that the 2026 Diana International Research Conference will be held at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, South Africa from June 26-29, 2026, under the theme:

### *Transforming Futures: Women and Social Entrepreneurship in a Digital Age*

Women's entrepreneurship contributes remarkably to economies and societies. In fact, evidence suggests that women are at the forefront of tackling global challenges such as poverty alleviation, climate resilience, health care and societal problems in ways that contribute to the achievement of the SDG goals (Sanchez-Limon, Severino-Gonzalez, Rebolledo-Aburto, Dote-Pardo and Scott-Kinney et al, 2025). Among the 37 different definitions of social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs (Dacin et al., 2010), the most commonly cited definition comes from Dees (2001/1998): "Social entrepreneurs play the role of change agents in the social sector". In this way, social entrepreneurship offers a means to provide economic stability for women and their families, while also serving as a pathway for political, social and personal empowerment.

Not only are women more likely to participate in social and government services worldwide, but the 2023/2024 GEM Women report also showed that women are more likely than men to start a business in order to "make a difference" and are more likely than men to report sustainability strategies (Elam et al, 2024). In fact, social entrepreneurial organizations led by women make important contributions to positive social change through the values they incorporate and express (Borquist & de Bruin, 2019) and are more likely than men to emphasize social value goals over economic value goals than men (Hechavarria et al, 2017). Indeed, scholars have argued that women are a better fit for leading social enterprises because of their concern for social issues (Rosca, Agarwal & Brem, 2020).

However, despite recent evidence showing a 75% increase on women's start-up rates across 30 GEM-participating countries over the past 20 years (Elam et al, 2024), the ways that women engage in social entrepreneurship or launch social ventures is not well understood (de Bruin, Eversole, & Woods, 2024; Garcia-Lomas & Gabaldon, 2021). Equally important is the emerging knowledge about how women entrepreneurs harness digital resources to start and grow their ventures (Swartz, Scheepers & Toeffy, 2023). For those women in the Global South context, the barriers may be more persistent and access to digital and mobile resources more challenging (GSMA, 2024).

Social entrepreneurship is a powerful pathway for women to shape the future, harnessing innovation while critically engaging with the social, ethical, climate and cultural dimensions of technological change. Rapid technological transformation, marked by the AI and digital revolution, enables social entrepreneurs and social mission-driven ventures to leverage new tools and platforms to expand opportunities, pursue innovations, and reduce barriers to solving social problems in education, employment, the environment, climate and healthcare (Suseno & Abbott, 2021). By bringing together scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, we aim to generate knowledge and dialogue that will illuminate how women social entrepreneurs are transforming futures in a digitally interconnected world. More specifically, invited topics may include but are not restricted to:

- Social entrepreneurship and digitalization: opportunities and challenges with innovation, technology, and AI; ways that women are leveraging AI to address grand societal challenges.
- Theories of women's entrepreneurial activity: how do context-specific phenomena influence women's social entrepreneurial activity? What are the limits of Western-centered entrepreneurship theory and Western-feminism for the African or Global South context?
- Inclusive ecosystems: the role of entrepreneurial ecosystems, networks, and institutions in enabling or constraining women, especially young women social entrepreneurs; the influences of finance and investment, policy, law and governance.
- Women as beneficiaries of social enterprises: the impact of institutions, policies and practices on their launch, start-up and growth of new social ventures, especially among young women in the Global South.

We encourage papers that explore new research ideas, adopt novel methodological approaches and contribute to theory development to help advance the field and pave the way for an exciting future research agenda for the Diana community. Authors are limited to authoring/co-authoring no more than two submissions and should expect to receive notification of acceptance by March 1, 2026. Full papers are due by April 20, 2026 and will be considered for "Best Paper Awards".

### **About the Diana International Research Institute**

Building on the foundation of excellence established by the Diana Project™, the Diana International Research Institute (DIRI) cultivates a vibrant international research community with an expanded reach across continents, cultures and contexts, sharing knowledge and experience through dedicated books, journal articles and conferences. The Diana Project was established in 1999 by Professors Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene and Hart in partnership with ESBRI in Stockholm to provide a platform for research and scholarship focusing on women entrepreneurs and their business growth. Each year, the Diana International Research Conference brings together more than 100 scholars worldwide, providing a forum to share global research dedicated to gender and women's entrepreneurship.

For questions about the conference, please contact us at [dirc@babson.edu](mailto:dirc@babson.edu)

### **2026 Conference Chairs**

Candida Brush, Babson College, US

Amanda Elam, Babson College, US

Diana Hechavarria, Babson College, US

Anastacia Mamabolo, GIBS, University of Pretoria

Caren Scheepers, GIBS, University of Pretoria

Ethne Swartz, Feliciano School of Business, Montclair State University