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**Michele Eccher**

## Social Enterprise in Ireland: The Camara Education Experience

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# Social Enterprise in Ireland: The Camara Education Experience\*

Michele Eccher\*\*

## Abstract

The concept “social enterprise”, despite being widespread, is still of difficult interpretation. What is certain is that social enterprises bring great benefits to different communities or groups of disadvantaged people by managing economic activities. This paper analyzes the situation of social enterprises in Ireland, being Ireland an example of a country in which social enterprises still do not have a nationally accepted and agreed definition.

The first part of this work gives an up-to-date representation of the Irish social enterprise sector, while in the second part Camara Education is presented as a specific case of successful Irish social enterprise. The Camara Education model will be presented, together with the results obtained and the beneficial impact on society it generates.

## Keywords

Social enterprise, Ireland, Camara, reuse, ICT

## JEL codes

L31, L86, I29, L20

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\*\* University of Trento. Email: michele.eccher@hotmail.it

## 1. Introduction

Social enterprises constitute a relatively new, complex and multi-sided phenomenon that is still difficult to interpret. They developed quickly and are spreading fast. The reason for this growth is the benefit they bring to a community or to a group of disadvantaged people through the managing of production activities, plus the fact that for-profit and public organizations are not anymore able to keep up with the escalating needs.

Despite the fast spreading of social enterprises, legal frameworks have not developed with the same speed. Legislative reforms have been introduced only in a few countries, even though these reforms are made urgent by the crisis of both financial markets and public finance. The fact that social enterprises have been less affected by the crisis gives them important development potential in the medium and long run, but without a legal recognition they cannot operate at their full potential.

This paper presents an analysis of the situation of social enterprises in Ireland. Ireland is one of those countries in which social enterprises still do not have a nationally accepted and agreed definition. Throughout the years different scholars and researchers have given their contribution to the subject. The first part of this paper aims to give an up-to-date representation of the Irish social enterprise sector. The second part presents a specific case of Irish social enterprise: Camara Education. What is interesting about this organization is that it has implemented a highly successful social enterprise model. No entity similar in size and achievements to Camara exists today in Italy. The model will be presented, followed by some data regarding the results obtained since its foundation in 2005 and the impact it had on society and people.

## 2. Social Enterprise in Ireland: definition and diffusion

The term social enterprise was introduced in Ireland quite recently. It brought along the concept of social economy, which most of the time is used to indicate the same thing as social enterprise.

### 2.1 Definition

In Ireland the terms “social economy” and “social enterprise” are used when referring to the initiatives involving the production of goods or services that have a social goal, rather than a profit-making or commercial one (O’Hara, 2001). Besides this use of the terms, they are not widely accepted within the country and a nationally agreed definition does not exist.

At first the Irish third sector was associated to non-profit organizations with a strong social and community ethos that provided and delivered health and personal social services. In the 1990s, due to high levels of unemployment and several urban and rural disadvantages, the social economy model started to attract the attention of policy-makers. Consequently, in year 2000 the Irish Government launched the SEP program (Social Economy Program), which aimed to support the growth and development of the so called “social economy enterprises” that were operating in order to increase employment opportunities in disadvantaged areas (O’Shaughnessy and O’Hara, 2004).

As outlined earlier, an agreed definition of what constitutes a social enterprise does not exist yet. The Irish Government has not currently adopted a definition of social enterprise. In 2013, both Forfás<sup>1</sup> and the

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<sup>1</sup> Forfás was established in 1994 as an agency of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. It is Ireland’s policy advisory board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation (see <http://www.forfas.ie/aboutus/>).

recently created Irish Social Enterprise Network (SOCENT<sup>2</sup>) tried to elaborate a definition of social enterprise. These were the first definitions proposed by governmental institutions in Ireland. They closely match the EU definition given by the EMES Network<sup>3</sup>. Forfás states that a social enterprise “is an enterprise that trades for a social/societal purpose, where at least part of its income is earned from its trading activity, is separate from government, and where the surplus is primarily reinvested in the societal objective” (Forfás, 2013). SOCENT, admitting that there are lots of definitions changing over time and across countries, refers to the definition given by the European Commission. In order to be considered as social enterprises, organizations must be income generators and trading organizations with a social mission that is measured<sup>4</sup>. Even if these two definitions are given by different entities, the overall thrust is the same: social enterprises have a social mission, but must also have the generation of income feature that characterizes traditional enterprises.

## 2.2 Categorization of social enterprise

As stated by O’Hara (2001), categorization of social enterprises in Ireland has always been arbitrary. Since the development of a nationally recognized definition of social enterprises is very recent and still ongoing (it started in year 2013), individual enterprises may select their legal identity from a number of different options. Unlike what happens in other European countries, where particular types of organizational forms for social enterprises are encouraged, the legal context in Ireland generally exerts neither a facilitating nor inhibiting influence on the social economy sector. For many years the fact that an increased number of new social enterprises were developing has not given rise to any specific legislative changes.

In the early 1990s, the government-established Social Economy Working Group together with Planet<sup>5</sup> identified three types of organizations belonging to the social economy sector:

- *Community businesses, which are generally financed only from trading income;*
- *Deficient-demand social enterprises;*
- *Enterprises based on public sector contracts, which consist in local community businesses and enterprises that subcontract public sector expenditures in disadvantaged areas (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008).*

An alternative important categorization of Irish social enterprises has been done by O’Hara (2001) and supported by O’Shaughnessy (2002). This classification does not focus on the organizational forms of social enterprises, but rather on their objectives, activities and operation.

- *Work integration*

This type of social enterprises (also known as WISE) provide work and labor-market integration/reintegration for people who are socially excluded (e.g. people with disabilities, long-term unemployed) (O’Hara, 2001).

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<sup>2</sup> Irish Social Enterprise Network is an organization founded in early 2013 with the aim of supporting and giving visibility to the social enterprise sector (see <http://www.socent.ie/about-us/what-do-we-do/>).

<sup>3</sup> The acronym EMES stands for "EMergence des Entreprises Sociales en Europe" – i.e. the title in French of the vast research project carried out from 1996 through 2000 by the network. The acronym EMES was subsequently retained when the network decided to become a formal international scientific association. See [www.emes.net](http://www.emes.net).

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.socent.ie/about-us/>.

<sup>5</sup> Planet, which stands for Partnership for Local Action Network, is a network of area-based partnership companies.

- *Housing*

This category is constituted by voluntary organizations that provide social housing. These enterprises rent accommodation to people in need, especially old people, people with disabilities and homeless (O'Hara, 2001).

- *Personal and proximity services*

This category comprehends non-profit organizations providing services such as community care, health care, childcare, counseling, services to Roma people or homeless, as well as recycling and food cooperatives attending to elderly, children and unemployed (O'Hara, 2001).

- *Credit Unions*

The Irish credit union movement, established in 1957, is the typical and probably the most recognizable example of social enterprise in Ireland. A credit union is constituted by a group of people who collectively save their money and lend to each other at a reasonable rate of interest (O'Hara, 2001).

- *Local development organizations*

These organizations emerged in the 1990s in the context of local development initiatives that were able to provide innovative responses to the emerging needs of modern society (O'Hara, 2001).

- *Community cooperatives*

Community cooperatives have the objective to serve the community and deliver a wide range of public utilities and services (e.g. piped water, electricity supplies, marketing local products and tourism development) to inhabitants located in areas characterized by declining and unbalanced demographic structures and with impoverished public service provision (O'Shaughnessy, 2002).

In 2013 another attempt to categorize Irish social enterprises was made by Forfás. The agency distinguished four types of social enterprises:

- *Organizations that trade in a service or product that has a social good and a high potential income generation;*
- *Organizations that create employment opportunities for marginalized groups;*
- *Economic and community development organizations;*
- *Organizations that deliver public services.*

Among the different categorizations that have been elaborated along the past decades, one thing has been noted by Forfás: organizations tend to define themselves according to the prevailing policy themes, including the availability of grant funding. Until 1999, when the SEP and the subsequent CSP were introduced, Ireland did not have a social enterprise funding scheme, so this may be one of the reasons why entities have identified themselves as types of organizations other than social enterprises (whereas the label "social enterprise" has been more widely used where funding schemes for that type of organization were put in existence).

### 2.3 Legal structures and regulation

The term social enterprise is not a recognized legal form in Ireland. Social enterprises may adopt different legal structures. They may be limited companies, industrial and provident societies—which is the legal form adopted by cooperatives—or trusts (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008). The "company" is the most used legal form by business firms in general. Companies can be limited by shares (this is the case of most commercial

companies) or by guarantee. The “company limited by guarantee”<sup>6</sup> is the legal form most commonly used by Irish social enterprises, followed by the form “industrial and provident society”. Credit Unions have a separate legal status and are defined by statute (O’Hara, 2001).

It is quite common for Irish social enterprises to apply for charitable status. This status does not give any legal status to the organization and it neither confers incorporation. An entity can have charitable status without being incorporated<sup>7</sup> and vice versa (Dochas, 2006)<sup>8</sup>. As stated by The Wheel, an umbrella and advocacy group for more than 900 charities, “when in Ireland an organization has ‘charitable status’ it simply means that it is recognized as charitable by the Revenue Commissioners for tax purposes”<sup>9</sup>. In order to be recognized as charitable, an organization needs to fulfill two conditions. First, it must have a legal structure with a ‘governing instrument’ (e.g. a written constitution, memorandum and articles of association or a trust deed) that includes a clause stating that the organization will use its funds for charitable purposes only. Second, the organization must have as objective either the relief of poverty, the advancement of education, the advancement of religion, or other purposes beneficial to the community.

As outlined above, the majority of social enterprises take the form of companies limited by guarantee with charitable status. As explained by Clarke and Eustace (2009) this is due to the fact that this type of organization has more sources of funding available. Even if, from an historical point of view, the cooperative would have been a more common structure, the increase in requirements of state sources of funding meant a growth in the limited company model. This ruled out credit unions as a potential source of finance. In fact, credit unions can lend to cooperatives but not to limited companies (Clarke and Eustace, 2009).

Among social enterprises, only two main types receive statutory support (together with some community cooperatives, e.g. Udaras na Gaeltachta<sup>10</sup>): local development social enterprises and work integration social enterprises. The former have emerged with the support of statutory funding made to support area-based development partnership structures; while the latter received provision of subsidies through the national active labor market policies, also known as ALMPs (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008).

## *2.4 Mapping the social enterprise sector*

As outlined in the previous paragraphs, the use of the terms social enterprise and social economy are very recent. A common understanding of the concept and a common definition are still absent. Due to this, no national official studies have been carried out in this field yet. Up to now, research in the field of social enterprises has been carried out only by academics and sector stakeholders with different approaches to

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<sup>6</sup> Companies limited by guarantee are registered companies in which liability of members is limited to the amount that each member has guaranteed, in writing, to contribute to the company in case of dissolution or in case the assets are insufficient to cover all debts. Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) is the legal form used by cooperatives. IPSs must be engaged in industries, business or trade, and have a constitution known as the Rules of the Society, which states the goals, the terms of members’ admission, the voting details and the appointment of auditors (O’Shaughnessy, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Incorporation: The process of legally declaring a corporate entity as separate from its owners. Incorporation protects the company’s owners, shareholders and directors from exposure to personal financial liability outside of their original investments in the company (<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/i/incorporate.asp>).

<sup>8</sup> Dochas is The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organizations.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.wheel.ie/content/charitable-status>.

<sup>10</sup> Udaras na Gaeltachta is an agency that has specific responsibility for the development of native Irish speaking regions (Gaeltachts).

measurement. The main studies have been done by O'Shaughnessy and Fenton in 2004, by Clann Credo<sup>11</sup> in 2011 (results of which were reprised by Forfás in 2013) and by Prizeman and Crossan in years 2010-2011. What resulted from those studies is that the field of social enterprise in Ireland is highly diversified, multifaceted and comprised of a wide range of organizations with complex missions, different legal status, organizational structures, networks and entrepreneurial behaviors.

One thing that Irish social enterprises have in common is that they are driven by a social mission and apply innovation, risk taking and proactive characteristics in order to achieve their social agenda. They show typical entrepreneurial features when approaching their social purpose and the market. The most important source generating income were grants. As a consequence, the most common legal form used by social enterprises resulted the company limited by guarantee, which has the most favorable conditions attached to grants. According to the studies, in 2009 in Ireland there were 1,420 social enterprises and community businesses. The total income of these organizations was around 1,4 billion euro, accounting for 0.9% of national GDP. The average turnover per social enterprise was then over 1 million euro, of which 17% was coming from trading. From the results it turns out that social enterprises were also major employers, providing more than 25,000 jobs (both full-time and part-time). This labor intensive feature explains why the biggest part (64%) of total expenditures was represented by payroll.

The information coming from all the previous studies is a great starting point for future public, statutory and corporate intervention. Additional research still needs to be done in order to help understanding and supporting the development of the Irish social sector, which is still underdeveloped but which has much to offer to the country.

## *2.5 Financing social enterprise*

When referring to the financing of social enterprises in Ireland, there are some unclear aspects. Irish social enterprises have depended for many years mostly on public support, but in the past years they started recurring to other sources (e.g. loans). The use that social enterprises do of the financing is not clearly defined; it depends principally on the nature of the support measure they are in receipt of. It is likely that social enterprises use statutory funds to meet capital and employment costs. Social finance is more commonly used for capital projects (O'Shaughnessy and O'Hara, 2014).

According to Forfás (2013), potential sources of funding for social enterprises may be, among others, employment supports, organization development finance (grant or repayable loan for start-up, growth, expansion), public funding dependent on the activity undertaken by the social enterprise (e.g. environment, tourism, youth, disability), tax based initiatives that encourage investments in initiatives, philanthropy, trading income, and membership fees. Each social enterprise may recur to one or more of those sources in accordance to its specific configuration. Specific sources on which Irish social enterprises may count include the Community Services Program, the Social Finance Foundation (which consists in a fund of 97 million euro distributed through five approved social lending organizations), government contracts for public service delivery, bank finance through Triodos Bank serving Ireland from the UK, and funding provided to social enterprises by the Arthur Guinness Fund (650,000 euro in 2012).

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<sup>11</sup> Founded in 1996, Clann Credo provides affordable loan finance to community, voluntary and charitable organizations, community businesses and social enterprises throughout Ireland and abroad (see <http://www.clanncredo.ie/default.aspx?m=22&mi=171>).

The US Institute of Social Entrepreneurs<sup>12</sup> has identified three models regarding how social enterprises may fund themselves. First, a *dependency model*, where enterprises rely mainly on grants and donations; second, a *sustainable model*, where revenues are constituted by a mix of grants, donations and earned income; third, a *self sufficient model*, where the income of the enterprise comes entirely from its earnings. Clarke and Eustace (2005) stated that Irish social enterprises belong to the second model. If the aspect of grants is considered, in Ireland social enterprises have received support both from governmental bodies through public schemes and from the social investments sector.

### 2.5.1 Public support

As explained in the previous paragraphs, Irish policy started focusing on the social economy sector only during the 1990s. The reason for this interest was the perceived role of the sector in addressing unemployment and urban and rural disadvantage. As a consequence, in order to stimulate and support social enterprises, the government established a number of national programs (O'Shaughnessy, 2013).

A national Social Economy Program<sup>13</sup> (also known as SEP or SE) was launched in year 2000 with the goal to support community/voluntary groups in the development of social enterprises that would tackle disadvantage and support community regeneration. In January 2006 the government switched from the SEP by launching a new Community Services Program (CSP) (O'Shaughnessy, 2013). The CSP had the support of community businesses and social enterprises as main goal. It focused more specifically on funding local services and employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups of people, especially in those areas that were either geographically or socially isolated (i.e. those areas in which public and/or private sector supports were not available). The CSP aimed also at ensuring that potential benefits of other public investment in community facilities and amenities were realized (O'Shaughnessy and O'Hara, 2013). Other programs funded by Irish government to support social enterprises were the Community Employment<sup>14</sup> and the Job Initiative<sup>15</sup>.

At the European level, an important source of funding for social enterprises has been (and will be in the future) the Social Business Initiative introduced by the European Commission in 2011. The measures related to finance and funding within the Initiative consist in a 90 million euro European financial instrument be set up to facilitate access to funding for start-up, development and expansion of social enterprises by way of investment in solidarity investment funds, which provide own-capital and debt-financing instruments; proposals to improve the regulatory environment for the facilitation of private investment funds that wish to invest in social enterprises; and proposals to simplify state aid guidelines with regard to social and local services (Forfás, 2013).

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<sup>12</sup> Founded in 1999 by Jerr Boschee, the Institute for Social Entrepreneurs provides information, education and training resources to help launch and expand social enterprises in the US and around the world (see <http://www.socialent.org/>)

<sup>13</sup> Launched in 2000, the Social Economy Program (SE) was designed to support social enterprises that were professionally managed and that were 'working' in the market place (O'Shaughnessy and O'Hara, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> The Community Employment (CE) provided training, development and work experience to unemployed people, travelers, lone parents and people with disabilities in community and voluntary projects and in public bodies (O'Shaughnessy and O'Hara, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Introduced in 1998, the Job Initiative (JI) was a three year work experience scheme for people who have been unemployed for five years or more. The goal of the JI was to progress participants into mainstream employment (O'Shaughnessy and O'Hara, 2004).

### 2.5.2 Social Investments Sector

Apart from public schemes, a second big source of funding for social enterprises has been social finance. The term “social finance” indicates a means of providing support to social enterprises by way of repayable investment loans. The need for social finance arose when it was evident that the market failed to provide certain types of enterprises with adequate funds, preventing them from growing and/or remaining in business. Social enterprises and community businesses in Ireland had always found it hard to access credit from the mainstream banking sector, principally because they do not fit the conventional risk and security profile that lenders required. Social finance allows communities and enterprises that are usually overlooked by conventional sources of finance to receive resources and ensures that all investments produce a social gain or benefit. In order to receive funds from social finance, entities have to first demonstrate their ability to deliver meaningful benefit to the people or community they serve, then that they are able to repay the loans (Clann Credo and DKM Economic Consultants, 2011).

Though being still quite small, the Irish social investment sector is constantly and rapidly growing. In 2006 the government established the Social Finance Foundation (SFF), a wholesale lender in the social finance market supported by the Irish Banking Federation which operates through Social Lending Organizations (SLOs). The main SLOs are Clann Credo, First Step Microfinance, UCIT, Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership, and Cavan Enterprise Fund (Clann Credo and DKM Economic Consultants, 2011). At the moment the social investment market is dominated by two of the previously listed lending actors, Clann Credo and the Ulster Community Investment Trust Ireland (UCIT).

Clann Credo, established in 1996, “provides affordable loan finance to community, voluntary and charitable organizations, community businesses and social enterprises throughout Ireland and abroad” (Clann Credo and DKM Economic Consultants, 2011: 1). It invests in community-based projects that generate not only a “social dividend”, but also a financial return, which then will be used to cover the operation costs. Clann Credo has been granted a charitable status by the Revenue Commissioners, it operates as a social enterprise and is a Company Limited by Guarantee without share capital (Clann Credo and DKM Economic Consultants, 2011).

The Ulster Community Investment Trust Ireland (UCIT), established in 1995 in Northern Ireland, since 2008 is lending also in the Republic of Ireland. The goal of the organization is to provide social finance, free advice, business support and mentoring to the social economy sector in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (i.e. community organizations, charities and social enterprises). Some of its clients include enterprise and workspace projects, tourism initiatives, rural development projects, childcare schemes, housing associations, community transport, energy and environmental initiatives, and sports and recreation facilities. Before lending funds to any entity, UCIT takes into consideration the social purpose and the business model (if it is viable or not) of the recipient. UCIT is a Limited Company with charitable status, which means that all profits generated are reinvested into the community and social enterprise sector<sup>16</sup>.

As at July 2013 UCIT and Clann Credo together had around 24 million euro of outstanding social investments in Ireland. Clann Credo accounted for 20 million euro of the sum, while UCIT accounted for the additional 4 million euro. Approximately 250 organizations availed themselves of the loans offered by the two entities, with an averaged borrowed sum of around 100,000 euro. The minimum size of the loan available is 40,000 euro for Clann Credo and 30,000 euro for UCIT while, for both entities, the maximum level is 500,000 euro. The average term is respectively seven and eight years, with an average interest rate

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.ucitltd.com/roi-home.html>.

of approximately 6%. Both Clann Credo and UCIT have never received funds from the Irish government. The first has been funded largely by charitable donations from religious organizations, while UCIT has been funded by UCIT Northern Ireland, which is considered as its “mother organization”. The establishment in 2007 of the Social Finance Foundation (SFF) by the Irish retail banks with 25 million euro donation set a change in the financing of Clann Credo, UCIT and the other lending actors. Nowadays, the SLOs are responsible for generating and evaluating loan application, but the SFF has right to refuse those loans. The capital is disbursed by SFF, with SLOs receiving the payment of interests and the SFF getting the principal. Clann Credo and UCIT are able to accept around 80% of loan applications.

The demand for funding from the social investment sector has always been constrained because of the volume of grants available from the government and other public agencies. The cutback in funding operated by the government in recent years has moved community organizations from public grants to the social investment market, increasing the demand for social investments (Clann Credo and DKM Economic Consultants, 2011; UCIT website; Forfás, 2013).

### 3. Camara education

#### 3.1 The firm

Camara is a registered business name of CAMARA EDUCATION LIMITED. The company is incorporated under the Companies Act 1963, is limited by guarantee, which means that it does not have any share capital, and it is governed by a board. It is also a registered Irish charity (CHY 16922).

Camara, following its motto of “Transforming Education”, is an international organization dedicated to using technology in order to improve education and livelihood skills in disadvantaged communities around the world. It does so by reusing computers and IT equipment that would otherwise be recycled, offering training to teachers on how to use the technology for learning purposes and providing eLearning Centers to disadvantaged schools. Through receiving this kind of education, it is believed that people will be better able to break the circle of poverty they find themselves in.

Camara operates as a social enterprise, “generating its own revenues but with the sole purpose of effecting social change – the enhancement of education in disadvantaged schools<sup>17</sup>”.

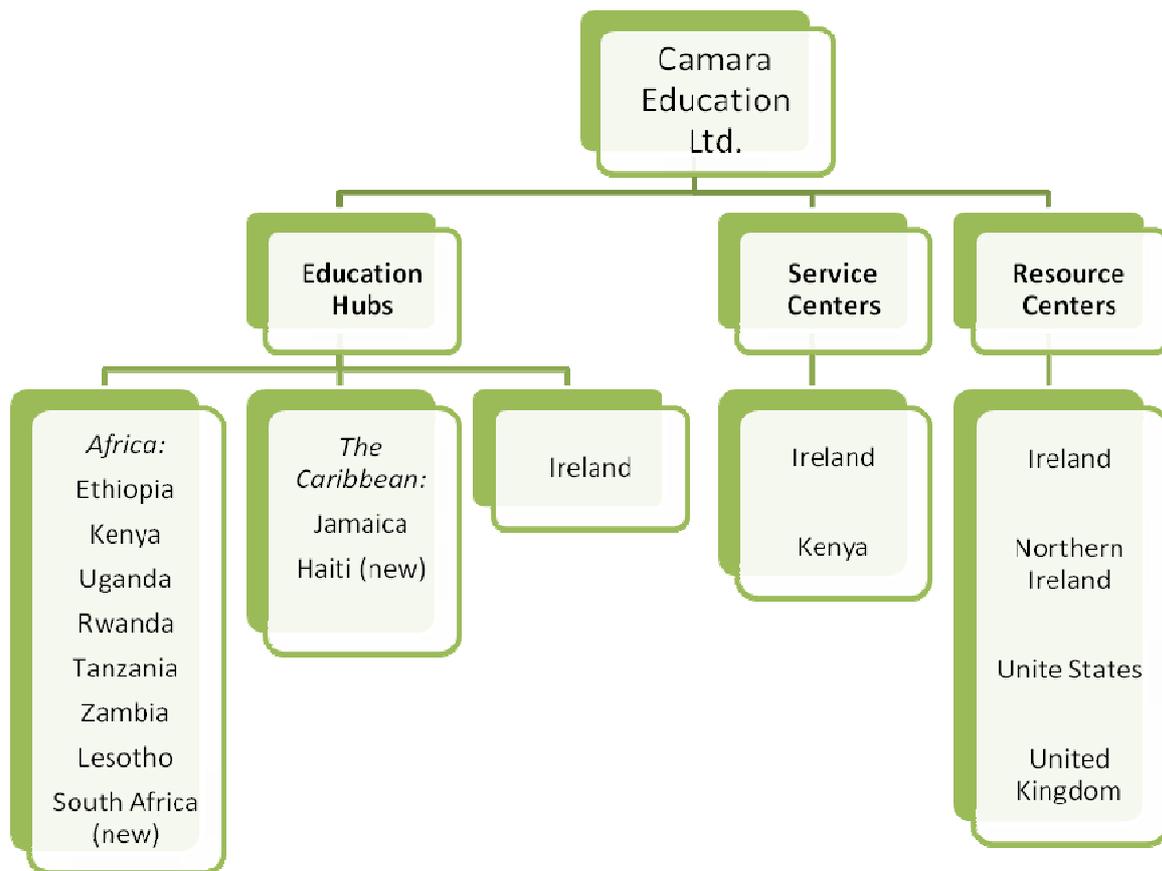
Founded in 2005 in Dublin, where the business offices are still located, Camara has operations in other 12 countries besides Ireland. It is present in eight African countries, in Northern Ireland, in the United Kingdom, in the United States and in the Caribbean. The Camara network is represented in Figure 2.1<sup>18</sup> and consists in Education Hubs, Service Centers and Resource Centers. The Education Hubs are independent local entities responsible for the front-line delivery of the Camara “education delivery” model to educational institutes within their respective countries. The Service Centers provide support and governance to the Education Hubs. The Resource Centers source financial and/or technical resources to deliver affordable hardware to the Education Hubs. All Hubs and Centers operate as social enterprises and are financially sustainable after one year.

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://camara.org/about-us/how-we-do-it/>.

<sup>18</sup> Source: Personal elaboration.

Figure 1 - The Camara Network



As outlined before, Camara Education Ltd. is a registered charity in Ireland. The charitable status was granted by the Irish Revenue Commissioners on the basis that Camara pursues the advancement of education in disadvantaged communities (which is one of the purposes for which a charitable status may be granted). The charitable status avails of certain tax exemptions and allows Camara to not register and account for VAT (Value Added Tax) on its income (Ryan, 2013). All Camara’s branches applied for charitable status. Camara Learning Ltd. is registered as a charity in the United Kingdom (1135540), while Camara Education Inc. is currently re-applying for charitable status (501(c)3) in the United States; and Camara Education UK Ltd. is registered with HM Revenue & Customs in Northern Ireland (XT17715).

### 3.2 History and name

Camara, which is a word that comes the Bantu dialect<sup>19</sup> of West Africa and means “teacher” or “one who teaches with experience” (Grant Thornton, 2013), was founded in 2005 in Dublin by Cormac Lynch, a former engineer and investment banker. With the growing of the organization, Lynch had to move from his garage to larger premises, ending in 2010 in Chapelizod Industrial Estate, Dublin, were it is still currently located. After developing the “Camarabuntu” operating system and application software that was to be installed on the refurbished computers, in 2007 Camara opened the first computer workshop in Kenya. Refurbishing and training centers were then established also in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Uganda. In 2009,

<sup>19</sup> The Bantu languages are a traditional sub-branch of the Niger – Congo languages.

after the global economic crisis affected severely the Irish economy and the whole society, Camara decided to establish Camara Ireland with the objective of tackling the problem of lack of funding of Irish schools that needed computers for their students but were not able to afford them. In 2011 Camara opened one Education Hub in Jamaica, followed the year after by the establishment of a refurbishment center in Silicon Valley, California (US), and of an Education Hub in Tanzania (where Camara was already selling computers through its other African hubs). Around the end of 2013 refurbishment operations started also in the UK, while new hubs were opened in Haiti and South Africa.

### *3.3 What Camara does and how*

Camara's goal is to help in the advancement of the national education systems in those countries where it operates, by improving access to Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) to students in a sustainable and cost effective manner (in line with the goal set by UNESCO regarding quality of education). By providing technology to schools and communities located in marginalized areas, Camara reduces a great number of obstacles affecting education and livelihood skills. It is believed that technology has a positive impact on different areas that regard the poor and marginalized. First it benefits livelihood, since being able to use a computer makes it easier for a person to get a job and earn income. Then it affects education, by enhancing the experience of learning for children, and social justice, since technology allows people to communicate to a wider audience the injustices and abuse of human rights affecting them. Technology also has positive impact on gender equality and health (i.e. technology can be used to tackle health problems). Technology affects democracy, since it allows people to organize themselves and to communicate and gather support from the international community. A clear example of this is the impact of technology on the Arab spring of 2011. A final area benefitting by technology is the environment, which even though ICT uses energy, it gives the possibility to advance environmental research, planning and action. Due to all these reasons, giving students the possibility to become digitally literate it is believed will lead them to use those skills to improve their livelihood and subsequently drive development within their local communities, lifting themselves and their families out of poverty.

The concept of technology is the link between Camara's two business lines: Computer Reuse and Education Delivery.

#### *3.3.1 Computer Reuse*

Computer Reuse is carried out by the Hubs in Dublin, US and UK. It consists in collecting computers and IT equipment from individuals and organizations that would otherwise throw them away. Camara reuses computers, laptops, servers, screens (both CRTs and flat screens), keyboards, mice, power leads and hard drives, but also accepts other IT equipment, which is either kept in the office if needed (e.g. printers, scanners) or recycled (e.g. cables, big servers, old printers). Camara offers a collection service via DHL (with whom it has an arrangement regarding transportation fees) to entities that are donating more than 10 reusable items, in exchange for a variable transport fee. The price depends on the amount of stuff that has to be collected, on the size of vehicle that needs to be used for collection, on the distance between the workshop and the collection place, if there is someone on site that will help load the vehicle. If the collection includes big items that need to be disposed of, an additional payment may also be requested. A collection can be booked within 24 hours notice. Suppliers of Camara computers include different types of entities, like for example public agencies, large businesses, small and medium businesses, schools, universities, IT firms and private individuals. An alternative to the collection is the possibility to drop off the

equipment at either one of the Camara workshop premises (Dublin, London, Silicon Valley) or at other drop off locations (Belfast and Galway).

Each “client” that donates equipment to Camara receives an Equipment Docket Receipt stating name, address and contacts of the client, together with the number of items collected/dropped off. Once the items reach the workshops, they are counted, put on pallets and it is checked that the amount delivered corresponds to what is written on the docket. After this first check, a Bulk Donation Registration Form is filled out and attached to each pallet. This document contains the collection ID number (which is the same number present on the Equipment Docket Receipt), the date of collection, the customer’s name and the quantities of equipment on the pallet. The next step consists in logging the collected computers into Camara’s recording system called “Africatrack”. The make, model, serial number and asset number (if any) of each computer is logged into the system with the use of a bar code. Each computer is assigned an Africatrack number and is associated to the client that donated it. Donations coming from private people are recorded as “private donations”.

The unique computer tracking system Africatrack used by Camara has been designed thanks to help of Salesforce volunteers. Salesforce.com is a global cloud computing company based in the US and a strong partner of Camara. The partnership is reinforced by the fact that the Irish company uses Salesforce CRM<sup>20</sup> product. This program permits to link every Africatrack number of a computer to a client present in the system. In this way Camara is able to keep track of a specific machine for the whole process, from when it enters the workshop until it is recycled. So, if an organization for example would like to know where their donated computers are or what has been done with them, Camara can quickly answer to that. At any moment Camara can find where a particular machine is, if it has been reused or recycled, if it is still in the workshop or it has been already delivered, and to which destination.

After registration, the computers go through to the next step which consists in checking if they meet the minimum specification requirements in order to be reused and whether they function or not. The minimum specs are 40 GB Hard Drive, 512 MB RAM, P4 only, 1800 Mhz Processors, CD Rom or DVD, Network Card. If the machines pass the test, they are sent on to the next step, if not they are sent to the “computer hospital” for repair or upgrade. The computers that cannot be repaired are sent to recycle stream. Before being recycled, every Hard Drive is removed from the computers and it is either wiped using DBAN for future reuse, or is degaussed, crushed, and stored for recycling. Recycling is done in accordance to the EU WEEE Directive<sup>21</sup> at a licensed WEEE facility.

The computers that pass the test undergo the process of hard drive wiping. Camara has a strict hard drive treatment policy. For no reason and at no time during the refurbishment process the computers are accessed by Camara. Before being recycled or reused each hard drive is wiped or degaussed and crushed. The wiping of the hard drives is done by running a DBAN operation. DBAN, which stands for “Darik’s Boot And Nuke”, is a free software that allows the removal of any information contained in a hard drive. DBAN wipes the hard drive 7 times, making it impossible to retrieve any sensitive data. This system complies with the United States Department of Defense standard 5220.22-m<sup>22</sup>, which is one of the highest. If the wiping procedure does not work due to a partition failure, the hard drive is degaussed, crushed and sent for

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<sup>20</sup> Customer Relationship Management.

<sup>21</sup> The European Union Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive, incepted in 2002, is an European Law that sets collection, recycling and recovery targets for all types of electrical goods.

<sup>22</sup> US DoD 5220.22-m recommends the approach “Overwrite all addressable locations with a character, its complement, then a random character and verify for clearing and sanitizing information on a writable media” (see on <http://www.killdisk.com/dod.htm>).

recycling. Once the data erasure process is completed, a Data Erasure and Reuse/Recycling Certificate is sent via email to the client who donated that equipment. This document lists the serial numbers and asset tags of all computers whose hard drives have been erased, the quantity of equipment received other than computers and it certifies that all equipment will be either reused or disposed at an authorized WEEE recycling company. Camara offers also an on-site data destruction service for more than 50 hard drives for organizations that are willing to donate their computers but have strict policies regarding information leaving their premises (e.g. information companies, hospitals, social media companies).

After the wiping process the computer is clean and is ready to start its “second life”. The next step is to install a new operating system. Linux, which is a free operating system, is installed on those computers destined to Africa, whilst those destined to Jamaica or Ireland are loaded with Windows 7. Camara is an authorized Microsoft Refurbisher, which allows the Irish company to refurbish desktop and laptop computers and servers with Microsoft software<sup>23</sup>. Together with the operating system, an educational package is also installed into the computer. The package includes Edubuntu (a free educational package of numeracy and literacy games), Open Office, an offline version of Wikipedia Encyclopaedia and a teacher training program. Advantages of using free operating systems include no required license fee, limited risk of catching viruses, and the availability of educational content at no cost (plus the fact that Edubuntu runs faster than other operating systems). Moreover, Camara is able to substantially reduce the cost to the school and actively discourage software piracy. Once the installation is completed, the computers are cleaned and it is made sure that everything is working properly and no problems have arisen.

The final stage of the refurbishment consists in boxing the computers (desktop, monitor, keyboard and mouse) and preparing the pallets that will then be sent to the Education Hubs around the world. Each box is assigned a bar code, so that Camara can track at any time what equipment is contained in each box, in what quantity and with what features. The computers are now ready to be shipped. Once they reach their destination, they are set up by Camara in eLearning Centers in schools, colleges and community centers.

### *3.3.2 Education Delivery*

Camara sells the refurbished computers and its educational package to educational institutions at heavily subsidized prices, making technology affordable and valued to even the most disadvantaged communities. Through the development of relationships with the Ministry of Education, local education and government bodies, along with other key entities, Camara ensures that its goals and outcomes are harmonized with domestic educational policies and initiatives. It is through these relationships that the advantages of ICT in education can be brought to the most marginalized areas and communities where it is most needed, in the form of affordable, effective, sustainable and long-lasting initiative.

Once the computers reach the Education Hub they are tested again and subjected to quality controls before they are installed in eLearning Centers in schools and community centers. Besides supplying the computers, the Hub offers also other three key services: maintenance support, teacher training and the recycling of the computers at the end of their useful lives.

Camara works together with the schools and community centers since the very beginning. First, the educational institution must apply to Camara and provide appropriate documentation. Second, the

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<sup>23</sup> Camara has a ‘Non-profit organization’ license that permits to pay a reduced rate (6€ per operating system instead of 80€) to install Windows 7 Pro on its refurbished computers. Camara is allowed to use the license as long as it is supplying the computers to schools, educational organizations or specially approved recipients who are working with disadvantaged groups (see <http://www.microsoft.com/refurbishedpcs/MAR.aspx>).

educational institution is visited by Camara and the eLearning facilities inspected for suitability. It is made sure that the eLearning Center has lab furniture, lab wiring, ventilation and safety and security measures. In fact, since many of the countries in which Camara operates are very poor, technology may become an attractive target for bandits and thieves. For this reason computers are provided to schools only if some sorts of security measures are assured. In order to receive the equipment, the educational institution must commit teachers for training with Camara. Once the eLearning Center is ready, the computers loaded with the open source operating systems and software are delivered and installed. Schools sign a contract stating that the equipment is for educational purposes, cannot be resold and must be returned to Camara for recycling when obsolete. Together with the computers the educational institution receives a maintenance contract (including a replacement of non-working equipment) for a period of 6 months. Longer contracts are also available, always made as affordable as possible. The institution receives ongoing training, is provided additional support and services (e.g. lab networking), and is visited to carry out Camara's Monitoring & Evaluation. The possibility to purchase upgrades is also offered. Once the computers reach their end-of-life, they are returned to Camara and replaced with comparable ones. Schools supplied by Camara are contractually obliged to return all end-of-life computers and IT equipment to Camara, which will dispose them in authorized recycling facilities that comply with international regulations.

Together with the computers, Camara provides also training and certifies the teachers to use the technology. This is a way to fully recognize the fundamental importance of competence development of all school personnel who engage with the e-Learning Center. For this reason, Camara offers "a comprehensive Learning Framework that supports the ICT Competence Development of Teachers, Principles and School Technicians to truly allow for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century school embracing ICT in Education" (Grant Thornton, 2013: 59). The courses offered by Camara, which partners with Intel and other internationally recognized educational bodies, focus on elements such as basic ICT skills, technical skills and how to enable ICT in education (how to use ICT to teach subjects such as science and math). Courses are addressed to selected teachers, principals, school leaders, and school technicians, and include preparation regarding basic computer maintenance, networking, and administration of the eLearning Center. The whole training may be provided by skilled experienced instructors through modern pedagogical techniques, it may be online or it can have a blended approach. Trainers consist of both Camara staff (i.e. paid employees) and volunteers with strong teaching and technical skills that are willing to take some time off their work in order to train teachers in one of Camara's Education Hubs.

The Camara Learning Framework is structured in order to facilitate the meeting of UNESCO education goal of "improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills<sup>24</sup>".

### *3.4 The Camara social enterprise model*

As explained earlier, Camara receives computers from companies, which pay a small variable fee, and individuals. Once the computer has been refurbished it is sold and sent to one of the Education Hubs around the world. When the Hub receives the computer at the port, it takes care of all customs charges and import taxes, and then pays Camara for the equipment received. Then the Hub sells the computer to the "approved schools" at a very fair and low price, together with a maintenance contract, training program for a number of teachers and a recycling and replacement service at the end of the computer's

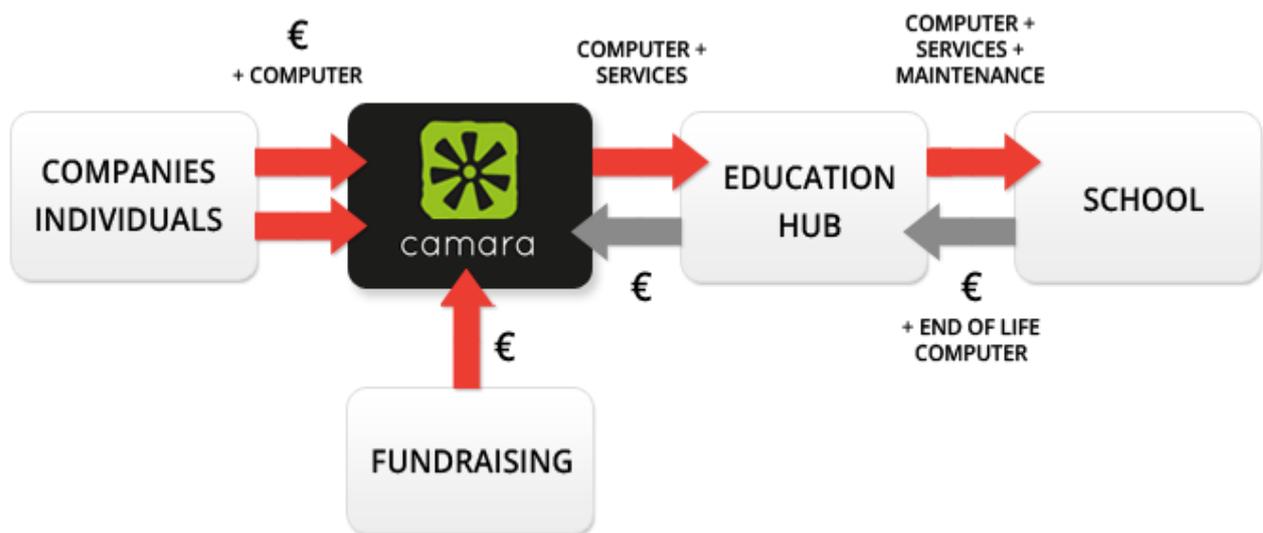
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<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/efa-goals/>.

life. Prices of the computers vary across the network. When setting prices Camara focuses on each school in the context of the system and country that it is in, rather than from a worldwide comparison perspective. The analysis includes the wealth levels of the country and the relative cost of buying a new computer and training in that country. Prices of computers sold by Camara are lower than prices that would be found on the regular market for the same product. This allows disadvantaged schools and community to provide digital literacy to students that would not otherwise have the possibility to gain those skills that will help them break the cycle of poverty they find themselves in.

Figure 2.2 summarizes the social enterprise model of Camara just explained. It represents a supply chain stretching from technology and educational provision through to schools.

Figure 2 – Camara’s social enterprise model



Source: <http://camara.org/about-us/how-we-do-it/> (January 2014).

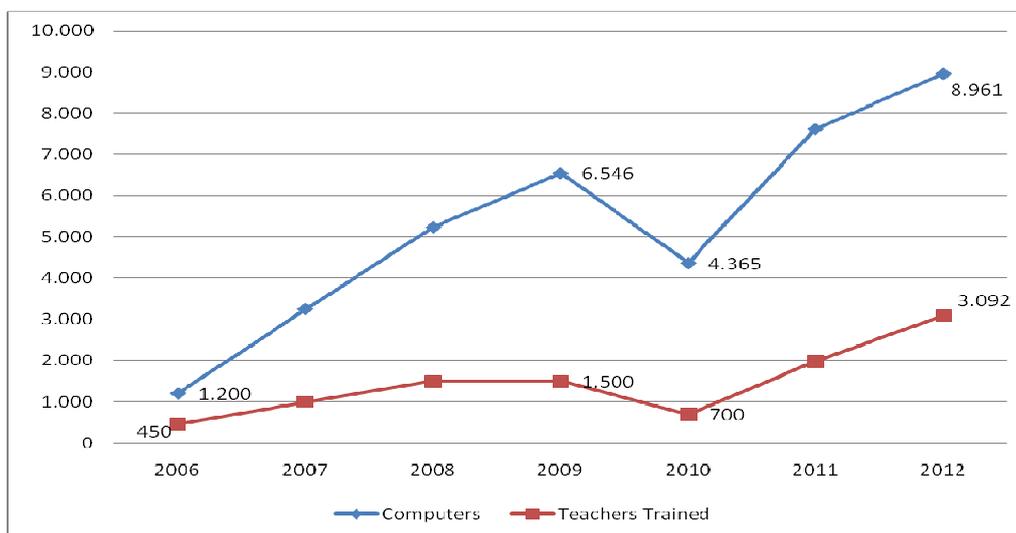
As can be seen in the figure, there is an “asset” movement from companies and individuals to the school in need, passing through Camara and its Education Hub. On the opposite side goes the financial part of the transaction. Money goes from the school to the Education Hub, which then takes care of custom charges for receiving the equipment and pays Camara for its services. Camara, by selling the computers instead of donating them, makes the purchaser responsible for the equipment he/she is buying. If a school is investing part of its money in buying computers, it means that it believes in Camara’s vision and truly thinks that technology may enhance students’ education. The fact that Camara receives equipment for free and relies highly on the work of volunteers permits to deliver technology at a very low and affordable rate.

### 3.5 Camara in numbers

Up to the end of year 2012 Camara has refurbished and reused more than 38,000 computers, recycling approximately 32,000, for a total of 70,000 computers processed (Grant Thornton, 2013). The shipping of the computers to the Education Hubs is done via 40 feet (approximately 12.2 meters) containers, where each container typically contains between 500 and 850 machines. The difference of 350 units is mainly due to the type of monitors transported, being them big CRTs or flat screens (where one box can contain either

one CRT or four-five flat screens). Figure 2.3 shows the yearly number of computers refurbished and shipped since Camara started its operations in 2005, together with the number of teachers trained during the same period.

**Figure 3 – Number of computers refurbished and shipped and number of trained teachers (2005-2012)**

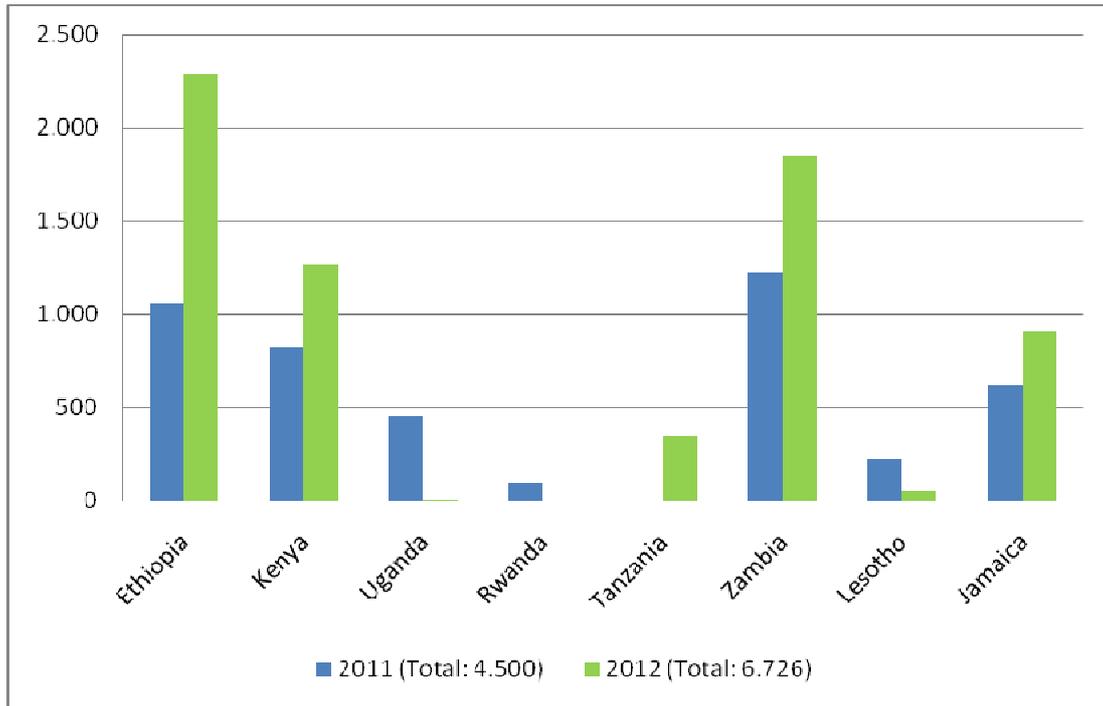


Source: Camara Annual Reports (2006 – 2012).

As can be seen, there has been a constant increase of both computers shipped and teachers trained among the time period considered. The decrease of computers in year 2010 was a consequence of different events. First, Rwanda and Uganda introduced a ban on importation of refurbished computers; second the Hub in Ethiopia was closed and relocated due to termination of the agreement with the original partner. The new Ethiopian Hub started its operations only in the second half of 2011. The decrease of refurbished and shipped computers was also fueled by Camara’s introduction of a stricter distribution policy (i.e. each Hub would receive a number of computers equal to their capacity of distribution). The decrease of trained teachers in 2010, besides the reasons just highlighted for the computers, is mainly due to the more rigorous selection of trainers undertaken by Camara (meaning that fewer qualified trainers were available to be sent out) and to the weaker economic situation in Ireland. The crisis affecting almost every country around the world reduced the number of suitable candidates that were willing to take time off their work to go to Africa. In addition many candidates were not sure whether they were able to raise the money required to cover the cost of the trip. The decision undertaken in 2011 to move its Irish Hub to bigger premises (meaning that more equipment could have been processed), the increase of awareness achieved, the establishment of new important partnerships and the opening of new Hubs in Jamaica, US and UK brought a big increase on the demand of the services offered by Camara, consequently increasing the computers shipped and the teachers trained. According to Camara’s first newsletter of 2014, in 2013 the firm reached a top of 10,000 computers shipped and 3,500 teachers trained.

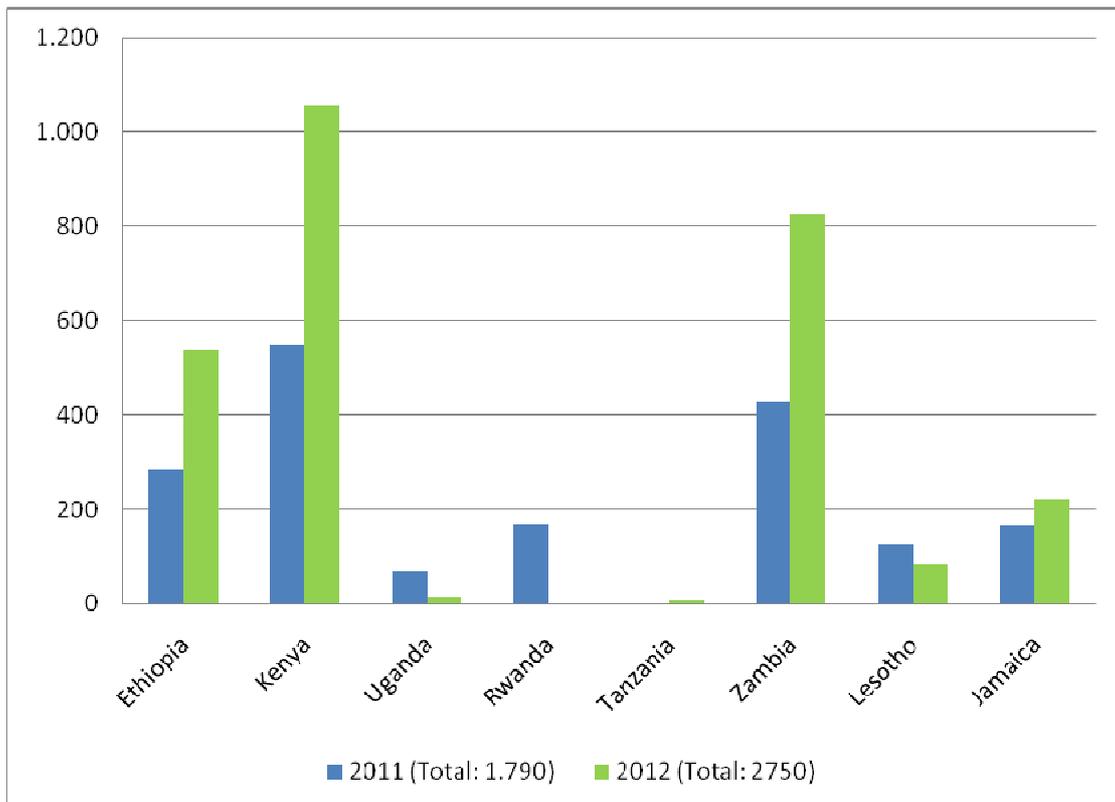
Figures 2.4 and 2.5 highlight respectively the number of computers dispatched by Camara’s Hubs and the number of teachers trained for the years 2011 and 2012 separated by country.

Figure 4 – Number of computers dispatched



Source: 2011 and 2012 Camara Annual Reports.

Figure 5 – Teachers trained



Source: 2011 and 2012 Camara Annual Reports.

As can be seen, the most active countries have been Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia. These countries have favorable conditions and support Camara's vision and mission. The look for support is at the core of Camara's strategy when establishing a Hub in a new country. The creation of relationships and partnerships with regional and national governmental agencies and other companies already present in the area is fundamental for success. Agreements have been made with the Ministry of Education in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Jamaica and Zambia, while collaborations with companies such as Intel and DELL have been put in place in Ethiopia and Zambia.

The fact that countries such as Rwanda, Uganda and Lesotho are less active is due to external factors that could not be controlled by Camara. In 2010 Rwanda and Uganda decided to introduce a ban on import of refurbished computers, while in Lesotho the government has been restricting the budget affecting schools. The ban introduced in Rwanda and Uganda was kept in place also in 2011 and 2012 forcing Camara to close the Hub in December 2011. The numbers in the graph for those two countries represent donations of computers that were still in stock or in-country donations. Despite the difficult situation, Camara still offers services such as teacher training, maintenance and e-waste in both Rwanda and Uganda. The low numbers of Tanzania are due to the fact that the Hub has opened only in 2012, even though Camara was already selling computers there through its other African Hubs.

Camara Ireland is noteworthy because, unlike the other hubs, it targets schools and communities located in a country that is not considered "poor" or "less developed". Irish schools are wealthier than schools located in Kenya or, more generally, in Africa, but the 2008 economic crisis has put all the so called "rich-western" countries in a difficult situation. Camara Ireland was established in 2009 with the objective of providing computers to schools and community organizations in Ireland that are not able to afford them. The objective is to deliver high quality education by supplying a package of low cost computers, software and training to schools and community groups in Ireland, focusing in particular on those that work with disadvantaged communities. Since its establishment, up to 2013, Camara Ireland has supplied more than 3.200 computers and trained more than 1.000 teachers around the whole country<sup>24</sup>.

According to Camara, up to today the company has provided eLearning Centers to over 2,500 schools around the world, it has installed nearly 45,000 computers and trained over 12,000 teachers on how to use the technology for learning purposes<sup>25</sup>. Camara has thus made more than 600,000 children in poor communities digitally literate. This number is found by considering that each computer reused and donated helps 21 children become digitally literate.

### *3.6 Supporting Camara*

There are three ways in which both organizations and private people can support Camara in reaching its objectives: by sponsoring, volunteering or donating computers.

Sponsoring is mainly targeted at organizations and consists in donating an entire eLearning Center to communities in Ireland, Africa or the Caribbean. Other forms of sponsoring include fundraising (e.g. organizing an event the proceeds of which will be donated to Camara) and direct donations (which can be done either online, via bank transfer or by cheque).

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<sup>24</sup> Source: data provided by Camara Ireland manager Steven Daly.

<sup>25</sup> Data taken from <http://camara.org/about-us/what-we-do/>

Another way to support Camara is to volunteer at one of its facilities. Camara is in fact a volunteer driven organization that relies on the commitment, energy and enthusiasm of people who give their time for free. People are needed both in support to the administrative area (e.g. marketing, customer relations, finance) and in the workshop (e.g. refurbishing computers). Volunteers are recruited from four different areas: college and universities, internship programs, back to work programs and volunteering organizations. Positions offered to volunteers range from work experience placement and non-paid internship to simply few hours' collaboration for those people who are willing to donate some of their time to a good cause. In 2012 Camara recruited a total of 163 workshop and office interns, as well as other volunteers that regularly offered their assistance to Camara, for a total of more than 250 volunteers all over the world and 34,000 volunteered hours.

The resort to donors (both financial donors and donors of computers) and to volunteers allows Camara to provide computers to disadvantaged schools at a very subsidized price. If all those resources were to be paid, costs would be too high and the social enterprise model would not be sustainable anymore. So if Camara's model is working and is sustainable is thanks to the contribution of all those volunteers and donors that gave part of their time and/or money to support the Camara cause.

### *3.7 Partners and supporters*

Since its foundation in 2005 Camara developed important partnerships with worldwide companies and organizations. Camara collaborates with companies and organizations such as: DELL, HP, Intel, IBM, Salesforce, DHL, Microsoft, Cisco, UNESCO and UNICEF. It has also received financial support from private companies (e.g. Google, DELL, Juniper Networks), foundations (e.g. Digicel Foundation, Iris O'Brien Foundation), governmental institutions (e.g. Irish Aid), trusts (e.g. The Bower Trust, Jill Franklin Trust) and philanthropists (e.g. The Ireland Funds, the Arthur Guinness Fund). Other Camara supporters include Diageo, PwC, UCD Dublin, Topaz, Zurich, EMC, Peter Mark, KPMG, Facebook, Hertz, Bord Gais, Grant Thornton, ESB, Electric Ireland, Dublin City Council, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine of the Government of Ireland, Dublin Airport Authority and many others.

Many of these listed companies decide to recur to Camara's services as part of their CSR policy. The fact that firms dispose their IT equipment in a proper way and also help students in disadvantaged areas reflects a strong CSR policy, which, as defined by McWilliams, Siegel and Wright (2006), is set up to engage in "actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law".

## **4. Conclusions**

Social enterprises are recognized as a growing part of the economy and lately governments have taken action to support and develop them. Even though the social enterprise area in Ireland is relatively small, it is still of significance and has high potential for development. Irish social enterprises support local economies by employing local people, providing local services, building community assets and by purchasing from local suppliers. They also provide services to disadvantaged groups of people, engaging in personal development, training and confidence building. By providing both job opportunities and services, social enterprises ensure also social inclusion to the disadvantaged, enhance the quality of life, build community spirit and focus more on making services affordable and accessible to everybody than making profit. Often social enterprises are the only organizations able to provide services to certain areas, which

otherwise would not be reached by private firms or by the state (e.g. because of dispersed population, uneconomic returns or too high costs of provision).

In order for social enterprises in Ireland to be successful some measures need to be taken. To date, there is no nationally accepted definition of what constitutes a social enterprise. The only consensus is on the fact that a social enterprise uses any surpluses generated to further its social objectives. Clarity surrounding this definition is necessary in order to enable the sector to grow and develop. A coherent voice of the social enterprise “sector” must be established, so that needs and cases can be put forward to government and links with other sectors of the Irish society can be created (with the aim of working together) (Clarke and Eustace, 2009). An examination of the appropriateness of the social enterprises’ legal forms is also needed. Regarding the financial area, the majority of Irish social enterprises depend on grant aid as a major source of funding. There are viable alternatives, such as the social investment sector for example, but in order to recur to this type of funding, social enterprises need to be informed about the risks and rewards involved and under what circumstances they can access those sources.

A lot has to be done in order for the social enterprise sector to operate at its full potential. In order for social enterprises to have a positive impact on Irish economy and society, awareness must be raised and promotion among a wide range of audiences must be done. Indeed, in order to have a meaningful contribution to Irish economy and society, social enterprises need to be brought into the mainstream (O’Shaughnessy and O’Hara, 2013). Camara Education was successful in this, reaching the attention of the national and international community with its social enterprise model that proved to be successful and received great recognitions.

In very few years Camara opened more than 10 premises among Education Hubs and Resource Centers around the world. Anyway, situation in a country can change pretty fast. A ban on importation, a cut in governmental funds for education, a bad economic downturn or an internal crisis can compromise the work of any company operating in that country. The sustainability of each Camara Hub depends in large part on the relationships and partnerships that Camara is able to build in each country. If the government believes in what Camara does and is willing to give its support, there are higher probabilities of success with respect to countries in which less (or none) support could be found. Very positive is the fact that Camara has reached a very high level of awareness, receiving consequently a lot of support. Nowadays many different entities around the world know and share what the organization does and how it can help improve education and livelihood of disadvantaged communities, spreading Camara’s values and mission worldwide.

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