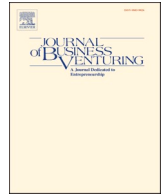




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Journal of Business Venturing

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jbusvent

Discipline, abjection, and poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship: A constitutive perspective

Luca Castellanza

Institut für Mittelstandsforschung, Universität Mannheim, room 108, L9, 1-2, 68159 Mannheim, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

JEL:

O12
O13
O14
O15
O17
Q13

Keywords:

Constitutive ontology
Poverty
Opportunities
Emancipation
Grounded theory

ABSTRACT

Collective entrepreneurship has been found to alleviate extreme poverty by helping poor individuals integrate into their societies and overcome their multiple intertwined liabilities. We complement this line of inquiry by exploring the conditions under which group structures may instead reinforce economic and gendered poverty constraints.

We conducted grounded-theoretical interviews with 104 women entrepreneurs operating in farming cooperatives and non-farm groups in war-torn South-West Cameroon. Analysing our data through a constitutive lens, we found that discipline, the extent to which rules determine and control individual behaviours, helps poor women overcome extreme economic constraints but prevents them from attaining prosperity and emancipation.

1. Executive summary

Extremely poor women entrepreneurs face both considerable economic constraints forcing them in unsustainable living conditions and gendered constraints leading to discrimination and marginalization. Many poor individuals are unable to cope with collective societal obligations and relegated to a condition of ‘abjection’ entailing exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination (Butler, 1993; Garud and Tharchen, 2016). Entrepreneurial groups have been hailed as a possible solution to poverty as they can provide the abjectly poor with access to otherwise unavailable resources, training, and support (McDermott et al., 2009; Sutter et al., 2017). Yet, extant research has not accounted for the intertwined nature of economic and gendered constraints afflicting the abjectly poor and the potentially undesirable effects of group structures in reinforcing societal pressures and propagating discriminatory practices.

We fill this gap through grounded-theoretical interviews with 104 poor women entrepreneurs participating in farming cooperatives and non-farm groups in war-torn South-West Cameroon. Collective entrepreneurship, the coordinated action to create economic value in the interests of a group (Cook and Plunkett, 2006), may both ease and strengthen the multiple constraints affecting extremely poor women. To inquire into the phenomenon, we asked our participants to recall and explain changes in their gendered, social, and political conditions before and after joining their groups. We found that rigid rules in farming cooperatives facilitate abjectly poor women’s rise out of extreme poverty but hinder their possibilities to attain economic prosperity and overcome gendered prejudices. Conversely, flexible rules in non-farm groups enable poor women entrepreneurs to distance themselves from traditional normative and cultural constraints limiting the rights of women. In addition, women entrepreneurs in both agricultural and non-farm groups escape

E-mail address: castellanza@ifm.uni-mannheim.de.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106032>

Received 27 March 2019; Received in revised form 21 May 2020; Accepted 23 May 2020

Available online 30 May 2020

0883-9026/© 2020 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

extreme poverty by leveraging scarce resources, making sense of traditional customs, and actively re-enacting these customs according to their interests.

We draw on the literature on poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship (Sutter et al., 2019) and opportunity theory (Sarason et al., 2006) to connect our findings to extant theoretical discussions. Specifically, we introduce the concept of discipline, the intensity in which sets of contextual prescriptions restrict and enable the possibilities for human action, which helps economically marginalized women integrate into their societies but hinders departure from traditions encouraging discrimination and gendered oppression.

Our results have several implications for theory and practice. First, we expand upon the links between entrepreneurs and their contexts by looking at how different group types are effective in tackling intertwined poverty constraints. Second, we provide the earliest empirical evidence of some negative consequences of collective entrepreneurship. Policy-makers can build on our insights by promoting rigid or loose organisational forms according to the type and severity of the poverty constraints they wish to intervene upon. Overall, we contribute to the discussions of entrepreneurship as a tool for structural change, poverty alleviation, and emancipation.

2. Introduction

Abject poverty is usually defined as the situation of those individuals surviving with less than \$2 a day (McKague and Oliver, 2012). Yet, absolute monetary thresholds do not account for the different cost of living across countries and the relative well-being of poor people compared to the non-poor, eluding the context-specific liabilities of social marginalization, lack of education, and health hazards typical of conditions of abjection (Butler, 1993). These oppressive structures often interact with patriarchal traditions and tribal customs encouraging discrimination against poor women and ethnic minorities (Scott et al., 2012) and further limiting the subjects' possibilities to learn skills, mobilize resources, and attract partners (Dorado and Ventresca, 2013; Matos and Hall, 2019).

Among the approaches suggested to aid the poor overcome abjection, collective entrepreneurship, the coordinated action to create economic value in the interest of a group (Cook and Plunkett, 2006), holds the unique potential to transfer skills and expertise, hedge against the risk of market failure (Perez-Aleman, 2010), and provide support against adverse life circumstances (Kimmitt et al., 2019). However, the evidence as to what kinds of groups and collective initiatives are effective in alleviating poverty is inconclusive. First, scholars have not yet inquired into the interdependencies of the economic and societal components of abjection within a single study (Sutter et al., 2019), failing to provide a comprehensive picture of the effect of entrepreneurship on multifaceted poverty constraints. Second, groups may feature hierarchical organisational forms favouring group leaders over those least able to contribute to the group's well-functioning (Bunderson et al., 2016). While prior research has examined economic and gendered constraints simultaneously (e.g. Mair et al., 2012), we investigate whether collective action may lead to differences in how poor women experience and eventually escape diverse types of poverty constraints.

We conducted grounded-theoretical interviews with 104 women entrepreneurs participating in farming cooperatives and business networks in South-West Cameroon. South-West Cameroon is a valuable empirical setting for several reasons. First, a governmental reform in 2014 encouraged farming cooperatives to cater to the poorest Cameroonian farmers, who would otherwise be excluded from non-subsistence economic activities. Second, because of a political crisis starting in 2016, many entrepreneurs have been facing the concrete risk of falling into abject poverty. Third, discriminatory traditional norms limit women's possibilities to participate in public life and impose submission to one's husband and segregation to low-status roles. The ongoing civil war and the gendered traditions constitute non-economic aspects of abjection comparable to those entrepreneurs confront in other African countries (Bentley et al., 2015; Tobias et al., 2013). Additionally, the coexistence of a growing non-farm sector and a steady agricultural tradition enables to observe how opportunities to alleviate poverty emerge across distinct types of entrepreneurial groups. Agricultural and non-farm contexts differ in their sets of norms, values, and physical constraints determining entrepreneurs' possibilities for action (Doern and Goss, 2013) and opportunities to attain emancipation from intertwined poverty constraints (Mair et al., 2012). While farming cooperatives feature a rigid discipline pushing their participants to work and live together in a structured fashion (Fitz-Koch et al., 2018; Yessoufou et al., 2018), non-farm groups have more loose rules encouraging women to be independent and conduct business on their own according to capitalist principles (Venkataraman et al., 2016).

To identify how collectives may assist poor women or impede them from rising out of abjection, we devised a grounded-theoretical analysis based upon a constitutive ontology. Constitutive ontologies understand contexts as the 'rules and resources according to which social systems are reproduced' (Giddens, 1984, p. 377), whereas entrepreneurs are agents 'who employ resources to make things happen, intentionally or otherwise' (Giddens, 1984, p. xix), either by reiterating or disrupting the overarching social structures (Sarason et al., 2006). Discipline, the extent to which rules, roles, and procedures condition how group members should behave, emerged from our analysis as the key determinant of whether abject women could escape poverty through entrepreneurship. In the remaining of the manuscript, we shall refer to rules in their broadest sense as 'principles governing individual conduct', including in our definition legal policies, traditional norms, and behavioural expectations. Consistently with a constitutive ontology of entrepreneurship (Garud et al., 2014), the subjects may exercise agency by engaging in practices that challenge and discontinue oppressive traditions and introducing more inclusive norms and beliefs in their communities (Goss et al., 2011). In contrast to extant research considering groups the 'given' forms in which collectives are organised (e.g. Slade Shantz et al., 2019), constitutive ontologies entail the processes through which organisations dynamically come into being and mediate the effects of societal traditions and beliefs on individual behaviours.

This article contributes to the discussion of poverty reduction through entrepreneurship by exploring the effect of discipline in facilitating and hindering the alleviation of poverty constraints for the abjectly poor. Prior literature has assumed that collective entrepreneurship alleviates poverty by providing poor individuals with access to training and resources (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Sutter et al., 2017). In contrast, we found that resource endowments and education do not suffice to alleviate abject poverty and the

effectiveness of groups varies according to the severity and type of poverty constraints. While most women entrepreneurs in non-farm groups successfully escape both economic and gendered constraints, those in farming cooperatives face increased pressures to conform to traditional norms restricting women's role in society. In fact, the rigid rules of farming cooperatives not only provide guidance to the subjects but also limit the extent to which women entrepreneurs can deviate from discriminatory practices. Moreover, we found differences in how the subjects reiterate societal structures as they climb the social ladder. The most disadvantaged women entrepreneurs only deploy limited material resources in their activities and naively behave according to their peers' instructions and expectations. However, once they gain capital and legitimacy within their communities, formerly abject individuals start actively challenging and influencing cognitive and normative prescriptions. Our work has implications for the literature on contextualizing entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011), accounting for the dynamic components of societal structures, and emancipation through entrepreneurship (Rindova et al., 2009), connecting organisational forms to their potential for breaking women free of gendered constraints.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. First, we base our study on a review of collective entrepreneurship in conditions of abjection. Second, we present our empirical setting, methodology, and analytical procedure. Third, we inductively develop a process of poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship in agricultural and non-farm contexts from our analysis. Finally, we discuss how the findings advance entrepreneurship research by enriching our understanding of poverty alleviation and contextualized entrepreneurial activities.

3. A constitutive ontology of entrepreneurship

In constitutive ontologies, social systems are composed of three types of intertwined rules: cognitive, influencing individuals' ability to make sense of their environments and understand how actions relate to their contexts, normative, establishing the boundaries of appropriate and desirable behaviour, and dominative, determining the set of actions available to agents within a context (Giddens, 1984). Within societal structures, rules also attribute roles, shared expectations as to how individuals should behave, and status, a social ranking granting legitimacy to operate in a certain context (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011; Giddens, 1984, p. 89). Roles and status determine individual-level variance in how structures enable and constrain entrepreneurial action depending on the historically-located position of the individual within the social system (Selden and Fletcher, 2015). The attribution of roles and status is not only 'given' when structures are constituted but it evolves through time and determines whether rules can function efficiently, strengthen, and be challenged (Bunderson et al., 2016). Opportunities for profit arise as individuals gain status and agency, the ability to legitimately re-enact and re-shape overarching societal structures (Battilana, 2006; Slade Shantz et al., 2018).

Unlike dualistic views of entrepreneurship that isolate the entrepreneur from her context (see Welter, 2011 for a critique), constitutive approaches posit that social systems evolve orderly, depending on the historical development of the system, the roles of the individuals inhabiting the system (Dorado and Ventresca, 2013), and the constraining and enabling function of structures on agents (Jack and Anderson, 2002). The configuration of social structures influences whether individual behaviours reinforce the mechanisms of perception, legitimation, and action underlying social systems or lead to the emergence of alternative dynamics (Chiles et al., 2010). Poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship requires the exercise of constitutive agency (e.g. Garud and Tharchen, 2016; Martin de Holan et al., 2019) through which the subjects, originally excluded from dominative, cognitive, and normative structures, may integrate into their societies, change rules, and spread inclusive customs and beliefs.

3.1. Extreme poverty as abjection

Extreme poverty entails not only the insufficiency of means to sustain oneself and one's family but also the set of attitudes, values, and beliefs that reiterate distress and create barriers to the subjects' social and economic development (Sutter et al., 2019). The subjects are subject to a vicious self-reinforcing economic circle in which they have no means to invest in commercial activities and limited opportunities to start profitable businesses (Bruton et al., 2015). Lack of economic capital constrains the subjects' access to education, sanitation, shelter, and nutrition, and exposes them to increased health risks and vulnerability to natural calamities (Williams and Shepherd, 2016). Moreover, most subjects are cut out of social events because of collective pressures requiring frequent financial contributions and marginalising those who fail to comply (Slade Shantz et al., 2018).

These oppressive structures influence more intensely the weakest members of the population, such as women and minorities, who face additional discrimination as they are considered inferior to men and majority groups (Mair et al., 2016). The belief that women are 'less capable' than men and should not carry out the same duties reflects in discriminatory informal rules limiting women's possibilities to conduct business, speak out in public, and attain equal rights to men (Doern and Goss, 2013). Often, abjectly poor women give up to poverty constraints, get used to extreme sufferance, and conform to patriarchal customs (Mosse, 2010), passively accepting their attributed roles and contributing to reiterate poverty and discrimination (Garud et al., 2007).

In the vicious circle affecting the subjects, cognitive, normative, and dominative structures interact and reinforce each other. Dominative structures, such as the lack of financial means, resources, and opportunities, foreclose abject women's possibilities to engage in economic activities and accumulate personal wealth. Normative structures dictate how abject women should behave, for example by limiting their interactions with richer community members or forbidding them to own possessions and participate in politics. Cognitive structures determine abject women's interpretations of their role within society and their subsequent actions according to their attributed role. Poverty constraints are reinforced as the abjectly poor make sense of their role in society and act according to the expectations imposed by their peers (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011; Bruton et al., 2010), contributing to co-create the discriminatory structures conditioning their lives. In the following, we elaborate on how collective entrepreneurship may reverse or exacerbate these worrisome trends.

3.2. Groups and economic constraints

Poor entrepreneurs operating in groups can access loans and resources they would not obtain individually (Cook and Plunkett, 2006), distribute the risks of business failure and personal accidents (Mair et al., 2012), and acquire knowledge of quality standards (Sutter et al., 2017). Thus, collective entrepreneurship may counterbalance the vicious circle of poverty on all three cognitive, normative, and dominative dimensions. By pooling skills and knowledge, the underprivileged can identify and exploit economic opportunities better than if they were alone (Perez-Aleman, 2010). Within entrepreneurial groups, tasks can be highly specialized, in a way that dedicated team members take charge of aggregating supply, trading, processing, and any other necessary productive or commercial activity (Handy et al., 2011). Collective forms of organisation make explicit each participant's domain of expertise, formalising roles and duties and enabling individuals to coordinate in the pursuit of shared objectives (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011). Collective rules may thus improve the subjects' understanding of entrepreneurship by substituting for personal decision-making and prescribing how group members should behave (Mair and Marti, 2009; Selden and Fletcher, 2015), enabling agency beyond the possibilities of single individuals.

Although extant research has accentuated the positive effect of groups in alleviating poverty, there is uncertainty as to whether collective entrepreneurship can tackle extreme economic constraints. In principle, groups represent the interests of their leadership more than those of disadvantaged members (Bunderson et al., 2016; Dorado, 2013) and would not cater to the poorest members of a community. It is in the interest of farming cooperatives to invest in cash crops and commercial agricultural products (Yessoufou et al., 2018) and potentially exclude those members who do not dispose of sufficient capital to diversify out of subsistence farming. Furthermore, studies of collective entrepreneurship in poverty have rarely dealt with abjection's intertwined gendered, social, and economic constraints.

3.3. Groups and gendered constraints

Abject women and discriminated minorities who become entrepreneurs may disrupt the oppressive structures conditioning their lives. Women who engage in entrepreneurship in countries with strong patriarchal beliefs might challenge normative expectations of submission and segregation through their economic behaviour (Ahl, 2006). By doing business, women establish new social ties and gain roles that break with discriminatory prescriptions and patriarchal values (Lindvert et al., 2017; Mair et al., 2012). Those women entrepreneurs who succeed and gain legitimacy within their communities can counsel other women and encourage them to pursue emancipation against dominative structures (Goss et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2012). Similar positive effects of entrepreneurship through societal ties and cognitive bonds have been found also for discriminated minorities (Mair et al., 2016) and hostile ethnic factions in post-war conditions (Tobias et al., 2013).

Although entrepreneurship may be an emancipatory agent on all the three types of cognitive, legitimating, and dominative structures, the effect of collectives on individual emancipation is unclear. Since the abjectly poor are often unable to resist requirements and societal pressures from their better-off peers (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2017), there could be a counterintuitive negative effect of groups in raising the expectations to conform to discriminatory rules. Collectives may increase the pressure to conform to informal traditions (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011), potentially strengthening oppressive gendered constraints. Yet, groups may also provide benevolent leaders with a conduit to establish new rules addressing their disadvantaged peers' needs and promoting messages of inclusion and equality (Mair et al., 2016). Hence, we empirically investigate the boundary conditions of emancipation through collective entrepreneurship.

4. Empirical setting

We chose the Anglophone South-West region of Cameroon as our empirical setting. The region had long been subject to a political crisis because of the resentment of the English-speaking minority against the Francophone central government. The Francophone government had been held responsible for the state of severe underdevelopment in the region, the heavy tax regime, the general state of corruption, and the inability to protect its citizens (BBC, 2018). The political crisis worsened in summer 2018, when groups of rebels occupied the capital of the South-West region, engaged in guerrilla and open clashes in the city, and instituted curfews and trade restrictions exacerbating the living conditions of the abjectly poor (O'Grady, 2018). As a consequence of the crisis, we were able to access a variety of women entrepreneurs recalling vivid accounts of their experiences of poverty and oppression (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012).

The regional economy is mainly based on agriculture and non-farm enterprises hardly flourish because of the heavy tax regime and corrupt institutional environment. In 2014, the government introduced a plan to promote the diffusion of technical skills and facilitate access to funds in the agricultural sector. Since then, the number of farming cooperatives formally registered with the agricultural authorities had been growing 15% a year (development practitioner, personal communication, 19th March 2019). Some farming cooperatives were pre-existing to the reform, as members of rural communities traditionally come together to cultivate the land and discuss agricultural techniques. Nonetheless, after the reform, farming groups extended their membership to the poorest and most disadvantaged farmers, who used to be excluded from collective farming because of their inability to contribute to the group's good functioning.

By contrast, most of the non-farm businesses operating in the region are solo- and family-enterprises in the informal sector in urban areas. Non-farm entrepreneurs are inherently dis-incentivized to scale up their operations and register formally with the local authorities to avoid legal pressures and governmental scrutiny (development practitioner, personal communication, 16th June 2018).

Consequently, non-farm activities other than petty trading and small-scale in-house production are rare and usually avoided. Collective non-farm entrepreneurship is uncommon, as it is not simple for businesswomen to obtain synergies across their different activities (microfinance officer, personal communication, 19th July 2018).

To isolate the phenomenon of poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship and explore how extremely poor women deal with multiple constraints affecting their lives, we restricted our analysis to women entrepreneurs (totalling 100 out of 104 study participants) operating within a radius of 10 km from Buea, the capital of the region. Within the last 15 years, the province of Buea transitioned from a rural area covered in forests and based on agriculture to a growing trading centre with a rising middle class. As the province developed, the central peasant settlements turned into commercial streets but the city retained farms in its outer areas, a strong attachment to agricultural values, and tribal governmental structures (local geographer, personal communication, 19th June 2018). Due to its relative prosperity, the city of Buea attracted a sizeable inflow of migrants from the neighbouring areas and regions within the last decades. Today, migrants constitute about one-third of the population in the area and they are generally well-integrated within their communities. The variety of the empirical setting enabled us to select individuals balanced in terms of location and income level, disentangling the potential of entrepreneurship to remove poverty constraints from the mere exposure to urban beliefs and formal governmental structures. Focusing on a limited geographic area also allowed to limit the differences in cultural and traditional beliefs, which influence the constitution of entrepreneurial opportunities (Garud et al., 2014), and partial out the civil war, which for security reasons was out of the scope of our analysis.

Finally, the choice of limiting our analysis to women made possible to better highlight the effect of emancipation through entrepreneurship, which can be identified only when observing individuals known to face a condition of abjection (Rindova et al., 2009). Traditionally, Cameroonian women were severely discriminated against, to the point that they were forbidden to own money or possessions, interact in public without the husband's consent, or participate in decision-making and meetings in the villages (development practitioner, personal communication, 20th June 2018). As in other African and low-income countries, gendered constraints in South-West Cameroon manifest in daily interactions between women and their peers (Doern and Goss, 2013) and limit the extent to which women can access resources and engage in entrepreneurship.

To select our study participants, we relied on agricultural cooperatives, business networks, NGOs, government officials, and social groups operating in our area of observation. Selecting participants through intermediaries is often necessary to overcome the lack of trust in outsiders in poor rural communities (Mair et al., 2012; Perez-Aleman, 2010). Furthermore, by contacting intermediaries rather than entrepreneurs directly, we were able to sample the participants according to our research needs. For example, an individual's income level is intrinsically related to her potential to overcome poverty constraints. Since income is not observable and tends to be disclosed erroneously because of social desirability biases (Kistruck et al., 2013), we needed local contacts familiar with each individual's history and experiences to locate the subjects most relevant to our study. Finally, relying on local contacts ensured that the data collection could be conducted in safety in spite of the mounting tensions in the region.

Before the fieldwork, we contacted ICENECDEV, a local NGO coordinating 6 groups of women farmers in the area around Buea. The NGO had long been working with the women and gained their trust and support by providing them with donations of material from international partners and training on agricultural techniques. Furthermore, ICENECDEV is an UN-accredited organisation with an extensive network of local contacts operating in both the agricultural and non-farm sectors. Through ICENECDEV, we obtained access to professors at the University of Buea, governmental delegates from the Ministry of Agriculture, microfinance officers, and other organisations which are kept anonymous for confidentiality reasons.

We attempted to maximize the variance (Gioia et al., 2013) among the farming cooperatives and non-farm groups by including both independent groups, who were not connected to a coordinating body, and sponsored groups, who received material donations and workshops from some NGOs. The organisations also differ as to whether they fulfill the governmental criteria for formal registration and are able to gather public funds and support. Even though farming cooperatives are common in rural areas and non-farm groups tend to concentrate in urban quarters, we purposefully selected groups operating in comparable locations to partial out the effect of rurality on poverty alleviation.

Nevertheless, there are some fundamental differences between business groups and farming cooperatives. All the cooperatives have a similar structure, featuring a group leader in charge of organising meetings, a treasurer administering finance, and officers tasked

Table 1
Key differences between agricultural and non-farm groups.

	Farming cooperatives	Non-farm groups
Organisation	Hierarchy based on seniority Several roles for coordination and finances. Family members can be involved in the activities Strong control over women's lives	Flat organisational structure. Few roles assigned based on personal initiative. Usually, only members participate Limited involvement in private matters
Finances	Collective finances are kept to support farming activities Collective purchase and borrowing of equipment and material to cultivate the land Signing and fulfilling bulk sales agreements with clients Collective financial targets	Some group savings are used in case of emergency Occasional loans for business or private purposes when required by group members Providing basic advice on managing the business Individual operations
Meetings	Working the farm together during the planting and harvest seasons Frequent coordination of sales Daily get-togethers for work and advice Many activities related to farming, such as trade fairs, are organised	Occasional workshops on basic skills such as literacy and accounting Some instances of within-group trading Weekly saving groups and discussions Some social activities might be organised

with several duties ranging from external relations to social events. The oldest and most educated members of farming cooperatives often take prominent positions within the groups. Moreover, all members spend considerable time together, as they share equipment and seeds, coordinate the workforce during the harvest and planting seasons, and stipulate collective sales agreement with clients and wholesalers. Farmers usually join or found cooperatives after observing their peers' improved standards of living or becoming aware of governmental incentives.

In contrast, business networks have several organisational forms. Many networks are first-of-a-kind, initiated spontaneously by entrepreneurs who saw opportunities for collective learning and support. Some non-farm groups evolved from pre-existing tribal communities where members started investing savings into businesses, while others were affiliated to governmental bodies, NGOs, and microfinance institutions. Due to their different affiliations, these groups vary greatly in their capacity to mobilize resources and access skills and technical know-how. On average, business networks are composed of younger and more educated women than those involved in farming cooperatives. Since non-farm entrepreneurs tend to conduct their businesses individually, most business networks only provide financial support, social events, and basic literacy training. As a consequence, business networks feature a relatively loose organisational structure with few defined positions and responsibilities. Overall, as we summarise in [Table 1](#), non-farm groups exercise considerably less control on their members' activities than farming cooperatives do.

Finally, there exist some differences transversal to the group type. Certain groups had existed for years at the time of the study, evolving into business or farming groups from pre-existing tribal networks, while others came together only months before the interviews were conducted. Moreover, we ensured variance in the participants' income level, age, education, and personal conditions, both within and across groups. For example, we interviewed a business group focused on youths and a farming cooperative catering to poor women in rural areas. In [Appendix A](#) we report the list of the agricultural and non-farm groups who collaborated to our research and provided us with access to women entrepreneurs.

5. Methodology

Given the limited number of empirical studies grounded in constitutive ontologies ([Garud et al., 2014](#)), the localized character of poverty constraints ([Tobias et al., 2013](#)), and the explorative nature of our research question, we devised a grounded-theoretical approach to inquire into the interdependencies between entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation. We adapted grounded theory to the necessities of our study in two ways.

First, to examine the processes through which collectives help entrepreneurs organise against poverty and oppose contextual constraints, we incorporated historical data in our analysis. Although for accessibility and security reasons we were unable to observe entrepreneurship over a long period of time, we triangulated our interview data with archival documents from our partner organisations and maintained contact with several participants in the two years after the fieldwork. Our approach aimed at identifying remarkable events experienced by the study participants and cross-checking the reported information with available secondary data sources, consistently with extant entrepreneurship research stemming from relational and constitutive ontologies (e.g. [Doern and Goss, 2014](#)).

Second, due to censoring and stigma in self-reported assessments of poverty ([Martin de Holan et al., 2019](#)), we used observational and factual data to assess how each participant was able to improve her living conditions. We collected secondary data concerning the participants' income, household members, contributions to the cooperative, and farm or business size. In addition, we asked the cooperatives' and business groups' leaders to provide records of the training, loans, and resources each group member received. Finally, we collected observations of any contextual evidence indicating whether the participants successfully overcame poverty constraints, such as the state of the interview premises and signs of wealth like jewellery and wigs ([Herzog, 2012](#)).

5.1. Data collection

We conducted retrospective interviews during two months between June and August 2018. The interviews were semi-structured, following a 3-phase design encompassing the participants' decision to start a business, the influence of their groups on their life and business choices, and how individual and collective actions alleviated or reinforced poverty constraints. Since poverty constraints can be highly context-specific, we spent the first week of fieldwork talking to local experts, including staff employed at development organisations, ministerial delegates, and professors at the University of Buea, to define the struggles of local entrepreneurs. In addition, we drew from the literature on emancipation through entrepreneurship ([Rindova et al., 2009](#)) and entrepreneurship in poverty ([Bruton et al., 2015](#)) to better understand the phenomenon and craft an initial interview template ([Gioia et al., 2013](#)).

The semi-structured format allowed adapting our interview template according to the themes emerging from previous interviews and deviate from the protocol should case-specific stories and insights emerge ([Corbin and Strauss, 2008](#)). For instance, after conducting the first interviews, we observed that our participants practice entrepreneurship differently according to the severity of their constraints. The poorest entrepreneurs tend to join their groups either for socialization or freeriding reasons, yet they take a more active role after they grow confident, escape severe economic constraints, and gain status and resources. We integrated the insight into the subsequent interviews and asked additional questions seeking to replicate the patterns emerging from the early analyses.

Due to the differences between English and the local dialect, interpreters from ICENECDEV accompanied the researcher during every field visit, as it is the norm in qualitative research where the interviewer speaks a language different than the participants' (e.g. [Lindvert et al., 2017](#); [Mair et al., 2012](#)). The interpreters were chosen among the NGO's young volunteers, to allow for a climate of trust and confidentiality between the researcher and the study participants. Several measures were taken to grant a smooth proceeding of the fieldwork. First, the interpreters were thoroughly trained and informed on procedural standards, such as the participants' right to

withdraw from the interview at any moment, the necessity to maintain a flat and open conversational tone, and the semantic differences between Western and local wordings (Brinkmann, 2018). Second, the parties involved in the fieldwork agreed that the data revealed during the interviews would not be shared with senior staff from the partner organisations, who were never present during the interviews to avoid biasing the responses. Third, every study participant was informed of the interview at least a week in advance and

Table 2
Data structure.

Intensity of socio-economic constraints			Contextualization of entrepreneurship		
In-vivo codes	1st-order themes	2nd-order categories	In-vivo codes	1st-order themes	2nd-order categories
'We are treated like dogs'	Marginalization (domination)	Abject poverty (working for the sake of survival)	'I only do things that benefit me'	Hard work (dedication)	Agriculture
'They know I am poor'			'I spend my whole day in the farm'		
'Without money, one cannot join groups'	Resignation (giving up)		'I need to be always productive'	Collectivism (group priorities)	
'There is nothing I can do'			'We always work together'		
'We always suffer'			'If someone is in need, I'd give'		
'I abandon everything to God'	(Self-) exclusion (group avoidance)		'We are a family'	Deference (respect authority)	
'I have no time for friends'			'My husband is the head of the household'		
'I am not up to their level'			'We are told to respect the elders'		
'No one represents me'	Subjugation (taking orders)		'I would accept any decision [from above]'	Flexibility (free to do)	Non-farm
'I fear being rejected'			'Doing business is not stressful'		
'I just do whatever I am told'			'I can decide when to sell'		
'I do very lowly jobs'	Optimism (confidence)	Moderate poverty (working according to societal prescriptions)	'I don't need physical strength'	Capitalism (self-interest)	
'Things are getting better'			'I try whatever earns more money'		
'I can work hard and become rich'			'It's better for the family finances'		
'Don't you see I'm happy'	Coping (setting trade-offs)		'My economy is growing'	Independence (individual priority)	
'I can manage'			'I can look after myself'		
'I don't need much money'			'Collective savings are inefficient'		
'At least, I can feed my family'	Self-identification (negative feelings)		'My clients are my only friends'		
'Everyone is poor here'					
'I am one with my neighbour'					
'We are all in the same boat'	Awareness (realistic attitude)				
'I know how to live'					
'I had to struggle to be where I am'					
'I'd like to do so many things'	Recognition (attributed status)	Negligible poverty (working free of societal expectations)			
'They always come to me'					
'Everyone has high esteem of me'					
'People think I am rich'	Symbolic action (events and facts)				
'Everyone can see us'					
'I met important people from the city'					
'I can do things men do'	Pride (satisfaction)				
'I have the best'					
'I am going to buy a large house'					
'I always want more'	Advocacy (calling for rights)				
'I tell women how much they are worth'					
'I am a mentor to others'					
'I can talk against the men'					

provided with summary information on the themes to be covered.

Although we cannot be completely sure that every participant reported accurate and reliable information, we have reasons to believe censoring and stigma were not a major concern in the interviews. First, 58 out of 104 interviewed participants provided accounts and descriptions of severe constraints they experienced, such as 'struggling to send children to school', 'being unable to manage', 'being a burden on others', 'being beaten by one's husband', and 'having no voice'. Second, we were able to access relevant information in single interviews by partnering with ICENECDEV and other NGOs enjoying trust within the local communities (Herzog, 2012). For example, Marie expressed malcontent with peer pressure 'forcing' her to lend money and equipment to community members, Carl complained of his social marginalization derived from economic problems, and Jolanda and Annemarie reported favouritism and discrimination within their farming groups. Had censoring been a problem, we would have been unable to access such sensitive information. Third, both the researcher and the interpreters used language colloquially, chose a simple vocabulary, and posed frequent probing questions. For instance, the participants who reported an improvement or worsening of their poverty constraints were asked to provide factual descriptions and concrete examples of how the changes they experienced manifested in daily practices (Herzog, 2012).

Every interview was recorded and verbatim transcribed in the same or the following day. To ensure the reliability of the data, the ICENECDEV volunteers helped transcribe the parts in dialect and interpret the transcripts when the meanings intended by the participants were unclear. In total, we collected 104 interviews (836 pages), of which 76 members of farming cooperatives (537 pages) and 28 participants in business groups (299 pages). After completing the interview, every participant was offered compensation of CFA 2000 (€3), which is slightly above the average daily wage in the area of Buea. Considering that 95% of the interviews lasted between 25 and 45 min, the compensation seems appropriate and in line with that of other studies conducted in low-income countries (e.g. Kistruck et al., 2013). All the interviews and quotes were anonymized by assigning each participant a random fictional name to ensure her confidentiality. Following best practices in qualitative research, we triangulated our interviews with secondary data sources, such as documents, training material, project descriptions, and organisational web pages, for an additional 99 pages of data. Finally, we kept a daily diary of all the conversations we had with experts and locals, totalling an extra 107 pages of material.

5.2. Analytical strategy

We analysed our data through the software for qualitative analysis MAXQDA 2018, complying with the procedures suggested by Gioia et al. (2013). We followed the well-established steps of open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) and integrated elements of narrative analysis (Elliott, 2005) to construct representative vignettes. First, during open coding, we coded in-vivo each phrase reported by the participant describing her activities or recalling a change in the intensity of her poverty constraints. In line with the constitutive view of entrepreneurship (Sarason et al., 2010), we marked each sentence where the participant mentioned social structures or personal behaviours, such as 'working the farm together', 'being no longer a dirty farmer', 'making an investment', 'empowering others', and 'seeking profit'. In total, we identified 243 unique first-order codes capturing the whole range of our participants' experiences (Gioia et al., 2013).

Second, during axial coding, we compared the codes reported by different entrepreneurs and aggregated them in overarching categories, highlighting the commonalities in the experiences and reports of our study participants. The topic of 'abjection' emerged inductively during this phase of the analysis, as we identified a particularly severe poverty condition characterized by marginalization, resignation, self-exclusion, and subjugation. Abject poverty differs from conditions of moderate poverty where women entrepreneurs gain a positive attitude towards life and cope with the gendered and economic constraints they face. During axial coding, we also refined the features of agricultural and non-farm entrepreneurship according to our participants' understanding. Agricultural and non-farm entrepreneurship do not refer merely to the entrepreneur's 'factual' belonging to a farming cooperative or a business group but also to her adherence to and awareness of the societal structures widespread in a certain context. Some of our study participants were involved in both agricultural and non-farm groups, yet behaved according to the prescriptions of a single societal context, for example by refusing the agricultural value of deference to the elders or the individualistic pressures of the non-farm sector. Table 2 reports the data structure and further illustrates the differences in degrees of poverty intensity and contextual norms we identified in our transcripts.

Third, during selective coding, we practised abductive reasoning to explain the mechanisms through which our study participants overcame or failed to overcome poverty constraints. In doing so, we used the categories developed during axial coding to group those participants who had similar experiences of abjection and constraint removal (Elliott, 2005). Based on the categorization, we identified a recurring behavioural pattern of abject women who tackle poverty acting on dominative, cognitive, and normative structures, in this order. Moreover, we found differences between entrepreneurs in agricultural contexts, who mostly failed to overcome gendered constraints, and those in non-farm contexts, who often challenged discrimination against women. Then, we sought additional evidence for the emerging patterns by sampling new study participants that could (dis)confirm the predictions from our analysis, asking for explanations of details recurring across the participants, and iterating the process until extra participants yielded no additional information (Gioia et al., 2013). As an illustration, we interviewed entrepreneurs conducting non-farm and agricultural activities within a variety of empirical settings, disentangling the effect of group structures from that of distance from Buea, market conditions, land fertility, and other group features. The theoretical insight of discipline emerged during this phase of the analysis as we linked the accounts of our study participants to the discussions in the extant literature as to how roles and status within collectives may affect intertwined poverty constraints.

As a result of selective coding, we drew a process diagram of the typical patterns of poverty alleviation in our sample, based on the reports of 'factual' (Gehman et al., 2018) interactions among multiple individuals involved in entrepreneurial processes, decisions to

Table 3
Vignettes of representative entrepreneurs.

Name	Personal info	Transition	Life summary	Quote
Samantha	Young woman, member of a registered ICENECDEV cooperative in a rural area	Abject to moderate poverty in agriculture	Samantha is a young woman from a poor family in a rural area where youths are excluded from decision-making and subordinate to the elders. After joining her cooperative, Samantha purposively deployed farming techniques to eschew extreme poverty constraints and social skills to better integrate into her community.	'Before joining, I could not even afford a bed to sleep on. The things I learned, the extra yield, and my new social circles made me grow confidence I can solve problems.'
Elena	Young widow, trader within the registered tuber cooperative, migrant from the nearby countryside	Farm to non-farm job in abject poverty	Following her husband's death, Elena migrated to Buea in search of a job to sustain her children. She rented a parcel and started farming, but she soon got indebted because of her poor harvest and inability to pay school fees. She then serendipitously moved to a tuber-trading business.	'I was farming only because, otherwise, I'd have no money to feed my children. Selling cassava powder provided me with sufficient income to re-pay my debts.'
Alison	Old woman, member of an informal ICENECDEV cooperative near Buea, strongly religious	Fall-back into abjection in agriculture	Alison was born in a privileged middle-class household in her village. Albeit Alison was doing relatively well financially, during the crisis she was pressured to host 17 community members in her house. The cooperative's collectivistic pressures outweighed its value-added services and forced the woman in abject poverty.	'ICENECDEV taught me improved methods to cultivate the land and manage my finances. But when the crisis came, people kept coming to my house asking for food and financial support.'
Eleanor	Middle-aged woman, member of a registered cooperative in a rural area	Moderate to negligible poverty in agriculture	After joining her cooperative and increasing her yield, Eleanor became popular in her village as she could help many of her disadvantaged peers. To compensate her efforts, her fellow farmers elected her treasurer, a high-status position within the cooperative.	'Everyone knows me in the village! I often help farmers solve their difficulties and my house is always open for those who need food and company.'
Francisca	Middle-aged woman, living in an urban area, abandoned a registered ICENECDEV group	Fall-back into moderate poverty in agriculture	Francisca came from a large agricultural household. She joined an ICENECDEV group to learn about farming techniques and improve her livelihood. However, she soon switched to a different cooperative because of the internal dynamics of her group.	'My ICENECDEV cooperative only helps its most advantaged members. They asked for a large sum of money as a registration fee and forbade my husband to join the group.'
Joice	Old woman, serial entrepreneur, member of a tribal business group, migrant from the far North	Farm to non-farm job in negligible poverty	Joice was a rich migrant who accumulated finances through her agricultural activity. After moving to Buea, she used her capital to start several businesses more profitable and prestigious than farming, such as hairdressing, catering, and tailoring.	'I always had many farms and poultries. Diversifying into other activities helped me increase the income and well-being of my family and supporting my husband.'
Donna	Young woman, member of a registered cooperative near Buea, migrant from the neighbouring seaside	Non-farm to farm job in abject poverty	Donna used to work long hours in precarious conditions as a street vendor, roasting and selling fish until 3 or 4 in the night. Once she got sick with smoke blindness, she relocated to the nearby Buea and joined a farming cooperative in search of a better life.	'I stopped roasting fish because of the fire hazards. Farming is a safer and less demanding job as we can work the land together, earn more, and make less effort.'
Mariah	Old woman, fish trader within the registered tuber cooperative, strongly religious, living in a rural area	Abject to moderate poverty in non-farm	To cater for her sick husband, Mariah started a seasonal job within the tuber cooperative. With the savings from her wages, she then opened a fish-trading business. Seeing her hard work and commitment, the tuber cooperative supported her with loans and resources.	'I usually borrow from the cooperative so that I may invest in my fish-trading business. As I always help my friends with their farms, they know they can trust me.'
Giovanna	Young woman, pastry-maker, member of the NGO-sponsored group in a rural area	Fall-back into abjection in non-farm	Everyone in Giovanna's community was a farmer, but her NGO encouraged her to switch to a non-farm occupation. She faced several pressures and exclusion from her social circles as she broke with the long-standing farming tradition of her community.	'My friends don't really like me baking and street selling the whole day, they complain I do not farm with them. On the other hand, I find their meetings useless and unnecessary.'
Moana	Middle-aged woman, tailor, member of the informal business network in Buea	Moderate to negligible poverty in non-farm	A former street tailor and social misfit, Moana gained respect in her community by enriching herself through her tailoring business. After her upper-class clients were	'I have been alone my whole life. Only recently, as my customers saw my abilities with tailoring, I have been building myself a

(continued on next page)

Table 3 (continued)

Name	Personal info	Transition	Life summary	Quote
Pamela	Middle-aged woman, snail trader, member of the government-sponsored group in Buea	Fall-back into moderate poverty in non-farm	impressed with the size and garnishments of her shop, they invited her to an exclusive business network. Pamela earned a little fortune by selling snails with a mark-up of up to 80%. During the crisis, she attracted severe social scrutiny as she left her husband working in the bushes to sustain the business in spite of the mounting violence outside Buea.	name within the neighbourhood and a network of trusted contacts. 'Now that our house in the village has been burnt, it makes no sense for me and my husband to live together in Buea. He lives in the forests and still looks after our farm.'

reiterate or oppose structural constraints, and the function of physical assets, resources, and structures in shaping entrepreneurial activities. Next, we focused on the study participants who experienced different phases of poverty alleviation and constructed vignettes representative of each transition providing additional evidence for the process emerging from our data. For example, Joice (in Table 3) is representative of those entrepreneurs who achieved negligible poverty in the agricultural sector and then switched to a non-farm occupation. To construct the vignettes, we followed the 'discrete-time event history' approach suggested by Elliott (2005), listing chronologically the events recounted by each entrepreneur and highlighting the changes in the participants' circumstances at the time of every transition. Then, we replicated the logic of Doern and Goss (2014), identifying the most vivid and culturally significant events in the history of each study participant and selecting the instances most representative of the patterns within the overall sample. The vignettes allowed to fully capture the processual aspects of our data, combining the 'factual' physical constraints and 'subjective' narratives of poverty alleviation in the experiences of our study participants (Garud et al., 2014).

6. Findings

In this section, we illustrate the recurring patterns among our study participants who rose out of abjection. In the following three subsections, we present the stories of the women entrepreneurs who went through abject, moderate, and negligible poverty in agricultural contexts and systematically compare them with the narratives of non-farm entrepreneurs.

6.1. Abject poverty

Abjection is a condition of extreme poverty entailing severe lack of means and resources and social rejection by richer individuals. Abject women are harshly discriminated against as they are often unable to react to life constraints and forced to passively conduct activities according to societal prescriptions. As such, abjection entails the objectification of poor women and their subordination to men and their more emancipated counterparts (Butler, 1993).

6.1.1. Rigid discipline in farming cooperatives

Through governmental incentives, farming cooperatives in South-West Cameroon sponsor those individuals who would be unable to pay for membership fees and participate in the group through their own finances. Most often these people have lived in a marginalized condition for their whole life, facing severe economic disadvantages compared to their peers, failing to send their children to school, and struggling to provide for their families. Due to their unstable economic conditions, the abjects are socially isolated and unable to keep up with their peers' expectations of sharing and collaboration (Slade Shantz et al., 2018). As a result of their lack of education and social isolation, abjectly poor farmers are excluded from decision-making within their cooperatives. For example, Loredana joined her farming cooperative when the group was recruiting and she needed economic assistance. After joining the cooperative, Loredana's life changed dramatically, as she was pushed to spend the whole day working the land with the other group members. Nevertheless, due to her critical initial conditions, suffering from old age and having a gravely ill husband, the material and financial help she received was not enough to overcome abjection.

Most abject women join farming groups because of their basic socialization and economic needs, in the hope that the group may help them escape from their marginalized conditions. Some women might even be forced to join farming cooperatives because of adverse personal circumstances. Six entrepreneurs in our sample switched from a non-farm job to an agricultural occupation because they were 'getting smoke blindness', 'did not earn enough through their previous job', and 'it was the only thing they could do'. Several other study participants frequently discuss their concerns about 'managing' and 'surviving' and report that their daily activities consist of merely acting according to what other group members tell them. Those women who join their cooperative because of a forced choice have limited possibilities to participate in their group's decisions and passively take orders from their better-off peers.

However, farming cooperatives have an important function for the abjectly poor. First, the groups facilitate access to resources for those people who would otherwise be failing to survive. Even though several women remain in a condition of abjection after joining the groups, the cooperatives hedge against the risk of starvation and protect against market failures and bad harvests. This is the case for Patty, who found herself in abject poverty because of her inability to pay a loan following a bad harvest of her main crop but was helped by her cooperative to sustain herself and her family. Second, the groups might include abject entrepreneurs in a fabric of social ties, normative structures, and cognitive devices from which they were previously excluded. For example, Ignatia is a migrant from the far North who came to Buea in search of fortune. When she arrived in the city, Ignatia joined several farming groups because of her

need to socialize and integrate into her new community. For many of the abject women we interviewed, being accepted in the farming cooperative by conforming to collective norms became the main purpose in life. They were pushed to work the farm the whole time, rescind social bonds external to their cooperatives to keep up with the groups' obligations, and behave according to the expectations of their richer counterparts. In Arianna's words, 'the farm is all they had'.

6.1.2. Loose organising in non-farm groups

Some poor women are forced in non-farm entrepreneurship by contextual contingencies. However, unlike farm entrepreneurs, abjectly poor non-farmers are often left alone by their community members. For example, Heather lost her job because of the political crisis and fell into abject poverty. While she struggled to provide for herself and her family, she engaged in several non-farm activities, ranging from producing charcoal to wholesaling mushrooms. Heather was driven by her need to 'manage through life's circumstances' using the limited resources she had and engaging in several poor and simple activities. She was always looked down because of the limited investments and inadequate returns involved in her businesses. Heather's friends and neighbours were reportedly astonished that she, a relatively young woman, would humiliate herself in the lowly jobs of small-scale production and petty trading. Unlike abject farm entrepreneurs, who normally take orders and follow rules from their superiors within the cooperatives, non-farm entrepreneurs tend to act individually without conforming to societal normative and cognitive prescriptions as Heather does.

We found a total of 16 non-farm entrepreneurs who had experiences of abjection and were stigmatized by their peers. For instance, Moana got pregnant at a young age and had to drop out of school because of social stigma. Subsequently, she became a self-employed street tailor, following the example of her mother. Street tailoring is the poorest form of tailoring and street tailors are often insulted and discriminated by their richer counterparts. When she started her job, Moana was frequently spat against, 'treated like a dog', and victim of theft and vandalism. Eventually, she endured through her grievous difficulties and persisted in her tailoring occupation, establishing a network of frequent customers and building a reputation as she conducted business. Like Moana, who joined her group after becoming wealthy and accepted in her community, non-farm entrepreneurs receive limited support while they live in conditions of abjection. Abjection in the agricultural and non-farm contexts features different characteristics as in the former women face strong subordination to elders and more privileged group members whereas in the latter they are often left alone against severe societal prejudices and discrimination.

Most non-farm groups do not target the poorest members of a community. Non-farm entrepreneurs are expected to conduct their work independently and they hardly collaborate with their fellow group members other than in sharing purchasing costs and entertaining commercial relations. As a result, abject non-farm entrepreneurs are often tempted to switch to farming jobs where they perceive lower risks of business failure and starvation and can more easily receive support. Only two NGO-led non-farm groups in our sample aim at empowering the abjects through trainings on financial literacy and commercial techniques. The non-farm groups working with abject women feature a rigid discipline similar to that of farming cooperatives and they exercise strong control over their members' business choices, investments, and decisions in private life. For instance, Annerose, a beneficiary of one of these NGOs, recounted how the group imposed her to switch from farming to trading and stop participating in collective community savings if she wanted to keep receiving support.

6.2. Transitioning from abject to moderate poverty

When they are out of a condition of abjection, women entrepreneurs start dealing more actively with the dominative, cognitive, and normative structures in their societies. In agricultural and non-farm contexts alike, women in moderate poverty ought to enact trade-offs in their daily activities as they gradually pass from 'objectified' persons to active influencers of their social circles. Although they do not enjoy the same independence and freedom of women out of poverty, entrepreneurs in moderate poverty have some leeway in how they conduct business and attain profits.

6.2.1. Rigid discipline remediating abjection

Farming cooperatives do not always raise the abjects out of poverty, yet they provide access to otherwise unavailable resources and, at least partially, ease economic constraints. Many farming cooperatives provide poor women with tools and equipment, such as wheelbarrows and spray cans, to cope with the everyday struggles of extreme poverty. At times, cooperatives offer loan programs so that their members may invest in land parcels and grow a higher quantity and variety of crops. As a result, among the 41 agricultural entrepreneurs who experienced abject poverty, 20 successfully overcame their most severe constraints and transitioned to a condition of moderate poverty. The percentage is slightly higher within ICENECDEV cooperatives as the NGO provides on average more training and resources than other groups and exercises stronger control over its members' activities.

After overcoming abject poverty, many women entrepreneurs are no longer 'forced to farm' but participate actively in their groups, take roles of responsibility, coordinate other women during the collective work, and contribute to decision-making. Formerly abject farm entrepreneurs consider themselves 'businesswomen', no longer 'dirty farmers', and reiterate societal structures in conformity with the overarching collectivistic and traditional norms. For instance, Theodora became knowledgeable on the best farming techniques to maximize yields, the optimal distance between crops, and the application of fertilizer, and she started counselling her peers on their decisions as to how to manage their farms. Mina experienced a similar change of attitude, from passively following orders from her superiors to actively working to rise out of poverty. Bianca reports episodes of bribing within her community, whereby women farmers provide village elders with agricultural produce so that the cooperatives may enjoy favourable political decisions. By bribing, farmers implicitly subscribe to, reinforce, and acceptably stretch the norms of collectivism and submission to the elders.

After raising in wealth, agricultural entrepreneurs improve not only their self-perception but also their popularity and status within

their communities. For instance, Karla, who enriched herself by selling the produce from her farm, is known and respected by everyone in her village. Friends and strangers alike call her 'mama', a sign of respect among rural women, because 'they know they can always rely on her if they need help or advice'. Besides becoming popular and well-known in their villages, some women also receive formal acknowledgements of their services to the community. These women might be elected as members of their village councils and invited to take political decisions with the men, discontinuing patriarchal customs. For example, because of her economic success, Bessy became part of the *queen mothers*, the body participating in the elders' meetings and making decisions on behalf of women. At times, cooperatives as a whole gain legitimacy in the eyes of non-farming community members by organising public events. The most prominent example is the bi-yearly meeting of ICENECDEV cooperatives when the members of all the affiliated groups gather in extravagant locations in the inner parts of Buea. Other times, agricultural consortia organise large trade fairs where citizens can connect to farmers and purchase products from the invited sellers. These events contribute to shaping perceptions towards farmers, who are no longer considered inferior and uneducated but capable of upholding quality standards and delivering attractive products.

6.2.2. Loose organising reiterating abjection

Non-farm groups are less effective than farming cooperatives in alleviating poor women's extreme poverty constraints. In urban settings, where farming might not be an option due to the distance from land parcels, the operations of non-farm groups help abjectly poor women entrepreneurs conduct business and attain a sustainable livelihood. However, in rural areas, the operations of non-farm groups are inconsistent with community expectations. In fact, six formerly abject non-farm entrepreneurs we interviewed reported attrition with their family and friends after they abandoned the farming traditions of their communities. Notably, the economic help provided by non-farm groups is more limited than that coming from farming cooperatives as it consists of monetary loans rather than more easily accessible borrowings of equipment and material.

To initiate a non-farm business, women need to gather resources through all means available. Many non-farm entrepreneurs asked loans to friends, relatives, and social groups, at times failing repeatedly and frustratingly because of their female gender. Pia, who manages a craft trade business, encountered considerable struggles when she asked for loans to banks and micro-finance institutions, who were reluctant to lend money to a woman. Through her persistence, she eventually obtained the necessary resources to invest and expand her activity. Like Pia, non-farm entrepreneurs in moderate poverty need to persuade their communities of the viability of their ideas, stretch rules, and leverage permissive social networks to gather resources for their businesses. In this way, the restraints of non-farm settings make harder to gather resources and overcome abject poverty compared to the more rigid discipline and control exercised in agricultural contexts.

Instead of being forced to conduct a business with anything they have at their disposal, non-farm entrepreneurs in moderate poverty select activities based on their expected profitability and estimations of market demand. For instance, Hillary decided to establish a pharmacy in her neighbourhood because of the lack of sanitary services, and Luna purchased a street desk to roast the corn she produces from her farm. Several moderately poor women expressed their tentative conformity to the norms of individuality and personal gain. This is an important difference with the cooperative model of farming groups whereby collective food-producing activities are prioritized over individual effort and self-interest.

Just as in the agricultural sector, non-farm women entrepreneurs are expected to contribute financially to their neighbours and communities. However, non-farm entrepreneurs cannot decipher each other's economic welfare as easily as farmers can see yields and products carried to the market. Instead, non-farm entrepreneurs must rely on cues and perceptions of wealth. Thus, women who show signs of well-being often gain legitimacy in their groups and communities. This may lead to situations where status is attributed because of misperceived economic wealth and does not reflect the entrepreneur's actual success in overcoming dominative and cognitive structures. Anastasia is a case in point, as she grew in status in her community by pioneering a child nursery business, which is considered a capital-intensive activity despite requiring limited resources. Anastasia was struggling to break-even, but her community members started asking for favours and financial support. The business eventually bankrupted because misplaced community expectations weighed on Anastasia and worsened her precarious financial condition.

6.3. Transitioning from moderate to negligible poverty

Women entrepreneurs in both agricultural and non-farm contexts may escape poverty constraints to a degree that the influence of societal expectations on individual behaviour becomes negligible. Women entrepreneurs in negligible poverty share many similarities across contexts, as they all freely re-enact societal structures according to their interests. However, the effects of entrepreneurial actions vary between the agricultural context, where rigid discipline is expected, and the non-farm context, where more flexible behaviours are tolerated.

6.3.1. Rigid discipline hindering emancipation

Farming cooperatives determine the extent to which farm entrepreneurs can influence shared cognitions. Although cooperatives help overcome dominative structures, they may hamper women's potential to overcome gendered prejudices. Most of the members of farming cooperatives have grown used to the informal rules of submission to one's husband and discrimination against women and tend to oppose any overt attempt to destabilize patriarchal and collectivistic traditions. For example, Clara, who was beaten by her alcoholic husband, could not divorce him because of social scrutiny from her peers. Several cooperatives impose constraints incapable by the women, just as when Marie, a farm entrepreneur with a successful business, complained that she could not avoid group members who 'kept coming and begging for her tools and money'. The ICENECDEV coordinator himself refrains from addressing issues of women discrimination because he fears he might lose trust among the group members and such an attempt might result in

emancipated women being denied participation in the cooperative (personal communication, 29th June 2018). Overall, among the 48 entrepreneurs who experienced moderate poverty constraints in agricultural contexts, 32 mentioned increased pressures from their groups in terms of economic burdens, inability to attend social and political meetings outside their cooperatives, envy from poorer farmers, and expectations to submit to their husbands and elders.

We also find evidence of a few women who gain legitimacy in their communities to the point of being able to circumvent some of the behavioural expectations imposed by their peers. Enriched agricultural entrepreneurs may leave their group and start activities on their own, as they prefer hiring a seasonal workforce to paying the ‘burdensome’ group fees. Others engage in anti-competitive behaviours, as in the case of Angela, who promotes her vegetables at the market shouting against other women whose harvest ‘sucks’ because they ‘do not know how to farm’, ‘sell bad vegetables’, and ‘use harmful pesticides’. In fact, there were conflicts between abjects and enriched farmers in five of the 12 cooperatives we analysed. When enriched farmers become group leaders, they may change their cooperatives’ policies and restrict membership or limit the support provided to the abjectly poor. This led to critical problems as governmental support diminished after the burst of the civil war. For instance, in the years from 2016 to 2018, the tuber cooperative shrunk from 120 to 35 members, excluding those participants who failed to meet production targets and contributed the least to the group’s functioning.

A handful of enriched agricultural entrepreneurs used the position they acquired in their communities to advocate for women’s rights and emancipation or attempt reducing patriarchal pressures. These women tended to distance themselves from other farmers, for example by diversifying into non-farm businesses and spending increasingly more time in urban areas or carrying out activities independently from their groups. For example, Serena campaigned against gendered violence in her village elections but carefully refrained from mentioning the topic within her group. Similarly, Nana, a primary school teacher and farm entrepreneur, aims to educate women about gender equality and emancipation but must conceal her training as a ‘farming workshop’ to avoid the disapproval of her cooperative’s members.

6.3.2. Loose organising facilitating emancipation

The flexible rules of non-farm groups allow women to engage in a broad set of social behaviours. While women who have emancipatory views in agricultural settings must hide their projects from their community members, those who operate in non-farm contexts can often benefit from the endorsement of other women. Many of the women who overcame poverty through non-farm businesses subsequently dedicated time and effort to empower their disadvantaged community members and promoted inclusive institutions in their societies, contesting discriminatory norms and encouraging other women to become independent. For instance, Daniela, who migrated to the poorest neighbourhood of Buea in her childhood, challenged societal prejudices by following her dream to manage a restaurant of *haute cuisine*, a prestigious sector reserved to men. Subsequently, she started hiring young girls and school dropouts who had difficulties supporting themselves and their families. Daniela is not only an employer but also a mentor and moral guide to the girls as she provides them with advice as to how to cope with gender discrimination, respond to harassment from customers, and build up their character against societal prejudices.

Notably, the purposive engagement in non-farm entrepreneurship may lead women to change their perception of gendered constraints. The non-farm entrepreneurs we interview gained independence from their husbands, participate more in political activities,

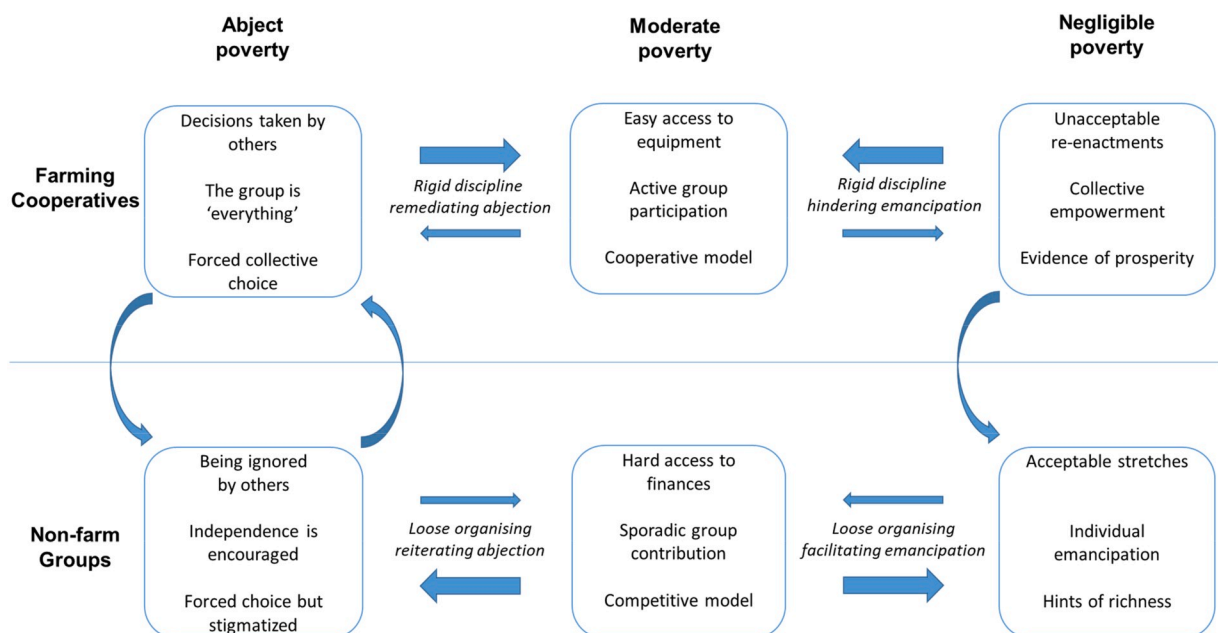


Fig. 1. Alleviation of poverty constraints.

and improve the quantity and quality of their ties to other community members. While traditionally women in Cameroon are 'relegated to the kitchen' and forbidden to interact in public without their husbands' consent, entrepreneurs managing a non-farm business violate the tribal patriarchal customs. By doing business, non-farm entrepreneurs challenge the norms restricting the role of women in society and prescribing submission to men and husbands. A clear example of this process is Esra, a rural farmer who opened a small shop in Buea to gain economic independence and participate in public events. She spent increasingly less time in her village, where her fellow community members judged her negatively because of her individuality. At the same time, Esra established new social ties to urban citizens more supportive of her chosen way of life.

A fundamental difference between the agricultural and non-farm context is the acceptance of women's independence and parity with men on community matters. Tatiana, who grew up in a poor rural community 10 km away from Buea, is an illustrative case. Tatiana's husband lent her some money to establish a factory of canned beverages and she employed girls and boys from several street gangs roaming in the area. After her husband died, Tatiana retained popularity within her community and became one of the key decision-makers in her village, holding several talks and workshops on women's emancipation, participating to the roundtable for peace in South-West Cameroon, and influencing political decisions and public policies on minorities', migrants', and women's rights. Like Daniela and Tatiana, eight other entrepreneurs in non-farm settings engage in advocacy on social and political issues, for example by launching social media campaigns, founding their own NGOs and women's groups, or holding talks and workshops with disadvantaged women.

7. Discussion

We conducted retrospective interviews with 104 members of farming and business groups to explore how abject women may overcome economic and gendered constraints through collective entrepreneurship. Building on our empirical findings, we conceptualized a process of entrepreneurial action in poverty settings contingent upon the entrepreneur's severity of constraints and strength of contextual discipline, as summarised in Fig. 1. Discipline, the intensity in which contextual prescriptions are enforced, emerged from our analysis as the determinant of whether and how poor women can escape their conditions of abjection. The strong rules of farming cooperatives facilitate the passage from abject to moderate poverty by complementing individual agency in conducting farm businesses, yet they impede the attainment of negligible poverty by enforcing traditional norms and gendered expectations. Conversely, the more flexible arrangements of non-farm groups are less efficient in tackling abjection but allow women to more easily step into a condition of negligible poverty less affected by patriarchal customs and gendered discrimination. In Table 3, we also present vignettes of our study participants who transitioned out of poverty providing further evidence for the processual framework. We conclude the article by elaborating on the implications of our findings for collective entrepreneurship, constitutive approaches to management science, and poverty alleviation.

7.1. Implications for entrepreneurship research

Groups play a key role in helping entrepreneurs escape poverty constraints (Sutter et al., 2017) as they ease the burdens affecting the abjects' lives and provide disadvantaged entrepreneurs with access to social capital, resources, and finances (McKague and Oliver, 2012). Consistently with these insights, we find that groups catering to abjectly poor entrepreneurs help their members overcome economic difficulties by offering otherwise unavailable resources and tools. However, we also observe some controversial negative effects of collective entrepreneurship on poverty conditions.

We add to Sutter et al. (2019) by shedding light on how contextual features may lead to entrepreneurship that 'remediates poverty' or 'reforms institutional contexts' and the incongruities between the two courses of action. Disciplined groups enforce conformity pressures on the poorest of their members who must struggle to comply with collective obligations and retain their right to participate. These entrepreneurs often 'work all the time', giving up social relations to dedicate more hours to their jobs and facing limited opportunities and incentives to challenge traditional norms. In this way, organisations with a rigid discipline remediate abject poverty but perpetuate some of the oppressive patriarchal structures they could attempt to undermine.

Furthermore, complementing Slade Shantz et al. (2019), who attribute the effectiveness of cooperatives to the alignment of formal and informal hierarchies, we investigate how the groups' composition and internal norms affect their potential to eradicate poverty. The existence of strong rules within entrepreneurial groups is a double-edged sword, as it can not only facilitate the inclusion of marginalized minorities but also decrease the incentives for these minorities to engage in behaviours contrary to the groups' expectations. In fact, several farming cooperatives are ineffective in tackling economic constraints for their poorest members because of the very presence of strong and unbalanced rules within the group. All in all, we identify two negative aspects of rigid organisations, namely (1) the enforcement of collective expectations hindering emancipation from gendered constraints, and (2) the possibility that enriched group leaders implement personal agendas contrary to the organisations' collective interests.

Our work extends the debate as to whether and when entrepreneurship may lead to emancipation (Rindova et al., 2009). Marginalized individuals who engage in entrepreneurship can gain legitimacy within their communities (Mair et al., 2012) and influence discriminatory societal norms (Scott et al., 2012). Yet, the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship seems to differ across contexts, depending on the fit between the chosen organisational forms and the severity and types of poverty constraints. In a constitutive ontology, groups are not 'given' organisational forms (e.g. Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011; Dorado, 2013) but they emerge from the evolving interdependencies between entrepreneurs and their contexts, mediating the influence of societal structures, traditions, and expectations on individual behaviour. Discipline, the strength with which rules confirm, contrast, and influence the attribution of status and roles in societal structures, is a key determinant of the types of poverty constraints abject women can

overcome. Our findings suggest that collective entrepreneurship facilitates the removal of gendered constraints only when abject women experience individualistic pressures and freedom to enact societal structures. Rigid organisational forms encourage women entrepreneurs to conform to traditional patriarchal and collectivistic norms and penalise those who deviate from the expected behaviours. In contrast, flexible rules in non-farm groups allow women to entertain a broader range of entrepreneurial activities and pose fewer constraints to personal enrichment and emancipation.

We also expand on the antecedents and consequences of agency in entrepreneurship. Although Giddens (1984) conceptualizes an agent as anyone capable, intentionally and unintentionally, of acting on societal structures, the reception of Giddens' work has disproportionately focused on 'knowledgeability', the ability to leverage one's knowledge to enact social contexts (Sarason et al., 2006). However, entrepreneurs may enact societal systems even when they are not aware of cognitive, normative, and dominative processes (Garud et al., 2007; Welter et al., 2017). In addition, models assuming actors' knowledgeability are inadequate to explain how the abjectly poor, who often give up to their difficulties (Slade Shantz et al., 2018), may escape the constraints affecting their lives. Entrepreneurs living in extreme poverty are frequently marginalized and excluded from their communities, of which they passively reiterate values and ideas. Rigid discipline in cooperatives and some NGOs seems to substitute for abject entrepreneurs' ability to identify and exploit opportunities. Vice versa, loose organisational forms in non-farm settings promote individuality and may encourage women to develop knowledgeability of their social contexts and engage in behaviours contrary to discriminatory traditions. We believe our work makes an important contribution to the debate on contextualizing entrepreneurship (Dorado and Ventresca, 2013; Welter, 2011) by exploring how abject individuals are driven into business and may exercise their activities with different degrees of agency and intentionality as they grow out of poverty.

Finally, our work has implications for the literature on women's empowerment. Contrary to studies advocating emancipation and gender equality through entrepreneurship (e.g. Ahl, 2006; Rindova et al., 2009), we question whether escaping patriarchal traditions is possible and desirable for women living in abject poverty. Among our study participants, we observed a recurrent pattern wherein women were able to pursue emancipation only after overcoming harsh economic constraints and societal prejudices. Hence, we infer that fulfilling abject women's basic needs is a necessary step before discourses of gender equality can be initiated. Moreover, we provide a nuanced picture of the emancipation process in which the removal of gendered constraints does not always run counter to the men's interests. In farming cooperatives and non-farm groups, some abject women are enabled to challenge patriarchal and collectivistic norms by gaining status and legitimacy in conformity with these same norms. We call on scholars to further investigate this paradox and explore how gendered tensions and conflicts of interest may arise as women entrepreneurs grow their business and rise in status within their communities.

7.2. Implications for poverty alleviation

Our study has several implications for development practitioners and policymakers aiming to tackle abject poverty through entrepreneurship. While some scholars posited that innovative entrepreneurship is the best tool to raise the abjects out of poverty (Alvarez and Barney, 2014; Bruton et al., 2015; McDermott et al., 2009), we provided evidence that even simple activities within farming cooperatives may alleviate economic constraints. For those living in the most extreme poverty conditions, agricultural businesses might be the only option available to escape poverty. First, poor entrepreneurs need finances and social approval before they can start non-farm ventures, yet they can easily gain the support of their peers for agricultural businesses compatible with traditional practices. Second, the abjects might be in such a disadvantaged condition that they are unable to make sense of ventures other than the farm businesses widespread in their communities. Third, even when the abjects do not overcome their condition of extreme poverty, collective entrepreneurship may help their sustenance and survival. Thus, policies aimed at reducing poverty through entrepreneurship should not only foster an encouraging institutional environment (Dorado and Ventresca, 2013) but also create basic infrastructure enabling the abjectly poor to sustain themselves and initiate a self-employed career. Although access to markets (McKague and Oliver, 2012) and quality standards (Perez-Aleman, 2010) can be important in creating economic growth, we found they are effective only for those individuals who face limited risks of sudden accidents and market failures. We suggest development practitioners could subsidize collective forms of entrepreneurship reducing risks for the abjectly poor before they incentivize more profitable and sustainable activities.

In addition, we shed light on the links between economic and gendered constraints affecting abject women. Poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing precarious health and living conditions, lack of education, and limited possibilities to conduct economic activities (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011), yet empirical work has concentrated predominantly on its economic aspects (Sutter et al., 2019). Surprisingly, we find that measures tackling economic constraints, such as the introduction of collective farming, might reinforce discriminatory practices and make difficult for women entrepreneurs to overcome gendered biases and oppressive traditions. Practitioners should take our insights into account when they plan interventions encompassing multiple aspects of the abjects' livelihoods. For example, the negative effects of farming cooperatives could be minimized by experimenting with flexible rules entailing more freedom to challenge gendered societal norms.

7.3. Limitations

Despite its numerous contributions to the debate of entrepreneurship as a solution to poverty, our work is not immune to limitations. First, even though constitutive ontologies have an inherent focus on processes, we relied mostly on interviews investigating abject women's current perceptions and memories of entrepreneurship. Although we took several measures to ensure the validity of our analysis, such as the triangulation with quantitative data, archival sources, organisational statutes, and project documentation,

there is room for future research observing poverty reduction via entrepreneurship on a longer time through longitudinal methods that may reduce recall and censoring biases. Retrospective interviews are a valid instrument to inquire into remarkable events experienced by the study participants (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012), yet longitudinal designs could better highlight how perceptions of entrepreneurship and oppressive poverty constraints evolve.

Second, there are some concerns about the use of interpreters. Despite employing interpreters is the norm in fieldwork where the researchers speak a language different from the participants' (e.g. Lindvert et al., 2017; Mair et al., 2012), this practice might potentially make difficult to establish trust with the interviewees. We contend this is not the case in this article's empirical setting, as our interpreters were all young and trained volunteers at ICENECDEV, an organisation enjoying a high reputation in the communities under study. Also, the Cameroonian dialect has many phonetical similarities to English and the lead researcher was able to understand most of the participants' replies without the interpreters' interventions.

Finally, some remarks concern the ongoing war at the time of the study, the inherent differences between the agricultural and non-farm activities, and the generalisability of our findings to men, oppressed minorities, and non-African contexts. We contend that data collection protocols have been applied to the best of the researchers' knowledge and possibilities, given the inherent limitations in doing research in our empirical setting. For instance, because of the dangers of kidnapping, theft, and armed clashes, several interviews were shortened to allow the involved researchers, participants, and volunteers to travel during safe times. Similarly, due to the difficulties in establishing contact with entrepreneurs living in poverty, we had to recur to the use of intermediaries. We argue that such deviations from the 'ideal' protocol of qualitative research are not shortcomings of our study but necessary steps to provide a reliable picture of entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa, where war, social stigma, and mistrust are commonplace. Although generalisability and selection biases might be a problem for some of the cases, we maintain that our study offers some pioneering methodological milestones for research in extreme poverty settings and yields findings potentially valid also in the cases of non-African contexts and discriminated minorities other than women.

8. Conclusion

Prior research explored how entrepreneurial groups may help the abjectly poor overcome their liabilities by substituting for individual agency in the enactment of profit opportunities. In contrast, we found that the groups exercising most control over their members are not only more efficient in raising the abjects out of poverty but also less effective in generating economic prosperity and emancipation from discriminatory norms. These findings shed new light on poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship by highlighting some undesirable consequences of collective action and development interventions tackling abjection. We encourage scholars to build on our insights and explore how entrepreneurship may affect different types of poverty constraints that vary with localized practices, traditions, and contingencies. All in all, we have provided theoretical and methodological advancements to further the study of global poverty and its possible solutions.

Funding

This work was supported by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst [grant number 'IPID4ALL 20 32 20 73 01'].

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Luca Castellanza: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support of the University of Buea, the South-West regional sub-delegation of Agriculture in Cameroon, ICENECDEV Buea, and the other partner organisations. I thank Michael Woywode, Jeremy Hall, Stelvia Matos, Itziar Castello, Elke Weik, Alfred Kieser, Konrad Stahl, the three anonymous reviewers, the field editor Joel Gehman, and all the others who provided comments on previous versions of the manuscript. I gratefully acknowledge the help of Eric Fongoh, Harrison Ngantu, Robert Njilla, Stefanie Mvodo, Nkam Fonkam, and Franklin Nkoko, who contributed fruitful discussions of the early results and facilitated the work's completion. All errors are my own.

Appendix A

Table A1

List of farming and business groups participating in the study.

ID	Description	Sector	Activity	Location	Founded	Members	Participants
1	Registered cooperative	Farm	Vegetable Farming	Buea	2013	15	8
2	Registered cooperative	Farm	Tomato Farming	Buea	2010	40	5
3	Registered cooperative	Farm	Various Farming	Province	2012	20	3
4	Registered cooperative	Integrated	Tuber Value Chain	Province	2006	35	9
5	Reg. ICENECDEV group	Farm	Various Farming	Buea	2013	15	5
6	Reg. ICENECDEV group	Farm	Various Farming	Province	2015	30	9
7	Informal cooperative	Farm	Vegetable Farming	Buea	2017	10	3
8	Informal cooperative	Farm	Various Farming	Province	2016	25	3
9	Inf. ICENECDEV group	Farm	Various Farming	Buea	2014	12	11
10	Inf. ICENECDEV group	Farm	Tomato Farming	Province	2016	15	9
11	Inf. ICENECDEV group	Farm	Cassava Farming	Province	2014	10	8
12	Inf. ICENECDEV group	Farm	Vegetable Farming	Province	2015	12	6
13	Informal tribal group	Non-farm	Trading	Buea	2003	15	5
14	Informal business network	Non-farm	Various	Buea	2014	10	3
15	NGO-program alumni	Non-farm	Tailoring	Buea	2016	24	3
16	Registered business network	Non-farm	Various	Buea	2011	30	2
17	NGO-sponsored group	Non-farm	Various	Province	2015	20	5
18	Microfinance group	Non-farm	Various	Province	2009	6	3
19	Government-sponsored group	Non-farm	Trading	Province	2016	15	4

References

- Ahl, H., 2006. Why research on women entrepreneurs needs new directions. *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 30, 595–621. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2006.00138.x>.
- Alvarez, S.A., Barney, J.B., 2014. Entrepreneurial opportunities and poverty alleviation. *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 38, 159–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12078>.
- Banerjee, A.V., Duflo, E., 2011. *Poor Economics: Rethinking Poverty and the Ways to End it*. Public Affairs, New York, NY.
- Battilana, J., 2006. Agency and institutions: the enabling role of individuals' social position. *Organization* 13, 653–676. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508406067008>.
- BBC, 2018. Cameroon Election: Five Things to Know [WWW Document]. BBC News. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-45740188/cameroon-election-five-things-to-know-about-the-presidential-poll>. (Accessed 14 October 2018).
- Bentley, T., Olapade, M., Wambua, P., Charron, N., 2015. Afrobarometer Round 6 New Data from across Africa where to Start? Aligning Sustainable Development Goals with Citizen Priorities [WWW Document]. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2019.1640476>.
- Brinkmann, S., 2018. The interview. In: Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications, Inc, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 997–1038.
- Bruton, G.D., Ahlstrom, D., Li, H.L., 2010. Institutional theory and entrepreneurship: where are we now and where do we need to move in the future? *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 34, 421–440. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00390.x>.
- Bruton, G.D., Ahlstrom, D., Si, S., 2015. Entrepreneurship, poverty, and Asia: moving beyond subsistence entrepreneurship. *Asia Pacific J. Manag.* 32, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-014-9404-x>.
- Bunderson, J.S., van der Vegt, G.S., Cantimur, Y., Rink, F., 2016. Different views of hierarchy and why they matter: hierarchy as inequality or as cascading influence. *Acad. Manag. J.* 59, 1265–1289. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.0601>.
- Butler, J., 1993. Bodies that matter. In: *On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. Routledge, New York, NY.
- Chiles, T.H., Tuggle, C.S., McMullen, J.S., Bierman, L., Greening, D.W., 2010. Dynamic creation: extending the radical austrian approach to entrepreneurship. *Organ. Stud.* 31, 7–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840609346923>.
- Cook, M.L., Plunkett, B., 2006. Collective entrepreneurship: an emerging phenomenon in producer-owned organizations. *J. Agric. Appl. Econ.* 38, 421–428. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1074070800022458>.
- Corbin, J., Strauss, A., 2008. Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. In: *Basics of Qualitative Research Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, 3rd ed. SAGE Publications, Inc, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Diefenbach, T., Sillince, J.A.A., 2011. Formal and informal hierarchy in different types of organization. *Organ. Stud.* 32, 1515–1537. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840611421254>.
- Doern, R., Goss, D., 2013. From barriers to barring: why emotion matters for entrepreneurial development. *Int. Small Bus. J.* 31, 496–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242611425555>.
- Doern, R., Goss, D., 2014. The role of negative emotions in the social processes of entrepreneurship: power rituals and shame-related appeasement behaviors. *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 38, 863–890. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12026>.
- Dorado, S., 2013. Small groups as context for institutional entrepreneurship: an exploration of the emergence of commercial microfinance in Bolivia. *Organ. Stud.* 34, 533–557. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612470255>.
- Dorado, S., Ventresca, M.J., 2013. Crescive entrepreneurship in complex social problems: Institutional conditions for entrepreneurial engagement. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 28, 69–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2012.02.002>.
- Elliott, J., 2005. *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.15.2.11oli>.
- Fitz-Koch, S., Nordqvist, M., Carter, S., Hunter, E., 2018. Entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector: a literature review and future research opportunities. *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 42, 129–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1042258717732958>.
- Garud, R., Tharchen, T., 2016. The Performative puzzle: How institutions matter in marginalizing and reconstituting identities. In: Gehman, J., Lounsbury, M.D., Greenwood, R. (Eds.), *How Institutions Matter!* Emerald Group Publishing Ltd, Bingley, UK, pp. 235–260. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X201600048B008>.
- Garud, R., Hardy, C., Maguire, S., 2007. Institutional entrepreneurship as embedded agency: an introduction to the special issue. *Organ. Stud.* 28, 957–969. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840607078958>.

- Garud, R., Gehman, J., Giuliani, A.P., 2014. Contextualizing entrepreneurial innovation: a narrative perspective. *Res. Policy* 43, 1177–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2014.04.015>.
- Gehman, J., Glaser, V.L., Eisenhardt, K.M., Gioia, D., Langley, A., Corley, K.G., 2018. Finding theory–method fit: a comparison of three qualitative approaches to theory building. *J. Manag. Inq.* 27, 284–300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492617706029>.
- Giddens, A., 1984. *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Gioia, D.A., Corley, K.G., Hamilton, A.L., 2013. Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organ. Res. Methods* 16, 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151>.
- Goss, D., Jones, R., Betta, M., Latham, J., 2011. Power as practice: a micro-sociological analysis of the dynamics of emancipatory entrepreneurship. *Organ. Stud.* 32, 211–229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840610397471>.
- Handy, F., Cnaan, R.A., Bhat, G., Meijs, L.C.P.M., 2011. Jasmine growers of coastal Karnataka: grassroots sustainable community-based enterprise in India. *Entrep. Reg. Dev.* 23, 405–417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2011.580166>.
- Herzog, H., 2012. Interview location and its social meaning. In: Gubriu, J.F., Holstein, J.A., Marvasti, A.B., McKinney, K.D. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*. SAGE Publications, Inc, Thousand Oaks, California. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452218403>.
- Jack, S.L., Anderson, A.R., 2002. The effects of embeddedness on the entrepreneurial process. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 17, 467–487. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026\(01\)00076-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026(01)00076-3).
- Johnson, J.M., Rowlands, T., 2012. The interpersonal dynamics of in-depth interviewing. In: Gubriu, J.F., Holstein, J.A., Marvasti, A.B., McKinney, K.D. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*. SAGE Publications, Inc, Thousand Oaks, California. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452218403>.
- Kimmitt, J., Muñoz, P., Newbery, R., 2019. Poverty and the varieties of entrepreneurship in the pursuit of prosperity. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2019.05.003>.
- Kistruck, G.M., Sutter, C.J., Lount, R.B., Smith, B.R., 2013. Mitigating principal-agent problems in base-of-the-pyramid markets: an identity spillover perspective. *Acad. Manag. J.* 56, 659–682. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.0336>.
- Lindvert, M., Patel, P.C., Wincent, J., 2017. Struggling with social capital: Pakistani women micro entrepreneurs' challenges in acquiring resources. *Entrep. Reg. Dev.* 29, 759–790. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2017.1349190>.
- Mair, J., Marti, I., 2009. Entrepreneurship in and around institutional voids: a case study from Bangladesh. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 24, 419–435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2008.04.006>.
- Mair, J., Marti, I., Ventresca, M.J., 2012. Building inclusive Markets in Rural Bangladesh: how intermediaries work institutional voids. *Acad. Manag. J.* 55, 819–850. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0627>.
- Mair, J., Wolf, M., Seelos, C., 2016. Scaffolding: a process of transforming patterns of inequality in small-scale societies. *Acad. Manag. J.* 59, 2021–2044. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0725>.
- Martin de Holan, P., Willi, A., Fernández, P.D., 2019. Breaking the wall: emotions and projective agency under extreme poverty. *Bus. Soc.* 58, 919–962. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650317745633>.
- Matos, S., Hall, J., 2019. An exploratory study of entrepreneurs in impoverished communities: when institutional factors and individual characteristics result in non-productive entrepreneurship. *Entrep. Reg. Dev.* 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2019.1640476>.
- McDermott, G.A., Corredoira, R.A., Kruse, G., 2009. Public-private institutions as catalysts of upgrading in emerging market societies. *Acad. Manag. J.* 52, 1270–1296. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.47084929>.
- McKague, K., Oliver, C., 2012. Enhanced market practices: poverty alleviation for poor producers in developing countries. *Calif. Manag. Rev.* 55, 98–129. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2012.55.1.98>.
- Miller, D., Le Breton-Miller, I., 2017. Underdog entrepreneurs: a model of challenge-based entrepreneurship. *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 41, 7–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12253>.
- Mosse, D., 2010. A relational approach to durable poverty, inequality and power. *J. Dev. Stud.* 46, 1156–1178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2010.487095>.
- O'Grady, S., 2018. Africa's next civil war could be in Cameroon [WWW Document]. *Washington Post*. URL <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/05/30/africa-next-civil-war-could-be-in-cameroon>. (Accessed 31 August 2018).
- Peredo, A.M., Chrisman, J.J., 2006. Toward a theory of community-based enterprise. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* 31, 309–328. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2006.20208683>.
- Perez-Aleman, P., 2010. Collective learning in global diffusion: spreading quality standards in a developing country cluster. *Organ. Sci.* 22, 173–189. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0514>.
- Rindova, V., Barry, D., Ketchen, D.J., 2009. Entrepreneurship as emancipation. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* 34, 477–491. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2009.40632647>.
- Sarason, Y., Dean, T., Dillard, J.F., 2006. Entrepreneurship as the nexus of individual and opportunity: a structuration view. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 21, 286–305. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2005.02.007>.
- Sarason, Y., Dillard, J.F., Dean, T., 2010. How can we know the dancer from the dance? Reply to “entrepreneurship as the structuration of individual and opportunity: a response using a critical realist perspective”. (Mole and Mole, 2008). *J. Bus. Ventur.* 25, 238–243. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2008.06.003>.
- Scott, L., Dolan, C., Johnstone-Louis, M., Sugden, K., Wu, M., 2012. Enterprise and inequality: a study of Avon in South Africa. *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 36, 543–568. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2012.00507.x>.
- Selden, P.D., Fletcher, D.E., 2015. The entrepreneurial journey as an emergent hierarchical system of artifact-creating processes. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 30, 603–615. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2014.09.002>.
- Slade Shantz, A., Kistruck, G., Zietsma, C., 2018. The opportunity not taken: the occupational identity of entrepreneurs in contexts of poverty. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 33, 416–437. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2018.02.003>.
- Slade Shantz, A., Kistruck, G.M., Pacheco, D.F., Webb, J.W., 2019. How formal and informal hierarchies shape conflict within cooperatives: a field experiment in Ghana. *Acad. Manag. J.* 62, 335–355. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.0335>.
- Sutter, C.J., Webb, J.W., Kistruck, G., Ketchen, D.J., Ireland, R.D., 2017. Transitioning entrepreneurs from informal to formal markets. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 32, 420–442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2017.03.002>.
- Sutter, C., Bruton, G.D., Chen, J., 2019. Entrepreneurship as a solution to extreme poverty: a review and future research directions. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 34, 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2018.06.003>.
- Tobias, J.M., Mair, J., Barbosa-Leiker, C., 2013. Toward a theory of transformative entrepreneurship: poverty reduction and conflict resolution in Rwanda's entrepreneurial coffee sector. *J. Bus. Ventur.* 28, 728–742. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2013.03.003>.
- Venkataraman, H., Vermeulen, P., Raaijmakers, A., Mair, J., 2016. Market meets community: institutional logics as strategic resources for development work. *Organ. Stud.* 37, 709–733. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840615613370>.
- Welter, F., 2011. Contextualizing entrepreneurship—conceptual challenges and ways forward. *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 35, 165–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00427.x>.
- Welter, F., Baker, T., Audretsch, D.B., Gartner, W.B., 2017. Everyday entrepreneurship—a call for entrepreneurship research to embrace entrepreneurial diversity. *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 41, 311–321. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12258>.
- Williams, T.A., Shepherd, D.A., 2016. Building resilience or providing sustenance: different paths of emergent ventures in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake. *Acad. Manag. J.* 59, 2069–2102. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0682>.
- Yessoufou, A.W., Blok, V., Omta, S.W.F., 2018. The process of entrepreneurial action at the base of the pyramid in developing countries: a case of vegetable farmers in Benin. *Entrep. Reg. Dev.* 30, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2017.1364788>.