ENTREPRENEURSHIP, POVERTY, AND CRISES:

GROUNDED-THEORETICAL ESSAYS ON SMALL-BUSINESS OWNERSHIP IN SOUTH-WEST CAMEROON

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Luca Castellanza

Mannheim

Dean: Professor Dr. Joachim Lutz

Main evaluator: Professor Dr. Michael Woywode

Second evaluator: Professor Dr. Bernd Helmig

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Introduction

1. Poverty and entrepreneurship

"The fact that the poor are alive is clear proof of their ability."

Muhammad Yunus (founder of Grameen Bank, India)

Nobel Peace Prize awardee Muhammad Yunus pioneered a ground-breaking approach to poverty alleviation which consisted in giving micro-loans to Bangladeshi groups of entrepreneurial women. Implemented in 1983, Grameen Bank's microfinance model introduced a shift in banking logics and contributed to shaping global perceptions about poverty and its related societal issues. Grameen Bank's business model also predated, inspired, and renewed academic and managerial interests in entrepreneurship among the poorest. When Muhammad Yunus had been growing and operating his business for nearly two decades, Prahalad and Hammond (2002) issued the first call to global businesses to take advantage of the untapped potential of markets in poverty settings. Drawing, among others, on the example of Grameen Group's telecom activities, the authors argued that businesses can benefit by serving the world's poor, collaborating with them, and providing them with opportunities to mitigate and overcome their multifaceted poverty constraints. Since Prahalad and Hammond (2002), considerable progress has been made in understanding how poor individuals may behave entrepreneurially as they deal with the multiple constraints affecting their lives.

For instance, scholars have been exploring the effects of scarcity on entrepreneurial behaviour and how entrepreneurs can improvise with their resources at hand by stretching normative expectations (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Sarkar, 2018), the complex relationship between experiences of hardship and the motivation to initiate a business (Dencker, Bacq, Gruber, & Haas, 2021; McMullen, Bagby, & Palich, 2008), and the ways entrepreneurship itself may be a coping mechanism or spur positive societal externalities (Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009; Williams & Shepherd, 2018). Relatedly, in recent years there has also been a surge in interest

in the challenges faced by entrepreneurs living in low-income countries. Low-income countries stand in stark contrast to Western contexts not only because of their widespread poverty-related societal issues but also due to their different cultures and behavioural expectations. For example, in a study of entrepreneurship in Ghana, Slade Shantz, Kistruck, and Zietsma (2018) found that the prevalence of collectivism, the social obligation to contribute to one's peers and community members, and fatalism, the belief that individuals have no control over the outcomes of their actions, are a strong hindrance to the success of local entrepreneurs. Other sets of constraints, such as gender discrimination related to patriarchal traditions, are country-specific and strongly rooted in certain cultures. Through a reflexive process (Suddaby, Viale, & Gendron, 2016), poor individuals may become aware of these constraints and challenge them by engaging in entrepreneurship. Lastly, poor entrepreneurs are often subject to multiple constraints at the same time. As a case in point, poverty may add to issues of social exclusion, health, and gender discrimination (Mair, Martí, Ventresca, Marti, & Ventresca, 2012; Mair, Wolf, & Seelos, 2016), and poor individuals are especially vulnerable to crises and natural disasters (Akter & Mallick, 2013; Williams & Shepherd, 2016).

However, scholarly inquiry into the multifaceted relationship between poverty and entrepreneurship is still in its infancy (Sutter, Bruton, & Chen, 2019) and several questions remain to be answered. In this dissertation, I present three grounded-theoretical studies of small-business ownership in South-West Cameroon that address the determinants, consequences, and dynamics of entrepreneurial behaviour in poverty settings. The three studies share part of the same dataset, which comprises a total of 214 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2018 and 2020, and a similar methodology, which in all cases includes a grounded-theoretical analysis based upon a dual ontology. The first study develops a retrospective processual framework of poor entrepreneurs' transitioning out of poverty through the participation in farming cooperatives and business groups. The study's main finding is that the rigidity of the rules and structures of agricultural and non-farm groups conditions the extent to which poor women

entrepreneurs are able to overcome poverty constraints. The second study builds on the emerging insight that some agricultural entrepreneurs were much more empowered than others and delves deeper into whether and how poor individuals decide to challenge normative constraints. As a result, the second study shows the dynamics of influence and reversal of the power exercised over women farmers by the normative constraints of class and gender discrimination. The third study takes place two years after the first two and is based mainly upon the data collected in 2020. In the period from 2018 to 2020, the local entrepreneurs' activities had been largely disrupted by the outbreak and diffusion of a civil war. Hence, the study furthers our understanding of the antecedents of entrepreneurship in low-income countries by inquiring as to how poor entrepreneurs adapt and continue their businesses after encountering adversity. Although each study explores a specific research question, adopts a different theoretical lenses, and draws its distinct contributions, taken together the three studies provide a nuanced picture of poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship in South-West Cameroon with implications for entrepreneurship in Africa and other poverty settings.

2. Short summaries of the three studies

Next, I shortly present the research questions and motivations underlying each study. An important point about grounded-theoretical studies is that, traditionally, this type of research has been strongly focused on empirical phenomena rather than on theories. The name 'grounded theory' itself, introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), indicates the generation of new theory 'grounded' in empirical data that significantly departs from pre-existing theoretical apparatuses. Through the decades, as the body of academic knowledge increased exponentially, the focus of grounded theoretical studies has gradually shifted from the generation of entirely new theories to the abductive derivation of new constructs and concepts that enrich and provide nuances to existing theories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Typically, the starting point for any grounded-theory study is a relatively unexplored empirical phenomenon potentially yielding insights to answer important research questions (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016; Suddaby,

2006). Although a project's initial research question may be aimed at filling a specific gap within an existing theory and scholars rarely approach a grounded-theory project completely free of 'theoretical prejudices', the research question is bound to evolve as new insights emerge from the data and the final results can hardly be predicted in advance (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). The three studies included in this dissertation are no exception and they were subject to extensive rewriting following multiple iterative rounds of data analysis, in a way that the initial research questions and motivations were partially lost and altered into the final version of each manuscript. In Table 1 below, I summarize the key features of each study.

Table 1. Summary of the three studies.

	1st Study	2nd Study	3rd Study
Research question	How does collective entrepreneurship in different sectors alleviate or reiterate poverty constraints?	How do oppressed women farmers decide to and succeed in challenging different discriminatory norms?	After crises, how can poor business owners behave entrepreneurially despite their resource scarcity?
Theoretical lenses	Constitutive theories and approaches	Institutional theory	Opportunity theory and COR theory
Data	108 interviews conducted in 2018 with agricultural and non-farm entrepreneurs	76 interviews conducted in 2018 with members of farming cooperatives	214 interviews conducted with 151 agricultural and non-farm entrepreneurs in 2018 and 2020
Methods	Grounded theory and process theorizing	Grounded theory and phenomenology	Grounded theory
Ontology	Dual	Dual, but more subjectivist	Dual, but more positivist
Findings	A process framework of entrepreneurship through different stages of poverty	A mechanism model of institutional change against poverty constraints	A mechanism model of the determinants of entrepreneurship after crises
Main contribution	Groups alleviate or reinforce poverty constraints according to the rigidity of their rules and structures	Exercises of power within institutions determine the extent to which individuals can encounter and deviate from norms	The interplay of resource synergies and psychological motivation influences business owners' post-crisis behaviours

The first study was motivated by the observation that entrepreneurship research has long eschewed the analysis of economic activities in the agricultural sector (Fitz-Koch, Nordqvist, Carter, & Hunter, 2018) despite sectoral norms and beliefs being important determinants of entrepreneurial behaviour (De Massis, Kotlar, Wright, & Kellermanns, 2018; Welter, 2011) and the sector contributing substantially to the economic growth of low-income countries (Dethier

& Effenberger, 2012). Since local norms and beliefs also influence the extent to which poor entrepreneurs can overcome poverty constraints (Bruton, Ketchen, & Ireland, 2013; Slade Shantz et al., 2018), the study's original aim was to *inquire about differences in whether, and how, entrepreneurs operating in the agricultural and non-farm sectors are able to emancipate from poverty*. A distinctive feature of the study is the use of grounded theory, combined with narrative analysis (Elliott, 2005), to derive a process model from factual retrospective interview data (Gehman et al., 2018; Langley, 1999). Among the three studies, the first study also makes the strongest use of a dual ontology by subscribing to a constitutive perspective (Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014; Sarason, Dean, & Dillard, 2006) and providing a comprehensive picture of the interplay between entrepreneurial activities, group-level norms, and societal prescriptions. The analysis identifies three stages of poverty alleviation that differ with regards to the presence of economic and non-economic constraints. The study's key finding is that poor entrepreneurs' ability to transition out of poverty depends chiefly on group-level norms, which mediate the effect of societal prescriptions on entrepreneurial behaviours. Surprisingly, farming cooperatives are more effective than non-farm groups at eradicating extreme poverty because their rigid rules and discipline motivate entrepreneurs to conform to the group and behave efficiently. However, the farming cooperatives' rigid rules also hinder women entrepreneurs' emancipation from non-economic constraints as they reinforce the traditions of patriarchy and gender discrimination.

The second study was not planned in advance and was prompted by the emerging insight that, within farming cooperatives, some women entrepreneurs were radically more emancipated than others. Hence, the study asks *how individuals may decide to and succeed in challenging societal prescriptions*. The study is centred on the emerging concepts of 'encounters' (Creed & Scully, 2000; Goffman, 1961), moments whereby beliefs about and attitudes toward an identity are altered, and 'deviance' (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007), the extent to which systems of practices allow individuals to entertain activities contrary to the dominant norms. The study draws

heavily on institutional theory to introduce the emerging concepts and contribute to the discussion as to how oppressive institutions can be altered and eventually dismantled (Courpasson, 2016; Fleming, 2016; Martí & Fernández, 2013). However, consistently with grounded-theoretical methodologies, institutional theory was added to the study only during the analysis process, when the reading of relevant literature informed and enriched the emerging concepts of 'encounters' and 'deviance'. This study is also the most subjectivist of the three, as it attempts to fully account for women entrepreneurs' understanding and action against institutionalized constraints through a phenomenological analysis (Friedland, 2018; Gill, 2014). The analysis compares the two institutions of class and gender discrimination and abductively derives that women farmers can more easily overcome class constraints because of the different features of the two institutions. The study's contribution revolves around the analysis of these features, namely, the episodic strength and frequency of individual-level constraints, which determine the ease of 'encountering' institutions, and the systemic diffusion and legitimacy of institutions, which condition oppressed women entrepreneurs' possibilities for deviance.

The third study is perhaps the closest to the grounded-theory template originally intended by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The study was not motivated by specific literature nor by emerging insights, but rather by the unique opportunity to explore entrepreneurship in a context of poverty severely impacted by a harsh civil war. Although there exist studies on entrepreneurship after major crises and exogenous shocks in poverty settings (e.g. De Mel, McKenzie, & Woodruff, 2012; Welter, Xheneti, & Smallbone, 2018; Williams & Shepherd, 2016), to my knowledge, nobody has looked at *the specific relationship between poverty, the entrepreneurs' resource endowments, and the subsequent entrepreneurial behaviours*. When approaching the data collection, I had some knowledge of the different streams of literature and perspectives on entrepreneurship during and after crises (e.g. Korber & McNaughton, 2018; Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd, & Zhao, 2017), yet was open to any concept emerging from the analysis. The study also adopts a more positivistic stance towards the data, focusing on capturing

objective cues of entrepreneurial behaviours and reactions to adverse circumstances. Although many of the emerging concepts resonate with existing theories such as effectuation theory (Fisher, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001), motivational theories of entrepreneurship (Dencker et al., 2021; McMullen et al., 2008), and psychological behavioural theories (Doern, 2016; Hobfoll, 1989), the heart of the study is a novel and original analysis of the interplay of different antecedents to post-crisis entrepreneurial behaviours in poverty settings. The study challenges the common assumption that effectuation and improvisation are conducive to growth in poverty settings by delving deep into how extremely poor entrepreneurs use resources after crises and shocks. The study's key contribution lies in showing how entrepreneurs can turn resources from liabilities and sunk costs into business assets after going through periods of intense resource losses and uncontrolled hustling. The remaining of this dissertation proceeds as follows. The next three sections present each study in detail, and the fifth section concludes by drawing general theoretical and practical implications.

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

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.

Project history

At the time of writing, this article is in press in Journal of Business Venturing (VHB: A). The article is single-authored and I developed the original research idea, collected the data, and conducted the analysis on my own. The manuscript benefited from input and feedback from several colleagues, including Michael Woywode, Jeremy Hall, Stelvia Matos, Itziar Castello, Elke Weik, Alfred Kieser, and Konrad Stahl. Early versions of the manuscript were presented at the 2018 GSOM Conference on Emerging Markets in Saint Petersburg and during a doctoral seminar at the University of Surrey in 2019. The manuscript was also conferred the GESS Best Paper Award in 2019.

1. 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 abjects' possibilities to learn skills, mobilise 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 abjects 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 organized (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 abjects but also limit the extent to which women entrepreneurs can deviate from discriminatory practices. Moreover, we found differences in how the abjects 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 organizational 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.

2. **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 abjects, originally excluded from dominative, cognitive, and normative structures, may integrate into their societies, change rules, and spread inclusive customs and beliefs.

2.1 *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 abjects' social and economic development (Sutter et al., 2019). The abjects 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 abjects' 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 abjects 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 abjects, 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.

2.2 *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 abjects' 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.

2.3 *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.

3. **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 it 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 fulfil 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 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.

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

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

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 Table 2 we report the list of the agricultural and non-farm groups who collaborated on our research and provided us with access to women entrepreneurs.

Table 2. 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

4. **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).

4.1 *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 us to adapt 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 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 on 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 minutes, 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.

4.2 *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 into 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 3 reports the data structure and further illustrates the differences in degrees of poverty intensity and contextual norms we identified in our transcripts.

Table 3a. Data structure (socio-economic constraints).

In-vivo codes	1st-order themes	2nd-order categories
‘We are treated like dogs’	Marginalization	Abject poverty
‘They know I am poor’	(domination)	(working for the sake of survival)
‘Without money, one cannot join groups’		
‘There is nothing I can do’	Resignation	
‘We always suffer’	(giving up)	
‘I abandon everything to God’		
‘I have no time for friends’	(Self-) exclusion	
‘I am not up to their level’	(group avoidance)	
‘No one represents me’		
'I fear being rejected'	Subjugation	
'I just do whatever I am told'	(taking orders)	
'I do very lowly jobs'		
‘Things are getting better’	Optimism	Moderate poverty
‘I can work hard and become rich’	(confidence)	(working according to societal prescriptions)
‘Don’t you see I’m happy’		
‘I can manage'	Coping	
‘I don’t need much money’	(setting trade-offs)	
‘At least, I can feed my family’		
‘Everyone is poor here’	Self-identification	
'I am one with my neighbour'	(negative feelings)	
'We are all in the same boat'		
'I know how to live'	Awareness	
'I had to struggle to be where I am'	(realistic attitude)	
'I'd like to do so many things'		
'They always come to me'	Recognition	Negligible poverty
'Everyone has high esteem of me'	(attributed status)	(working free of societal expectations)
'People think I am rich'		
‘Everyone can see us'	Symbolic action	
'I met important people from the city'	(events and facts)	
'I can do things men do'		
'I have the best'	Pride	
'I am going to buy a large house'	(satisfaction)	
'I always want more'		
'I tell women how much they are worth'	Advocacy	
'I am a mentor to others'	(calling for rights)	
'I can talk against the men'		

Table 3b. Data structure (contexts of entrepreneurship).

In-vivo codes	1st-order themes	2nd-order categories
'I only do things that benefit me'	Hard work	Agriculture
'I spend my whole day in the farm'	(dedication)	
'I need to be always productive'		
'We always work together'	Collectivism	
'If someone is in need, I'd give'	(group priorities)	
'We are a family'		
'My husband is the head of the household'	Deference	
'We are told to respect the elders'	(respect authority)	
'I would accept any decision [from above]'		
'Doing business is not stressful'	Flexibility	Non-farm
'I can decide when to sell'	(free to do)	
'I don't need physical strength'		
'I try whatever earns more money'	Capitalism	
'It's better for the family finances'	(self-interest)	
'My economy is growing'		
'I can look after myself'	Independence	
'Collective savings are inefficient'	(individual priority)	
'My clients are my only friends		

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 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 4) 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 us 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).

5. **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.

5.1 *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).

5.1.1 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'.

5.1.2 Loose organising in non-farm groups

Some poor women are forced into 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 on 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 against 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 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 training 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.

5.2 *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.

5.2.1 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.

5.2.2 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 for 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 it 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.

5.3 *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.

5.3.1 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 inescapable 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 to reduce 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.

5.3.2 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 for 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, 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 10km 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 in 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.

6. 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 Figure 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 4, 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.

Figure 1. Alleviation of poverty constraints.

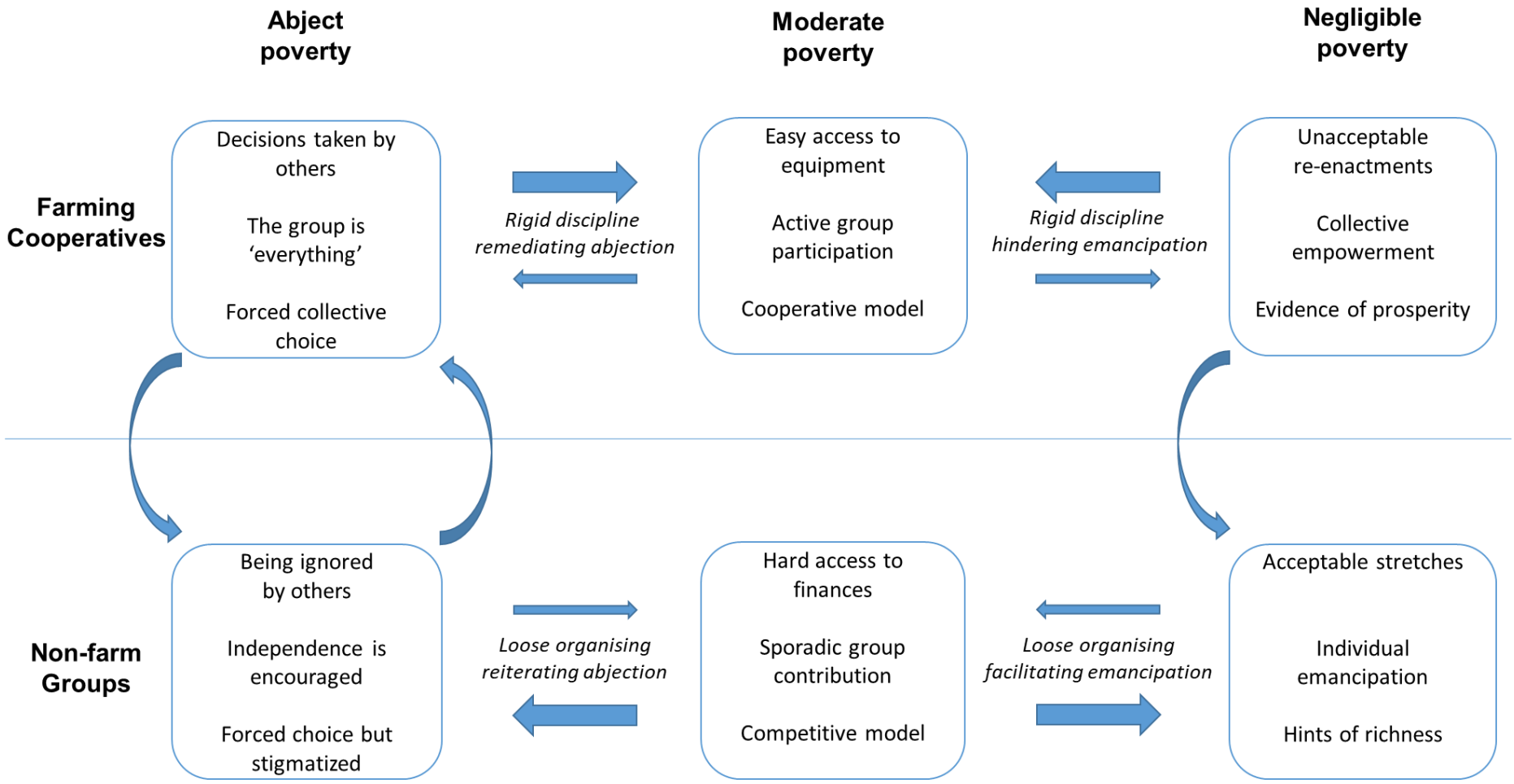

Table 4. Vignettes of representative entrepreneurs.

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 into 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 forbad 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 impressed with the size and garnishments of her shop, they invited her to an exclusive business network.	'I have been alone my whole life. Only recently, as my customers saw my abilities with tailoring, I have been building myself a name within the neighbourhood and a network of trusted contacts.'
Pamela	Middle-aged woman, snail trader, member of the government-sponsored group in Buea	Fall-back into moderate poverty in non-farm	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.	'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.'

6.1 *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.

6.2 *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 multi-faceted 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 it 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.

6.3 *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 it 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.

7. **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.

8. References (first study)

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The power dynamics of institutional resistance: A comparative analysis of class and gender discrimination in South-West Cameroon.

Abstract

Why do oppressed individuals resist some institutional constraints but not others? Building upon notions of power and resistance, we develop new theory about how oppressed individuals overcome the constraints stemming from different institutions. Through grounded-theoretical phenomenological interviews with 76 women farmers working in South-West Cameroon, we investigate how participating in farming cooperatives affects individuals' actions against class and gender discrimination.

We found that, by joining farming collectives, our study participants built enough confidence and economic prowess to overcome class discrimination but became exposed to patriarchal and collectivistic traditions reinforcing gender discrimination. We advance that features of episodic and systemic power help explain how easily individuals become aware of discrimination and can carry out activities that are contrary to the dominant norms. This study contributes to institutional theory by linking exercises of oppressive institutional power exercised to oppressed individuals' decisions and their possibilities to initiate institutional change.

Project history

At the time of writing, this article is in its fourth round of review at Journal of Management Studies (VHB: A). The article is co-authored with Michael Woywode, who contributed to the writing of the manuscript and drafting of the theoretical model. I developed the research idea, collected the data, and conducted the analysis. The manuscript benefited from input and feedback from several colleagues, including Renate Meyer, Doug Creed, Samer Abdelnour, and Robert Strohmeyer. An early version of the manuscript was presented at the Interdisciplinary European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research (IECER) in 2018.

1. Introduction

Institutions are the rules, norms, and beliefs that define reality for organizations and individuals, and they prescribe acceptable individual behaviours in social interactions and daily life (Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007). Every institution is 'inhabited' by individuals who are subject to its prescriptions, and by behaving in the way expected of them, reiterate the overarching order (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Institutions thus have the power to condition individuals' lives and restrict the actions available to them (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 2015). Institutional power can manifest in several ways, as, for example, when individuals exercise their privileges over their peers, or when institutions are enforced through violence and restrictions (Martí & Fernández, 2013). Exercising power within institutions gives rise to two classes of individuals: the privileged, who stand to benefit when institutionalized practices are reiterated, and the oppressed, whose possibilities for action are restricted. Although the oppressed have an interest in changing institutions, they rarely have sufficient power to bring about actual change (Battilana, 2006).

For our purposes, resistance is the set of actions oppressed individuals initiate to stretch the boundaries of acceptable social behaviours in their attempts to mitigate oppression and spread change (Courpasson, 2016; Martí & Fernández, 2013). Oppressed individuals who resist oppressive institutions need to first recognize possibilities for alternative practices and then initiate subversive actions motivated by either a desire to implement change or basic responses to ethical and social-justice values (Courpasson & Marti, 2019; Hardy, 2016). Resisting may allow oppressed individuals to reappropriate some of their rights and freedom and start reshaping the power relations that afflict them (Fleming, 2016). Scholarship on institutional resistance, however, is still in its infancy and several questions remain unanswered. For example, although resistance is intrinsically related to experiences of oppression (Hardy, 2016), we still do not know whether different forms of power influence oppressed individuals' ability

to initiate resistance. Also unknown are the conditions under which resistance will lead to a change in oppressive practices rather than a mere marginal gain in individual freedom. To help resolve these unknowns, we seek to answer the following research questions: *Why do oppressed individuals decide to resist some institutional constraints but not others?* and *When do initial reactions to oppression result in purposive action against the dominant institutions?*

To answer our research questions, we conducted an exploratory study of 76 women participating in farming cooperatives in South-West Cameroon. Our choice of study participants and our empirical setting are ideal for investigating our research questions for two reasons. First, Cameroonian women farmers are oppressed by both class and gender discrimination. Class discrimination has exacerbated because farming is considered a lowly 'dirty' occupation in juxtaposition to 'cleaner' occupations in the secondary and tertiary sectors (UN FAO, 2010) that have been increasing in numbers in recent years as the area surrounding Buea saw an extensive urban growth. Gender discrimination comes about because women are traditionally required to submit to their husbands, and gendered segregation of work is a long-standing traditional Bantu institution (UN Women, 2019). Second, farming cooperatives constitute an ideal empirical setting for our research because they provide their members with training, resources, and opportunities to discuss private and collective issues (Slade Shantz, Kistruck, Pacheco, & Webb, 2019), potentially enabling women farmers to initiate resistance against oppressive institutions. We found that while most women farmers resist class discrimination and take concrete actions to bring about change, few are aware of and initiate action against gender discrimination. The explanation for these divergent responses is that the institutions of class and gender discrimination exercises power differently.

Our work contributes to the literature on oppressive institutions by exploring how oppressed individuals can oppose different forms of institutional power and reverse exercises of oppression. Specifically, we found that class discrimination entails a diffuse exercise of

power affecting all the members of farming cooperatives, whereas gender discrimination is a relatively less-widespread phenomenon that directly affects only women. While most members of the groups accepted gender discrimination, almost every participant in farming cooperatives contested class discrimination. Resistance to class discrimination was extensive and resulted in numerous instances of deviance, whereas resistance to gender discrimination was punctuated and strongly opposed by group members. These results enrich our understanding of oppressive institutions by showing how different institutions exercise power over oppressed individuals and how these exercises of power can be contested and reversed. While prior scholarship has provided a general frame for understanding oppression by introducing the concept of resistance and exploring how oppressed individuals can oppose some institutionalized practices (Hardy, 2016; Martí & Fernández, 2013), we provide a nuanced conceptualization of resistance, revealing that it varies depending on both the frequency and intensity of episodic constraints, and on the degree of diffusion and legitimacy of the institutions being resisted.

2. Theoretical foundations

Organizational scholarship distinguishes between two forms of power: episodic and systemic. Episodic power is exercised through activities aimed at restricting the agency or conditioning the behaviour of individuals, while systemic power consists of the practices and beliefs that justify and enable episodic power (Clegg, 2010; Lawrence, Winn, & Jennings, 2001). Discrimination is both the process through which some members of society enforce their privileges over others, and the set of practices that allow privileged individuals to be treated favourably (Phung, Buchanan, Toubiana, Ruebottom, & Turchick-Hakak, 2020). Discrimination is an oppressive institution that restricts oppressed individuals' possibilities and abuses and conditions their behaviour, and its institutionalization is circular and self-reinforcing. Discrimination becomes institutionalized when discriminatory activities are so deeply rooted in society that they are taken for granted and unconsciously re-enacted by the

individuals who are affected by it (Amis, Munir, Lawrence, Hirsch, & McGahan, 2018). In this process of institutionalization, exercises of episodic power result in new systems of practices and beliefs which, in turn, enable further discriminatory activities. For instance, class discrimination arises when poor individuals become stigmatized because of their economic status and occupation and when their richer counterparts start treating them as inferior (Phung et al., 2020). When these discriminatory activities are then reiterated, it facilitates a set of beliefs and assumptions that put oppressed individuals at a disadvantage compared to others (Acker, 2006).

2.1 *Resistance against oppression*

Resistance against oppressive institutions is the process of 'undoing' the societal constraints that condition the lives of oppressed individuals (Martí & Fernández, 2013). Resistance is a form of 'institutional work' (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) that challenges the founding pillars of oppressive institutions and entails actions aimed at reversing the oppression of discriminated minorities. Individuals who resist oppression initiate action against institutionalized constraints, challenge the dominant discriminatory practices, and realize some gains in individual freedom and privileges (Courpasson, 2016). Resistance can be mundane, such as organizing systems of practices that parallel the oppressive institution, or can come in the form of violent outbreaks that openly challenge oppressive practices (Martí & Fernández, 2013). For resistance to happen, two pre-conditions must be met: (a) oppressed individuals must become aware of oppressive constraints and envision possibilities for alternative practices (Creed & Scully, 2000; Hardy, 2016), and (b) the conditions under which oppressed individuals are living must be conducive for initiating action against oppressive institutions (Courpasson & Marti, 2019; Fleming, 2016). While we know much about resistance, we know much less about how the process of resistance unfolds and how it varies among individuals who are subject to exercises of power from different institutions, such as class and gender discrimination.

2.2 *Institutional encounters*

Before oppressed individuals can initiate resistance, they need to first become aware of the institutionalized systems that reiterate oppression. Scholars have referred to such a process of becoming aware in several ways, including 'apprehending' (McCarthy & Moon, 2018), 'realizing contradictions' (Seo & Creed, 2002), and 'experiencing dissonance' (Dorado & Ventresca, 2013) with the dominant institutions. Suddaby, Bruton, and Walsh (2018) highlight that discriminated individuals need reflexivity—the capacity to understand taken-for-granted institutional constraints—before they can start opposing oppressive institutions. Goffman (1961) introduced the notion of 'encounter', a 'pivotal moment in a larger process whereby beliefs about and attitudes toward an identity are mediated and altered and discriminatory (workplace) policies and practices are challenged' (Creed & Scully, 2000, p. 392). An encounter thus captures the notion of becoming aware of the oppressive institutions and of institutional constraints becoming visible and actionable.

Scholars studying resistance, power, and institutions have linked encounters to certain features of systemic power. Hardy (2016), for example, argued that individuals are more likely to be incentivized to oppose oppression if resistance efforts are more widely spread and if their peers start contesting institutions. Clegg (2010) argued that individuals need to understand and encounter institutions by examining the extent to which institutionalized practices are homogeneous and culturally proximate. Similarly, in an organisational context, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) found that employees were likely to question, contest, and change organisational routines when they were subject to contrasting demands stemming from multiple constraints. While these researchers have provided many insights into encounters, systemic power, and resistance, fewer scholars have devoted their attention to investigating how episodic exercises of power affect discriminated groups' experiences of encounters. For instance, an important but underexplored determinant of resistance behaviour is the intensity of

constraints—that is, the extent to which certain activities 'objectify' oppressed individuals (Lawrence et al., 2001; Simon, 1988). Different institutions may impose constraints of varying intensity, such that some demands are more salient than others. Oppressed individuals in these situations would then need to choose which constraints to respond to. These questions about institutional encounters lead us to our first research question, *Why do oppressed individuals decide to resist some institutional constraints but not others?*

2.3 *Institutional deviance*

A second precondition of resistance to oppressive institutions is that individuals have the possibility to initiate systemic change. The Jews' ability to systematically resist against the Holocaust, for instance, was limited because Nazi laws and systems of governance restricted Jews' actions (Martí and Fernández, 2013). Before they can initiate change, oppressed individuals must be able to stretch some of the restrictions oppressive institutions impose on them. The notion of 'stretch' is similar to 'deviance', defined as a 'voluntary behaviour that violates significant (organizational) norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both' (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 556). Deviance requires that oppressed individuals enjoy some leverage over the oppressive constraints conditioning their lives. Lawrence and Robinson (2007) make this clear by linking deviant behaviours to different types of power exercised within organisations. In the authors' conceptual work, systemic and objectifying forms of power are harder to resist, but are also more likely to result in episodes of drastic deviance.

In encounters, oppressed individuals become aware of constraints and then decide to act in their own interests against discriminatory practices. Subsequently. deviance enables oppressed individuals' actual resistance actions and behaviours, and is a topic which many scholars have investigated. Chowdhury (2020), for instance, found that discrimination originates from multiple parties conforming to oppressive practices and the normative

prescriptions enabling some actors to enforce privileges over others. In a related work, Gehman, Treviño, and Garud (2013) illustrated how changing a university's code of values was only possible after the interested individuals had gained a position of leverage over the university's policies and decisions. Similarly, Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy (2004) argued that attempts to foster institutional change are more likely to succeed if these attempts are initiated by individuals and organizations that can exercise power over others. While this research has advanced our understanding of deviance, it mainly accounts for single instances of exercising power. But since oppressed and marginalized groups are inherently disadvantaged compared to the rest of society, this research cannot uncover which possibilities discriminated individuals have for resisting oppressive institutions. This gap in knowledge leads us to our second research question, *How does the systemic power of different institutions facilitate and hinder opportunities for deviant behaviours?*

3. Methodology

Because the purpose of our study is to build theory, the most appropriate tool to investigate our research questions is using a grounded-theory approach as per Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013). However, because our research focus is on participants' interpretations and self-reported views, the drawbacks to interpretive grounded theory are that it might not incorporate 'objective' research features, such as a researcher's observations of a woman's living conditions, and it may over-emphasize the views of a limited number of study participants (Gioia et al., 2013). To mitigate these drawbacks, we elected to combine grounded theory with a hermeneutic phenomenological interview protocol. Phenomenology is a scientific approach aimed at studying how individuals attribute meanings to experiences and is intrinsically related to the sociological tradition of institutional theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Heidegger, 1927/1962; Meyer, 2008). Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the 'objective' common events that individuals experience to investigate the judgments and beliefs

by which these individuals interpret such events (Gill, 2014). Phenomenology is compatible with grounded theory in terms of epistemological assumptions, data requirements, and analytical processes, since it compares experiences within a large sample, focuses on the tacit applications of knowledge in everyday life, and identifies recurring themes across the participants (Benner, 1994). Phenomenology adds to our study by (a) reducing the complexity of the data by focusing on common events our study participants experience; (b) subscribing to a dual ontology that connects 'subjective' thoughts and reports to 'objective' sensible reactions, physical conditions, and contextual features (Heidegger, 1927/1962); and (c) ensuring that the reflexive and experiential construct of institutional power is reliably identified (Friedland, 2018). Applying phenomenology was instrumental in our study because it allowed us to use our study participants' accounts of shame and discouragement to identify institutional constraints, and it informed our understanding of 'encounters'. In addition, it allowed us to use instances of gains in individual freedom to build the construct of 'deviance'.

3.1 *Case selection*

The focus of and setting for our analysis—farming cooperatives in the city of Buea in South-West Cameroon—was appropriate for several reasons. Buea is the capital of the southwest region, and despite a relatively rapid urban development in the last decades, the economy in the area surrounding the city is still predominantly based on agriculture and retains strong farming traditions. South-West Cameroon has a long history of gender discrimination rooted in local patriarchal traditions. In addition, although farming cooperatives are widespread in the region, farmers experience class discrimination from both the urban middle class and rural community elites. Lastly, rural and urban areas coexist in South-West Cameroon, and their different norms, traditions, infrastructure, and market opportunities allowed us to maximize the variance of the characteristics of our study participants (Gioia et al., 2013; Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013).

We purposefully chose farming cooperatives because we assumed that the ample opportunities the cooperatives gave members for discussing, transferring knowledge, and sense-making would be conducive to initiating resistance against institutionalized class and gender discrimination. All the farming cooperatives participating in our study provided women farmers with training on agricultural techniques and gave them a platform to discuss farm-related issues. These cooperatives are also an important component of collective life in rural communities where most inhabitants are farmers who participate in one or more groups for socializing, training, and working together. Choosing farming cooperatives allowed us to sample women who had similar experiences (joining the cooperative, participating in a group) and outcomes (acting or failing to act on institutionalized constraints)—a selection process that is consistent with phenomenological principles (Benner, 1994).

Half of the farming cooperatives participating in the study (6 groups, 48 participants) were affiliated with ICENECDEV (International Centre For Environmental Education and Community Development), a non-governmental organization (NGO) promoting women farmers' empowerment in and around Buea by providing them with resources, tools, and equipment to increase their yield and mitigate class discrimination. ICENECDEV groups are composed almost exclusively of women, with men rarely accepted in the cooperatives and never in positions of leadership. While their gender composition might make ICENECDEV groups less comparable to other farming cooperatives, it provides the women in these groups with more opportunities to talk and interact without their husbands' interference and offers them a protected environment where they can discuss and potentially encounter institutional constraints. The ICENECDEV groups we included in our study had different origins. Some groups were established by ICENECDEV between two and four years before the start of the study; others were pre-existing groups that ICENECDEV annexed and that had evolved from traditional get-togethers where tribe members discussed farming techniques. ICENECDEV got

in touch with the lead researcher before the study started and helped him get acquainted with the Cameroonian culture and get in contact with women farmers.

Because certain features of ICENECDEV might have systematically affected institutional resistance (Gioia et al., 2013), we also included selected six non-ICENECDEV farming cooperatives (28 participants) that we found using snowball sampling, asking for referrals from the regional delegate of the ministry of agriculture, professors at the University of Buea, ICENECDEV partners, and personal contacts. The non-ICENECDEV cooperatives had been established by local farmers from pre-existing religious or tribal groups or by individuals who were deliberately in search of opportunities to aggregate and achieve economies of scale. Since, at the time of the study, most of the ICENECDEV groups had been formed between two and four years earlier, we complemented our data by including cooperatives that had been recently established and those that were more than four years old. The demographics of the non-ICENECDEV cooperatives differed from the ICENECDEV cooperatives in that they often include men and, on average, their members are younger. In terms of leadership and responsibility, some organizations are composed of and run predominantly by men—in some cases the managing board is composed entirely of men—while others encourage women to take on responsibilities and participate in decision-making. All the six non-ICENECDEV cooperatives have fewer resources than the ICENECDEV cooperatives, but their level of resources varies. Formally registered groups have access to public funds, while informal cooperatives rarely receive governmental support. Finally, all groups have similar aims focusing chiefly on supporting their members in farming. Neither ICENECDEV nor non-ICENECDEV cooperatives have an explicit anti-gender-discrimination agenda. Table I reports the anonymized list of the farming groups participating in the study and exemplary descriptions of some study participants.

Table 1a. List of farming groups participating in the study.

ID	Affiliation	Main crop	Rurality	Gender	Board	Status	Interview venue	Age	Members*
1	ICENECDEV	Tomatoes	Rural	Female	Female	Informal	Public place	2	9 / 15
2	ICENECDEV	Vegetables	Rural	Female	Female	Informal	Icen. office	3	6 / 12
3	ICENECDEV	Various	Rural	Female	Female	Formal	Icen. office	3	9 / 30
4	ICENECDEV	Cassava	Rural	Mixed	Female	Informal	Private house	4	8 / 10
5	ICENECDEV	Various	Semi-urban	Mixed	Female	Informal	Private house	4	11 / 12
6	ICENECDEV	Various	Semi-urban	Mixed	Female	Formal	Private house	5	5 / 15
7	Independent	Various	Rural	Female	Female	Informal	Public place	2	3 / 25
9	Independent	Various	Rural	Female	Female	Formal	Public place	6	3 / 20
8	Independent	Tubers	Rural	Mixed	Mixed	Formal	Multiple venues	12	6 / 35
10	Independent	Vegetables	Semi-urban	Mixed	Female	Informal	Private house	1	3 / 10
12	Independent	Vegetables	Semi-urban	Mixed	Male	Formal	Private house	5	8 / 15
11	Independent	Tomatoes	Semi-urban	Mixed	Male	Formal	Multiple venues	8	5 / 40

* participants / total members

Table 1b. List of interviewees from Cooperative 1.

ID	Name	Role	Education	Age	HH size	Farm size*	Group**	Married**
1	Alberta	Group leader	Secondary school	53	6	1	3	missing
2	Angela	N/A	Primary school	48	8	2	2.5	30
3	Federica	N/A	Secondary school	59	6	missing	4	42
4	Gina	N/A	Primary school	47	8	1	2.5	30
5	Marca	Social coordinator	Professional school	49	3	1	4	15
6	Molly	N/A	Primary school	43	5	0.5	2.5	3
7	Patty	N/A	Primary school	52	9	0.5	1.5	35
8	Samantha	N/A	Professional school	28	7	2	2	8
9	Serena	Secretary	Secondary school	36	6	2	2	8

* hectares; ** duration of group participation and marriage, in years

3.2 *Data collection*

Between mid-June and mid-August 2018, we conducted interviews with 76 members of our 12 selected farming cooperatives. We adopted a semi-structured interview protocol, adapting the interview guideline as themes and insights emerged from initial analyses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For instance, during the first week of fieldwork, we talked extensively with academics, governmental delegates, and NGO managers operating in the province of Buea. Our impression from these discussions was that power is exercised against women and farmers, and these generated insights were integrated into the participant interviews.

All the interviews with women farmers followed a phenomenological protocol focusing

on two topics: (a) their experience of joining a group and participating in a cooperative, and (b) their experience of either reacting against or being resigned to institutionalized constraints. During the first interviews, the lead researcher asked mostly open questions to capture the participants' views, their motivations for acting or refuse to act, and the factors driving the participants' interpretations of their actions (Friedland, 2018). The later interviews had a more-specific focus, seeking to replicate the patterns of the earlier interviews and to confirm or disconfirm the emerging theory (Gioia et al., 2013). For example, from our first interviews with group leaders, we learned about their experiences, information which we used in our subsequent interviews with group leaders to find out whether their understanding of and reaction to institutionalized constraints was similar to the group leaders from the first set of interviews. We practised purposive theoretical sampling by selecting the next interview participant based on findings from the previous interviews and interviewee characteristics. This sampling approach resulted in both heterogeneity within the sample and generalizability of the theory across multiple cases (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016). It also allowed us to select individuals with complementary characteristics that we expected would enrich the emerging theory and define the boundaries of its applicability (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The final interview template can be found in Appendix A1.

To make it easier for participants to share their experiences and to help build a climate of trust and openness during the interviews, a local youth volunteer accompanied the lead researcher during every field visit. Three volunteers were trained during the week before the fieldwork and one of them joined the visits on a rotating basis. They served as interpreters and cultural mediators, clarifying the participants' answers and translating local idioms when meanings were unclear or when participants expressed themselves in dialect. Every interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and codified on the same day or the following day so that emerging themes could inform the selection of the subsequent study participants. The

interviews were conducted in informal locations: either private houses, farming-cooperative facilities, or bars and cafes the participants chose. The duration of most interviews was between 25 and 40 minutes; the three exceptions were those lasting 20, 45, and 50 minutes. The interview transcriptions totalled 537 pages. For triangulation purposes, we interviewed four of the husbands of the women farmers who participated in our cooperatives, and we analysed 99 pages of archival sources, web pages, and project documentation. Finally, during the entire fieldwork we carried on discussions with local experts and documented these discussions in a diary format totalling an additional 107 pages of material.

3.3 *Analysis*

The inductive coding process involved the three iterative steps of open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the open-coding step, the lead researcher reviewed every interview transcript, reading line by line and codifying the main themes that emerged. To understand the most-ambiguous phrases, the lead researcher contacted ICENECDEV staff and local experts to carry out a word-by-word analysis to reveal the underlying grammatical structure, choice of words, and sentence construction. For instance, the transcription included a phrase used by one study participant: 'I used to not speak much to my husband and *hide* the money I would earn from my work, but now I have learned how to behave with him'. This statement hints that this woman was overcoming her fear of gender violence and her marriage problems, and was disclosing to the researchers the existentiality of her experience (Gill, 2014; Heidegger, 1927/1962). The phrase was coded as 'hiding'. Open coding generated 174 codes that referred to women farmers' interpretations of their constraints and their participation in farming groups, capturing the whole range of our participants' experiences (Gioia et al., 2013). Since the meaning of some codes overlapped, we combined similar ones to reduce our initial 174 first-order codes to a more-manageable 48 items.

In our second step, axial coding, we aggregated first-order codes into overarching

categories. This step applied the phenomenological principle of seeking commonalities across the experiences of different study participants (Klein, 2015) and followed the grounded-theoretical prescription to iteratively group all the first-order codes into second-order categories (Gioia et al., 2013). This process of refinement from codes to categories led to a clearer definition of the objects of analysis and set the basis for establishing relations among concepts (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Thus, the constructs 'submission' and 'job segregation' were aggregated under the theme of 'patriarchal traditions'; and 'seeing sufferance' and 'discussing gender' were aggregated under the theme 'coming together with struggling women'. In constructing categories, we first separately identified themes of participants' resistance to class and gender discrimination, and then abstracted and defined theoretically informed labels that could describe participants who were resisting both sets of constraints. Our axial coding resulted in 16 themes and eight second-order categories that were equally distributed among (a) sources of institutionalized constraints; (b) experiences within farming groups; (c) conditions of deviance from constraints; and (d) experiences of action or inaction against constraints. The second-order categories in Figure 1 represent instances in which the institutions of class and gender discrimination are manifested in the lives of our study participants, a data structure consistent with phenomenological principles (Meyer, 2008). For instance, encounters of class discrimination involved seeing that the living conditions of one's peers were improving and receiving advice and support, whereas those of gender discrimination concerned reflexivity about women's sufferance and isolation. In Table II, we also report exemplary quotes for each of the second-order themes and categories occurring in our data structure.

Figure 1. Data structure.

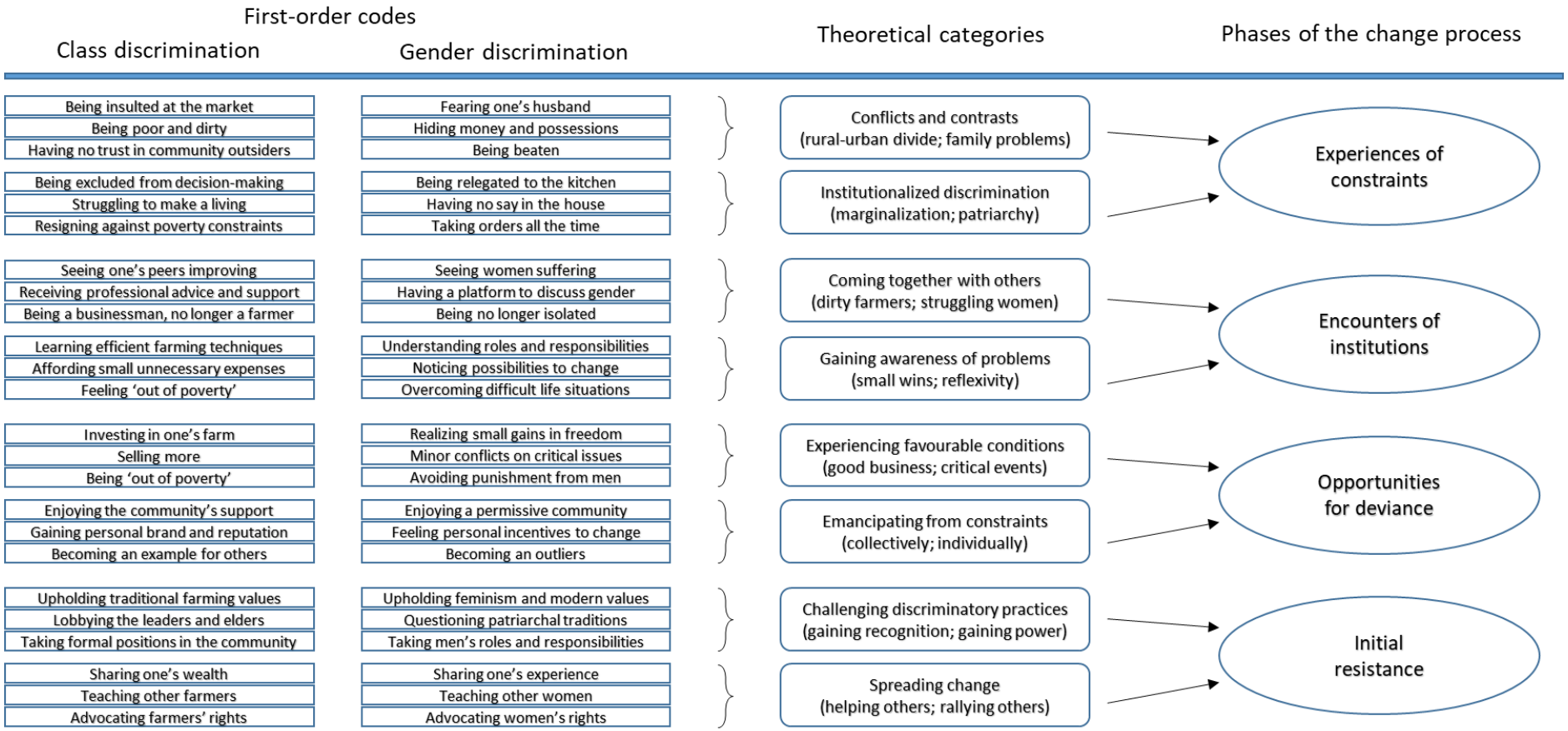


Table 2a. Illustrative quotes (class discrimination).

Phase	Code	Quote
Experiences of constraints	Rural-urban divide	'When I sell at the market, people often insult me and call me "dirty" and "poor".'
		'I only trust the members of my farming community. Outsiders just take advantage of us.'
	Marginalization	'We farmers cannot participate in community decisions. No one listens to us.'
		'I produce barely enough to survive. I struggle with covering basic expenses such as school and health.'
Encountering institutions	Coming together with farmers	'Together we can obtain scale economies and achieve more than if we were alone.'
		'It is nice to have a group where you can discuss farming techniques and share your difficulties.'
	Small wins	'The group taught me how to plant and harvest, and I multiplied my farm's yield.'
		'Thanks to the group, I increased my income. I can spend more on cooking and social life.'
Conditions of deviance	Good business	'I am investing back into the farm so that I can maximize the yield and help my family.'
		'Since I improved the quality of my harvest, I am able to sell more and at a higher price.'
	Collective emancipation	'If there is a problem, the whole community comes together and we do our best to contribute a solution.'
		'The community supports me because they know they can take advantage of my good harvest.'
Initial resistance	Gaining recognition	'Thanks to the cooperative, people know me and admire my hard work.'
		'People no longer discriminate against us, they can see we add value to the society.'
	Helping others	'My house is always full of people. I make sure to always have something ready to share.'
		'I am able to educate people on how to farm and to better sustain their lives.'

Table 2b. Illustrative quotes (gender discrimination).

Phase	Code	Quote
Experiences of constraints	Domestic conflicts	'My husband complains when I go out without his permission. I can only go where he allows.' 'When women refuse to do as they are told, they are often beaten by their husband.'
	Patriarchy	'Within the household, I can only decide matters pertaining to the kitchen.' 'I must report to my husband for all of the small expenses I have to make.'
Encountering institutions	Coming together with struggling women	'In the cooperative, there are many women like me who must struggle to support their family.' 'I have no friends outside of the cooperative. That's my only opportunity to meet people.'
	Reflexivity	'The woman must show she's serious. She cannot wait for the husband to provide everything.' 'Now that I can contribute to the family, my husband feels dishonoured.'
Conditions of deviance	Critical events	'My husband decides everything, but I make sure to defend the rights of my children.' 'When my husband died, I had to take up his role and look after the household on my own.'
	Individual emancipation	'Other farmers do not like that I speak out. I am spending less and less time with the community.' 'For the first time in my life, I have been able to start something on my own.'
Initial resistance	Gaining power	'In the cooperative I gained leadership skills I am able to transfer to other aspects of my life.' "I can stand in front of 200 women and talk. I am no longer afraid to express myself.'
	Rallying others	'I teach women to be independent and stop relying on their husbands.' 'If I am aware of problems in the community, I always make a case against gendered violence.'

Our third step was selective coding, in which we built theory by hypothesizing and testing relationships between our second-order categories. The process of hypothesizing was data-driven, emerging from the experiences and causal links our study participants reported (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and from the recurring factual antecedents of women who have had similar experiences (Benner, 1994). To build theory, we sought the ‘best-fit’ among all the pieces of evidence, summarizing what was common among the different cases and highlighting which differences influenced the variation in women farmers’ responses to oppressive constraints (Langley et al., 2013). As we looked for recurring patterns within our data, we realized that the main determinants of participants’ resisting institutions were whether they had experienced some features of episodic and systemic power. For instance, we noticed that

women who had had traumatic experiences such as domestic abuse or violent marital arguments were more likely to be aware of gender discrimination, and from there we identified the 'intensity' of episodic power as one of the causes of 'encounters'. Similarly, we noticed that most women farmers initiated resistance if and only if they had experienced both encounters of a given type of constraint and had possibilities to deviate from a given type of constraint. From this observation, we drew a causal link connecting our second-order categories. Next we adopted theoretical sampling to validate the emerging theory by selecting participants based on our hypothesized relationships among categories to establish boundary conditions of the emerging theory (Gioia et al., 2013). For example, by comparing and contrasting different cases, we realized that women farmers living in rural areas were more concerned about class discrimination than they were about gender discrimination because these two oppressive institutions had different 'diffusion' and 'legitimacy'. Once we realized this connection, we then collected additional evidence to confirm and explain our intuition. During selective coding, we iterated back and forth from the data to the existing literature in an attempt to inform the analytical concepts and ground the emerging theory in extant academic discussion. Lastly, the authors discussed the emerging theoretical framework and validated it with employees of development NGOs and governmental representatives, with whom the lead researcher had been in touch during the three years following the fieldwork. This feedback helped us make sense of the Cameroonian context, which we integrated into the analysis.

4. Findings

4.1 *Experiences of constraints*

Institutionalized discrimination. Both class and gender discrimination entail constraints rooted in Cameroonian traditions that oppress discriminated individuals. Class discrimination originates from traditional cultural norms juxtaposing farmers to privileged community elites. A local development practitioner informed us that, within rural communities, tribal chiefs and

oligarchs administer justice according to individual preferences and traditions, a system that excludes farmers from village politics and decision-making (personal communication, 20 June 2018). Farmers' lack of finances and education are two constraints that cause them several daily challenges, such as conserving food, selling their crops at a fair price, and transporting the harvest from the farm to the market (UN FAO, 2010). Economic growth in the area around Buea has exacerbated class discrimination in recent years and has led to more-frequent conflicts between 'poor tribesmen' and 'rich elites', increasing the tensions between the urban middle class and the rural agricultural society (ICENECDEV coordinator, personal communication, 16 June 2018). Farmers within local communities and almost all the women farmers we interviewed faced widespread class-discrimination constraints.

In contrast to class discrimination, gender discrimination stems from long-standing cultural traditions. The African Bantu culture dictates that men are the heads of the household and that women are excluded from ownership and decision-making. In addition, wives are expected to submit to their husbands and not spend money or do anything without their husbands' consent (development practitioner, personal communication, 20 June 2018). Similar to class discrimination, gender discrimination strongly influences oppressed individuals' livelihoods and activities. For instance, since women are not allowed to own land or assets, they lack collateral to obtain loans at the bank and must go to greater lengths to establish trust with lenders (microfinance officer, personal communication, 21 July 2018). Moreover, the informal legal systems in rural villages are managed according to the caprice of elites, which usually results in women not being granted any rights (governmental delegate, personal communication, 26 July 2018). Within rural communities, gender discrimination is relatively less diffused than class discrimination because it affects only women.

Conflicts and contrasts. The constraints of class discrimination mostly manifest in public settings, such as the market, social gatherings, or commercial interactions. Class discrimination

can manifest in individuals' exploiting farmers, as in the case of wholesalers who buy crops in bulk at extremely low prices and resell them in the market at triple the purchase price (local expert, personal communication, 19 June 2018). Almost all of our study participants reported that the urban middle class and the rural community elites have negative perceptions of them, saying to them such things as, 'you are dirty' and 'you are poor'. These insults often result in farmers feeling abandoned, desperate, and resigned, and leaving them to that 'there is nothing they can do', 'they should leave everything to God', 'everyone has low opinion of them', and 'they are not up to their society's expectations'. The interactions that qualify as class discrimination occur infrequently; for instance, when farmers are insulted while selling their products at the market or silenced during community meetings. Moreover, the most-economically disadvantaged individuals are the ones who experience stronger class-discrimination constraints because their poverty makes them more likely to receive insults and abuses.

Unlike class discrimination, gender discrimination occurs in private settings, such as within the household and during family interactions. Our study participants experienced gender discrimination in the home, describing it as 'being unable to contradict one's spouse', 'not feeling free to express oneself', 'being relegated to the kitchen', and 'being controlled by one's husband'. The intensity of gendered constraints varies more widely than the intensity of class constraints. Most women farmers we interviewed perceived gendered practices as 'normal' and did not openly report having feelings against them. Only when they felt threatened did they report having these feelings. Nineteen of our study participants had experiences with domestic alcoholism and violence, which they largely dismissed as 'normal' because 'wives are their husbands' property'. Among our study participants, the intensity and frequency of experiencing gendered constraints tended to vary according to factors that were partly out of their control, such as age, marital status, whether they lived in an urban or rural location, and the level of

education of the woman and her husband. For example, older women who were single (either because they were widowed or divorced), who lived in an urban area, and who were more educated experienced these constraints less often.

4.2 *Encounters of institutions*

Gaining awareness of problems. The first step in oppressed individuals' resisting discriminatory institutions is their becoming aware of their situation and envisioning alternative possibilities for action. In the case of class discrimination, relatively little effort is required to become aware of these problems. After joining cooperatives, most members improve their farming techniques. For most women farmers, improved farming techniques lead to a rise in their income and quality of living standards, allowing them to purchase kitchen utensils, modern stoves, farming equipment, and other goods they could not afford before. Although being able to make these purchases may seem like relatively a minor improvement, to women farmers, they are economic accomplishments that improve their self-image and insulate them from some societal pressures, as in the cases of Angela and Marie.

> Angela: "Being in the cooperative opened my eyes. At first, I saw farming as a burden and I could stay home for days without doing anything. But then, they showed me that a farmer can make a livelihood and become a rich man."

> Marie: "Some people don't like us because we work on the farm and we are dirty. However, these women become jealous when they see us succeed. They dislike us, but they would like to be like us."

As promising as these cases of rising income and living standards are, raising women farmers' awareness of gender discrimination in Cameroon is harder than raising their awareness of class discrimination because Cameroon has a long-standing tradition of discrimination against women and a lack of women's rights. Only 33 (43%) of our study participants realized they were in a subordinate position to their husbands and the men in their lives and felt the need to change their situation. Most women farmers who became aware of gender discrimination did

so after experiencing particularly harsh or unusual constraints, as in the cases of Clara and Marina. Clara's husband lost his job, became a chronic alcoholic, and started beating her to take her money. Marina's husband lives far away, cheats on her frequently, and does not support her economically.

> Clara: "Everyone in the group knows my husband drinks a lot and forcefully takes my money. When the situation became unbearable, we even had to move to different houses."

> Marina: "My husband lives far, uses to cheat on me, and does not contribute to our children's needs. Yet, I refrain from sharing my personal problems in the group because cooperatives are meant for discussing farming."

The women farmers who were aware of gender discrimination gained this awareness because they were better educated than their peers, either because they completed secondary school or home-schooled themselves by reading books and newspapers. These women have more advantages than the average illiterate farmer and develop critical thinking skills by participating in political discussions or taking positions of responsibility—such as leader, secretary, or treasurer—within their organizations. Mina's experience exemplifies this process.

> Mina: "When I was elected treasurer in my group, I got new tasks and responsibilities. The cooperative started to trust me more, I became more independent, and people would rely on me for counsel and advice. My life has much improved since then."

Coming together with others. Participating in farming cooperatives enables and facilitates individuals' encounters of class discrimination. In recent years, farming cooperatives have become popular in the area surrounding Buea, as they enable otherwise-disadvantaged farmers to gather resources and realize economies of scale (field officer, personal communication, 19 March 2019). These cooperatives encourage farmers to change how they cultivate the land; for example, by teaching them to diversify into additional crops or renting extra parcels; stressing the importance of organic products; and teaching them notions of 'pricing', 'wholesaling', and 'bookkeeping' (field observation, 23 June 2018, and ICENECDEV internal documents). By

participating in the cooperatives' activities, women farmers realize small economic gains and no longer consider themselves 'poor and dirty'.

Farming cooperatives also provide women farmers with a platform to discuss issues of class discrimination and share their experiences. By observing others who have succeeded in their farming endeavours, new members can envision possibilities for improving their own economic situations. Having a cooperative in a community can facilitate class-discrimination encounters, even for individuals who are not members, since women farmers observe and start their own cooperatives using the others as a model. Brunilde is a woman farmer who exemplifies this dynamic. She started a cooperative because she wanted to resist the strong economic constraints affecting her and the farmers in her community.

> Brunilde: "When we were alone, it was difficult to survive. But then, we saw other farming cooperatives were doing well and decided to come together in a group."

As in Brunilde's case, the women farmers who experienced stronger class constraints—for example, those who found it difficult to support their families or who were insulted in public—were more likely to reach out for help and aggregate, discuss, and act with other farmers within their communities and cooperatives.

We found that farming cooperatives are less effective, however, in enabling encounters of gender discrimination. Women farmers encounter these constraints less often because women empowerment is not on the agenda of most farming cooperatives (field officer, personal communication, 17 June 2018) and discussing gendered issues is more difficult if men are in the group (field observation, 15 July 2018). Even when women do experience strong gendered constraints, as did Marina (whose husband cheated on her and did not provide economic support to her and her children), they may avoid discussing what they see as 'private' and 'normal' behaviour in the group setting. Hence, farming cooperatives only indirectly facilitate encounters of gender discrimination in two ways. One way is by making women farmers feel valued,

accepted, and safe. Several of our study participants reported that being part of a cooperative gave them the feeling of 'being a family' and of 'loving to be together', which stands in stark contrast to women's traditional role of being isolated within the household and 'relegated to the kitchen'.

> Luna: "I have been in the group for two and a half years now. I just love farming with them, they make me feel I have a family. We share all our difficulties, unlike housewives who spend their day gossiping and doing nothing."

A second way is by facilitating encounters of gender discrimination in exceptional cases, when one or more members experiences constraints so harsh that the group cannot ignore it. Clara's experience of being beaten and abused by her alcoholic husband made her whole group aware of gender discrimination, and they started reflecting on these issues. Janna's experience is similar. She is a farmer who joined a cooperative to improve her economic prospects, but her desire for resisting gender discrimination grew after being around several women who were suffering from discrimination and abuse.

> Janna: "In the cooperative, I met so many women who could not cope and were constantly abused by their husbands. I felt I had to do something for them; this is how I founded my NGO."

4.3 *Opportunities for deviance*

Experiencing favourable conditions. To engage in behaviours that deviate from discriminatory norms requires that oppressed women farmers first possess adequate means and be presented with favourable opportunities to do so. In our study, for instance, some farmers encountered class discrimination by observing and discussing it with their peers, but they lacked the necessary leverage and resources to challenge these oppressive constraints. This situation describes the experience of one of our study participants, Patty, who was aware of class discrimination, yet experienced a drought affecting her harvest, and fell in a precarious state of debt and financial instability. Although she wanted to escape her negative condition, her poor

harvest and lack of financial means forced her into institutionalized oppression.

> Patty: "Within the cooperative, we share our burdens and plant and harvest together. But since the last harvest was bad, we became indebted to the credit union. We cannot borrow again because we did not pay them back, and they have our houses as collateral."

In general, having increased economic and material success gave discriminated farmers a means to gain legitimacy within their communities and alleviate oppression, whereas when they lacked resources, constraints were reinforced and they experience more-frequent discriminatory incidents. Among our 67 study participants who encountered class discrimination, we found that 52 (78%) subsequently engaged in some form of deviant behaviour.

A second enabler of deviating from class discrimination is having the support of one's community. Some women farmers cannot challenge oppressive constraints because they live close to urban areas and are constantly in touch with their non-farmer friends. Luna, who lives in Buea, does not enjoy the tight support of an agricultural community but instead is constantly exposed to 'snobby housewives who just sit and gossip the whole day'. Because she was isolated from other women farmers, Luna did not attempt to challenge the institutionalized constraints farmers face, but instead reacted by isolating herself and dedicating more energies to her farming job. Similarly, Gina had a hard time tackling institutionalized constraints because she lives in a Catholic compound with few farmers, and her community does not share her same problems.

> Gina: "I live in the Catholic compound, far from the other farmers. Those who live with me look down on farmers, they think we must be suffering a lot."

Only five women farmers in our study were in situations similar to Gina's, in which an unfavourable social context prevented them from taking action against class discrimination. Because few discriminated farmers lived in their communities, these five women farmers were relatively isolated and unable to mobilize others against oppression.

While more women farmers in our study were able to deviate from class discrimination, fewer were able to deviate from gender discrimination because independent women are stigmatized and discouraged from deviating . In addition, deviating from gender discrimination is harder because men tend to benefit from it. In total, only 17 (22%) of the women farmers we interviewed reported deviating from gendered constraints in some form. Women who did deviate from gendered constraints often did so because their personal circumstances gave them more leverage to deviate. Deviating from these constraints was often also a positive experience that allowed them to realize marginal gains in personal freedom and to continue to engage in behaviours challenging males' authority, as in the case of Fatima.

> *Fatima: "My husband has always been in charge of earning money and managing matters in the household. However, now that I started farming and contributing some income to the household, I can take part in decision-making with him."*

We found that the study participants least likely to deviate from gender discrimination were young, married to a farmer, had few children, and lived in a rural area. Conversely, women who had the greatest possibilities for challenging gender discrimination and fighting against the constraints on women held leadership positions in their organizations, lived in Buea, and had a husband who was dead or lived elsewhere. A local sociologist later informed us that within the Bantu culture, fertile women and older members of the community traditionally have a higher status and are treated with more respect (personal communication, 19 July 2018), indicating that before women farmers can attempt to tackle gender discrimination, they need to first achieve a level of legitimacy and acceptance within their communities.

Emancipating from constraints. We found a qualitative difference between deviating from class and gender discrimination. Deviating from class discrimination is collective and requires multiple oppressed individuals to come together and consciously decide to act against institutionalized constraints, whereas deviating from gender discrimination involves individual

women deciding on their own to challenge the constraints they experience.

Farming communities generally support women farmers in emancipating from class constraints, since economically empowered women farmers tend to contribute to their households, families, neighbours, and organizations. Lucia, for instance, told us that as she started to contribute more to her community's activities, funding schemes, and decision-making processes, she 'became well-known and highly reputed by everyone in her village'. Similarly, once Jennifer's farm turned profitable, she not only felt economically empowered but also noticed that her neighbours and the people in her community perceived her differently.

> Jennifer: "Participating in the cooperative changed how other people see me. Today, they see I can make good money from an abundant harvest. I'm a businesswoman, not just a farmer."

Deviating from gender discrimination is more complex. Even when women farmers are aware of gendered constraints, as several of our study participants were, they lacked the motivation and incentives to initiate change. Clara, for example, was frequently beaten by her alcoholic husband, but she decided to not divorce him because she wanted to avoid a negative reactions from her peers. Women in more favourable circumstances are more successful at deviating from gender discrimination. In contrast to Clara's situation, Barbara's situation at home was different: her husband used to work in a different region, cheated on her, and never provided food or money for their children. The physical distance between them, though, allowed Barbara to take advantage of the situation and affirm her independence.

> Barbara: "My husband is never at home. He works far, in Douala, and he comes back only at the weekend. He never has time for the family. He started to contribute to the family expenses only now that I am making money on my own and he feels his authority is challenged."

Notably, even having economic and educational advantages are not favourable-enough circumstances for women farmers to deviate from gendered constraints. Anita, a woman farmer

married to a rich business owner living in Buea, firmly believes that ‘a woman must stay under her husband’s authority’. Likewise, Ignatia, an old widow with more than average education who was elected as the group leader in her farming cooperative, has been living in a community with widespread gendered constraints her whole life and has few incentives to resist.

> Ignatia: “I have always been a group leader in my farming cooperative and my church. I see no problem in the group nor in my life, everything is moving smoothly. Why should I change?”

4.4 Initial resistance

Challenging discriminatory practices. All the women who experienced encounters and faced opportunities to deviate from either type of discrimination subsequently began to resist some of the constraints afflicting them. Resistance against both class and gender discrimination entailed challenging discriminatory practices and undoing oppressive constraints.

The women farmers who had enriched themselves to the point of no longer being considered ‘poor and dirty’ gained recognition and popularity within their communities. These women often got elected to positions of responsibility because of their accomplishments, and they used their newly gained leverage to buy resources for themselves and their families. Luke, the husband of a formerly poor woman farmer, benefitted from his wife’s success, enthusiastically stating that as a result of his wife’s efforts he ‘got accepted within the community, like someone who has money!’ Some women were also rewarded by their communities in non-material forms because of their economic accomplishments. Bessy was one of several women who was chosen to be part of the ruling committee in her village. Gina, who was scorned and excluded in her Catholic compound, successfully lobbied the bishop to grant her more land and resources.

Bessy: "Due to my achievements, the village chief offered me a position in the queen mothers, the body taking decisions on behalf of women on collective matters. Farmers are normally not allowed in this committee because they are too poor."

Gina: "After seeing me succeed, the bishop and the people living in my compound were persuaded that farming can be good for society. Eventually, I managed to convince him to allocate more land to expand my farm."

In contrast, challenging gender discrimination was more subtle, since independent and emancipated women tend not to be accepted in rural communities. Often, emancipated women act in ways that go against the long-standing tribal traditions of segregation and submitting to the demands of men and husbands. Women who overcome gender discrimination therefore sometimes hide their progressive views or distance themselves from their community. Serena openly challenged the justice system in her village by calling the police when she heard about cases of women's abuse, and Luciana distanced herself from her community and started questioning the elders' decisions as she became more independent and emancipated.

Serena: "I am against gendered violence. The justice in the villages does not work, the chief just settles everything as he pleases. He would ask for crates of beer to settle conflicts in favour of the husband. If I am aware of a case of violence, I suggest the woman to go to the police."

Luciana: "Now that I am independent, I spend much less time farming and attending meetings with the cooperative. I also learned to speak out and have my voice heard by the village leaders. Before, I would accept any decision and submit to the elders, but now I can speak out for myself."

Spreading change. Most women farmers who resisted discrimination worked to spread and establish inclusive practices, yet inclusive class-discrimination practices spread very differently than inclusive gender-discrimination practices. For class discrimination, economically empowered farmers taught others how to farm and read, and shared their newly acquired wealth to help their peers overcome poverty, uncleanliness, and illiteracy. Most members of farming communities welcomed and encouraged this type of change, and often pressured newly

enriched farmers to share their wealth and know-how. This experience was true for Marie, who complained that when people see her abundant harvest and resources, they 'keep coming'.

> *Marie: "Since people see that I have tools and a good harvest, they come begging for aid and financial contributions. I am forced to help out community members."*

This commitment to help others has roots in both cultural norms and in the cooperatives model (local sociologist, personal communication, 8 August 2018), yet it also represents an early form of resistance because it helps communities-at-large to overcome some of the constraints of class discrimination, and has other effects as well. Helping others can elevate the status of newly enriched farmers, distinguishing them from their disadvantaged peers. Participating in cooperatives also helps some farmers become a more-cohesive group and even leads some to change how they see their disadvantaged peers.

> Theresa: "We do not practice discrimination and try to discourage this behaviour in our cooperative. Our group is open to every farmer, rich and poor, literate or not. If you like it, you join. We work together with everyone."

By contrast, farming communities were often opposed to attempts at challenging gender discrimination. This opposition meant that some emancipated women had to hide their progressive views and intentions to avoid losing respect within the community and to prevent them from being silenced or excluded from social activities. This was the case for Mara, a well-educated 57-year-old woman, twice divorced and with eight children, who lectures women farmers in her community on issues of women's rights and gender equality.

> Mara: "I often gather women to teach them about gender equality. However, I must conceal my lectures as agricultural workshops, for otherwise, the community would oppose me."

Seeking to spread challenges to gender discrimination may also have negative consequences for oppressed women farmers because teaching about gender equality challenges long-

established patriarchal traditions and might expose women to scrutiny and negative judgments. As Jana stated,

> *Jana:* "I advise my fellow women to be independent and stop relying on their husbands. Most of these women started small trading businesses and established personal saving accounts following my advice."

We did not follow up with the women in Jana's community to see whether they had taken her advice, but we did see that emancipated and independent women might have to distance themselves from other farmers, as in the case of Luciana, or argue with their husbands and households about authority and decision-making, as in the case of Barbara. Even the ICENECDEV coordinator avoided addressing issues of gender discrimination because he deemed this subject too risky and 'feared [that if he did so], he might have lost trust and reputation among his beneficiaries' (personal communication, 29 June 2018).

Lastly, an important finding is that the women farmers who sought to challenge class discrimination tended to not resist gender discrimination and vice versa. Among the 52 women farmers who overcame class discrimination, only 17 (32%) reported being aware of their gendered constraints and only three had taken action against gender discrimination. One explanation could be that the women who deviate from the two oppressive institutions have different interests and face different conformity pressures. Zena, the wife of a well-known civil servant, was among the few women in our sample who tackled both gender and class discrimination. As she described it, her relatively privileged position and legitimacy within the community allowed her to tackle multiple discriminatory constraints.

> Zena: "I have served as an elder in my church and a leader in my social groups for almost my whole life. Because of this, I can say what I want and tell other women how they should behave. I also enjoy freedom within my house, own the whole profit from my agri-business, and decide how family expenses should be handled."

Tables III and IV provide additional support for our interpretation of encounters, deviance, and

resistance, and include descriptions of and quotes from women who resisted both class and gender discrimination.

Table 3. Exemplary life stories of women farmers dealing with class discrimination.

Name	Personal info	Life summary	Encounter of constraints	Deviance from constraints	Main Theme(s)
Karla	Middle-aged woman, treasurer in her group	Karla joined her ICENECDEV group because she was suffering poverty and marginalization. After joining the group, she considered herself a businesswoman ('no longer a poor farmer') and gained recognition and respect from her community.	'My farm improved and I have become more optimistic because of the group. There are so many things I could not afford before learning about farming.'	'Everyone in the community respects and trusts me. They call me 'mama farm' because they know they can come to me to improve their agri-businesses.'	Small wins
Brunilde	Old widow, founder and group leader of a young cooperative in Buea	Brunilde recently decided to found a farming cooperative because she saw the improvement in the living conditions of those who farm in a group. Brunilde aims to tackle class discrimination by lobbying village elders and enabling her group to integrate into society.	'When we were alone, it was difficult to survive. We saw other farming cooperatives were doing well and decided to come together in a group.'	'We have been gifting our harvest to the elders and village leaders so that they may know we have come together and take decisions that benefit us.'	Marginalization Coming together with farmers
Claire	Old widow, popular and respected in her community	By participating in her farming group, Claire increased her harvest and gained a new understanding of farming 'as a business'. Subsequently, she was able to educate farmers in her community and contribute to the economic difficulties of those in need.	'We were poor as we did not know how to cultivate many crops. Now we have learned to cope with seasonality, poor infrastructure, and market forces.'	'I help my fellow community members and encourage them to work hard, so that they may grow their finances and improve their lives.'	Collective emancipation
Marie	Old woman with a sick husband, current leader of a group in Buea	Marie was chosen as the leader in one of the groups initiated by ICENECDEV. During her time in the group, she saw a dramatic improvement in her life condition, but she also felt increased pressures to contribute to her peers' difficulties.	'We were struggling to feed our families, but look at us now! With all the investments we have made, we no longer have problems with managing.'	'Since people see that we have tools and a good harvest, they come begging for aid and financial contributions. We are forced to help our community.'	Good business Coming together with farmers
Theresa	Old woman, migrant from the North-West, member of several cooperatives	Theresa migrated to the area of Buea from the North-West Region, where there is a strong agricultural tradition. She was surprised to find farming cooperatives around Buea and soon started joining them. Both her private and community life improved drastically.	'In the North-West, we cultivate the land without knowing what we are doing. Since our methods are inefficient, I used to be always sick and lack nutrients.'	'Today, I am happy and healthy. I not only contribute to my neighbours' difficulties but also share all the things I have learned in my community and groups'	Rural-urban divide Helping others
Eleanor	Middle-aged woman, member of a long-established cooperative	Eleanor was amongst the poorest farmers in her village and joined the cooperative seeking to improve her life. The whole community saw her life changing as she worked hard and became able to provide financial and material support for her neighbours.	'I joined the cooperative 12 years ago because I needed help. I was poor and lacked adequate tools and know-how. Together we can do more.'	'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.'	Gaining recognition
Bianca	Old widow, grandmother of 12, member of a newly founded group	Bianca recently joined her neighbours in a farming cooperative as she saw opportunities for economic gains. In spite of the limited time she spent with the group, Bianca already made sense of class discrimination and started taking action against it.	'When we were alone, we worked inefficiently and wasted a lot of time and resources. Now we can grow economically and expand our farms.'	'We have to work hard so that people may change their perceptions of farmers. After joining the cooperative, I no longer have time for other activities.'	Good business Helping others

Table 4. Exemplary life stories of women farmers dealing with gender discrimination.

Name	Personal info	Life summary	Encounter of constraints	Deviance from constraints	Main Theme(s)
Federica	Old woman working as a primary school teacher	Federica joined her ICENECDEV group because of her passion for farming and the insufficiency of her salary to sustain her extended family. Through her education and involvement in politics, she is aware of and active against gender discrimination.	'We are not just a farming group. We are a family. We are always together no matter our individual differences and personal problems.'	'Every woman should have the possibility to sustain her family and conduct a decent life. I always counsel my women when they are facing difficulties.'	Coming together with struggling women
Jana	Old widow, current group leader, former middle manager in a tea estate	Jana came from a privileged household, attended primary school, and got employed in the local tea cooperation. After her husband died and she was laid off, she founded her own cooperative and fought against women's constraints.	'My husband died and the tea estate was privatized, cutting wages by 70% and laying off workers. For the first time in my life, I felt burdened and vulnerable.'	'I advise my fellow women to be independent and stop relying on their husband. Most of them started small trading businesses following my advice.'	Reflexivity Gaining power
Francisca	Old woman, second wife of a farmer in a family with ten children	Francisca is the second wife of an old man who had five children with his previous partner. Although Francisca had always been submissive to her husband, she challenged his authority when she felt her own children's interests were threatened within family conflicts.	'My husband takes every decision within the household. When I want to use money, I need his approval. But I cannot stand my children suffering.'	'My children are young and voiceless. I always discuss with my husband and talk against him to make sure that my children get their right part.'	Patriarchy Critical events
Fatima	Old woman, migrated to Buea from the North-West	Since Fatima migrated to Buea from the rural North-West Region, where patriarchal traditions and women's constraints are strongly rooted, she was able to appreciate the improvement in her women's rights after joining the farming cooperative.	'I migrated here as a young girl from the remote North. My husband has always been in charge of earning money and managing matters in the household.'	'Now that I started farming and contributing some income to the household, I can also take part in decision-making with my husband.'	Domestic conflicts Individual emancipation
Julia	Middle-aged woman, owns a diversified tuber business near Buea	Julia joined her cooperative to improve her farming techniques and learn about different uses of cassava. Through the group, she obtained a protected environment to discuss her ideas and was able to open a small shop selling starch, flour, and local recipes.	'I had no confidence in my skills and struggled to keep the family going. My husband looked down on me as I was relying on him for every minor thing.'	'In the group, I can talk out and share my ideas. After I joined, I started talking out and expressing myself within both my household and community.'	Domestic conflicts Reflexivity
Janna	Young woman living in Buea, educated, married to an entrepreneur who lives elsewhere	Janna completed a Bachelor's degree in gender studies and joined her cooperative because she saw opportunities for economic gains. After encountering struggling women within the cooperative, Janna decided to found an NGO to help them ease their constraints.	'In the cooperative, I met so many women who could not cope and were constantly abused by their husbands. I felt I had to do something for them.'	'I work a lot on empowering women socially and economically. I often teach them about issues of women's rights, children's rights, and female leadership.'	Coming together with struggling women Rallying others
Jin	Old woman, former group leader in the North-West Region	Jin used to be the group leader in a cooperative in the North-West Region, but she was forced to relocate to Buea because of rising armed conflicts. Going through harsh difficulties, she changed her perspective on the role of women within society.	'The crisis was so severe we had been forced into our houses for days. I had to look after the women in my group and counsel them against their difficulties.'	'I was desperate and alone, but now I have courage. I can stand up in front of 200 women and talk. I know women can try and change things in our society.'	Critical events Gaining power

5. Discussion

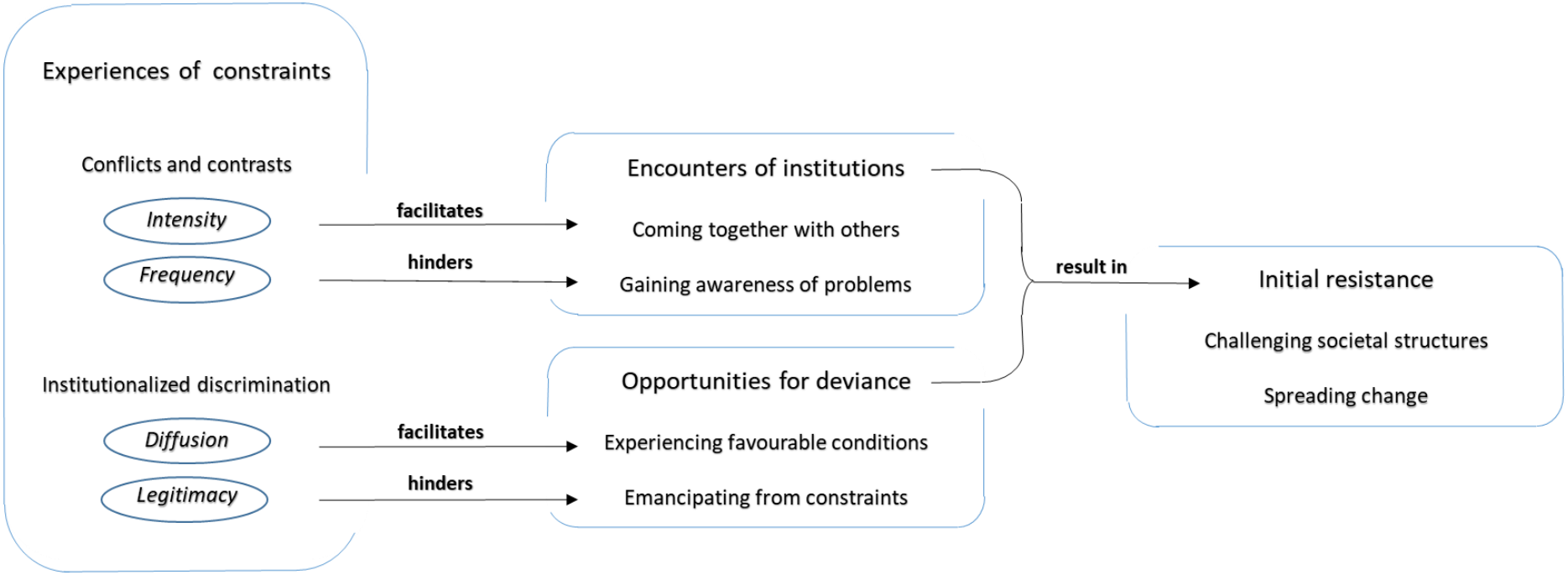
We devised a grounded-theoretical study to investigate why oppressed individuals act against some oppressive institutions but not others, and to explore when initial resistance efforts result in change. We found that the institutionalized constraints of class and gender discrimination entail power against women farmers in different ways. From our analysis, we derived a model of resistance to oppressive institutions that is contingent upon whether individuals' experiences of power are episodic or systemic (see Figure 2), which we discuss below, along with the theoretical and practical implications of our work.

5.1 *Implications for research on oppressive institutions*

Institutional power. Oppressive institutions exercise power over oppressed individuals by limiting their agency and determining which behaviours are possible (Martí & Fernández, 2013; Munir, 2020). Our work provides a nuanced picture of the construct of institutional power, which helps conceptualize it, and sheds light on how oppressive institutions can exercise power in different ways. Prior research, for example, has assumed that all institutions are vectors of power that constrain individual lives (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 2015), yet we found that oppressive institutions vary considerably in how they affect oppressed individuals.

Specifically, research suggests that two forms of institutional power exist: episodic and systemic. The episodic form manifests in single instances of oppression, while the systemic form describes how entire institutions affect the lives of oppressed individuals (Lawrence et al., 2001). Our findings allow us to go beyond this distinction and more finely characterize episodic power depending on the intensity and frequency of oppressive episodes. Individuals experience episodic power differently depending on the type of constraints they experience. For instance, gender discrimination can be both strong and subtle, as experiences of beating and abuse or as limits on individual freedom and tacit expectations. Individuals can also experience similar oppressive constraints with different frequency and intensity. The frequency

Figure 2. Power dynamics of resistance against institutionalized discrimination.



and intensity of class discrimination, for example, strongly correlates with an individual's level of poverty and number of interactions with community outsiders.

Our findings also allow us to add insights to systemic power; specifically, the components of diffusion and legitimacy, with diffusion as the percentage of individuals who are oppressed by a certain institution, and legitimacy as the extent to which individuals do not contest the exercise of power and consider it acceptable. While episodic power varies across instances of oppression, systemic power is a characteristic of each institution and indicates how oppressively practices are exercised. Class and gender discrimination are two institutions of different systemic power. Class discrimination entails a diffuse yet contested power, and affects all members of farming communities. Conversely, gender discrimination is more localised, because it oppresses only women, but is perceived as more legitimate because it is rooted in patriarchal traditions.

Episodic power and encounters. The type of power—episodic or systemic—and the qualities of each within oppressive institutions have implications for how easily individuals can initiate resistance to these institutions. For oppressed individuals to initiate resistance they need to first make sense of discrimination (Creed & Scully, 2000; Suddaby et al., 2018) and then envision possibilities for taking individual action against constraints (Hardy, 2016). Extant research would argue that individuals affected and oppressed by multiple forms of discrimination would oppose all the institutions oppressing them (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). We found that the ease with which an individual becomes aware of constraints is determined by the type of power the oppressive institutions exercise.

We consistently found that an individual's experiences of episodic power were connected to her encounters of institutions. In general, those women farmers who experienced stronger but less-frequent constraints were more inclined to apprehend institutions, whereas those who experienced more-frequent constraints tended to get used to discrimination and not

resist. This finding suggests that the intensity of individuals' experience of institutional constraints can disrupt their perceptions of 'normality', and—in the case of experiencing stronger but less-frequent constraints—prompt them to become aware of power dynamics that they would otherwise have taken for granted. This behaviour suggests that oppressed individuals can develop reflexivity—the ability to enact institutional constraints (Suddaby et al., 2018)—which is a first step towards initiating resistance. Conversely, frequently experiencing institutional constraints hinders individuals' awareness and decreases their likelihood of encounters. Oppressed individuals who frequently experience constraints may get used to institutionalized discrimination and feel discouraged and disincentivised from resisting. These strength and frequency effects may even be compounded, such that the individuals who experience both frequent and subtle oppression are the least likely to encounter institutions.

Systemic power and deviance. Prior scholarship has shown that the frequency and intensity of organisational exercises of power exercise correlates with oppressed individuals initiating deviant behaviours (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007). What this scholarship has not yet examined is how systemic institutional power influences whether oppressed individuals have opportunities to deviate. We build on this gap by suggesting that the diffusion and legitimacy of systemic power influence how easily oppressed individuals can change oppressive institutions. Within farming communities, class discrimination is a diffuse oppressive institution that lacks legitimacy, which mobilizes more oppressed individuals. By contrast, the institution of gender discrimination is less diffuse, affects only women, is seen as more legitimate, and only a few women in critical personal conditions contest it. The same dynamic of diffusion also applies outside of farming cooperatives, for instance, at the national and global level, where gender discrimination is more widespread than class discrimination, and gendered issues have been attracting considerable scrutiny and attention in recent years (Njikem, 2017).

Diffusion and legitimacy of systemic institutional power influence oppressed

individuals' opportunities to deviate in multiple ways. First, both elements influence whether society has an interest in changing oppressive institutions. The more diffuse an institution, the more individuals will be willing to either adapt to it or dismiss it. For instance, class discrimination is so widespread that almost everyone within farming communities is affected by it and has an interest in tackling it. Second, these elements determine whether multiple parties can and will mobilize against an institution. In general, exercises of power that are perceived as legitimate are harder to reverse. For example, gender discrimination in South-West Cameroon is diffuse, affecting nearly every woman there, yet high diffusion alone is not sufficient to mobilize groups and individuals against gendered constraints. Gender discrimination is rooted in Cameroonian traditions, is generally perceived as legitimate, and favours the interests of the male population; many individuals therefore have no incentive to either take action against or openly support discriminatory practices. Lastly, the theoretical mechanisms we identified allow us to speculate on possible temporal and circular interdependencies between the legitimacy of systemic power and its diffusion, such that more-legitimate exercises of power are more likely to spread more easily and widely within societies. As discriminatory institutions spread and affect an increasing number of individuals, more individuals are likely to scrutinize them, and these institutions will likely lose part of their legitimacy.

Other links between power and resistance. We theorize other possible links between power and resistance (omitted from Figure 2 for clarity and concision). Episodic power mostly affects individuals' likelihood of encountering institutions, and systemic power predominantly relates to the possibilities oppressed individuals have for deviating. Yet it is noteworthy that episodic power also affects deviant behaviour (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007). The frequency of constraints negatively correlates with both encounters and deviance because more-frequent exercises of power become more 'normal' and make it harder to become aware of and deviate from them, while

more-intense oppression facilitates encounters but hinders deviance because it is easier to become aware of constraints but requires more-drastic deviant behaviours to change them, which is less likely to occur.

Moreover, while diffusion is chiefly a systemic feature of oppression, it also affects individual-level encounters. When oppression is widespread, as in the case of class discrimination, it is relatively easy for individuals to make sense of constraints. When oppressed individuals see that other oppressed individuals are making small improvements in their lives and realizing small wins in personal freedom and accomplishments, these observations might be enough to trigger in oppressed individuals a desire to improve their living conditions and take action against oppressive institutions. When institutions are less-diffuse, however, it is more difficult to make sense of alternative possibilities and initiate action. Gender discrimination, which affects only women, and to a lesser degree than class discrimination, is a good example: initial resistance is not easy because it requires critical events to trigger individuals' awareness of oppression and their desire to improve their living conditions. In sum, individuals subject to widespread oppression are likely to see that others experience similar constraints, giving them an opportunity to discuss and make sense of it, whereas those who are oppressed by less-diffuse constraints are more likely to be isolated and have less support when they initiate resistance.

Lastly, the legitimacy of different institutions varies, both between institutions and also on an individual and situational basis (Phillips et al., 2004). In addition, both systemic and situational legitimacy influence deviant behaviour, which suggests that deviance is not only a macro-level phenomenon related to systemic institutional power, but also an individual event that depends upon the personal circumstances of the oppressed individuals involved. Specifically, oppressed individuals may be subject to institutional power in different ways. Some women—those who are widows, are unmarried, or are divorced—are more likely to

deviate from institutions of gender discrimination because in their situations they are more inclined to challenge patriarchal traditions. Hence, not only is the institutional power of each institution perceived as more or less legitimate, but among the individuals affected by the same institution, this power is perceived as legitimate to a different degree. As a result, because class constraints are a collective and acceptable phenomenon, multiple oppressed individuals can legitimately entertain taking action against and deviating from systemic power; whereas because gendered constraints are an individual phenomenon, only some women in favourable personal circumstances will deviate from them.

In sum, farmers and women deviating from their separate constraints involves two different dynamics. As the community comes together, becomes aware of institutionalized constraints, and pushes women farmers to empower others, it is almost inevitable that farmers will spontaneously deviate from and challenge class constraints. Farming cooperatives provide a setting that fosters exchanges, makes farmers aware of class constraints, and provides the means for them to overcome a substantial number of cases of these constraints. In contrast, deviating from and challenging women's constraints is rare, and is contingent upon individual-level antecedents that might enable individual women to take personal action against discrimination. An interesting finding of our study is that the cooperative setting was not conducive for addressing gender discrimination, as these cooperatives had a different focus and they were not able to mobilize societal support to address this discrimination. The different reactions to systemic power also reflect different scales of change (Harmon, Haack, & Roulet, 2019) that depend on acceptability; specifically, whether society thinks deviating from institutionalized constraints is acceptable for single women or collectives. Overall, we contribute to the debate on how institutional theory can address issues of power and oppression (Clegg, 2010; Munir, 2020). In contrast to macro-level accounts of institutional change (e.g. Wadhwani, 2018), we investigated how discriminated individuals can resist oppressive

institutions despite widespread societal opposition. While extant institutional theory has conceptualized power as the potential that actors have to construct, maintain, and disrupt institutions (Gray, Purdy, & Ansari, 2015; Martí & Fernández, 2013), we shed light on how oppressive institutions have episodic and systemic aspects of power embedded within them. We believe the power dynamics we uncovered by comparing class and gender discrimination in farming cooperatives can be more widely applied to other types of institutions and can explain resistance in a variety of empirical settings, such as in the workplace and the public sphere.

5.2 *Implications for research on discrimination*

Multiple constraints. This study also contributes to research on discrimination by providing grounded constructs that explain how and why individuals deal with the multiple constraints afflicting them. We answer Liu et al.'s (2019) call for exploring how different power dynamics affect individual behaviour. Extant research has assumed that discriminated individuals always try to overcome their institutionalized constraints (Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2016), yet we found that this is not the case when different constraints lead to conflicting demands. A somewhat surprising finding is that, with few exceptions, those women who tackle class discrimination are disincentivised from taking action against gender discrimination, and vice versa. On the one hand, those individuals who gain recognition as accomplished farmers have a hard time establishing themselves as emancipated women, because their community strongly enforces the expectation that women should behave according to patriarchal prescriptions. On the other hand, women who gain independence by challenging patriarchal traditions come to devalue the male-dominated agricultural institutions and feel disincentivized to initiate change against class discrimination. Some of these women may start to feel ‘out of place’ within their rural communities and may decide to leave their villages and move to a city, start their own (non-farm) business, or look for salaried employment. The above reasoning

suggests that taking action against one set of constraints might reinforce others, since different types of discrimination stem from contrasting values and beliefs (Gehman et al., 2013). The process of resistance, which involves reversing the episodic and systemic power of discriminatory institutions, leverages values and beliefs that contrast with specific discriminatory practices but may result in new constraints stemming from different values and beliefs.

In our case, we found that cooperatives help their members dismantle the economic foundations of class discrimination but that these same cooperatives reinforce collective gendered stereotypes. Cooperatives provide their members with tools and know-how to ease economic constraints, yet when farmers come together, they seem to strengthen gendered roles and power relationships. Most often, the same conditions that facilitate overcoming class discrimination, such as a supportive husband and community, also hinder attempts to escape gender discrimination by imposing stricter controls and expectations on women farmers. By contrast, those women who gain the most independence from their husbands are subject to social scrutiny, which hampers their possibilities for class emancipation. These dynamics provide a hint at why oppressed individuals initiate action against some oppressive institutions but not others. More concretely, individuals who are subject to multiple discrimination must decide which constraints to tackle and must weigh the trade-offs (the incentives and rewards) in taking action against different institutions. An interesting observation is that development agents and intermediary organisations face choices and trade-offs similar to those of oppressed individuals. The ICENECDEV coordinator, for instance, avoided addressing issues of gender discrimination because he feared it would negatively affect women farmers' economic empowerment. This decision suggests that trade-offs in addressing the different constraints stem from both circumstantial and systemic features and may prove difficult to overcome for any given party. For instance, official policies aimed at tackling gender discrimination will fail

unless they can garner the support of local leaders and communities.

Organisational and individual resistance. By drawing on the theory of oppressive institutions (Martí & Fernández, 2013), we provide new insights relevant to understanding how organisations can plan and coordinate action against discrimination. Our findings complement the work of Mair et al. (2016), who investigate how NGOs organize to overcome discrimination. These authors propose that institutional change against discrimination can be achieved if development agents selectively disclose which of their aims is most compatible with tackling oppressive practices. In contrast, we investigated which systemic features of institutionalized constraints make it possible for those different aims to exist in the first place. Depending on whether oppressive institutions have legitimacy and how diffuse they are, change agents can decide whether to act directly or indirectly. Direct actions openly leverage the customs and norms to oppose discrimination, as in the case of farmers' constraints, which were widespread and illegitimate. Indirect actions create conditions favourable for change, as in the case of women's constraints, which are both localised and deeply rooted. This choice of action has consequences for how to intervene to effect change. Intervening on gender discrimination, for example, would require indirect actions, with agents paying attention to each woman's experiences of constraints and personal circumstances, whereas class discrimination could be tackled through open forums and discussions. When dealing with multiple discrimination, change agents may have to combine direct and indirect strategies, selecting the actions that are appropriate for each set of constraints they want to act on.

Furthermore, agents and practitioners should be aware of how acting against one set of constraints may facilitate or hinder action against other constraints. In our case, ICENECDEV had abundant resources and was composed of women-only groups, which we expected would be enough to overcome both class and gender discrimination, yet we found only three study participants who initiated action against both sets of constraints, and even then, only because

they were in a privileged condition. Joining and participating in the farming cooperative gave these women an opportunity to improve their lives, but they were able to achieve this outcome by also leveraging their pre-existing legitimacy and social networks, creating synergies, and making improvements to many different aspects of their lives. Change agents can leverage these insights when attempting to tackle multiple discriminatory constraints at the same time. For instance, change agents may be more successful in devising plans of action for overcoming multiple forms of discrimination if they analyse discriminated individuals' motivations, incentives, and rewards, and act against each set of oppressive constraints.

Lastly, our work hints that the strategies aimed at changing societal perceptions are importantly linked to individuals' actions aimed at overcoming oppression. Extant research (e.g. Chowdhury, 2020; Phung et al., 2020) has emphasized that the effect of multiple parties mobilizing can result in either discriminatory practices being enforced or in helping to eliminate them. We propose that the individuals who are directly affected by discrimination have the ability to initiate action against these practices themselves, even with the limited means at their disposal. In general, mobilizing multiple parties against discrimination happens when the interest in changing societal perceptions is widespread or when opposing discriminatory practices can lead to intrinsic gains. For example, Chowdhury (2020) explained that local Bangladeshis helped refugees resist their camps' discriminatory norms because locals were able to profit by smuggling goods in illegal bazars. In contrast, for oppressed individuals to resist discrimination requires that they make sense of the constraints and possibilities for engaging in actions that oppressive institutions prohibit. Thus, discriminated individuals' experiences of encounters and their options for deviance are important preconditions for incentivizing them and for change to be effective. When discriminated individuals are not aware of the constraints they are experiencing, they may be unable to enact the consistent behavioural changes needed to overcome the systemic power of oppressive institutions. Conversely, discriminated

individuals may be incentivized to act against discriminatory institutions, but they may lack adequate possibilities to act, either because they are too isolated or because they have limited legitimacy. Altogether, this reasoning suggests that incentives are necessary to mobilize multiple parties to act against discrimination and change societal perceptions, but that for resistance to be successful, the individuals who are directly affected must exercise cognizant reactions to realize opportunities for change.

5.3 *Limitations and future research*

Although initiating change against class discrimination reduces women farmers' incentives to tackle gender discrimination and vice versa, we acknowledge this might not be the case for other types of discrimination. A key feature of our study, which enabled the comparison between class and gender discrimination and the generalization of the power dynamics underlying institutional resistance, is that the two sets of constraints mostly occur in separate instances, as class discrimination manifests in the public sphere but gender discrimination is a predominantly private phenomenon. Thus, there is room for future research exploring how the power dynamics of institutional resistance vary and interact when intertwined constraints from multiple institutions exercise their influence in the same place and time, as in the case of race and gender at the workplace. We were also limited by the selection of farming cooperatives as our empirical setting, as these organisations turned out to be effective in tackling class discrimination but less successful when it comes to gender discrimination. Future studies could examine organisations that have been able to mobilize widespread action against multiple discrimination to draw further insights as to how organisations may do so.

While the model of farming cooperatives is sufficient to provide basic resources and generate awareness of discriminatory institutions, its long-term impact on the most-discriminated women farmers remains to be assessed. Due to the limited time frame of our fieldwork and our focus on individual farmers, we have been unable to observe the unfolding

of actual institutional change within the farming communities under observation and we have been limited to the women farmers' decision to take early action against discrimination. Future research should develop longitudinal studies monitoring how individual behaviours, episodic constraints, and systemic power evolve over long periods and assessing the conditions under which conflicts may reach a solution, persist, and exacerbate. Moreover, the choice of interviewing individuals participating in farming cooperatives raises generalisability concerns to empirical settings where groups exert limited influence. For instance, with regard to easing class discrimination, it would be interesting to examine whether women farmers who face increases in their resource bases can experience encounters and opportunities for deviance even if they do not participate in a group.

6. Conclusion

Following numerous calls for an improved understanding of power in institutional theory (e.g. Hirsch & Lounsbury, 2015; Munir, 2020), we set out to investigate why discriminated individuals decide to oppose some oppressive constraints but not others and under what conditions they might undertake actions aimed at reverting oppressive institutions. By comparing and contrasting how southwest-Cameroonian women farmers resist class and gender discrimination, we found that oppressed individuals' possibilities for resistance depend chiefly on how power is exercised within oppressive institutions. As a result of our analysis, we drew a generalized model of the dynamics of episodic and systemic power facilitating and hindering institutional resistance. Our model constitutes a first step in understanding how different types of oppression may be reversed and presents several implications for theories and policies aimed at easing discrimination or changing institutions more broadly.

7. References (second study)

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Appendix A. Interview template.

1. Experiences within the cooperative

Why did you join your farming cooperative?
How long have you been a member?
What do you like about collective farming?

2. Gender discrimination

Who takes decisions within your household?
How do you divide tasks?
After joining your cooperative, did you change your behaviour within the household?
If so, how? And why?
What personal difficulties do you face?
Do you feel your personal difficulties have changed after joining your cooperative?
If so, how? And why?

3. Class discrimination

What does your community think of you?
After you joined the cooperative, has the community changed what they think of you?
If so, how? And why?
Did you change your spending behaviour after joining the cooperative?
If so, how? And why?

4. Multiple discrimination

Do you participate in community life?
After you joined your group, have you changed how you participate in community life?
If so, how? And why?
Do you feel you are represented well?
Is there any event related to your cooperative that made you change your view on politics?

Crises and the disadvantaged: How effectual behaviour leads to resilience among Cameroonian micro-entrepreneurs.

Abstract

Crises hamper entrepreneurship by eroding the entrepreneurs' resource bases. Entrepreneurial resilience, the act of maintaining functioning during adverse circumstances, requires using resources to counteract disruptions. Building on these ideas, we develop theory as to how entrepreneurs operating in extreme poverty settings may behave resiliently when confronted with crisis-related losses.

Through a grounded-theoretical analysis of entrepreneurship in South-West Cameroon, we identify three behaviours entrepreneurs enact in reaction to losses: negative, need-driven, and causal effectuation. Then, we build theory as to how the entrepreneurs' effectual behaviours enable them to build resilience against current and future adversity.

Project history

This work-in-progress article has been under review at Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice (VHB: A) and Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal (VHB: A). The article is co-authored with Michael Woywode, who contributed to the writing of the manuscript, coding, and drafting of the theoretical model. I led the development of the research idea, data collection, and analysis. I am also the main corresponding author of this work. The manuscript benefited from input and feedback from several colleagues, including Himani Singh, Cristoph Sajons, Esra Gullu, and Carina Hartmann. Early versions of the manuscript were presented at the research seminars of the Mannheim University's Institut für Mittelstandforschung, Polytechnic University of Milan, and Vrijie Universiteit Amsterdam. The manuscript received the Best Paper Award from the International European Conference on Entrepreneurship Research (IECER) in October 2021.

1. Introduction

Crises, extreme and unexpected events causing shocks in the lives of individuals and organisations (Buchanan and Denyer, 2013), affect countless entrepreneurs and small business owners. Thus, research on how entrepreneurs can react to adverse circumstances and rebuild their businesses after major shocks has blossomed in recent years (Branzei and Abdelnour, 2010; Bullough et al., 2014; Williams and Shepherd, 2016a). Crisis research has highlighted the concept of psychological resilience, the ability to maintain functioning during adverse circumstances and positively react to negative events (Doern et al., 2019; Korber and McNaughton, 2018). In the context of small ventures and one-person businesses, entrepreneurial resilience is defined as using resources to take advantage of opportunities during adverse times (Branzei and Abdelnour, 2010; Salvato et al., 2020; Williams and Shepherd, 2018). Resources, defined as anything that entrepreneurs value and may use to attain their goals (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Welter et al., 2018), encompass not only economic means but also human capital, socioeconomic status, access to social networks, and psychological states. However, when crises arise in extreme poverty settings, entrepreneurs' resource scarcity may be so severe as to endanger survival and force individuals to abandon their businesses and switch to subsistence activities (Bischoff et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2020). Hence, investigating whether, and how, entrepreneurs living in settings of extreme poverty can be resilient despite life-threatening resource scarcity can generate new theory on the antecedents of resilience and extend our understanding of the construct's boundary conditions.

To inquire into our research problem, between 2018 and 2020, we conducted 214 interviews with 151 entrepreneurs operating in the region of South-West Cameroon. South-West Cameroon is an appropriate empirical setting for our research since the region, which is among the poorest areas in Africa, featured two major crises in the period under observation. First, a civil war between anglophone secessionist and the francophone government had been ravaging the region since 2016. Then, in 2020, the covid-19 pandemic spread to the region and several

rules restricting businesses' operations and slowing the economy were introduced to halt the disease. Through our inductive analysis, we identified three different behaviours among the entrepreneurs we interviewed: negative effectuation, need-driven effectuation, and causal effectuation, which differ with regards to the entrepreneurs' activities, driving motivations, main objectives, approaches towards present and future adversity, and dominant focus concerning the use of resources. Based on the patterns we observed within our sample, we developed a model of effectuation and resilience under conditions of life-threatening poverty.

Our key contribution lies in shedding light on the links between extremely poor entrepreneurs' patterns of resource use and their resulting ability to withstand crises and environmental jolts. While most literature on entrepreneurship in resource-scarce settings has highlighted the positive consequences of effectual behaviour (Dew and Sarasvathy, 2013; Nelson and Lima, 2020) and improvising with limited resources at hand (Di Domenico et al., 2010; Janssen et al., 2018), we warn that effectuation and improvisation do not always yield good returns and may not be conducive to resilience. Surprisingly, we found that effectual behaviour is most likely to lead to business growth for those entrepreneurs whose life is at risk and who are forced to make 'hustles' (Fisher et al., 2020) if they wish to survive. Moreover, effectuation seems conducive to long-term resilience and ability to withstand multiple crises only for those entrepreneurs who are able to combine causal and effectual behaviours. Lastly, we illustrate how loss spirals (Hobfoll, 2001), inefficiencies (Matos and Hall, 2019), hustles (Fisher et al., 2020), and serenity influence entrepreneurs in shifting among different effectual behaviours.

The remaining of the paper proceeds as follows. First, we shortly introduce the literature on resilience and effectuation. Second, we present our empirical setting, methodology, and analytical strategy. Then, we illustrate the three behaviours we observed among our study participants and the interconnections between the three behaviours. We conclude the paper by elaborating on how effectual behaviours may lead to or hamper resilience among extremely poor entrepreneurs and drawing implications for theory and practice.

2. Theory

To investigate our phenomenon of interest, we draw mainly from the resilience, effectuation, and poverty literatures.

2.1 *Resilience and poverty*

Previous studies of entrepreneurial resilience in settings of poverty have highlighted how entrepreneurs may leverage different types of resources to conjecture resilient behaviours. For instance, in their studies of organisational responses to the Haitian earthquake, T. A. Williams and Shepherd (2016a) and Farny, Kibler, and Down (2019) found that social entrepreneurs' connections to international donors and embeddedness within the local community enabled them to devise long-term recovery strategies and deal with accidents and unforeseen circumstances. Similarly, during a field experiment in Sri Lanka, De Mel, McKenzie, and Woodruff (2012) offered financial support to randomly selected entrepreneurs whose activities had been disrupted by the 2004 tsunami. Not surprisingly, the authors found that additional economic resources spur post-disaster growth. Yet, the effectiveness of financial incentives varied according to the opportunities available in a given sector, with ventures operating in the retail sector featuring more options for recovery than companies in manufacturing or services. Relatedly, Welter et al. (2018) explored how different types of unstable environments may influence entrepreneurial behaviours. In the context of changes in the European Union's eastern borders, the authors showed that the harshness of border restrictions had a strong influence on cross-border entrepreneurs' decisions to reconfigure their resource bases and adapt their businesses. Other studies have explored the role of psychological and emotional resources in fostering resilient behaviours (e.g. Bullough et al., 2014; Muñoz et al., 2019), the variance in the pay offs of enterprise resilience (e.g. Branzei and Abdelnour, 2010), and the procedures through which organisations may develop resilience (e.g. Gray et al., 2014). To our knowledge, although some of these studies have researched intermediary organizations in poverty settings, none has focused on poor entrepreneurs themselves and explored how resilient behaviours may

develop amidst life-threatening adversity.

2.2 *Entrepreneurship, poverty, and effectuation.*

The entrepreneurship and effectuation literatures provide some avenues to address extremely poor entrepreneurs' struggles when dealing with crises. Management scholars have recently been interested in entrepreneurship in settings of extreme poverty and examined such topics as poor entrepreneurs' liabilities (Morris et al., 2020), suboptimal ventures (Matos and Hall, 2019), and distinctive modes of organizing (Sutter et al., 2019). Resource-poor entrepreneurs are known to improvise more than their richer counterparts because constraints on available means limit the extent to which such entrepreneurs are able to plan for future adverse circumstances and implement causal courses of action (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Hart et al., 2016).

Effectuation theory posits that entrepreneurs' behaviours depend chiefly on the types and quantities of resources they can access. Specifically, entrepreneurs may choose between causal courses of action, which prioritize goals over means and consist of devising action plans to achieve one's personal objectives, and effectual behaviours, in which entrepreneurs improvise with their available means in an incremental fashion and are open to developing their ventures in a variety of possible directions (Arend et al., 2015; Sarasvathy, 2001). Under conditions of adversity, effectuation is a more common course of action than causation because of the environmental uncertainty and unpredictability that prevent entrepreneurs from adequately planning for long-term competitive advantage (Nelson and Lima, 2020). At the same time, resource erosion is an important determinant of entrepreneurial behaviour following adverse circumstances that hampers entrepreneurs' ability to function and exploit opportunities in the aftermath of crises (Salvato et al., 2020). Since these topics have been explored predominantly in the context of Western and developed countries, we believe that inquiring into post-crisis behaviours in a setting of extreme poverty where entrepreneurs are at risk of survival can establish new boundary conditions to the theories of effectuation and resilience.

2.3 *Resources and resilience*

While effectuation theory has potential in explaining different types of entrepreneurial behaviours following adverse circumstances, conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) proposes rationales and mechanisms that drive entrepreneurs' motivations and behavioural shifts. Originating from the domain of psychology and stress management, COR theory has found several applications in studies of entrepreneurial resilience following disasters and traumatic events (Danes et al., 2009; Doern, 2017; Williams and Shepherd, 2016b). A key tenet of COR theory is that the threat of incurring resource losses is more salient than the prospect of gaining new resources because losses have a detrimental psychological effect on individuals (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Since experiences of loss may cause significant stress and dysfunction, individuals are motivated to limit losses by cultivating and growing their resource bases (Hobfoll, 2002). Thus, according to COR theory, the entrepreneurs' use of resources in the aftermath of negative events is itself a coping mechanism directly related to the losses they incurred (Williams and Shepherd, 2016b). COR theory also posits that individuals are likely to react to stronger threats of loss but more prone to respond dysfunctionally when heavy losses do occur (Hobfoll, 2001). COR theory further distinguishes three ways in which individuals may use resources when they recover from adverse circumstances. To recover from losses, individuals may (1) protect their remaining resource stocks by investing some resources to safeguard others, (2) acquire new resources by expending effort to secure access to a broader resource base, and (3) develop their resources' potential by seeking new ways to use and deploy existing resources (Hobfoll, 2001; Lanivich, 2015). As individuals' ability to respond to adversity depends highly upon their extant resource bases, COR theory posits that those who own more resources are better able to react to shocks, shed against losses, and realize future gains (Doern, 2016; Hobfoll, 1989). Conversely, individuals who own fewer resources are more likely to incur losses and fall in vicious loss spirals as they have fewer means to prepare for and react to environmental changes (Bacharach and Bamberger, 2007; Hobfoll, 1989).

Nevertheless, little is known as to how COR theory applies to non-psychological resources and whether entrepreneurs who are at risk of survival follow the same behavioural rationales as their richer counterparts.

3. Methodology

Since our objective is to build theory as to how entrepreneurs operating settings of extreme poverty may conjecture responses to crises, we faced two major empirical challenges. First, South-West Cameroon and Sub-Saharan African have rarely been the object of mainstream management research because they entail challenges related to cultural differences and local contingencies such as poverty, lack of education, and tribal unrest. Second, the Cameroonian civil war and covid-19 pandemic have dissimilar features that may affect local entrepreneurs' behavioural rationales and reactions to adversity in a number of ways. Because of these problems, we opted for an objectivist grounded theory approach as per Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss (2008). Objectivist grounded theory enabled us to isolate entrepreneurial behaviours in spite of the circumstantial differences between the anglophone civil war and covid-19 crises and objectively capture the behaviours enacted by our study participants. As a feature of our chosen approach, we strived to adopt our study participants' perspectives on the issue of (the lack of) resilient behaviour following crises. In doing so, we combined grounded theory with some ethnographical methods which involved the participation in events such as group meetings of saving groups or the observation of the study participants at their workplace (Van Burg et al., 2020). These methods enabled us to identify the cultural facets of Cameroon and appreciate the differences with Western empirical settings where the lead researcher is used to operate.

We conducted interviews in summer 2018, when the civil war had recently broken out in our area of observation, and summer 2020, when the local entrepreneurs had taken measures to deal with both the civil war and a covid-19 outbreak. Additionally, we monitored local media outlets and kept in touch via email and WhatsApp with several of our study participants to observe

how the entrepreneurs' behaviours evolved in relation to the major events happening in our area of observation. The data collection at two points in time enabled us to establish a trusted relationship with the entrepreneurs and gain an insiders' perspective on sensitive topics such as the struggles in our participants' everyday lives and the entrepreneurs' pre-crisis resource levels. An important point is that the interviews conducted in 2018 were not directly related to the anglophone civil war but part of a different project aimed at unveiling the poverty-alleviating effect of entrepreneurship and they serendipitously happened when the civil war was breaking out. Hence, the data presented in the current paper has mostly been collected in 2020 and between the 2018 and 2020 field visits.

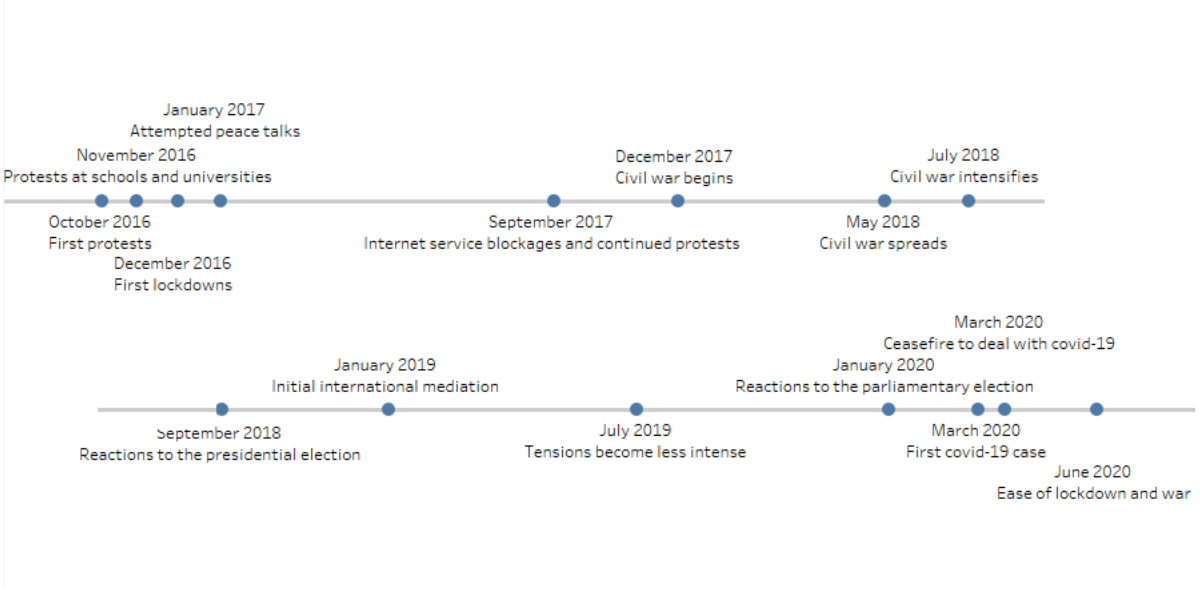
3.1 *Empirical setting*

Buea, the capital of the South-West region of Cameroon is an adequate empirical setting for several reasons. First, entrepreneurship is widespread in the area, as there are limited possibilities for public and private employment and many locals decide to start a business to make a living. Interesting, the vast majority of entrepreneurs operating in Buea run micro-enterprises employing at most one or two employees and usually dealing with the trade of goods or the production of agricultural crops. This makes South-West Cameroon comparable to other Sub-Saharan African regions and an appropriate empirical setting to investigate resilience during life-threatening crises. Second, South-West Cameroon is unique in that the region has witnessed two major crises in the period from 2018 to 2020 while enduring persisting issues related to poverty, gender discrimination, and migration. Third, since Buea has experienced a rapid economic growth in recent years and there is no clear cut-off line between the city and the neighbouring agricultural villages, the empirical setting enabled us to sample entrepreneurs operating in both urban and rural areas and obtain insights that are generalizable across a variety of empirical settings.

The outbreak of two crises allowed us to identify dynamics recurring across different types of adverse events and explore how reactions to the first crisis facilitated or hampered an

entrepreneur's ability to counteract the second crisis. Armed clashes have been spreading in South-West Cameroon since 2016, when the Anglophone population formally started asking for more rights and representation in the country's government. The conflict reached Buea in 2017 and intensified during the elections of October 2018 and January 2020, when the armed groups instituted frequent curfews and intimidated local businesses to put pressure on the government (O'Grady, 2018). The civil war posed a continuous threat to the entrepreneurs operating in Buea, many of whom were victims of violence, theft, and threats of kidnapping or had to relocate or interrupt their operations. Conversely, the covid-19 pandemic is a global disease causing respiratory problems that may develop into serious illness. The first case in Cameroon was confirmed in March 2020, and soon thereafter the country entered a three-month lockdown (Tih, 2020). The city of Buea complied with government directives by mandating restrictions on movements, regulating social activities, and limiting opening times for businesses and commercial establishments. Compared to the Anglophone crisis, the covid-19 pandemic had a shorter effect and a lighter impact on personal safety, yet it brought economic distress to entrepreneurs in Buea. Overall, the pandemic made it difficult to maintain operations, ensure the flow of supplies, and reach out to customers. In Figure 1, we summarise the main events affecting Buea during the period of our study.

Figure 1. Anglophone civil war and Covid-19 crises timeline.



The two crises entailed different magnitudes of resource losses for the affected entrepreneurs. For instance, while the civil war affected predominantly the villages surrounding Buea where the rebels conducted frequent raids, the covid-19 restrictions were more thoroughly enforced in urban areas with a higher risk of spread of the disease. Moreover, the civil war had direct psychological and economic consequences for most of the entrepreneurs living in Buea. In some of the villages around the city, the loss of security was so severe that all the economic activities had to stop for several months because of the frequent shootings. This led to significant economic losses for the entrepreneurs. Those who left or lost their houses had to spend a sizeable portion of their savings in maintaining themselves and their families in their new places of residence. Those who remained in Buea suffered from a severely reduced access to markets as many of their former customers moved away or significantly cut down their expenses. Besides, many of the entrepreneurs remaining in the city also experienced theft, vandalism, and extortion by rebel forces.

The covid-19 pandemic had somewhat less severe consequences for the entrepreneurs living in Buea, partly because it did not entail a severe disruption of the safety and security in the area, and partly because the entrepreneurs themselves were already used to adverse circumstances and suffered from less severe distress. Although most covid-19 related losses were lower in magnitude, there were several instances in which these losses proved disruptive to the entrepreneurs' routines. For instance, the indirect economic consequences of the pandemic, such as the increase in supply prices and the difficulties in transporting goods and accessing markets, forced many entrepreneurs to either switch to self-subsistence or think of new business models to cope with the changing environment. In many cases, the losses incurred from the pandemic summed up and aggravated those previously encountered during the civil war. For example, schools had been interrupted since the intensifying of the civil war, but the covid-19 school lockdown posed further strain on local entrepreneurs and their families as the expenses

for children's homecare accumulated. Similarly, the social restrictions put in place during the pandemic added to measures implemented during the civil war, hindering entrepreneurs' ability to leverage support from friends and relatives. Entrepreneurs in Buea could no longer rely on their usual sources of support to secure resources as social networks were disrupted, banks would offer limited loans, and programs from NGOs and the government became inaccessible. The impact of the crises also varied among different sectors. For instance, the agricultural sector was heavily impacted as many turned to agriculture to make a living. In turn, the prices of agricultural products fell drastically, eroding agricultural entrepreneurs' profits. Adding to the dire situation, the movement restrictions and interruptions of social contacts prevented farming cooperatives from functioning properly and providing support to agricultural entrepreneurs. Although farmers usually conduct all the activities related to planting, planning, and harvesting crops with their cooperative members, none of this had been possible during the civil war and pandemic, resulting in higher efforts for lower yields. Within non-farm sectors, there was significant variance as to how enterprises were impacted by the two crises. For instance, the entrepreneurs relying on trade with rural areas for sales or supplies saw a sharp decline in their volumes and often had to interrupt their operations for some time. Similarly, ventures offering non-essential services, such as travel agencies and laundries, also suffered heavy losses due to the decrease in demand for their offer. However, for a handful of firms, such as those operating in online sales and outsourcing of IT services, the pandemic entailed limited losses and even had a positive impact on demand.

3.2 *Data collection*

We conducted two rounds of data collection. First, in summer 2018, we conducted open-ended interviews with 108 entrepreneurs operating in the area around Buea. These interviews were aimed at assessing the general ease of entrepreneurship in the country, the prevalence of such issues as gender and economic discrimination, and the early impressions of and reactions to the Anglophone civil war, which had been intensifying in the period leading to the October 2018

national elections – even though the civil war was not the main focus in the first-round interviews. During the interviews, we asked several questions about the entrepreneurs' small ventures and expectations towards the future, the cultural aspects of doing business in Cameroon, and the early impact of the civil war. These first interviews averaged between 25 and 40 minutes, with three exceptions lasting 20, 45, and 50 minutes. In the period from 2018 to 2020, we monitored Cameroonian news sources and followed up with some of our study participants via email and WhatsApp to monitor any reaction they had to the evolving situation in the region and the motivations driving their behaviours. We often contacted our study participants as soon as we knew of any major accident happening in the area around Buea so that we could observe the entrepreneurs' early responses to adversity and track these as the situation in the region evolved. Publicly available data sources such as news articles and reports were not an integral part of the analysis but served as background information to position our participants' experiences within the broader timeline of events affecting Buea.

Then, in 2020 we conducted a second round of interviews with 106 entrepreneurs, of which 63 were repeated participants from the earlier round. In many cases, it was impossible to contact the first-round participants because they had died, had relocated, or were otherwise untraceable. Overall, since we are interested in establishing how poor entrepreneurs may cope with life-threatening adversity and several of our participants struggled with making ends meet, we contend survival bias is not a major concern as we can observe a wide spectrum of reactions across entrepreneurs who were differently impacted by the crises. Nevertheless, we chose to add 43 new participants to complement the insights from the repeated interviewees and explore the boundary conditions of our emerging theory. These included mostly internally displaced individuals, who had been heavily affected by the civil war but were not living in Buea in 2018, and entrepreneurs not affiliated with a business group or partner organisation, which were under-represented in the 2018 sample. During the second-round interviews, we adopted a semi-structured protocol that we adapted as we gained insights from our study participants. We

initially asked the entrepreneurs to talk freely about the Anglophone civil war and the covid-19 pandemic, the impact the crises had on their businesses, the measures and reactions they took in response to the crises, and the motivations spurring their behaviours. In the later interviews, we covered similar topics but asked more specific and detailed questions based on the responses we obtained from the earlier participants, aiming to disconfirm the emerging theory and test its boundary conditions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). For instance, as the topic of "losses" became prominent after the first interviews, the subsequent interviews shifted from asking generic questions about the impact of the crises to more specific queries about the entrepreneurs' experiences of losses and related use of resources during coping strategies. The second-round interviews averaged about 30 minutes, totalling 674 pages of single-spaced transcripts. The topics dealt with in the interviews varied according to each entrepreneur's experiences and behaviours: while some delved deep into the (de)motivational impact of the crises, others treated more the rationales, strategies, and processes driving entrepreneurial decisions.

To contact our study participants, we employed two main methods. First, since it is hard for outsiders to establish trust within local communities (Mair et al., 2012), we relied on partner organisations, such as farming cooperatives and business groups, working with entrepreneurs in the area around Buea. This was the main method of contacting participants during the 2018 wave of data collection, when we were interested in assessing the general ease and features of micro-entrepreneurship in the region. The external partners were not directly involved in the analysis and provided continuous feedback concerning the evolving situation in Buea and the cultural aspects of doing business during the crises. Moreover, since most of these organisations interrupted their activities when the crises intensified, the affiliation with groups and cooperatives did not significantly alter the results of our analysis. Second, we contacted additional participants through snowball sampling by asking for recommendations to both our partner organizations and the entrepreneurs we previously interviewed. We used snowball sampling mostly in 2020 to get in touch with the 43 new participants we needed for theoretical

sampling and validation of the emerging theory. Although snowball sampling may lead to biases when trying to gain a statistically representative picture of the population of interest (Miles et al., 2014), in our case it made it possible to identify and contact otherwise untraceable participants, such as internally displaced persons, entrepreneurs who had been particularly successful, and individuals who experienced heavy resource losses.

In selecting the study participants, we made sure to maximize the variance within our sample to cover every aspect of our phenomenon of interest and ensure the generalizability of our study to other empirical settings (Gioia et al., 2013). Thus, we contacted entrepreneurs from both urban areas and rural villages, where the latter were more heavily affected by the civil war and saw more frequent rebel incursions but were subject to less stringent covid-19 regulations. Moreover, to complement the experiences of extremely poor micro-entrepreneurs, we included some participants having a slightly higher income level, which is a major determinant of resource availability. We also strove to include entrepreneurs who never participated in business groups/cooperatives and non-governmental programs, which enabled some of our study participants to leverage material and psychological support in the immediate aftermath of negative events. In addition, we interviewed micro-entrepreneurs operating in a variety of economic sectors. These include both the agricultural sector, featuring a traditionally strong presence of farming cooperatives and collective activities, and a variety of non-farm establishments ranging from petty-trading to production of small goods, which are generally operated by individual entrepreneurs with their families or a limited number of employees. Moreover, we attempted to maximize the variance in the gender, age, and level of education of our study participants, yet our final sample is slightly unbalanced towards women, young-to-middle age individuals, and people with a high school degree or less, as these demographics are dominant among the entrepreneurs in Buea. Lastly, we applied purposive theoretical sampling (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Gioia et al., 2013) by selecting study participants that could disconfirm the insights emerging from our early analyses. For example, as the topic of “loss

spirals" emerged, we sought to interview participants who encountered severe losses during our window of observation, including internally displaced entrepreneurs and those who suffered from personal crises such as the death of a spouse, the loss of a job, or health problems. Table 1 describes the demographics of our sample.

Table 1. Participants' demographics.

Gender			Age		
	Female	74		< 30	32
	Male	32		30 - 54	51
Group membership				≥ 55	23
	Yes	76	Education		
	No	30		No formal	33
Sector of business				Professional	16
	Farming	47		High school	43
	Other	59		University	14

We took two measures to ensure the integrity of our data and the subsequent validity of our analysis. First, as it is common when conducting qualitative research in unfamiliar contexts (Lindvert et al., 2017; Mair et al., 2012), we employed and trained interpreters to facilitate the communication between the lead researcher and the participants and help make sense of the data. The interpreters were young volunteers who had been living in Buea for some years at the time of the first round of data collection and were familiar with the problems affecting entrepreneurs in the area. They served the double purpose to help establish trust with the study participants, which is critical in crisis and poverty settings, and translate and clarify sentences when necessary. About 90 percent of the interviews were conducted in English, since South-West Cameroon is an English-speaking region, and only few study participants preferred to express themselves in the local Pidgin dialect. Second, to ensure the integrity of the data, we recorded and verbatim transcribed the interviews on the day they were conducted or on the following day, and analysed the data soon thereafter. We also redacted notes detailing our impressions after each interview and a daily diary with details of any relevant conversation we had with local public authorities, civil society organisations, and professors at the University of Buea. This enabled us to minimise recall biases (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) by making sure that

any relevant insight was recorded when it emerged.

3.3 *Analysis*

In analysing our data, we followed the well-established steps of open, axial, and selective coding as described by Gioia et al. (2013) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). During open coding, we read line-by-line each sentence reported by our study participants and coded each phrase related to the material and psychological impact of the crises, the participants' reactions, and the participants' motivations to (not) act. In open coding, we were careful to ensure the correspondence between the codes and the participants' original sentences. For instance, idiomatic expressions such as "managing from hand to mouth", indicating the struggle to live with limited income on a day-to-day basis, and "having no choice", expressed by those participants who felt overwhelmed by the crises and incapacitated to take action, were retained in our first-order codes. In total, we obtained 168 first-order codes capturing the whole spectrum of our participants' actions and experiences. This stage of the analysis involved limited interpretation of the participants' reports and most codes referred to factual experiences and actions lived by our participants, including, among others, "feeling depressed", "investing in the business", "abandoning home", and "reaching out to customers". Then, we sought similarities among the initial 168 codes to achieve a more manageable number of items. For example, all the codes concerning frustration and unhappiness with the situation in Buea were labelled "reporting frequent negative feelings", and the reports of different actions aimed at ensuring the stability of the business were combined under "setting up operational procedures". As a result of open coding, we inductively derived 30 first-order codes.

In the second step of the analysis, axial coding, we aggregated first-order codes into meaningful categories exemplifying the different aspects of the phenomenon under observation. To identify categories, we clustered first-order codes based on whether they were mentioned together or appeared in similar reports by two or more different study participants. For example, the codes "enacting trade-offs" and "getting used to danger" were grouped in the category "fighting

adversity" as both behaviours were performed by participants who were trying to react after experiencing adverse circumstances. In axial coding, we aggregated the 30 first-order codes into 9 second-order categories describing different behaviours entrepreneurs adopted in response to the crises. In constructing categories, we constantly iterated from the raw data to the literature to link our emerging concepts to relevant theoretical discussions and improve our understanding of post-crisis behaviours. For instance, drawing upon the discussion on the drivers of entrepreneurship in conditions of necessity (Dencker et al., 2021; McMullen et al., 2008), we distinguished between need-driven effectuation, a reaction to adversity stemming from the need to comply with immediate demands and involving the rapid use of all available means, and causal effectuation, a long-term entrepreneurial response leveraging personal resources to anticipate changes in the evolving environment. In a similar fashion, we found that some of our first-order codes echoed with COR theory's notions of protecting, acquiring, and developing resources, and further elaborated on how the three strategies are used in different and contrasting post-crisis behaviours. Our first-order codes and second-order categories are reported in the data structure in Table 2.

Table 2. Data structure.

1st order codes	2nd order actions	Aggregate behaviour
Not having the motivation to change	Persisting	Negative effectuation
Lacking funds and resources to invest		
Seeing limited options to adapt the business		
Repairing damages to keep operating		
Reporting frequent negative feelings	Adjusting to adversity	
Blaming external circumstances		
Adapting to the situation		
Limiting losses by avoiding risks	Protecting resources	
Substituting lost resources		
Seeking stability in an evolving environment		
Keeping up with strong obligations	Frenzying	Need-driven effectuation
Improvising with available resources		
Implementing frequent changes		
Reacting to (multiple) impending threats		
Enacting trade-offs	Overcoming adversity	
Taking advantage of limited synergies		
Getting used to danger		
Prioritizing potential gains over risks	Acquiring resources	
Complementing lost resources		
Seeking good short- and mid-term returns		
Leveraging unique resources	Renewing	Causal effectuation
Taking advantage of the evolving environment		
Combining resources through new ideas		
Carefully evaluating alternative options	Planning for future adversity	
Avoiding danger and uncontrollable situations		
Setting up operational procedures		
Building personal skills		
Combining personal and collective goals	Developing resources	
Fostering the value of the remaining resources		
Sacrificing short-term gain for long-term sustainability		

In selective coding, the third phase of our analysis, we built theory as to how and why entrepreneurs chose to engage in different post-crisis behaviours. To identify theoretical mechanisms, we categorized each study participant according to the behaviour(s) he or she predominantly engaged in at a given time. Then, we examined each participant's antecedents and self-reported motivations to entertain a given course of action, and sough commonalities and patterns recurring among the different entrepreneurs. Hence, we observed that we could largely predict the entrepreneurs' chosen behaviours by considering their availability of resources and the incidence of crisis-related losses on their resource bases. This insight enabled us to identify study participants who switched behaviours through time and sample new study participants that could provide additional information on the mechanisms driving behavioural changes. For example, when we noticed that the entrepreneurs who were worst-off after a crisis were most likely to adapt their businesses, we asked more questions about the impact of losses in our subsequent interviews. In this way, the topic of inefficiencies (Matos and Hall, 2019) emerged as a relevant determinant of loss spirals among extremely poor entrepreneurs. In addition, to examine whether our insight that losses may spur entrepreneurship was plausible, we purposively contacted internally displaced entrepreneurs, who had been heavily affected by the civil war to the extent that they had to relocate far away from their home place, and observed that their behaviour was more instinctive and risk-prone than the behaviour of their counterparts. Through these additional interviews, we inferred that prolonged loss spirals and inefficiencies cause entrepreneurs to move from "adjusting to adversity" to a more proactive behaviour of "fighting back" against negative circumstances, whereas hustles (Fisher et al., 2020) and ambidexterity encourage need-driven effectuators to shift to more long-term actions driven by a causation logic. We repeated the analytical steps several times, iterating from first-order codes to extant literature, theoretically-informed categories, and new data. We kept interviewing entrepreneurs until theoretical saturation (Gioia et al., 2013; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), when newly-selected study participants no longer yielded additional insights into our

phenomenon of interest.

4. Findings

In the following paragraphs, we illustrate the three post-crisis behaviours we identified through our analysis: negative effectuation, need-driven effectuation, and causal effectuation. The three behaviours differ with regards to the entrepreneurs' activities, driving motivations, objectives, approaches towards present and future adversity, and dominant focus concerning the use of resources. While describing each behaviour, we highlight the conditions under which entrepreneurs are likely to entertain a given course of action or interrupt it in favour of alternatives. All the names reported in the following paragraphs are pseudonyms.

4.1 *Negative effectuation*

Most of the entrepreneurs within our sample did not exploit opportunities, made minimal changes to their businesses, and attempted to continue their operations as if the crises did not happen. Negative effectuation entailed some coping attempts, such as adapting one's living standards to a decreased level of income, cutting unnecessary expenses, and implementing small price changes to match the evolving supply and demand. Yet, these actions were mostly driven by factors external to the entrepreneur rather than by the decision to actively exploit opportunities and grow one's resource base. Among the entrepreneurs who enacted negative effectual responses to the crises, we identified two sub-groups driven by different rationales and experiences of losses. While some entrepreneurs encountered heavy losses hampering their motivation and ability to organize against adversity, others suffered a relatively less severe resource depletion but were left with limited options to conjecture a response to the crises. Negative effectual behaviour entailed three sets of actions: *persisting*, the attempt to continue the businesses' operations without significant changes, *adjusting to adversity*, the process by which the entrepreneurs became accustomed to their new conditions, and *protecting resources*, the investment of efforts in avoiding and limiting future losses. In Table 3, we report exemplary quotes for each of these actions.

Table 3. Exemplary quotes from entrepreneurs engaging in negative effectuation.

Name	Background info	Quote	1st-order code	2nd-order action
Andreas	When the rebel raids intensified in the villages, Andreas interrupted his activity of solar panel installations and focused on electronics repairs, which have a much lower demand and profit margin. Andreas' previous investments in skills, activities, and material for electronics repairs foreclosed him the access to different sets of activities.	"When the crisis hit, I had to discontinue my activity of solar panel installations and focus on electronic repairs within the city. However, there is little demand and I do not know what to do other than trying to reduce costs and work more efficiently."	Seeing limited options to adapt the business	Persisting
Elsa	Elsa is an internally displaced tailor who had been moving from place to place for more than a year at the time of her interview. Since her resources had been significantly eroded during her diaspora and she was facing continuous pressures to keep up with financial demands, Elsa had been unable to implement any investment into her business.	"I used to live in one of the villages where there were frequent gunshots. The past two years have not been easy for me, as I had to relocate three times because of the clashes. I kept doing business, but it was hard to raise capital and the profits were low. Also, moving continuously has been expensive."	Lacking funds and resources to invest	Persisting
Carlo	Carlo, a barber whose shop was frequently visited by militaries and rebels asking for bribes, lamented he was forced to drastically reduce his opening times and his customers no longer had money to get a haircut and purchase his services. He also felt dis-incentivised to think about possible solutions.	"How can we do business when armed militaries keep running up and down the streets? The profits of my barbershop have fallen by two thirds, no one has money for my services now. I see nothing I can do."	Blaming external circumstances	Adjusting to adversity
Kesha	Kesha is an agricultural entrepreneur living in a village near Buea heavily affected by the civil war. Everything in the village, including Kesha's cooperative and market activities, was interrupted or slowed down when the rebels established a local base. The woman expressed frustration and discontentment with her situation.	"The market has been bad for the past two years, and I see no possibilities for improvement. Many things have stopped, nothing is progressing, and the crisis disrupted my market, my farm, and most of my activities. I have to put in more and more effort every day to keep going."	Reporting frequent negative feelings	Adjusting to adversity
Marianne	Marianne is a primary school teacher who used to run a small craft-trading shop as a side business before the civil war. She decided to sell out her business once her rising expenses made it difficult to keep sponsoring her children's school fees.	"In hindsight, I mismanaged the business. I was running low on cash due to all the expenses we had to endure during the war, and I needed some money to send my children to school, so I just closed and sold out the whole thing. Paying the school fees was more important than continuing the operations."	Adapting to the situation	Adjusting to adversity

Debrah	Debrah, an agricultural entrepreneur living in the city of Buea, witnessed a drastic drop in her market size followed by a sharp decrease in income. To cope with her evolving situation, Debrah decided to cut her expenses, lower her living standards, and scale down her business to limit further losses.	"The business and the market have been so slow that we are unable to keep up with our former living standards, hence we just focus on what we have. My children used to attend a high-quality school but they had to relocate to a more affordable one. I also cut my production to avoid waste and limit the losses."	Limiting losses by avoiding risks	Protecting resources
Sheila	Sheila received frequent loans and giveaways from her neighbours to keep running her poultry activity which had turned unprofitable during the civil war because of the decrease in demand for eggs and chicken meat.	"With the crisis, I cannot sell at a profit. However, I am able to keep the business going by taking several side jobs to raise capital and asking for help from friends and neighbours."	Substituting lost resources	Protecting resources

The “persistence” of the entrepreneurs’ businesses often had a negative connotation accompanied by such statements as seeing “no possibilities for growth” and “no options to adapt the business”. In many cases, the entrepreneurs’ decision to continue their operations without adapting was a direct consequence of the losses they experienced: even relatively non-traumatic yet disruptive losses, such as a lost market, may leave entrepreneurs with a feeling of “paralysis” and “lack of ideas” to react to a crisis. This was the case for Tyson, a laundry owner who was successful in 2018 and had a solid customer base consisting of both businessmen and party-goers. Yet, when the civil war reached Buea, most of Tyson’s usual customers fled the city and he saw no way to continue his business other than keep going with the ones who remained. Tyson’s lack of alternatives can also be explained by the large sunk cost of the investment he sustained in the laundry business, as the expensive machinery for washing, drying, ironing, and packing clothes cannot be easily redeployed into a new or different business.

> *Tyson: “Many of our customers have relocated away from Buea. We just keep doing business with the ones who remained, but things are moving slowly and demand for our service is decreasing. There is nothing we can do.”*

Often, the magnitude of the losses was the main determinant of whether the entrepreneurs were able to behave effectually after a crisis. Some losses, such as the loss of security forcing many people to abandon their houses and relocate elsewhere, had such a heavy impact that they entailed the erosion of large parts of local entrepreneurs’ resource bases. In several villages surrounding Buea, the fear of armed clashes, violence, and kidnappings was so high that almost all economic activities were halted for several months to avoid getting attention from the rebels. Many entrepreneurs left Buea and went living with their relatives, using a large amount of their savings to sustain themselves in their temporary place of residence. After returning to their houses, these entrepreneurs had limited financial means to invest in their businesses and often recurred to borrowing money from friends and relatives to resume their operations. Notably,

these entrepreneurs' losses had the double effect of causing a heavy burden negatively affecting motivation and encouraging the unaltered continuation of the business by limiting the options for resilience, in a way that effectuation, the act of building upon one's means, became detrimental to business growth. For some agricultural entrepreneurs, the situation was even worse, as their farms had turned unproductive in their absence and they had to waste time and resources to eradicate weeds and pests. The following quote is from Deetta, an agricultural entrepreneur who left her farm uncultivated for six months.

> *Deetta: "When the political crisis intensified, I and my family moved to Yaoundé [the Cameroonian capital] to avoid the clashes. We were doing nothing there, just living on our savings and waiting for things to improve. When we got back to Buea, we only had our farm. Everything had spoilt, and it took weeks of work to restart cultivating."*

Most entrepreneurs adapting negative effectuation adjusted to adversity by making sense of their losses and becoming used to operating under adverse circumstances. Although adjusting to adversity was to some extent helpful in coping with losses, it had detrimental effects on the entrepreneurs' businesses as it entailed frequent feelings of uncertainty, frustration, and helplessness, further building upon and fostering the entrepreneurs' inability to take concrete reactions. After being exposed to prolonged losses, some entrepreneurs no longer cared about profits but merely sought to attain some minimal income enabling them to survive. For instance, in the agricultural sector, several entrepreneurs had to sell their harvest at a loss as prices plummeted when the civil war broke out. The sudden and sharp decrease in income resulted in agricultural entrepreneurs losing confidence in their businesses, scaling down production, and shifting to self-consumption models, as Norah reports.

Norah: "The prices of vegetables have fallen fivefold. What we used to sell for 500 francs ($ 1) a bucket we now sell for 100 francs ($ 0.20). I have no idea if and how much I will be able to cultivate in the next planting season."

Getting used to the crisis also involved complying with new social obligations and demands from family, relatives, or the community. In these cases, social capital became a liability weighing upon the entrepreneurs' businesses and bringing additional demands for the entrepreneurs to fulfil. Some entrepreneurs did not experience heavy losses themselves yet felt compelled to divest from their businesses to look after their families and friends who suffered from the crises. Due to the widespread migration during the civil war, several entrepreneurs had to host their displaced family members at their houses and stretch their resources thin to accommodate a broad variety of demands. These entrepreneurs often prioritized helping their loved ones by catering for their immediate needs of nutrition, health, and safety over investing in the business to increase profits and gather new resources. Negative effectual behaviour was often driven by a desire for stability and resulted in business models that limited further losses but barely sufficed to provide for the entrepreneurs' and their families' survival needs. For instance, Mark, an agricultural entrepreneur who also works as a freelance plumber, decided to interrupt his farming activity after spending large sums of money when his relatives were displaced.

Mark: "This year I was unable to farm because my finances were really down. I had a lot of people who came living with me and we are struggling together to make it out of the crisis. My income from plumbing is barely enough to sustain us."

An important observation is that negative effectuation was often initiated by entrepreneurs who had sufficient capital to survive. Like Mark, some entrepreneurs had side activities they could use to maintain themselves after discontinuing their core businesses. Some other entrepreneurs attempted to wait for the crises to end while living off their savings as they felt that investing in their businesses could lead to potential losses and survival risks. The presence of a sufficient

resource base to ensure survival enabled the entrepreneurs to opt for actions aimed at reducing losses. Negative effectuation involved some actions aimed at protecting resources, such as lowering the price of the merchandise in the attempt to stimulate demand, cutting down operational costs, closing down the business temporarily, abandoning some of the highest-risk and capital-intensive activities, and dropping unnecessary expenses to adapt to the reduced level of income. However, these actions were only temporarily effective in preserving the entrepreneurs' resource bases and often resulted in further losses when additional adverse circumstances, such as rebel raids, curfews, and the covid-19 outbreak, arose on top of the initial difficulties. The focus on protecting resources is overall inadequate to organise against future adversity and based mostly on the possibility to fulfil current needs and the hope that current adversity will end. The following quote from Maude exemplifies the entrepreneurs' rationales to protect resources and attempt to limit losses.

Maude: "Several relatives have come live with us, posing an additional strain on our limited resources. The income I obtain from my farm is barely enough to feed everyone in the house, so I don't have much room for investing in the next planting season. We just struggle, cut expenses, and keep going."

Some entrepreneurs used social connections to acquire new resources that may compensate for the losses they incurred. This acquisition of resources was aimed at simply continuing the entrepreneurs' operations, rather than exploiting new opportunities. The support sought during negative effectual behaviours took many forms, including not only loans and financial giveaways but also aid through food and shelter. Yet, this support often was not beneficial from a business perspective. We found twelve entrepreneurs who received material or financial resources but felt dis-incentivized to invest in their activities as the support from family and friends substituted for the personal effort in running the business. In some cases, financial and material support only enabled entrepreneurs to continue otherwise dysfunctional ventures. Some other of these entrepreneurs sought fewer opportunities for profits and prioritized fund-

raising activities aimed at maintaining a sense of safety and a steady resource base. As an illustration, Adrianne, who relocated with her sister's family when her village was hit by the civil war, decided to give up most of her farming and trading activities because her sister would cater for most of her needs.

> *Adrianne: "Now that I live with my sister, she provides for my feeding and all of my basic needs. I no longer need to run my trading business, and I can farm much less frequently than I used to."*

4.2 *Need-driven effectuation*

"Need-driven effectuation" is a behaviour that entailed resilient actions aimed at growing one's business and securing new flows of income after crisis-related losses had been incurred. Need-driven effectuation comprised three sets of actions: *frenzying*, the engagement in multiple, simultaneous, and improvised activities in the desperate attempt to secure resources, *fighting adversity*, the implementation of practical and immediate reactions to recover from losses, and *acquiring new resources*, the search for additional and complementary material to revamp the entrepreneurs' activities. We found two different rationales for why entrepreneurs engaged in need-driven effectuation. Some entrepreneurs experienced heavy economic losses during the crises to the extent that they became financially unable to cater for themselves and their families. In turn, the extremely low level of economic resources motivated these entrepreneurs to look for support and implement changes in their businesses to realize some additional profits to fulfil their survival needs. Others did not encounter severe income shocks, yet experienced some losses that were disruptive in kind, such as a lost job or market, which prompted them to revisit their routines or adapt their business models to comply with the evolving environment. In Table 4, we report exemplary quotes illustrating need-driven effectual behaviours.

Table 4. Exemplary quotes from entrepreneurs engaging in urgency-driven behaviours.

Name	Background info	Quote	1st-order code	2nd-order action
Camilla	Camilla, an agricultural entrepreneur whose husband died in 2019, implemented continuous and substantial changes in her farm due to the rising risk of starvation for herself and her children.	"The crisis has been hard on me because my husband died recently and I have been catering for our children on my own. I had to make changes to my farm and switch to crops with a faster turnover so that my family would not starve."	Reacting to (multiple) impending threats	Frenzying
Jolie	Jolie, a trader, rapidly switched between the businesses of tomato trading and child clothes retailing as soon as the sales of her products gave early signs of decline. As she was living in poverty, the threat of the slight decrease in income was a sufficient motivation to reinvent her activities.	"When my customers started to buy less, it had become hard to keep the business going and cater for my child. To cope with the decreased demand, I switched from trading tomatoes, which are perishable and have a low margin, to retailing child dresses, which are safer and more profitable."	Implementing rapid changes	Frenzying
Effie	When the covid-19 pandemic hit her village, Effie, a callbox operator, leveraged her good customer relationships and the steady demand for phone services to adapt her business model and sell door-to-door mobile packages.	"With the corona crisis, people would no longer go out of their houses to purchase phone services and my business suffered a lot. However, since many people know me in the village, I was able to adapt and switch from a callbox to a door-to-door business model."	Taking advantage of limited synergies	Overcoming adversity
Jack	Jack is a consultant who welcomed several internally displaced relatives in his house. As he wanted to care for his extended family in the most efficient way, he decided to stay and keep working on his business, even though the area where he lived was being heavily targeted by rebel groups.	"The simplest way to cater for my large family was to stay and keep running my activities. However, the rebels established one of their bases right next to my home. I have been kidnapped five times since the start of the conflict."	Enacting trade-offs	Overcoming adversity
Demetra	Demetra decided to start a business as a walking saleswoman selling boiled eggs. During her activities, she was continually exposed to fatigue, harassment, and potential gunshots. Nevertheless, she coped with the danger as she deemed the situation in Buea safer than the one she experienced in her home village.	"When I moved to Buea, I had to start something with the few resources I had. This egg-trading business is not my first choice nor the safest possible option, but I experienced much worse while I was still living in my former village."	Getting used to danger	Overcoming adversity

Rae	Looking for ways to cope with her lost market, Rae was able to start a new commercial activity by leveraging resources and know-how from an NGO, switching from a perfume trading business to a poultry farm when the civil war hit her village.	"When the crisis hit my village, I could not continue selling perfume because the business had turned unprofitable. Then, I reached out to a local NGO asking for help and suggestions. They contributed some capital to purchase land and chicks."	Complementing lost resources	Acquiring resources
Anthony	Anthony, an artist and art dealer, witnessed a sharp decline in the demand for his works as his usual customers cut down unnecessary expenses during the crisis. He reacted by initiating an aggressive marketing campaign through word-of-mouth to grow interest in his venture, leveraging the recommendations from his friends in Buea and the surrounding area.	"I was having difficulties finding customers when the civil war broke out but I managed to recover well with the support and effort from my friends. They would often promote my services, refer me to potential new customers, and help out on Facebook and Instagram."	Seeking good short- and mid-term returns	Acquiring resources

For most entrepreneurs engaging in need-driven effectuation, financial hardship was the main motivation to adapt the business or start new activities. Several of these entrepreneurs reportedly struggled to cope with daily expenses or went without food for days at some point during the crises. In this context, frenzying involved seeking rapid and often temporary adaptations that may substitute for the loss of resources and help entrepreneurs bounce back to a sufficient income level to sustain themselves and their families. At times, experiencing income shocks did not directly endanger the entrepreneurs' survival but led to subsequent losses further eroding their resource bases. For instance, many of our study participants adopted need-driven actions after spending several months in a loss spiral. Other times, sudden and sizeable income shocks encouraged entrepreneurs to take action and make rapid changes to their businesses in the attempt to survive. This was the case for Rachel, whose inability to provide for her large family pushed her to seek opportunities for new investments.

> *Rachel: "When the crisis hit, my daughters became internally displaced and had to move back under my roof, thus I had to cater for 14 grandchildren staying at my house. It was necessary to expand my business, engaging in a range of activities from farming to trading and in-house production of household appliances."*

Some entrepreneurs felt a sense of urgency and started "frenzying" after experiencing losses that were moderate in magnitude but disruptive to their routines. For example, Alison lost her nursing job during the civil war and, after some weeks of inactivity, decided to start a food-selling business to achieve a more stable financial situation.

> *Alison: "When the hospital stopped paying us, I had to find an alternative source of income to keep on living. Then, I decided to start a food business providing sick people with homemade snacks and beverages."*

A key feature of frenzying is the instinctive adaptation of the entrepreneurs' businesses aimed at generating short-term income to fulfil immediate demands. Many entrepreneurs saw their livelihoods threatened and implemented changes to their businesses as soon as a crisis arose. In

doing so, need-driven effectuators also improvised with their readily available resources and rearranged or redeployed means in new ways to fit the evolving needs of their businesses. The resources with which entrepreneurs improvised included not only finances and business assets but also access to customers, labour, and intangible knowledge and expertise. As a case in point, Marie, who used to run a restaurant catering to the workers of a banana plantation, switched to a door-to-door drink-selling business soon after the plantation was shut down. In the process, she took some assets from her previous business, such as the cooking stoves and the established customer base, to use in her new venture.

> *Marie: "When the crisis hit, the banana plantation closed down and the former plantation workers could not purchase my food anymore. To survive I had to reinvent my business, be proactive, and start selling drinks door to door."*

Unlike negative effectuation, which involved adapting and reducing one's standards of living, need-driven actions generally featured significant efforts aimed at overcoming adversity. While negative effectuators merely sought new resources to compensate for their losses, need-driven entrepreneurs exploited limited synergies among their remaining resources to take advantage of opportunities for business adaptation and expansion. Need-driven actions involved the positive evaluation of scarce and readily available resources to conjecture fast responses to adverse circumstances. For example, in contrast to those who saw the school lockdown during the pandemic as a burden impairing their children's education and their families' financial stability, Alexis employed her children in a food business where they would walk around the village to sell fried chicken snacks.

> *Alexis: "I used to have a poultry farm, but when the crisis hit customers stopped buying chickens. When schools were locked after the pandemic, I got inspired to butcher and cook the animals myself and send my children to sell the finished product."*

A further component of fighting adversity, as opposed to merely becoming used to it, is the

willingness to enact trade-offs with the entrepreneurs' remaining resources and engage in potentially risky or dangerous behaviours. As part of their efforts to grow their resource bases, some entrepreneurs focused mostly on their immediate needs and neglected the long-term consequences of their decisions. As a result, these entrepreneurs were likely to engage in dangerous activities that directly exposed them to armed clashes, violence, or kidnapping. Some entrepreneurs engaged in dangerous activities after shortly considering the potential returns from their actions. This was the case for Moritz, who started a trading business on top of his farming activity when he realized that other farmers in his area were unwilling to take long trips to the city to re-stock fertilizer and equipment. Thus, he decided that the extra income from trading was worth the exposure to the conflict.

> *Moritz: "The farmers in my community did not want to travel to Buea amidst the gunshots and insecurity to purchase the material they needed. Yet, I needed extra money, so I started buying and reselling in bulk for my friends and acquaintances."*

An interesting remark is that entrepreneurs may behave resiliently and start fighting adversity after prolonged exposure to negative events. In fact, the experience of dealing with adversity is itself a resource enabling entrepreneurs to undertake more daring ventures. For instance, after experiencing protracted periods with limited financial resources, several entrepreneurs became more willing to undertake dangerous activities to try and improve their precarious situation. This was the case for Lenora, an internally displaced person who travelled frequently back to her village to source material for her trading business despite the frequent shootings and heavy presence of the rebels. Since she grew used to the danger, Lenora was willing to take continuous safety risks to keep her business going.

Lenora: "I frequently travel back to my home village, which is in a warzone, to purchase coconuts I can resell in Buea for double the price. Since I have been living there for some time after the conflict started, I am not afraid of potential dangers and I know how to mitigate the risk."

Overall, most activities of frenzying and fighting adversity were conducted with a focus on acquiring future resources with limited concerns for the entrepreneurs' safety and potential losses. The focus on "acquisition" is especially evident when examining urgency-driven entrepreneurs' behaviour with regards to support and resources from their friends, relatives, and stakeholders. Unlike non-resilient entrepreneurs, who sought to minimize current losses by protecting resources, urgency-driven entrepreneurs actively looked for resources complementing their available assets and enabling them to grow and invest in their businesses. A clear example is Leandra, an internally displaced person who set up a small tailoring station at her sister's house and used the protected environment provided to her to focus on her work and grow her business into a full-fledged workshop. This sharply contrasts with the example of Adrianne in the previous paragraph, who divested from her business after she could benefit from her sister's hospitality.

Leandra: "As an internally displaced person, it has been beneficial to live with my sister and her husband. They would provide food and shelter so that I could set up a small tailoring activity at their place. Then, I slowly managed to save the proceedings from my business and rent a workshop on my own."

A distinguishing point about the focus on acquiring resources is that acquisition efforts, even when stemming from or motivated by experiences of losses, were not limited to compensate for the losses by substituting for the depleted resources but often intended to grow the entrepreneurs' businesses and secure more consistent profits in the immediate future. Consider Kathleen, who was the victim of a major theft in her liquor shop, where the rebels stole most of the inventory and supplies. Rather than filing for bankruptcy or simply restocking, Kathleen reached out to her suppliers and renegotiated her contracts to arrange for the shipment of new

merchandise with more flexible terms of payment, improving her small shop's potential for growth in the short- to mid-term.

> *Kathleen: "One day the rebels came and stole all of my stocks. Thankfully, my suppliers understood the situation, agreed to ship new goods, and accepted to receive delayed payments. In the end, the loss benefited the business."*

4.3 *Causal effectuation*

The last type of behaviour we identified through our analysis is causal effectuation, the pursuit of long-term opportunities by exploiting complementarities among the entrepreneurs' (remaining) resources. Entrepreneurs who engaged in causal effectuation adopted three sub-sets of actions: *renewing*, the devise of new business models and solutions to adapt to the evolving environment, *planning for future adversity*, the careful evaluation of the long-term risks and benefits of investing in a given entrepreneurial activity, and *developing resources*, the attempt to maximize the value of currently held assets by exploiting their synergies and potential. As for the reasons why entrepreneurs engaged in causal effectuation, we identify two main sub-groups: some entrepreneurs retained a high motivation to invest as they encountered limited or no losses during the crises, whereas others experienced a significant resource depletion but were able to bounce back by leveraging their initially higher levels of resources. Although resource losses always involve some level of stress, trauma, and disruption, most synergy-driven entrepreneurs did not experience persistent threats to their safety and often faced several options as to how they could react after negative incidents. Table 5 further illustrates the different actions involved in causal effectuation.

Table 5. Exemplary quotes from entrepreneurs engaging in synergy-driven behaviours.

Name	Background info	Quote	1st-order code	2nd-order action
Jeff	Jeff, an IT service provider, witnessed a rising demand for his services as more business owners sought to increase their online presence during the covid-19 pandemic. This motivated Jeff to expand his company's portfolio and diversify into new services that could better meet his customers' evolving needs and demands.	"During the pandemic, we experienced a surge in our customers' requests. We decided to expand our offer from app development to websites, content management, and IT training. Customers kept coming and asking for more as they felt the need to adapt to cope with the crisis."	Taking advantage of the evolving environment	Renewing
Nelson	Nelson is an entrepreneur who started a consulting network providing support for farmers at a time when most individuals and cooperatives were interrupting their activities. Nelson invested significant efforts to craft a scalable solution to the farm-abandonment problem and ideate a business model which could gather attention and funds from potential investors.	"Other cooperatives and agricultural services were closing down, but we could leverage superior expertise and an inflow of capital from investors that we used to establish a foothold in the industry. We took advantage of the situation to secure competitive advantage."	Leveraging unique resources	Renewing
Carina	Carina, a restaurant owner who saw her sales sharply decline during the civil war and pandemic, spent several months doing research on how to improve her business, undertaking such actions as talking to her mentors, reading about ventures in different sectors, and praying for inspiration.	"I am always looking for opportunities to expand my business and go through these difficult times. Before I start a new venture, I always do careful research, reflection, and prayer about it. Eventually, I expanded into catering, baking, and farming since the crises started."	Carefully evaluating alternative options	Planning for future adversity
Warner	Warner, an agricultural entrepreneur, conducted extensive market research before deciding to expand his farm and cultivate additional crops for the season. Since Warner was aware of the risks related to the spreading of armed clashes, he took measures to prevent losing his harvest and investment.	"Before I went on with investing in my farm, I made several phone calls to my usual buyers and ascertained that they were still willing to visit my area to pick up the harvest. In this way, I avoided the inconveniences related to the buyers' fear of armed clashes."	Avoiding danger and uncontrollable situations	Planning for future adversity
Cedric	Cedric opened a restaurant business in spring 2020 when there was still considerable uncertainty concerning the civil war and pandemic. As he had been building skills by working as a chef abroad, the unfavourable economic situation of Buea did not discourage Cedric to open a new restaurant in the city.	"I matured four years of experience working as a chef in Dubai. When I came back, I knew things would be difficult because of the crisis, but that did not demotivate me to try and open a business."	Building personal skills	Planning for future adversity

Amber	When the rebels established a base in her village, Amber had to interrupt her tuber farming activity because of the rising danger. Leveraging her expertise, Amber decided to reinvent her business by switching from a tuber farming to a tuber processing and packaging activity.	"When the rebels set up a base in the road of my tuber farm, I had to stop working the land. However, I was able to profit from my expertise in the tuber value chain by switching to a safer processing and packaging activity."	Fostering the value of the remaining resources	Developing resources
Geraldo	Geraldo, an egg trader, chose to maintain the price of his eggs low despite an increase in supply costs as he privileged a trusted relationship with his customers over short-term profits. Geraldo secured some advantage over his competitors who eventually run out of business as some customers felt cheated by the increase in price and bought their eggs elsewhere.	“Due to the crisis, the cost of a carton of eggs has increased by 200 francs. Although some of my competitors raised their prices, I decided to keep them constant to foster the trust of my customers.”	Sacrificing short-term gain for long-term sustainability	Developing resources

The distinguishing factor of causal effectuation is the pursuit of synergies between the entrepreneurs' resource bases and the evolving environment. Causal effectuators take advantage of a superior knowledge base, market position, or unique resource combination to craft new value propositions and obtain an edge over their competitors. As such, these entrepreneurs aimed at rebuilding and renewing their businesses in spite of adversity. A handful of entrepreneurs did not suffer heavy losses during the crises but, due to their particular pre-crisis strategies and business models, benefited from the spreading adversity in the city of Buea. However, in most cases, synergies stemmed from both the entrepreneurs' resource bases and position in the competitive environment. For instance, Brian had been relatively lucky when the crisis hit Buea, as his appliances shop did not suffer drastic losses of material or demand and retained an affectionate customer base. Leveraging the relationships with his customers, Brian was able to identify a qualitative shift in demand, from high-end building material to cheaper solutions, and subsequently invest in a major overhaul of his pre-crisis business model.

> *Brian: "I had to restock my whole inventory as customer demands changed during the crisis. They stopped asking for high-quality building material and started requiring cheaper affordable tools. Luckily I was able to track the evolution of my stock, retain good relationships, and anticipate the change in demand."*

An important point is that causal effectuation should not be conflated with merely having a broader resource base than other entrepreneurs, as this behaviour involved purposeful actions aimed at building upon existing resources, creating new resource complementarities, and expanding new or existing business models. This is another differentiating factor from some negative effectuators who, despite benefiting from a broad resource base, were unable to take advantage of synergies, and some need-driven effectuators who only took advantage of readily available synergies with the limited resources they had at hand. At times, causal effectuators pursued new business ideas through active search and evaluation of different opportunities following a major loss or disruption in the entrepreneurs' previous activity. This was the case

for Richard, who used to own an international car-dealership business before the war broke out, but had to shut down his operations when the borders were closed and he lost three luxury cars that were confiscated in Nigeria. Uncertain as to what to do next, he talked extensively with his contacts in search of ideas and eventually decided to invest in a new greenhouse business using some land he owned and the knowledge from a friend.

> *Richard: "I happened to have some spare land I inherited from my parents. Since my former business was discontinued due to the borders' lockdown, I have been looking for ideas to start something new. Then my friend, who is an agro-technician, came and gave the idea to partner in a greenhouse business."*

Just as in Richard's case, causal effectuation often involved considerable planning and evaluation of different activities to better take advantage of synergies with one's (remaining) resources. Planning activities involved evaluating which risks were acceptable from a business perspective and striking a balance between potential gains, losses, and security risks. Measures to prevent losses and avoid dangerous or uncontrollable situations were implemented in most synergy-driven behaviours. Among others, Nelson, an agricultural consultant who had started his business soon before the civil war broke out, hesitated to expand in some rural communities around Buea because of security concerns. This stands in stark contrast with negative effectuators' attempts to eschew any type of danger and some need-driven effectuators' radical embracing of dangerous activities.

> *Nelson: "While expanding our venture, we had an eye on the security of our operations. Since we could not afford to endanger our staff, we opted to postpone operations in the worst-affected areas until the situation improved."*

In some cases, planning activities were initiated long before adversity spread in Buea. Some entrepreneurs had ideas they had been working on for some years, and the evolving environment or any loss they incurred did not prevent them from pursuing their plans. Other times, the crisis and the spreading adversity triggered the entrepreneurs' motivation to engage

in new ventures, make significant changes to one's business, or implement long-held plans. George, an entrepreneur who opened a food business using the proceedings from his fashion store and some land he inherited, saw the negative situation as an opportunity to try new things, realize his dream of owning a restaurant, and setting up a business that will flourish in better times.

> *George: "I always wanted to open a restaurant business. Now that I have some proceedings from my fashion store and own a suitable piece of land, I see it as the perfect moment to start. If I can get things started during the crisis, the business will take off and be perfect once the situation gets better."*

A focus on developing the entrepreneurs' pre-existing resources was transversal to the different actions involved in causal effectuation. Causal effectuators not only used resources as a starting point to ideate new business models to overcome adversity but also nurtured, redeployed, extended, and adapted resources as the new business models evolved. A clear example of this is Carina's use of resources as she grew and expanded her restaurant business. Facing a decline in on-site visits to her restaurant, Carina built upon the assets she owned to craft responses to the evolving situation. Carina found new uses for pre-existing resources by leveraging her cooking skills to diversify into baking and developed the value of her restaurant business by starting a farm and integrating organic crops and animal products in the value proposition of her service.

> *Carina: "When I look for investment ideas, I always start from the things I own and my areas of expertise and try to make the most out of it. The baking business makes use of and complements nicely my restaurant activity, whereas the farm allows me to deliver fresh and organic products to my customers."*

Most entrepreneurs who developed their resources also considered the long-term viability of their plans and the benefits accrued to their communities. For example, Henrietta, an agricultural entrepreneur who works as the main supplier for a Catholic enclosure, realized that

by expanding her crop portfolio and adding poultry to her business she could strengthen her market position and improve her customers' choices and convenience.

> *Henrietta: "With the war, it has become more difficult to travel out of the compound to purchase things, hence I decided to add corn to my farm so that my customers may move less. For the same motive, I also invested in a chicken farm to supply the compound with eggs."*

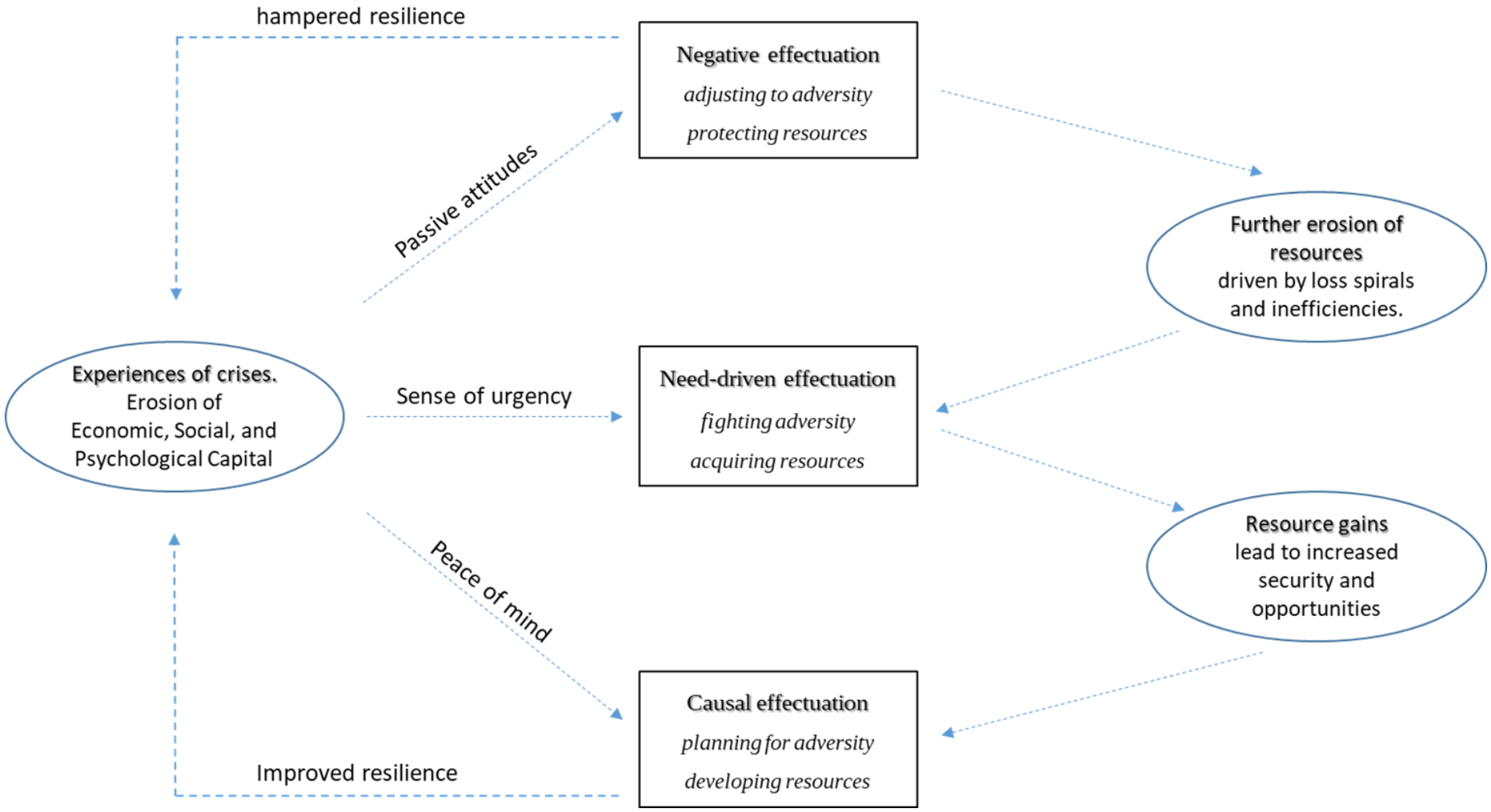
Lastly, the focus on developing resources, fostering long-term sustainability, and creating value for customers and communities was especially evident in causal uses of social connections. Although many social connections were lost or disrupted during the crises, causal effectuators invested significant efforts in growing their personal networks and reputation. For instance, Charles, an optician, started offering pro-bono services in collaboration with the local hospital and some NGOs in the attempt to expand his network, gain more referrals, and grow his business throughout the crisis. Although these actions did not have an immediate return, Charles hoped they would strengthen his foothold in the local community and increase the demand for his services.

> *Charles: "I started to collaborate with the hospital and offer my services for free or at a limited price. This pays off in the long run, as more potential customers come to know me and rely on me when they need my services later and in times of crisis."*

5. Discussion

We set out to investigate how entrepreneurs living in conditions of extreme poverty may conjecture responses to crises. From our grounded-theoretical analyses, we abductively derived a process model of effectual behaviour after adverse circumstances, which report in Figure 2 below. In the following, we expose how our findings add to the body of knowledge on effectuation and resilience.

Figure 2. Effectual behaviours and resilience in the aftermath of crises.



The entrepreneurs in our sample engaged in three effectual behaviours following adversity: negative effectuation, need-driven effectuation, and causal effectuation. The choice of engaging in a given behaviour depended upon the impact of the civil war on an entrepreneur's resources and the psychological attitude of an entrepreneur. Those who faced moderate losses but retained sufficient capital to cover their living expenses tended to slip into a passive mind-set, protecting their remaining resources and limiting future investments. Vice versa, the entrepreneurs whose survival was at risk engaged in riskier ventures that could yield them immediate returns to cater for themselves and their families. Lastly, many of the entrepreneurs who incurred limited losses or retained high amounts of capital engaged in causal effectuation, the expansion of their businesses in the pursuit of long-term opportunities for growth and profit.

We also identified two mechanisms by which entrepreneurs switch across effectual behaviours. First, entrepreneurs may switch from negative to need-driven effectuation after prolonged exposure to loss spirals and inefficiencies. Once their capital gets eroded and reaches critical levels endangering survival, entrepreneurs are motivated to start investing and adapting their businesses with any means necessary, switching from a focus on protecting resources to an attitude of resource acquisition and growth. Second, entrepreneurs may switch from need-driven to causal effectuation once they realize some profits through their business and are no longer at risk of survival. Causal effectual behaviour introduces aspects of causal reasoning by involving plans for future adversity and the exploitation of opportunities based on both the entrepreneurs' available means and their long-term vision and desired direction for the business.

An interesting point is that different types of effectuation affect the entrepreneurs' ability to be resilient in the face of subsequent crises. The entrepreneurs who engaged mostly in negative effectuation in the aftermath of the civil war were ill-prepared to face the covid-19 pandemic and kept behaving inefficiently when the second crisis arose. Conversely, the entrepreneurs who engaged in causal effectuation during the civil war were better equipped and prepared to deal with the pandemic and had more options to behave resiliently.

5.1 *Theoretical implications*

Our work has a number of implications for the theories of effectuation and resilience. First, the introduction of negative effectuation sheds light on the difficulties encountered by extremely poor entrepreneurs (Morris et al., 2020; Sydow et al., 2020) and the inefficiencies of running small businesses in developing countries (Matos and Hall, 2019). Specifically, while Matos and Hall (2019) ascribe the source of inefficiencies to either personal or environmental factors, we advance the view that inefficiencies may stem from poor entrepreneurs' inadequate resources and sunk costs preventing them from exploiting opportunities. In contexts of extreme poverty, not every entrepreneur can be an effectuator. In several cases, efforts to build upon available means may result in wasted energies (e.g. spending months eradicating weeds in a farm) or ineffectual actions (e.g. running a laundry business when customers have migrated far from the city). Under such circumstances, causal behaviour (i.e. starting new activities based on personal goals) may prove more effective than effectual courses of action.

An interesting remark is that, in several cases, the inefficiencies brought by negative effectuation spread across multiple entrepreneurs and communities. Once negative effectuators managed to raise capital to keep running their business and survive, this capital was often mismanaged and resulted in dysfunctional ventures or limited immediate sustenance for the entrepreneurs and their families. In the communities with a prevalence of negative effectuators, fatalism, the belief that one can do nothing to counteract adverse circumstances (Slade Shantz et al., 2018), interacted with the collectivistic Cameroonian culture by leading to collective resignation and discouragement in the face of crises.

Second, our study adds to the conceptualization of entrepreneurial hustles (Fisher et al., 2020) to navigate uncertainty and conduct business under life threatening circumstances. Fisher and colleagues (2020) identify hustles as actions characterized by urgency, unorthodoxy, and functionality in exploiting short-term opportunities. When exploring the construct in a Western context, the authors found that entrepreneurial hustlers are perceived to be more capable and

effective than their less brave counterparts. Our findings complement and contradict the authors' propositions, as we found that need-driven entrepreneurs have several distinguishing features from other types of effectuators.

In African contexts, hustlers are not necessarily seen as more capable than non-hustlers because hustling may be the only possible course of action for entrepreneurs who are striving to survive or perceiving a strong need to adapt their businesses. Hustlers are willing to stretch societal norms when they identify and exploit opportunities and open to a broader variety of entrepreneurial ventures. Need-driven effectuators tend to engage in activities that are riskier and offer potentially higher short-term rewards than those of either negative or causal effectuators. Also, hustlers are driven by perceived needs (Dencker et al., 2021) rather than actual negative circumstances, in a way that entrepreneurs may behave riskily even if they do not find themselves at survival risk. In context, hustles become instrumental to interrupting loss spirals (Hobfoll, 1989) when extremely poor entrepreneurs shift in mind-set from protecting the limited resources they have to convincing themselves they have nothing left to lose. In this way, need-driven effectuators may turn fatalism and collectivism (Slade Shantz et al., 2018) to their advantage by collecting resources for their ventures and exploit short-term opportunities with immediate benefits for their livelihoods.

Third, we make a contribution in conceptualizing entrepreneurial ambidexterity as the combination of causal and effectual reasoning (Sarasvathy, 2001). We found that most extremely poor entrepreneurs engage in effectuation, albeit often with limited or negative results, but after gaining some security and peace of mind they may start combining elements of causal reasoning in their ventures. Many of the entrepreneurs who boasted spare resources and were not at risk of survival engaged in causal effectuation, expanding their activities in a path-dependent fashion while working towards the long-term vision and objectives of their businesses.

Two important points can be noted from this. First, the entrepreneurs' well-being (Wiklund et

al., 2019) and peace of mind are important pre-conditions to the ability to function efficiently before, during, and after crises. The entrepreneurs who felt overwhelmed with fear or stranded with limited resources were unable to engage in causal effectuation and opted for inefficient or need-driven courses of action. Hence, entrepreneurs can combine long-term objectives while building on their available means only if immediate demands are not excessive and do not constitute a threat to their survival. Second, while the entrepreneurs' immediate reactions to a crisis are mostly driven by loss avoidance and attempts to minimize resource erosion (Doern, 2017), a fundamental shift of mind occurs when entrepreneurs start engaging in causal effectuation. After immediate and short-term demands are secured, entrepreneurs can shift to long-term behaviours aimed at ensuring the sustainability of their businesses and the achievement of competitive advantage in spite of adverse circumstances. In so doing, they overcome current adversity and build resilience against future crises and turmoil.

Lastly, our work explores the intersection between effectual behaviours and the ability to maintain functioning during crises. While most of extant literature has generally assumed effectuation is good for entrepreneurs (Fisher, 2012; Nelson and Lima, 2020), we found that effectuation does not always have positive consequences on the entrepreneurs' ability to adapt to adverse circumstances and prepare for future crises. In particular, negative effectuation, whereby the entrepreneurs' means constitute actual dis-incentives to exploit opportunities, can lead to long-term inefficiencies that spur from one crisis to the next, whereas causal effectuation, the ambidextrous use of means for sustained competitive advantage, can build poor entrepreneurs' ability to be resilient in the face of difficulties to come. Moreover, need-driven effectuation and hustles (Fisher et al., 2020) have proven useful to fulfil entrepreneurs' immediate demands after a crisis but inadequate to provide long-term competitive advantage.

All in all, we further the construct of resilience by introducing the boundary condition of survival risk during crises. Entrepreneurs who face crises while finding themselves in circumstances of extreme poverty often have limited choices as to how they can behave: they

either engage in need-driven effectuation or abandon their businesses and start begging their relatives and neighbours for material support. In the long term, these need-driven effectuators may switch to causal effectual behaviours after obtaining sufficient profits to avoid starvation and attain a secure livelihood for themselves and their families. Eventually, successful effectuation during the Anglophone civil war enabled several entrepreneurs to be adequately prepared to face the covid-19 pandemic, spurring resilience between the different crises.

6. Conclusion

Entrepreneurs living and operating in settings of extreme poverty face a number of challenges when it comes to securing resources for their operations and survival. This makes extremely poor entrepreneurs especially vulnerable to crises and adverse circumstances involving heavy erosion of means and resources. Drawing from the theories of effectuation and conservation of resources, we developed a model explaining how extremely poor entrepreneurs can overcome the difficulties they encounter during crises. We found two types of effectual behaviour, negative and need-driven effectuation, that are characteristic of entrepreneurs living in extreme poverty settings. Moreover, we identified the entrepreneurs' peace of mind and livelihood security as important antecedents to their ability to combine effectual and causal courses of action. Our work has important implications in understanding resilience in conditions of severe resource scarcity and life-threatening poverty.

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Discussion

1. Theoretical and practical implications

Taken together, the three studies included in this dissertation contribute to our understanding of the outcomes, dynamics, and antecedents of the entrepreneurial process in poverty settings. In the following, I do not repeat the contributions of each article but focus on how the dissertation as a whole seeks to advance our knowledge of entrepreneurship in low-income countries. Overall, this dissertation has several implications for scholarship on the social consequences of entrepreneurship, the tackling of societal challenges through business activities, the interdependence between entrepreneurs and their contexts, the role of institutions in the entrepreneurial process, the pursuit of opportunities in poverty settings, and the motivational drivers of poor entrepreneurs. In Table 1 below, I summarize the dissertation's contributions to each of these theories and thematic areas.

Table 1. Contributions by thematic area.

	Antecedents	
Thematic area	Opportunities in poverty settings	Drivers of entrepreneurial motivation
Key insights	- simple activities may have benefits for entrepreneurs and lead to subsequent opportunity exploitation (1st study) - entrepreneurs having more resources are not necessarily the best positioned to exploit opportunities (3rd study)	- the existence of opportunities for profit is often not a driver of poor entrepreneurs' decisions (1st study) - 'necessity' and 'opportunity' behaviours depend upon contextual circumstances more than individual motivation (3rd study)
	Dynamics	
Thematic area	Institutions in the entrepreneurial process	Contextual influences on entrepreneurs
Key insights	- institutions may draw legitimacy by contrast and juxtaposition with other institutions (1st study) - materiality influences individual decisions to change institutions; encounters lead to decisions to change (2nd study)	- materiality interacts with contextual prescriptions in determining entrepreneurial behaviour (3rd study) - contexts are multi-layered and prescriptions may change and interact at multiple levels of analysis (1st study)
	Outcomes	
Thematic area	Solutions to societal grand challenges	The social impact of entrepreneurship
Key insights	- poor individuals may turn from 'victims' to entrepreneurs and actively contribute to solving problems (3rd study) - solutions to grand challenges may emerge from the uncoordinated efforts of poor and marginalized individuals (2nd study)	- a business may have a social impact even if it is not in the intentions of the entrepreneur (1st study) - social value creation may come at a cost as entrepreneurs may alleviate some problems while aggravating others (2nd study)

The entrepreneurship literature has long shown interest in 'social' entrepreneurs, who 'explore and exploit opportunities to create social value by stimulating social change or meeting social

needs' (Mair & Martí, 2006, p. 37). Later research has further expanded upon how entrepreneurs can create different types of value, for instance, by catalysing attention to societal issues (Daskalaki, Hjorth, & Mair, 2015) or integrating sustainable and pro-social aspects in their business models (Dean & McMullen, 2007; McMullen, 2011). Moreover, social enterprises differ with regards to the scale of their impact (Smith, Kistruck, & Cannatelli, 2016; Smith & Stevens, 2010) and the extent to which they combine social goals with economic motives (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Ometto, Gegenhuber, Winter, & Greenwood, 2019). This dissertation provides some key insights enriching and extending the concept of social enterprise. First, concerning the motives of social entrepreneurs, the first study shows that some businesses generate positive societal externalities because of the entrepreneurs' social embeddedness and collectivistic pressures to share their wealth or help their loved ones in need. Similarly, the second study shows that positive externalities such as institutional change can arise through commercial activities even if the entrepreneurs themselves are not actively pursuing opportunities for social change. This extends the domain of social entrepreneurship by moving towards a relationally constructed view of opportunities for social value creation that does not focus on individual entrepreneurs but the collective pressures and demands exercised over local businesses. Second, the first and second studies also show that social value creation can have negative externalities, as some entrepreneurs fail to grow their ventures due to collectivistic norms or reinforce some societal problems as they attempt to tackle others. This indicates that social entrepreneurship is not always best for society and alternative forms of intervention, such as publicly-sponsored programs, might be more appropriate to tackle a certain problem.

Relatedly, in recent years, scholarly interest as to how businesses can coordinate and contribute to solving societal problems has significantly risen. Management literature defines grand challenges as 'highly significant yet potentially solvable problems such as urban poverty, insect-borne disease, and global hunger' (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016, p. 1113).

Grand challenges are complex and intertwined, involve complex interactions, and require the coordination of multiple actors to achieve a solution (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015). The societal problems of poverty, war, and discrimination discussed in this dissertation are examples of the impact of grand challenges on local entrepreneurs and communities. While entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as a process with a strong potential to contribute to solving grand challenges (Doh, Tashman, & Benischke, 2019; Markman, Waldron, Gianiodis, & Espina, 2019) and entrepreneurs have been found to collaborate and coordinate towards tackling grand challenges (Di Lorenzo & Scarlata, 2018; Grodal & O'Mahony, 2017), little attention has been paid to the role of ordinary and poor business owners. The studies included in this dissertation not only provide evidence that entrepreneurs can be victims of grand challenges (T. A. Williams & Shepherd, 2016) but also explore whether and when 'victim' business owners may bounce back from crisis-related shocks and behave entrepreneurially in the aftermath of losses. Based upon the findings from the second and third studies, I argue that the individuals experiencing psychologically heavy losses are less able to develop the reflexivity needed to act against grand challenges, whereas those who encounter materially disrupting losses are likely to engage in tackling societal problems. Policymakers and practitioners coordinating collective action may leverage this insight to ensure the collaboration of the poor and disadvantaged individuals most affected by grand challenges. For instance, I suggest that psychological counselling and relief programs aimed at overcoming shocks and stimulating reflexivity should be a priority in turning business owners from victims to entrepreneurs. Moreover, this dissertation raises questions as to whether and when solutions to grand challenges such as poverty and discrimination may arise from the efforts of poor and disadvantaged individuals seeking to improve their livelihoods rather than the coordinated action of more privileged actors, and how these 'bottom-up' solutions develop and evolve differently from more traditional 'top-down' approaches.

This dissertation also has implications for understanding the dynamic relationship between

entrepreneurs and their contexts. Entrepreneurs are embedded in networks of social relations, institutional structures, and geographical locations (Granovetter, 1985; Jack & Anderson, 2002; Steyaert & Katz, 2004). These features vary considerably across contexts so that theories generated from Silicon Valley start-ups may be completely unusable to explain entrepreneurial phenomena happening in different locations (Welter, 2011). Hence, research has increasingly focused on understanding the problems, challenges, and features of entrepreneurship in diverse and ordinary settings (Korsgaard, Ferguson, & Gaddefors, 2015; Welter, Baker, Audretsch, & Gartner, 2017). The studies included in this dissertation contribute to this perspective in two ways. First, they provide a dynamic view of contexts and examples of how contextual changes, such as the outbreak of a civil war or the decision to join a business group, may affect entrepreneurial behaviours. Specifically, the third study shows that external shocks affect not only resource levels but also contextual norms and prescriptions, for example, by spurring solidarity or leading to fear and uncertainty. This suggests that an important dimension of entrepreneurial contexts is the extent to which rules and prescriptions facilitate or hinder entrepreneurs' access to resources, and how resources, or their lack thereof, shape individual and collective beliefs on entrepreneurship. Although there exist some perspectives accounting for the materiality of entrepreneurship (e.g. Baker & Nelson, 2005; Venkataraman, Sarasvathy, Dew, & Forster, 2013), I contend that observing the evolution of resources through time and their interdependence with societal norms can help explain changes in contexts and entrepreneurial beliefs. Second, the three studies also provide a layered view of contexts whereby actions and variables at multiple levels of analysis mutually influence each other. This is most apparent in the first study, where participating in business groups and cooperatives reinforces the values of the non-farm and agricultural sectors respectively. From this finding, I would encourage scholars to adopt more fine-grained views of context, further exploring how multiple contexts may coexist and interact in a given empirical setting and the mediating role of groups, networks, and organisations in shaping contextual norms.

Delving deeper into this line of argumentation, institutional theory also discusses the coexistence of multiple contextual prescriptions (Currie & Spyridonidis, 2016; Greenwood, Díaz, Li, & Lorente, 2010) and the processes by which such prescriptions may change (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). The two phenomena are interrelated, as in conditions of institutional multiplicity individuals may change institutions by drawing upon the values and prescriptions already existing within different institutional arrangements (Furnari, 2016; Micelotta, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2017). Institutional theory also highlights how change is enacted through everyday practices and institutions are always changing as the meanings of different actions and objects evolve (Barley, 2008; Friedland, 2018; Zilber, 2016). The first study adds to this discussion by showing that the coexistence of multiple institutions is not always a reason for instability and change but may yield legitimacy to different social prescriptions. When considering agricultural and non-farm norms as institutions, each sector's prescriptions are reinforced by juxtaposition with the other sector's so that the contrast between 'dirty farmers' and 'do-nothing housewives' is often a source of pride for poor entrepreneurs subscribing to the two logics. The first and second studies also contribute to our understanding of the materiality of institutions by exploring how, in settings of poverty, individuals' decisions to subscribe to certain sets of norms are driven by an institution's system of incentives and the individuals' expected payoffs and desired life improvements. The second study further explores the link between cognizant decisions to change institutions and the evolution of practices through daily activities. Through encounters, individuals may move from passively reiterating institutional prescriptions to actively influencing norms and seeking change. Taken together, these insights imply that different types of institutional change may coexist and individuals and organizations who experience stronger constraints or face more incentives to pursue change will engage in more radical attempts to influence norms or escape societal prescriptions.

At the individual level of analysis, this dissertation has implications for the exploration of

opportunities in poverty settings and the motivations driving entrepreneurial behaviour. The entrepreneurship literature distinguishes between 'opportunity-driven' entrepreneurs, who initiate a business because they perceive opportunities for profit, and 'necessity-driven' individuals, who are pushed into entrepreneurship by their need for survival and the lack of alternative employment options (McMullen, Bagby, & Palich, 2008; Minniti, Bygrave, & Autio, 2006). This distinction is often conceptualized as dualistic and mutually exclusive, overlooking the coexistence of multiple motives to start a business and the processes through which necessity-driven entrepreneurs may realize profits and switch to opportunity-seeking behaviours (Sutter, Bruton, & Chen, 2019; C. C. Williams, 2007). The first and third studies contribute in this direction by showing that entrepreneurs may transition out of, or into, necessity conditions, according to the outcomes of their actions and the evolution of their contextual circumstances. These findings challenge the dualistic view of opportunity- and necessity-driven entrepreneurs and provide a more nuanced view on the multiple coexisting drivers of entrepreneurial behaviour. The first and third studies also indicate that, in poverty settings, the existence or lack of profitable opportunities do not always correlate with an individual's decision to start a business. Rather, engaging in entrepreneurship is determined more by societal norms, contextual and collective expectations, and evaluations of acceptable risks given an individual's needs and resource levels. This insight has implications for the conceptualization of entrepreneurial judgment (Foss, Klein, & Bjørnskov, 2019; D. W. Williams & Wood, 2015) by accentuating the role of individual challenges and characteristics in the entrepreneurs' decisions to initiate ventures in otherwise unfavourable contextual conditions.

Lastly, this dissertation sheds light on the features and nature of entrepreneurial opportunities in poverty settings. Alvarez and Barney (2014) discuss 'replication opportunities', consisting of the imitation of simple activities, such as animal rearing or petty trading, which are initiated by poor individuals in the attempt to make a living despite limited possibilities for profit and

growth. Similarly, Matos and Hall (2019) introduce the idea of 'non-productive entrepreneurship' to describe the condition of poor individuals who initiate a business when they face unfavourable circumstances and lack the necessary skills. While these studies provide a predominantly negative connotation of entrepreneurship among poor individuals, the first study included in this dissertation shows that even 'replication opportunities' can have positive externalities for an individual and lead to subsequent profit-oriented activities. This contributes to understanding the entrepreneurial process and the sequences of different replication, discovery (Shane, 2012; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), and creation (Alvarez & Barney, 2007; Alvarez, Young, & Woolley, 2015) activities as individuals mature skills and experience by engaging in entrepreneurship. This dissertation also highlights the need for more indigenous studies, theories, and methods aimed at unveiling the distinctiveness of entrepreneurial opportunities in poverty contexts. For instance, Dencker, Bacq, Gruber, and Haas (2021) argue that human capital is a key determinant of poor individuals' entrepreneurial behaviour, and (Rooks, Klyver, & Sserwanga, 2016) underline the role of collective pressures in shaping entrepreneurial opportunities. The first and third studies push these arguments forward by finding that sector-specific experiences and insights matter more than generic human capital for identifying opportunities and, in some cases, an entrepreneur's social context can entirely determine his or her decisions. Overall, the studies in this dissertation point out that simplistic theories of human, social, and economic capital are not adequate to fully capture culturally and historically situated phenomena of entrepreneurship in poverty settings, and high involvement methods, such as grounded theory, ethnographies, or relational approaches can be appropriate to unveil local entrepreneurial dynamics.

In conclusion, I initiated this dissertation intending to improve our understanding of the entrepreneurial process in low-income countries. Based on more than 200 grounded-theoretical interviews with poor entrepreneurs in South-West Cameroon, several conversations with local experts, and the monitoring of some regional news sources, I crafted three studies that provide

a number of insights on the antecedents, dynamics, and outcomes of entrepreneurship in poverty settings. The studies share the same empirical setting and similar methodologies, yet touch upon different aspects of the phenomenon and contribute to various theories. Each study also uniquely adapts grounded theory to fit the necessities of its research question. Beyond the contributions of the single studies, this dissertation has implications for the literature on social entrepreneurship, grand challenge research, entrepreneurial contexts, institutional theory, entrepreneurial motivation, and opportunity identification and exploitation. The three studies included in this dissertation also guide scholars and practitioners as to how they can tackle multifaceted poverty constraints and assist poor entrepreneurs in overcoming the harsh challenges they face in their everyday activities.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

09/2017 – 12/2021	**University of Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany**
	PhD in Management
	Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
	Advisors: Prof. Dr. Michael Woywode, Prof. Dr. Bernd Helmig
03/2018 – 11/2020	**ICENECDEV, Buea, Cameroon**
	Volunteer – Research Associate
07/2017 – 09/2017	**KIFAD, Bulabakulu, Uganda**
	Volunteer – Financial Empowerment
09/2015 – 08/2017	**Maastricht University, Maastricht, Netherlands**
	M. Sc. International Business – Strategy and Innovation
01/2017 – 07/2017	**Transsmart B.V., Tilburg, Netherlands**
	Business Development Intern
09/2016 – 01/2017	**Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India**
	Studies of International Business (Exchange program)
09/2012 – 07/2015	**IULM University, Milan, Italy**
	B. Sc. Tourism Management
12/2014 – 07/2015	**Booking.com, Milan, Italy**
	Thesis-Internship
06/2013 – 08/2013	**LEO Africa, Phalaborwa, South Africa**
	Volunteer – Ecological Conservation