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Types, determinants, and outcomes of entrepreneurial behaviours during crises

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurs usually have several means at their disposal to deal with and overcome adverse circumstances, ranging from simple non-resourceful coping strategies to more elaborate resourceful behaviours. However, entrepreneurs who find themselves in conditions of prolonged adversity and disadvantage have few effective possibilities to withstand sudden adversity such as crises and income shocks. Based on these premises, we develop theory on the types, antecedents, and outcomes of entrepreneurial responses to adversity by investigating how entrepreneurs living in conditions of extreme poverty may behave resourcefully while facing two major crises in a short timeframe. Through an analysis of entrepreneurship in South-West Cameroon, we identify three behaviours entrepreneurs enact in response to crises: passive, hustling, and future-oriented, which differ with regards to activities, driving motivations, main objectives, approaches towards present and future adversity, and dominant focus concerning the use of resources. We also find that entrepreneurs' enacted behaviours depend chiefly on the nature of the losses they incur and on the type of social capital they can avail of in the aftermath of a crisis. Lastly, we suggest that the different behaviours result in further changes in the entrepreneurs' resource levels, which subsequently influence the likelihood that entrepreneurs will shift between behaviours.

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Entrepreneurship; poverty; resourcefulness; crises; grounded theory; Africa; COVID-19

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurs may face different types of environmental constraints, including persistent adversity, long-lasting and largely stable conditions such as poverty, discrimination, and disability, and temporary adversity, which is typically sudden, has a contained time span, and includes crises such as wars, pandemics, and economic recessions (Shepherd, Saade, and Wincent 2020). When temporary adversity arises, those entrepreneurs who already have a debilitating condition are likely to be the ones worst affected by the change in environmental circumstances as they are usually at a disadvantage compared to their better-off counterparts (Miller and Le Breton-Miller 2017).

Entrepreneurs' possible responses to sudden adversity include both simple coping strategies, such as cutting costs or closing down their businesses, and more elaborate resourceful behaviours, which involve the unorthodox recombination of resources to take advantage of new or unexpected sources of value (Williams et al. 2021). Resources, defined as anything that entrepreneurs value and may use to attain their goals (Halbesleben et al. 2014; Welter, Xheneti, and Smallbone 2018), encompass not only economic means and physical assets but also human capital, socioeconomic

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status, access to social networks, and psychological states. Some examples of resourceful entrepreneurial behaviours are bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005), the act of making do, improvising, and recombining limited resources in unusual or unforeseen ways, effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001), the process of bringing new products and services to markets by building upon the means at the entrepreneur's disposal rather than breaking down his or her desired outcomes, and frugality (Michaelis et al. 2020), a tendency to conserve one's means and optimize the use and allocation of scarce resources. However, while there is evidence that entrepreneurs may react resourcefully to sudden adversity (Langevang and Namatovu 2019; Williams and Shepherd 2016a), research has still to investigate why entrepreneurs choose a given course of action when confronted with temporary constraints and how different uses of resources may prove beneficial or detrimental to entrepreneurs who already experienced persistent adversity before a crisis began.

For the purposes of our study, we consider resourcefulness, or its lack thereof, in the context of entrepreneurial responses to crises, which we broadly define as the set of actions, reactions, and behavioural changes enacted by entrepreneurs to anticipate, withstand, and recover from sudden adversity. For instance, we classify entrepreneurs who had creative business ideas but shut down their operations during a crisis as non-resourceful, unlike those who had relatively simpler ideas but made several changes and adaptations when sudden adversity arose. We also define the outcome of a certain entrepreneurial behaviour in response to a crisis as any change in resource levels an entrepreneur may have encountered after engaging in a particular course of action.

Between 2018 and 2020, we conducted 214 interviews with 151 entrepreneurs operating in the region of South-West Cameroon. South-West Cameroon is among the poorest areas in Africa and featured two major crises in the period under observation. First, a civil war between anglophone secessionists 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 abductive analysis, we identified three types of behaviours among the entrepreneurs we interviewed: passive, hustling, and future-oriented, 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 different types of entrepreneurial behaviours, their antecedents, their outcomes, and their interplay under conditions of life-threatening adversity.

Our key contribution lies in shedding light on the rationales of entrepreneurial actions in conditions of extremely limited resources and the resulting ability to withstand sudden and life-threatening adversity. While most literature on entrepreneurship in resource-scarce settings has highlighted the positive consequences of resourceful behaviour (Dew and Sarasvathy 2013; Nelson and Lima 2020) and improvising with limited resources at hand (Di Domenico, Haugh, and Tracey 2010; Janssen, Fayolle, and Wuillaume 2018), we warn that stretching limited resources thin does not always yield good returns and may hamper an entrepreneur's operations. Among the entrepreneurs we interviewed, only those who had a clear focus on increasing or developing their resource bases were successful in their businesses. Moreover, resourcefulness seems effective against prolonged adversity only when entrepreneurs keep a focus on the long-term sustainability of their businesses, rather than paying attention solely to the immediate problems and circumstances they are facing. Lastly, we found that the magnitude and kind of losses entrepreneurs incurred, the different types of social capital they availed of, the solidarity of their communities, and their varying level of resources were instrumental in determining the entrepreneurs' actions and their possible shifting between different behaviours.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. First, we shortly introduce the literature on resourceful behaviour in conditions of life-threatening poverty and extreme adverse circumstances. Second, we present our empirical setting, methodology, and analytical strategy. Then, we illustrate the three behaviours we observed among our study participants, their determinants, and their interdependencies. We conclude the paper by elaborating on how different behaviours may be

conductive or detrimental to survival and prosperity among poor entrepreneurs affected by crises and drawing implications for theory and practice.

2. Literature review

To investigate our phenomenon of interest, we draw mainly from the literature on poverty, crises, and resourcefulness.

2.1. Entrepreneurship in extreme poverty

Due to their dire financial conditions and multiple competing needs, entrepreneurs living in extreme poverty have limited means at their disposal to invest in their businesses compared to their richer counterparts and are at a continuous competitive disadvantage against their better-off peers (Bruton, Ahlstrom, and Si 2015). Specifically, extremely poor entrepreneurs have to deal with life-threatening scarcity, intense pressures in their finances related to non-business obligations, and the lack of a safety net in case of recession or business failure (Morris et al. 2020). In addition, extremely poor entrepreneurs' lack of skills, coupled with unsupportive or otherwise adversarial institutional environments, results in ventures that are often dysfunctional and insufficient to provide for the entrepreneurs and their families (Matos and Hall 2019).

Due to the life-threatening adverse circumstances they face, entrepreneurs in extreme poverty are obliged to behave resourcefully to survive and keep their businesses going. For instance, because of their numerous resource constraints, poor entrepreneurs are known to improvise with the limited resources they have (Baker and Nelson 2005) and utilize their scarce resources in ways that are unorthodox or unconventional (Sarkar, Osiyevskyy, and Hayes 2019). Moreover, extremely poor entrepreneurs are constrained in the extent to which they can plan their activities in advance and tend to act in effectual ways, attempting to make the most out of the limited and fluctuating means they have on a given day (Michaelis et al. 2020). A key characteristic of poor entrepreneurs' way of doing business is that they may start ventures or activities that are inherently riskier and more prone to failure than those of their richer counterparts because they see no alternative options to make a living (Miller and Le Breton-Miller 2017). Lastly, those extremely poor entrepreneurs who manage to succeed often do so by exploiting connections to charities, NGOs, or other associations that address the systemic challenges of extreme poverty (Sud and VanSandt 2011) or by relying on business groups and cooperatives that aid entrepreneurs shed against the risks of their ventures and enable them to pool resources and expertise (Castellanza 2022; Venkataraman et al. 2016).

2.2. Crises and entrepreneurship

One of the main theoretical lenses applied to the study of entrepreneurship during or in the immediate aftermath of crises is Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll 1989). COR theory is especially useful to understand entrepreneurs' uses of resources following adversity as it proposes rationales and mechanisms that drive entrepreneurs' motivations and behavioural shifts. 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). For instance, in the context of small and medium US enterprises exposed to natural disasters, Danes et al. (2009) found that the entrepreneurs more at risk of losing resources tend to take a more proactive stance towards adversity and obtain better financial results after a crisis occurs.

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). Empirically, in a study of small business performance in the aftermath of the 2011 London riots, Doern (2017) found support for resourceful behaviours among crisis-struck entrepreneurs, who engage in a variety of proactive behaviours involving the acquisition of new resources and the development of their extant resource bases.

2.3. Entrepreneurship at the intersection of poverty and crises

With the exception of a few studies, there is a dearth of research about how extremely poor individuals may behave resourcefully when dealing with crises. The insights emerging from this stream of research concern mostly the importance of the entrepreneurs' limited resource bases in determining the types of responses they engage in and the effect of market and institutional conditions in influencing the entrepreneurs' courses of action. For instance, in a study of disaster recovery after Peruvian mudslides, Nelson and Lima (2020) found that entrepreneurs' remaining resources are a core determinant of their recovery strategy because poor entrepreneurs affected by disasters tend to react and conjecture responses with the immediate means at their disposal. 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. The authors found not only that additional economic resources spur post-disaster growth but also that the effectiveness of financial incentives varies depending upon 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.

Some studies have taken a broader perspective towards poor entrepreneurs' resourcefulness amidst crises, encompassing not only financial means but also broader social and psychological resources. For example, in their studies of organizational responses to the Haitian earthquake, 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. Although these studies looked at intermediary organizations rather than at extremely poor entrepreneurs themselves, they demonstrate that entrepreneurs' breadth of social resources and ability to connect local knowledge with inputs from distant partners and suppliers are key to succeeding in the aftermath of a crisis. When it comes to psychological resources, Muñoz et al. (2019) showed that a long-term orientation and psychological preparedness can aid entrepreneurs deal with impending threats and unforeseen accidents.

Lastly, some aspects of poor entrepreneurs' behaviour in the aftermath of crises can be attributed to factors beyond the control of the entrepreneurs themselves. This is the case for entrepreneurs operating along the eastern border regions of the European Union, whose behaviour and market opportunities are strongly influenced by the extent to which border restrictions are harshly enforced and implemented (Welter, Xheneti, and Smallbone 2018). Taken together, evidence from these studies suggests that some poor entrepreneurs can be surprisingly resourceful when confronted

Table 1. Antecedents and outcomes of resourceful behaviour.

Article	Antecedent	Behaviour	Outcome
Matos and Hall (2019)	Mismatch skills/environment	Dysfunctional venturing	
Sarkar (2018)	Resource limitations	Bricolage	
Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017)	Lack of options	Risky ventures	
Sud and VanSandt (2011)		Reliance on NGOs and civil society	Systemic change
Castellanza (2022)		Reliance on groups or cooperatives	Rising out of poverty
Williams and Shepherd (2016a)		Reliance on international partners	Resource mobilization
Danes et al. (2009)	Risk of sizable losses	Proactive investment	Financial performance
Doern (2017)	Pre-crisis availability of resources	Resource acquisition and development	
Muñoz et al. (2019)	Pre-crisis preparedness and long-term orientation	Preventive measures	
De Mel et al. (2012)	Post-crisis availability of finances	Opportunity exploitation	Profit
Welter et al. (2018)	Availability of new and pre-existing resources following environmental changes	'Coping' or 'development' strategies	

with life-threatening adversity and that the success of entrepreneurial activities during crises depends on a variety of factors both within and beyond the control of individual entrepreneurs. In Table 1 below, we summarize the antecedents and outcomes of different entrepreneurial behaviours in conditions of poverty and crises that we identified through our literature review.

3. Methodology

We opted for a critical realist grounded theory approach drawing from Glaser and Strauss (1967), Langley (1999), Corbin and Strauss (2008), and Gioia et al. (2013). The need for grounded theory for our study is twofold: first, since there is a dearth of research on entrepreneurship in contexts of crises and extreme poverty, we need to establish what types of behaviour are relevant for the setting at hand grounded in empirical data, as the established theoretical concepts of frugality, bricolage, effectuation, and resourcefulness might not fully reflect the ways extremely poor entrepreneurs respond to crises. Second, grounded theory is an appropriate tool to extrapolate a theoretical framework encompassing different types of behaviours, their antecedents, and their outcomes. As a feature of our chosen approach, we strived to adopt our study participants' perspectives on the issue of resourceful 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 account for these into our analysis.

3.1. Empirical setting

In choosing our empirical setting, we needed to find a location featuring characteristics common throughout settings of extreme poverty, such as a high rate of necessity-driven entrepreneurship (Dencker et al. 2021) and formal institutions that are not well developed (Matos and Hall 2019), as well as having experienced a recent period of crisis. We chose Buea, the capital of the South-West region of Cameroon, for several reasons. First, entrepreneurship in Buea is similar to entrepreneurship in other poor regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as there are limited possibilities for public and private employment, many locals decide to start a business to make a living, and the majority of entrepreneurs operating in Buea run micro-enterprises employing at most one or two

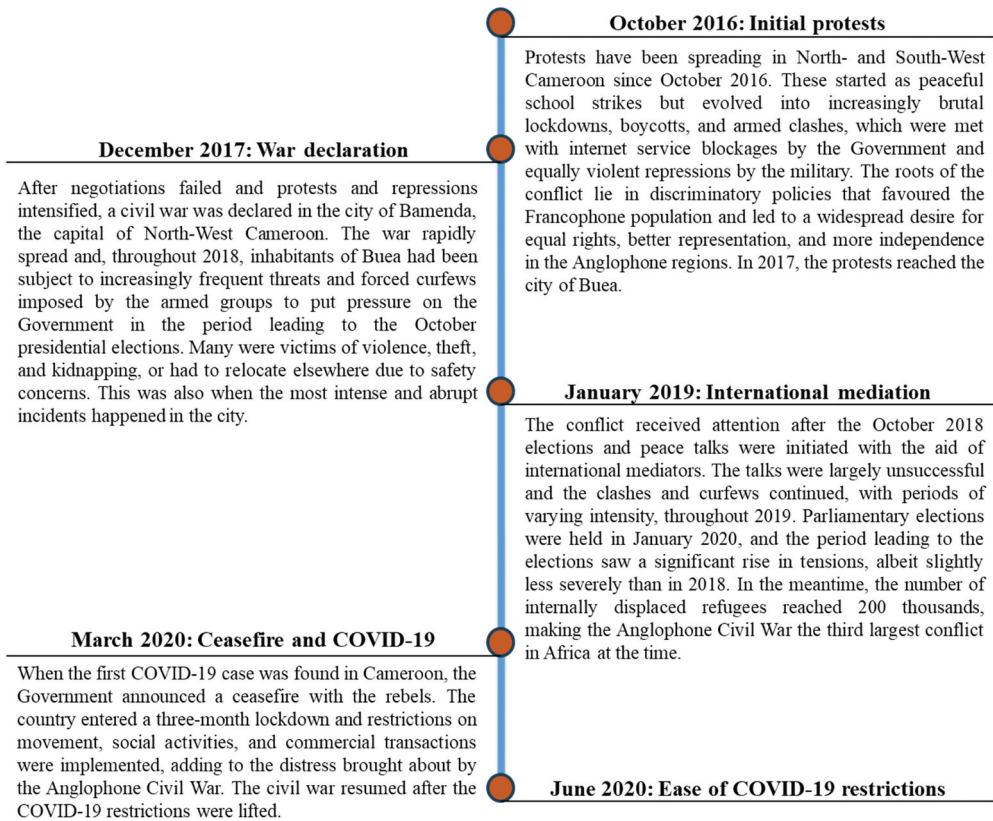


Figure 1. Anglophone Civil War and COVID-19 crises timeline.

employees. Second, since Buea is a relatively small city where there is no clear cut-off line between the urban area and the neighbouring agricultural villages (Castellanza 2022), we were able to obtain insights that are relevant across a variety of empirical settings. Third, South-West Cameroon is unique in that the region has witnessed two major crises – a civil war and a pandemic outbreak – in the period from 2018 to 2020. This enabled us to derive insights that are theoretically generalizable across different types of crisis and explore how responses to the first crisis facilitated or hampered an entrepreneur's ability to counteract the second crisis. In Figure 1 below, we detail a timeline of the key events affecting Buea during the period of our study and report the main differences between the Anglophone Civil War and COVID-19 pandemic.

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. 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. 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 observe 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. Then, in 2020 we conducted a second round of interviews with 106 entrepreneurs, of which 63 were repeated participants from the earlier round. These interviews were chiefly focused on the entrepreneurs' responses to the civil war and pandemic and are the main source of data we used for our analysis. In [Table 2](#) below, we detail the different sources of data we used and the main role each data source played within our analysis.

In many cases, it was impossible to contact the first-round participants because they had died, had relocated, or were otherwise untraceable. However, we contend survival bias is not a major concern as we can observe a wide spectrum of responses across entrepreneurs who were differently impacted by the crises. We also 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 organization, 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 actions 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 'resource 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 recovery strategies.

Table 2. Data sources.

Data	Period of collection	Purpose(s)	Main insight(s)
108 interviews with entrepreneurs	June 2018 - August 2018	Preliminary analysis	general assessment of entrepreneurship in Buea observation of early impact on businesses
15 interviews with local stakeholders (NGOs, public officials, field experts)	June 2018 - August 2018	Background information	general assessment of Cameroonian culture general assessment of policy frameworks
45 news articles 4 social media feeds of news organizations	September 2018 - May 2020	Monitoring	evolution of the civil war and pandemic
follow-up conversations with 10 entrepreneurs	September 2018 - May 2020	Monitoring Preliminary analysis	observation of early responses to the crises early conceptualization of behavioural types
63 interviews with repeated participants	June 2020 - August 2020	In-depth analysis Model building	conceptualization of motivations and drivers refinement of behavioural types early conceptualization of the interplay of behaviours
43 interviews with new participants	July 2020 - August 2020	In-depth analysis Model validation	refinement of motivations and drivers refinement of the interplay of different behaviours testing of boundary conditions
10 interviews with local stakeholders (NGOs, public officials, field experts)	July 2020 - August 2020	Triangulation Model validation	refinement of boundary conditions theoretical abstraction and generalizability

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 organizations, such as farming cooperatives and business groups, working with entrepreneurs in the area around Buea. The external partners provided continuous feedback concerning the evolving situation in Buea and the cultural aspects of doing business during the crises. Moreover, since most of these organizations 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 from both our partner organizations and the entrepreneurs we previously interviewed. We used snowball sampling mostly in 2020 to get in touch with some of the 43 new participants we needed for validating the emerging theory, as snowball sampling is appropriate when seeking specific participants to test a theory's mechanisms and boundary conditions (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2014). Specifically, we identified otherwise untraceable participants, such as internally displaced persons, entrepreneurs who had been particularly successful, and individuals who experienced heavy resource losses, which were fundamental in validating the relationships among the building blocks of our emerging theory.

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 theoretical generalizability of our findings to other empirical settings (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 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 programmes, 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. Lastly, 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

Table 3. Participants' demographics.

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

degree or less, as these demographics are dominant among the entrepreneurs in Buea. [Table 3](#) describes the demographics of our sample.

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, Patel, and Wincent 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, were familiar with the problems affecting entrepreneurs in the area, and received training from us before the fieldwork began. 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 in the few occasions when it was necessary. 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 organizations, and professors at the University of Buea. This enabled us to minimize recall biases (Corbin and Strauss 2008) by making sure that any relevant insight was recorded when it emerged.

3.3. Analysis

We analysed our data using MAXQDA 2022 and following the well-established steps of open, axial, and selective coding as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). 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 216 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 216 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'. As a result of open coding, we inductively derived 47 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 47 first-order codes into 15 second-order categories describing how the crises impacted the entrepreneurs we interviewed and the 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 entrepreneurial behaviours after the impact of a crisis. For instance, drawing upon the discussion on the drivers of entrepreneurship in conditions of necessity (Dencker et al. 2021; McMullen, Bagby, and Palich 2008), we distinguished between hustling resourcefulness, a typically short-term response to adversity stemming from the need to comply

with immediate demands and involving the rapid use of all available means, and future-oriented resourcefulness, a long-term 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 the notions of protecting, acquiring, and developing resources (Lanivich 2015), and further elaborated on how the three strategies are used in different and contrasting behaviours. Our first-order codes and second-order categories are reported in the data structure in [Tables 4 and 5](#).

Table 4. Data structure – effects of the crises.

1st order codes	2nd order categories	Aggregate dimension
Witnessing a worsening market structure	Sizeable losses	Varying levels of entrepreneurial resources
Experiencing theft and vandalism		
Losing will and motivation		
Fearing violence and infection		
Ramping up survival expenses	Disruptive losses	
Receiving requests for ransom		
Having irremediably ruined assets		
Employees and customers moving away		
Witnessing an improving market structure	Limited losses and marginal gains	
Realizing unexpected gains		
Gaining confidence in personal skills		
Experiencing charity and compassion	Opportunistic social capital	
Accessing borrowed assets		
Looking after internally displaced relatives	Negative social capital	
Feeling overwhelmed by the situation		
Having few remaining social contacts	Steady social capital	
Keeping a positive outlook		

Table 5. Data structure – entrepreneurial behaviours.

1st order codes	2nd order categories	Aggregate behaviour
Not having the motivation to change	Persisting	Passive non-resourcefulness
Lacking funds and resources to invest		
Seeing limited options to adapt the business		
Repairing damages to keep operating		
Reporting frequent negative feelings	Conforming 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	Hustling resourcefulness
Improvising with available resources		
Implementing frequent changes		
Reacting to (multiple) impending threats		
Enacting trade-offs	Fighting 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	Future-oriented resourcefulness
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 (Corbin and Strauss 2008), the third phase of our analysis, we built theory by identifying the relationships among the different categories we obtained from axial coding. To identify relationships, we categorized each study participant according to the behaviour(s) he or she predominantly engaged in at a given time, the changes in finances, physical assets, social ties, and psychological resources the participant encountered as a result of the crises, and the participant's self-reported motivation to entertain a given course of action. Hence, we observed that we could largely predict the entrepreneurs' chosen behaviours by considering the incidence of crisis-related losses on their resource bases and the type and availability of their socio-emotional resources. This insight enabled us to select new study participants that could provide additional information on the mechanisms driving behavioural changes and potentially disconfirm the emerging theory. For example, to examine whether the relationship between losses and resourcefulness 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 better-off counterparts.

We adopted an analogous process to theorize relationships among the three behaviours. First, we noticed that entrepreneurs engaging in similar behaviours would report comparable short-term payoffs. Then, we observed that these payoffs resulted in changes in the entrepreneurs' conditions, affecting their levels of financial, material, psychological, and social resources, and that there were a few entrepreneurs within our sample who displayed different behaviours at multiple points in time. By keeping track of how our participants' varying levels of resources influenced their actions (Langley 1999), we were able to isolate the roles of different types of resources in determining how entrepreneurs shift from one behaviour to another. Then, to validate our emerging theory, we sought referrals for new study participants who were known to have made drastic changes in their operations in the relatively short time span of the two crises. Through these additional interviews, we inferred that prolonged loss spirals and inefficiencies cause entrepreneurs to move from 'conforming to adversity' to a more proactive behaviour of 'fighting back' against negative circumstances, whereas newly gained resources and a less precarious condition may encourage hustling entrepreneurs to shift to more long-term resourceful actions. 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, Corley, and Hamilton 2013; Glaser and Strauss 1967), when newly-selected study participants no longer yielded additional insights into our phenomenon of interest.

4. Findings

In this chapter, we first illustrate the three behaviours that emerged from our data, and then present how varying levels of resources influence entrepreneurs' initial responses to crises and likelihood of switching between the three behaviours.

4.1. *Poor entrepreneurs' behaviours during crises*

In the following paragraphs, we illustrate the three behaviours we identified through our analysis: passive, hustling, and future-oriented. 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.

4.1.1. *Passive non-resourcefulness*

Most of the entrepreneurs within our sample made minimal changes to their businesses and attempted to continue their operations as if the crises did not happen. Passive behaviours 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 take advantage of market opportunities and grow one's resource base. Passive behaviours entailed three sets of actions: *persisting*, the attempt to continue the businesses' operations without significant changes, *conforming 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 6, we report exemplary quotes for each of these actions.

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

Table 6. Exemplary quotes from entrepreneurs engaging in passive non-resourcefulness.

Name	Background info	Quote	1st-order code	2nd-order action
Andreas	Due to rebel raids, Andreas interrupted his activity of solar panel installations and focused on electronics repairs, which have a much lower demand and profit margin.	'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'.	Seeing limited options to adapt the business	Persisting
Elsa	Elsa, an internally displaced tailor, had been unable to invest in her business after her resources had been significantly eroded during her diaspora.	'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'.	Lacking funds and resources to invest	Persisting
Carlo	Carlo lamented frequent visits by militaries asking for bribes and a sharp decrease in his customers' income as the reasons why he was forced to drastically reduce his opening times.	'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'.	Blaming external circumstances	Conforming to adversity
Kesha	Everything in Kesha's village, including her cooperative and market activities, was interrupted or slowed down when the rebels established a local base.	'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'.	Reporting frequent negative feelings	Conforming to adversity
Marianne	Marianne, a primary school teacher who used to run a small craft-trading shop as a side business before the civil war, decided to sell out her business once rising expenses made it difficult to keep sponsoring her children's school fees.	'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'.	Adapting to the situation	Conforming to adversity
Debrah	Debrah experienced a sharp decrease in income after her market size shrunk. She decided to cut her expenses, lower her living standards, and scale down her operations.	'We are unable to keep up with our former living standards, hence we just focus on what we have. I cut my production to avoid waste and limit the losses, and had my children relocate to a cheaper school'.	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. I only 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

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.

Most entrepreneurs adopting a non-resourceful passive behaviour conformed to adversity by making sense of their losses and becoming used to operating under adverse circumstances. Although 'conforming 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 actions. 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.

An important observation is that passive non-resourceful behaviours were often initiated by entrepreneurs who had sufficient capital to survive. 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. Non-resourceful behaviours 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 organize against future adversity and largely based 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.

Certain non-resourceful 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 operations, rather than exploiting new opportunities. The support sought 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 12 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 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, Adrienne, 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.

Adrienne: 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.

4.1.2. *Hustling resourcefulness*

Hustling resourcefulness is a behaviour that entailed actions aimed at growing one's business and securing new flows of income after crisis-related losses had been incurred. Hustling resourcefulness 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. In Table 7, we report exemplary quotes illustrating hustling resourcefulness.

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. 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, hustlers 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 passive non-resourceful behaviours, which involved adapting and reducing one's standards of living, hustling resourcefulness generally featured significant efforts aimed at overcoming adversity. While non-resourceful entrepreneurs merely sought new resources to compensate for their losses, hustlers exploited limited synergies among their remaining resources to take advantage of opportunities for business adaptation and expansion. Hustling resourcefulness 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

Table 7. Exemplary quotes from entrepreneurs engaging in hustling resourcefulness.

Name	Background info	Quote	1st-order code	2nd-order action
Camilla	Camilla, an agricultural entrepreneur whose husband died in 2019, implemented substantial changes in her farm due to the rising risk of starvation for her children.	'My husband died recently and I have been catering for our children on my own. I had to 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.	'When my customers started to buy less, it had become hard to keep the business going and cater for my child. Then, I switched from trading tomatoes to retailing child dresses, which are less perishable and more profitable'.	Implementing rapid changes	Frenzying
Effie	When the COVID-19 pandemic hit her village, Effie, a callbox operator, leveraged her customer relationships and the steady demand for phone services to adapt and sell door-to-door mobile packages.	'With corona, people no longer moved to purchase phone services and my business suffered a lot. However, I was able to switch from a callbox to a door-to-door model'.	Taking advantage of limited synergies	Fighting adversity
Jack	Jack welcomed several internally displaced relatives in his house. To care for his extended family in the most efficient way, he decided to keep working on his business even though the area where he lived was heavily targeted by rebel groups.	'When the rebels established one of their bases right next to my home, I had to stay and keep running my activities to cater for my large family. They kidnapped me five times since the start of the conflict'.	Enacting trade-offs	Fighting adversity
Demetra	During her activities, Demetra was continually exposed to fatigue, harassment, and gunshots. She coped with the danger as she deemed the situation in Buea safer than the one in her home village.	'I had to start something with the limited resources I had. This business is not my first nor safest choice, but I experienced worse while I was still living in my village'.	Getting used to danger	Fighting 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.	'When the crisis hit my village, my business had turned unprofitable. Then, a local NGO contributed some capital to purchase land and chicks and start a poultry'.	Complementing lost resources	Acquiring resources
Anthony	The demand for Anthony's works declined as his customers cut down expenses during the crises. He reacted with an aggressive campaign to grow interest in his products.	'I managed to recover with the support from my friends. They promoted my services, referred potential new customers, and helped on social media'.	Seeking good short- and mid-term returns	Acquiring resources

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.

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 hustlers' behaviour with regard to support and

resources from their friends, relatives, and stakeholders. Unlike non-resourceful entrepreneurs, who sought to minimize current losses by protecting resources, hustlers 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.

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 compensating 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.

4.1.3. Future-oriented resourcefulness

The last type of behaviour we identified through our analysis is future-oriented resourcefulness, the pursuit of long-term opportunities by exploiting complementarities among the entrepreneurs' (remaining) resources. Entrepreneurs who engaged in future-oriented resourcefulness adopted three sub-sets of actions: *renewing*, the devise of new operational 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. Table 8 further illustrates the different actions involved in future-oriented resourcefulness.

The distinguishing factor of future-oriented resourcefulness is the pursuit of synergies between the entrepreneurs' resource bases and the evolving environment. Future-oriented entrepreneurs 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 despite adversity. A handful of entrepreneurs did not suffer heavy losses during the crises but, due to their particular pre-crisis strategies and activities, benefited from the spreading adversity in the city of Buea. However, in most cases, synergies stemmed from both the entrepreneurs' resource bases and their 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 identified a qualitative shift in demand, from high-end building material to cheaper solutions, and subsequently invested in a major overhaul of his pre-crisis business strategy.

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 future-oriented resourcefulness should not be conflated with merely having a broader resource base than other entrepreneurs, as this behaviour involved purposeful

Table 8. Exemplary quotes from entrepreneurs engaging in future-oriented resourcefulness.

Name	Background info	Quote	1st-order code	2nd-order action
Jeff	Jeff witnessed a rising demand for his services as more business owners sought to increase their online presence during COVID-19. He expanded his portfolio and diversified into services better suited to his customers' evolving needs.	'We decided to expand our offer from app development to websites, content management, and IT training. Customers kept coming and asking for more'.	Taking advantage of the evolving environment	Renewing
Nelson	While most farmers and cooperatives were interrupting their activities, Nelson started a business that gathered attention from investors and tackled the farm-abandonment problem.	'We leveraged superior expertise and an inflow of capital from investors to establish an agri-consulting service'.	Leveraging unique resources	Renewing
Carina	Carina spent several months doing research on how to improve her business, talking to her mentors, reading about different ventures, and praying for inspiration.	'When starting a venture in difficult times, I do careful research, reflection, and prayer about it. I expanded into catering, baking, and farming since the war started'.	Carefully evaluating alternative options	Planning for future adversity
Warner	Warner conducted extensive research before adding crops to his farm during the planting season, accounting for the risk of armed clashes and future shifts in demand.	'To avoid accidents, I made several calls to my buyers and ascertained that they were still willing to visit my area to pick up the harvest'.	Avoiding danger and uncontrollable situations	Planning for future adversity
Cedric	Cedric opened a restaurant business in spring 2020, amidst the crises. He had been building skills working as a chef abroad and the situation in Buea did not discourage him to open a restaurant in the city.	'I worked for four years as a chef in Dubai. When I came back, the crises 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 reinvented her business by switching from tuber farming to a processing and packaging activity.	'When the rebels set up a base in the road of my farm, I was able to profit from my expertise in the value chain by purchasing tuber processing and packaging machinery'.	Fostering the value of the remaining resources	Developing resources
Geraldo	Geraldo chose to maintain the price of his products low despite an increase in supply costs as he privileged a trusted relationship with his customers over short-term profits.	'The cost of a carton of eggs has increased by 200 francs. Some of my competitors raised their prices but I decided to keep them constant to foster the trust of my customers'.	Sacrificing short-term gain for long-term sustainability	Developing resources

actions aimed at building upon existing resources, creating resource complementarities, and expanding new or existing operations. This is another differentiating factor from some non-resourceful entrepreneurs who, despite benefiting from a relatively broad resource base, were unable to take advantage of synergies, and some hustlers who only took advantage of readily available synergies with the limited resources they had at hand.

Future-oriented resourcefulness 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 future-oriented 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 non-resourceful entrepreneurs' attempts to eschew any type of danger and some hustlers' 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 future-oriented behaviours. Future-oriented entrepreneurs not only used resources as a starting point to ideate new activities to overcome adversity but also nurtured, redeployed, extended, and adapted resources as their operations 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.

4.2. Antecedents, outcomes, and interplay of different behaviours

Through our analysis, we identified two main factors that influenced crisis-struck entrepreneurs' courses of action, namely the nature of the losses they incurred after a shock and the type of socio-emotional resources they could avail of when recovering from a crisis. These two factors influenced both poor entrepreneurs' initial responses to sudden adversity and the likelihood that they would switch between behaviours as their resource configurations further changed after the initial responses.

4.2.1. Resource losses and gains

We found that the magnitude and kind of losses entrepreneurs incurred was the main determinant of the behaviours they subsequently engaged in. In general, each of the three behaviours – passive, hustling, and future-oriented – was encouraged by losses of different kinds. Hustling was typically caused by the gravest losses that were extremely disruptive to the entrepreneurs' businesses and routines, passive behaviours were influenced by losses that were sizable in magnitude yet contained enough that the entrepreneurs would still be able to conduct business as usual, and future-oriented

behaviours generally entailed losses that were limited in scope or afforded entrepreneurs opportunities to reconsider and revamp their operations.

The magnitude and kinds of losses also varied between the two crises and across urban and rural areas. For instance, the civil war affected predominantly the rural villages surrounding Buea where the rebels conducted frequent raids. 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' economic and psychological 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 places of residence. After returning to their houses, these entrepreneurs had limited financial means to invest in their businesses and often resorted to borrowing money from friends and relatives to resume their operations. The entrepreneurs who remained in Buea did not fare particularly better as they suffered from a severely reduced access to markets when many of their former customers moved away or 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 the region, 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. 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. Unlike the civil war, which had a strong impact in rural areas, the regulations pertaining the pandemic were predominantly enforced in the urban areas surrounding the centre of Buea.

Within our sample, the entrepreneurs who behaved non-resourcefully incurred losses that were, depending on individual circumstances, either sizable or less severe but leaving limited options to respond to the crises. 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 reacting, detrimentally to business growth. This is the case for Trevor, an entrepreneur who runs a tour operator organizing visits to Mount Cameroon near Buea but was unable to take any measures to adapt his business when the flow of international tourists visiting the region plummeted following the onset of the civil war.

Trevor: The business is stifling, and I see nothing we can do to improve our situation. Most tourists have stopped coming to the South-West Region when the war broke out, and we can only organize tours with the few brave ones who still visit.

For several agricultural entrepreneurs, the situation was even more severe, 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.

Typically, the entrepreneurs who engaged in hustling did so because of losses that were worse than those incurred by non-resourceful entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs were usually affected by the crises so harshly that they became unable to cater for themselves and their families. 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, thus relying on hustles. This was the case for Deborah, a woman who became internally displaced during the civil war and struggled to make ends meet yet successfully grew her business by partnering with her husband – who would source materials from the war zone for her to sell in her business in Buea.

Deborah: Since we were unable to cover the expenses for our children, we had to make some drastic arrangements. My husband decided to remain to work in our village in the war zone so that I could come and set up shop in Buea with the goods he produces.

An important point to note is that losses not only determined entrepreneurs' immediate responses to a crisis but also influenced whether they changed their behaviour after their initial response. For instance, we found many study participants who did not incur life-threatening losses immediately after a crisis, yet were subject to continuous loss spirals after behaving non-resourcefully for a protracted period. This happened, among others, to Latina, who tried to continue a business that had turned unprofitable for several months before deciding to shut down her operations and start over with a new trade in a different location. In her new activity, she made continuous changes and adaptations to fit with her customers' evolving tastes and invested significant efforts in acquiring resources.

Latina: Relocating and closing the business was not an easy choice, as we had to leave our house, farm, and social circles behind. However, the situation had become unsustainable. The business here is going well, I have been adding items to my offer frequently, and I plan to move to a bigger location as soon as I raise enough capital.

As for the reasons why entrepreneurs engaged in future-oriented resourcefulness, we identified 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 entrepreneurs in this group did not experience persistent threats to their safety and often faced several options as to how they could react after negative incidents. 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 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.

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 after the civil war arose. However, for a handful of firms, such as those operating in online sales and outsourcing of IT services, the pandemic and civil war entailed limited losses and even had a positive impact on demand. The entrepreneurs of these firms usually had several options to plan for adversity and engage in future-oriented resourcefulness, for instance, Lyndon, a mechanic, was able to relocate his shop to a safer – albeit less crowded – location and invest in online channels to retain his customer base and grow his business.

Lyndon: I was lucky enough that people still need car repairs, regardless of the war and pandemic. While my previous location had become somewhat unsafe, after moving here I have intensified my social media communication and online presence to keep the business growing.

Lastly, there were some instances of entrepreneurs who switched from hustling resourcefulness to future-oriented resourcefulness after successfully gaining resources through their businesses. In general, hustling can prove stressful for entrepreneurs and, although it usually results in recovery and growth after a crisis, it is rarely a desirable long-term course of action. An exemplary entrepreneur is Ernie, who was internally displaced during the civil war and engaged in a number of different activities after relocating, yet decided to set up an IT training centre as soon as he gathered sufficient capital. This enabled him to leverage his expertise in the field and build upon his pre-crisis career.

Ernie: I worked in IT services all my life, but I didn't have enough money to open a new business after I moved to Buea. I started several activities, such as door-to-door repairs and petty trading, before I was able to raise capital to rent this place and set up my business.

4.2.2. Types of social capital

A second determinant of entrepreneurial behaviour during a crisis is the type of socio-emotional resources entrepreneurs can avail of when they attempt to recover from a shock. Passive behaviours are often facilitated by social capital that is *opportunistic* in nature, as it allows entrepreneurs to appropriate resources from friends, relatives, and community members for persisting in running activities that have become inefficient and otherwise inadequate to face adverse circumstances. Conversely, hustling behaviours tend to be caused by a condition whereby entrepreneurs' obligations towards family, friends, and relatives outweigh the benefits they receive from these relationships, which we named *negative* social capital. Lastly, most entrepreneurs engaging in future-oriented behaviours were able to benefit from *steady* social capital that was either unaffected by the crises or afforded them new opportunities to rebuild their businesses.

Both the civil war and the COVID-19 pandemic had a substantial effect on the social capital available to the entrepreneurs around Buea. The civil war was particularly disruptive as it forced several entrepreneurs to relocate elsewhere, thus losing access to several of their usual contacts, or host their displaced family and relatives, thus incurring a significant increase in their livelihood expenses. The COVID-19 pandemic was to some extent less severe, yet its effects summed up to those of the already disrupted social relationships during the civil war. The restrictions put in place during the pandemic posed further stress on local entrepreneurs' social connections, as meetings were interrupted, business groups and farming cooperatives could no longer function, and the psychological and financial support offered by several NGOs was momentarily interrupted. The effects of the two crises on social capital also varied by sector. For instance, the farming sector was heavily affected, since farmers normally collaborate and share resources on a rotational basis during the planting and harvesting seasons but this was impossible during the civil war and the pandemic, whereas businesses with a less-intensive reliance on personal contacts were less severely impacted.

An important point to note is that *negative* social capital was present for both the entrepreneurs who hustled and those who behaved non-resourcefully. In many cases, social capital became a liability weighing upon the entrepreneurs' businesses and bringing additional demands for the entrepreneurs to fulfil. 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. There are entrepreneurs who behaved non-resourcefully because they 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. 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.

The difference between entrepreneurs who behaved non-resourcefully and those who hustled is that the obligations stemming from social relationships were significantly heavier for the latter group, often pushing them to look for ways to adapt or expand their businesses to cope with the increased demands from family and relatives. This was the case for Rachel, whose inability to provide for her large family pushed her to seek multiple unrelated 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.

Regarding *opportunistic* social capital, we found several entrepreneurs who neglected to invest in their business, or kept running activities that had turned unprofitable, because they could benefit from free support from their family, friends, or communities. A prime example is Adrienne, the woman who interrupted most of her farming and trading activities after her sister started looking after her, yet there are many others who felt disincentivised in growing their business after they received some form of support. For instance, Jeremy is an entrepreneur who used to raise and sell poultry for a living and, after getting some financial aid from his uncle, he used the money to cover some of his basic needs instead of revamping the business.

Jeremy: The business has not been going well during the crisis as the market for chickens has been shrinking. I managed to get some funds from my uncle and I plan to use them to supplement my income from poultry.

While social capital was of an opportunistic nature also for some hustling entrepreneurs who, like Leandra, the woman who opened a tailoring workshop while she was displaced at her sister's house, successfully leveraged their social connections when attempting to acquire new resources, opportunistic social capital was not a determinant of hustling. Most entrepreneurs started hustling after finding themselves in conditions of dire necessity – either because their funds became inadequate for survival or because they had to cater to several displaced family members and relatives – and subsequently were able to benefit from resources freely given to them by some of their social contacts. In other words, opportunistic social capital is akin to episodes of charity and compassion arising when seeing a loved one in need.

Overall, the relationship between social capital and passive and hustling behaviours is complex. We theorize that negative social capital can trigger either non-resourceful or hustling behaviours, depending on the severity of social obligations and the extent to which these endanger an entrepreneur's survival needs. Conversely, opportunistic social capital, which is often a factor enabling hustling entrepreneurs' resource acquisition efforts, can cause entrepreneurs to behave non-resourcefully when it substitutes for the need to invest in one's business or causes an entrepreneurs' survival needs to be fulfilled through non-business means. In support of these arguments, we found a number of entrepreneurs who had been hustling when they found themselves in dire conditions after the onset of a crisis, yet switched to non-resourceful behaviours after receiving gifts and giveaways from some of their neighbours or family members. A case in point is Natasha, an internally displaced entrepreneur who has been running several businesses in partnership with her husband after relocating to Buea. After her landlord learned about her condition, he decided to grant her free housing and financial support to feed her family, allowing her to discontinue most of her activities.

Natasha: Life has not been easy for us after we moved to Buea. We had to struggle and try a lot of businesses to feed ourselves and our two children. Luckily, after our landlord decided to help us by levying the rent and assisting with food, we have been able to reduce our activities. Now most of our income comes from my husband's carpentry, which is not faring too well.

Unlike non-resourceful and hustling behaviours, future-oriented resourcefulness was often facilitated by social capital that had only limitedly been affected by the crises and allowed entrepreneurs to leverage social connections in their business activities. Unlike opportunistic social capital, whereby entrepreneurs received free giveaways and support from their social connections, *steady* social capital involved active investments from the entrepreneurs in developing social relationships that could benefit the business in the long-term while also being mutually beneficial for the other party. For instance, in the case of Richard, the entrepreneur who started a greenhouse business in partnership with his friend after losing his car dealership, steady social capital enabled a prompt reaction and a carefully planned response to the losses brought about by the civil war. Other times, future-oriented entrepreneurs leveraged social capital in anticipation of long-term benefits for their businesses and the possibility to establish additional mutually beneficial contacts in the future. 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.

4.3. A theoretical framework of entrepreneurial behaviour under adversity

From our grounded-theoretical analysis, we abductively derived a model of entrepreneurial behaviour during adverse circumstances, which we report in [Figure 2](#) below.

The central elements of our model are the three behaviours entrepreneurs engaged in following adversity: passive, hustling, and future-oriented. The left side of the model depicts the impact of a crisis on the entrepreneurs' resources, which is the central determinant of their subsequent behaviour. The choice of engaging in a given behaviour depended chiefly upon the extent to which crisis-related losses disrupted an entrepreneur's business and whether the entrepreneur could leverage social capital after a shock. The entrepreneurs who faced sizable losses but retained sufficient capital to cover their living expenses tended to slip into a passive non-resourceful mindset, protecting their remaining resources and limiting future investments. Passive behaviours were also facilitated by opportunistic social capital, which allowed entrepreneurs to appropriate free resources from their families and friends. Vice versa, entrepreneurs whose survival was at risk, either because of personal difficulties or increased obligations towards crisis-struck acquaintances, started riskier ventures that could yield them immediate returns to cater for themselves and their families. Lastly, many of the entrepreneurs who incurred limited losses and were able to leverage their pre-crisis social connections engaged in future-oriented behaviours, expanding their businesses in the pursuit of long-term opportunities for growth and profit.

The right side of the model reports the short-term outcomes and interplay of different resourceful behaviours. To sum up, social capital and resource gains and losses also influenced whether entrepreneurs switched across different behaviours. First, opportunistic safety nets and gifted materials from friends and relatives enabled some entrepreneurs to avoid hustling and maintain non-resourceful behaviours that take advantage of their neighbours' compassion. Second, several entrepreneurs turned from passive behaviours to hustling after prolonged exposure to loss spirals and inefficiencies. Once their capital got eroded and reached critical levels endangering survival, entrepreneurs were motivated to start investing and adapting their businesses with any means necessary, shifting from a focus on protecting resources to an attitude of resource acquisition and growth. Third, some entrepreneurs switched from hustling to future-oriented resourcefulness once they realized some profits through their business and were no longer at risk of survival. Future-

oriented behaviours typically leveraged entrepreneurs’ newly-gained peace of mind, involved the exploitation of opportunities based on both the entrepreneurs’ available means and long-term vision for the business, and resulted in further gains in financial, material, social, and psychological resources.

5. Discussion

We set out to investigate how entrepreneurs living in conditions of extreme poverty may conjecture responses to crises. We found a typology of different entrepreneurial behaviours under conditions of adversity and developed theoretical mechanisms explaining poor entrepreneurs’ choice to engage in these behaviours. Our work has many implications for advancing the study of the antecedents, types, and outcomes of resourceful behaviours in conditions of adversity and contributes to the body of knowledge on resourcefulness, poverty, and crises.

5.1. Determinants of resourceful behaviours

Consistently with previous studies (e.g. Doern 2017), we found that poor entrepreneurs’ immediate reactions to crises are mostly driven by loss avoidance and attempts to minimize resource erosion. However, while most work on responses to adversity has investigated how individual motivations stem from the threat of potential losses, we have been able to observe how actual losses influence entrepreneurial behaviours. Namely, heavy losses are a strong disincentive to behave resourcefully and leave entrepreneurs with a sense of paralysis and inability to adapt their businesses. In our sample, the entrepreneurs who incurred sizable losses only made minimal attempts to cope with the crises and eventually failed to take advantage of changing circumstances. However, when losses were so serious as to be disruptive to poor entrepreneurs’ businesses and daily operations, the entrepreneurs were forced to hustle and improvise responses to the crises with the limited means remaining at their disposal. While COR theory predicts that the heaviest losses will result in dysfunctional behaviour (Hobfoll 2001), we observed that they instead led to responses to crises that were better to cope with short-term resource fluctuations and the immediate needs of entrepreneurs and their families. Based on this insight, future research on crises and entrepreneurship should pay particular attention to distinguishing between the expected and actual losses incurred by entrepreneurs.

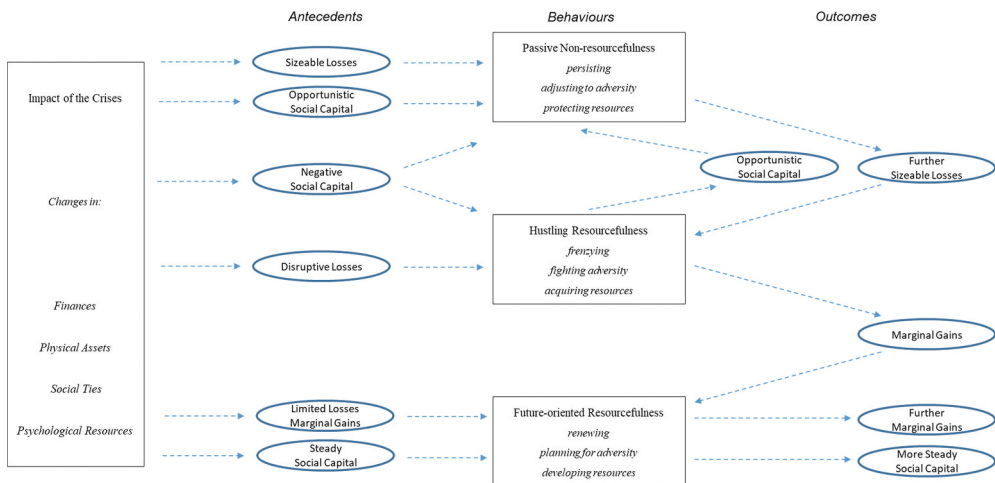


Figure 2. Antecedents and outcomes of entrepreneurial behaviours during crises.

A second surprising finding concerns the role of social capital in entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation. In the case of entrepreneurs engaging in future-oriented behaviours, a steady level of social capital in the aftermath of the crises was instrumental in enabling access to otherwise unavailable resources and becoming aware of opportunities and ideas to recover from the shocks. Likewise, social capital enabled entrepreneurs who hustled to leverage connections to friends and neighbours to borrow resources or draw from their community ties to gain customers and suppliers for their new ventures. These findings echo extant literature on the role of social capital among poor entrepreneurs and its potential to substitute for the limited economic and material resources available to the poor (Castellanza 2022; Venkataraman et al. 2016). However, we also found the possibility that social capital may hinder entrepreneurship and recovery from crises. When crisis-struck poor entrepreneurs have access to free resources and giveaways from their friends and neighbours, they are encouraged to persevere in businesses that have turned unprofitable or are otherwise inadequate to overcome adversity. Moreover, many of the entrepreneurs who had to look after their family and relatives who were displaced during the crises were led to behave non-resourcefully because of the need to divest from their businesses and cover the extra expenses they incurred. Overall, these findings highlight the need for further investigation into the complex relationship between entrepreneurship and social capital, with a specific focus on the conditions when social capital may become a disincentive to behave entrepreneurially or the obligations stemming from social connections outweigh their benefits.

5.2. Types of resourceful and non-resourceful behaviours

Our work also makes a contribution to understanding poverty and the rationales and constraints driving entrepreneurial behaviour in conditions of extreme adversity. In general, the poverty literature suggests that poor people are able to make do with the limited means at their disposal (Michaelis et al. 2020) and can generally be creative to overcome shocks and accidents (Nelson and Lima 2020) because living in poverty entails dealing with limited resources on a regular basis. However, since we found that most entrepreneurs in our sample behaved non-resourcefully when confronted with a major crisis, we believe the relationship between poverty and resourceful behaviour is more nuanced than was previously assumed. Namely, while poverty encourages resourcefulness when no crises are present, it also hampers entrepreneurs' ability to withstand shocks and temporary adversity. The scarce resources available to poor entrepreneurs limit their possible courses of actions and, from a psychological perspective, being used to the persistent adversity of living in poverty may encourage entrepreneurs to continue their activities when further adversity arises, behaving non-resourcefully in the hope that negative circumstances will improve on their own.

Relatedly, our work contributes to the conceptualization of hustling in conditions of extreme poverty. The entrepreneurship literature has highlighted that poor entrepreneurs tend to hustle much more than their richer counterparts due to the strict environmental constraints and resource limitations they face (Miller and Le Breton-Miller 2017). Fisher et al. (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. However, in African contexts, hustling may be the only possible course of action for entrepreneurs who are striving to survive. Hustlers are willing to stretch societal norms when they identify and exploit opportunities and are open to a broader variety of entrepreneurial ventures. In settings of crises, hustling is not overall more efficient than its alternatives, but it is distinctively unique in that hustlers tend to engage in activities that are riskier and offer potentially higher short-term rewards than those of entrepreneurs entertaining more traditional courses of action. Hustling is also a behaviour

that can be stressing for extremely poor entrepreneurs affected by crises and is often intended as a temporary measure to recover from adversity until a more stable solution is found.

5.3. Short-term outcomes and interplay of different behaviours

Our research has implications for applications of COR theory in entrepreneurship research and to evaluate the effectiveness of resourceful behaviours characterized by different uses of resources. While COR predicts the three uses of protecting, acquiring, and developing resources (Lanivich 2015) in the aftermath of crises, the theory has so far been silent as to how these relate to different resourceful behaviours. In this regard, we found that a focus on protecting resources is primarily associated with behaving non-resourcefully, a focus on acquiring resources is mostly adopted by those entrepreneurs looking for short-term recovery and gains, and a focus on developing resources is related to the attempt of obtaining long-term benefits from adverse circumstances. Also, our study is among the first to investigate whether resourceful behaviours with different foci will have different payoffs. Our findings suggest that COR theory can be applied to predict entrepreneurial performance, in a way that protecting resources results in loss spirals and inadequate responses to crises, whereas acquiring and developing resources lead to positive short- and long-term returns respectively.

Lastly, our work sheds light on the outcomes and interplay of different behaviours under conditions of adversity. Passive behaviours often result in a vicious cycle of loss spirals that erodes the entrepreneurs' resource bases and hampers their ability to face future adversity. However, as loss spirals become prolonged and the entrepreneurs' resources reach critical levels endangering survival, poor entrepreneurs are likely to switch to hustling behaviours involving abrupt changes to their business and the establishment of riskier ventures in the necessary attempt to make ends meet. While necessity is typically identified as a hindrance to entrepreneurship (Dencker et al. 2021; McMullen, Bagby, and Palich 2008), our findings indicate that being in a condition of extreme necessity may motivate entrepreneurs to proactively seek to exploit new opportunities and grow their businesses. Furthermore, although we have been unable to observe long-term performance in the years after the crises, our findings suggest that future-oriented resourcefulness yields better returns than hustling and non-resourcefulness. To extend the resourcefulness scholarship, which has been chiefly concerned with examining how the resources immediately available to the entrepreneurs determine their actions (Baker and Nelson 2005; Michaelis et al. 2020), we propose that the ability to combine readily obtainable materials to craft long-term plans and strategies might be central in determining the success or failure of resourceful behaviours.

5.4. Practical implications

Our work has several implications for the delivery of aid programmes and post-crisis recovery interventions in settings of extreme poverty. First, we advise organizations who aim to empower poor individuals through entrepreneurship to avoid free giveaways of monetary or material resources, as these tend to be used as safety nets rather than to invest in the entrepreneurs' business. Different solutions, such as loan programmes or tying the distribution of financial and material resources to short- and medium-term performance metrics could encourage poor entrepreneurs to invest these resources and become successful and independent of aid and donor organizations in the long term.

Relatedly, development agencies and aid organizations can make use of our findings to improve the selection of their beneficiaries and the delivery of their training programmes. Although it might be tempting to deliver aid and resources to all the entrepreneurs affected by a certain crisis, we found that resources received through friends, family, and neighbours were effective in fostering

resourceful behaviour only for those entrepreneurs who were in conditions of extreme necessity or incurred limited losses. Thus, we recommend aid organizations to prioritize the delivery of post-crisis support programmes to the entrepreneurs who have been worst impacted by a shock, rather than to the whole population of affected business owners.

Moreover, our finding that the different foci of protecting, acquiring, and developing resources result in distinct behaviours can be used to better understand the motivations of crisis-struck poor entrepreneurs and tailor training programmes to the necessities of each group. For instance, entrepreneurs who have an excessive focus on protecting resources might benefit from investment advice and encouragement, whereas those who focus predominantly on acquiring resources could be trained in business planning to develop synergies and complementarities among their different activities.

5.5. Limitations and further research

Our study is not without limitations. As it is common in qualitative and exploratory research, our findings do not offer statistical generalizability because our study participants were purposively selected to validate and (dis)confirm the emerging theory and they are not representative of the wider population of poor entrepreneurs affected by crises. Although we took measures to ensure the validity and reliability of our analysis and the resulting findings have several implications for entrepreneurship in conditions of extreme adversity, further quantitative research is needed to establish causal relationships between the antecedents, types, and outcomes of resourceful behaviours and to account for some of the elements of the Cameroonian context, such as its strong collectivistic culture, which might have affected our results. It is also possible that some variables for which we found no clear connection to resourcefulness in our setting, such as our participants' pre-crisis qualifications and human capital, might be stronger predictors of responses to crises among poor entrepreneurs operating in Western and non-African contexts.

Future research could also explore the relationships between resourcefulness and crisis-related concepts, such as resilience, the ability to withstand and recover from adverse circumstances (Williams and Shepherd 2016a), and preparedness, entrepreneurs' capacity to anticipate environmental jolts and take preventative measures (Muñoz et al. 2019), which we found did not resonate with the data we collected. For example, although the limited timeframe of our study did not allow us to observe long-term outcomes, it would be valuable to explore the long-term consequences of resourcefulness and whether resourceful behaviours are always more suitable than non-resourceful behaviours to recover from crises, or investigate whether entrepreneurs' pre-crisis resourcefulness during their everyday operations has an effect on their subsequent activities when confronted with adversity.

In conclusion, we further the construct of resourcefulness by exploring the boundary conditions of extreme poverty and life-threatening crises. Our study contributes to the literature on poverty, entrepreneurship, and crises by providing a nuanced model of entrepreneurial behaviours in a context of extreme hardship. Besides investigating the determinants as to how and why poor entrepreneurs may fail to behave resourcefully, we differentiate between hustling and future-oriented resourcefulness and delineate the unique characteristics that make these courses of action effective in the short and long-term respectively.

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Ethics approval

The requirement for ethics approval has been waived by the Ethics Committee of Mannheim University since the work involves interviews and does not significantly affect the study participants. All the study participants gave verbal consent to participating in the study prior to being interviewed and no study participant is identifiable through the manuscript.

Geolocation information

The data for this work was collected in an area within a 10 km radius from Buea, South-West Region, Cameroon (4.1566, 9.2627).

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