Antecedents of social enterprise creation at the Base of the Pyramid

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the emergence of social entrepreneurial intentions (SEI) of youngsters at the base of the pyramid (BoP). A small but growing literature is emerging at the intersection of social entrepreneurship and BoP perspectives. However, little is known about the emergence of SEI in this context. Drawing on a qualitative approach, our findings highlight perceived self-efficacy, self-fulfilment and reciprocity as important drivers of SEIs of youngsters at the BoP. At a practical level, our study also highlights how social support could aid to develop individuals' perceptions of their own capabilities and help them to project themselves as social entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurial intentions, Base/Bottom of the pyramid (BoP); qualitative study; perceived self-efficacy; social outcomes; social support

Introduction

There is a longstanding assumption that entrepreneurship and enterprise development contribute to economic growth (Schumpeter 1987). In recent years, this has led to a growing interest in entrepreneurship as a mechanism for poverty alleviation (Castellanza 2022; Dencker et al. 2021; Shepherd, Parida, and Wincent 2021) and there is a growing body of evidence to suggest it can indeed be a viable pathway out of poverty (Morris et al. 2022).

This line of thought is particularly relevant for base of the pyramid (BoP) perspectives as mechanisms for addressing poverty and inequality (Seelos and Mair 2007; Chatterjee, Gupta, and Upadhyay 2018; Morris, Santos, and Neumeyer 2018). The notion of BoP refers to the poorest segment of the income pyramid (Prahalad and Hart 1999). In 2017, this corresponded to about a quarter of the global population that lives below the 3.20 USD/day poverty line—just under 10% lives below the 1.90 USD/day mark for extreme poverty (World Bank 2020). Increasingly, BoP strategies focus on co-creating value with the poor and empowering them to start their own enterprises (Simanis and Hart 2008). Hence, creating social value is a major concern the BoP literature shares with the social entrepreneurship (SE) literature (Seelos and Mair 2005; Lashitew, van Tulder, and Muche in press).

Social entrepreneurs are typically seen as agents of change (Dees 1998), who try to bring about change by setting up innovative solutions to social, economic or environmental problems they identify by applying market-based solutions (Haugh 2007). For the purposes of this study, we define SE at the BoP as entrepreneurship aimed primarily at creating social impact for beneficiaries by engaging in commercial activity. Typically, SE is characterised by its other-orientation (Miller et al. 2012). In this regard, Morris, Santos and Kuratko (2021), argue that at its core, SE is a form of development and is guided by a philosophy of integral human development (Goulet 1995). SE has long been recognised to have an important role to play in facilitating community development and revitalisation efforts (Wallace 1999; Fowler

2000; Haugh 2005). For example, Claeyé, Brookes and Ramos (2020) show how a local social enterprise in South Africa is able to lift thousands out of poverty by providing employability training and channelling them into stable employment or creating their own businesses.

To fulfil its potential to bring about sustainable change, we need a thorough understanding of the processes that lead up to social enterprises making a positive impact. This includes understanding the antecedents of social entrepreneurial intention (SEI) i.e., an individual's "intent to pursue a social mission by starting a business or launching a social venture" (Bacq and Alt 2018, 334). In recent years, there have been a large number of quantitative studies into SEI (Zhang et al. 2021; Hockerts 2018; Wach et al. in press). Most of these were based on deductive theory building from areas outside of the SE domain. Moreover, much of what we know about SEI relies mainly on quantitative studies in affluent societies or more affluent socio-economic groups in developing nations. We know very little about SEIs of poorer segments of society. As such, we remain with an incomplete picture of the context specificity of SEI formation. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study addresses this gap by focusing on situated human actions and their meanings (Saldaña and Omasta 2018), and thus, moves away from variance-based approaches. This gives us a richer and more contextualised understanding of the processes and practices underlying SEI formation in the context of extreme poverty (Tracy 2020).

A small but growing literature is emerging at the intersection of SE and BoP perspectives (Agarwal et al. 2018; Desa and Koch 2014; Goyal, Sergi, and Kapoor 2017). This literature shows how SE may be a vehicle to alleviate poverty. Yet, the issue of how entrepreneurship is influenced by poverty has not been explored fully (Acheampong and Esposito 2014; Morris et al. 2022), and little is known about the individual entrepreneur in this context (Sutter, Bruton, and Chen 2019). We contribute to this line of research by investigating

inductively the following research question: *What are the antecedents of social entrepreneurial intentions at the base of the pyramid?*

If we consider entrepreneurship to be key to the emancipation of people at the BoP, we need a deeper understanding of how intentions to create enterprises (be it social or 'commercial') at the BoP emerge. This, in turn, may help to equip policy makers, civil society organisations or corporations to develop better strategies to stimulate and capacitate individuals and communities to set up and sustain enterprises so as to create a long-lasting solution to their poverty.

We investigate this question drawing on a qualitative study conducted in a local NGO, running a SE mentoring programme for the poor in Southeast Asia. We develop a grounded framework that clarifies the antecedents of SEI at the BoP and the dynamics between these antecedents. Our findings highlight the importance of social support in building self-efficacy and adds two concepts to the literature that emerge from the data: self-fulfilment and reciprocity. Our study shifts the theoretical lenses of SEI formation by highlighting expected social outcomes—self- and other-oriented—as a strong salient antecedent of SEI formation at the BoP. We also contribute to the general literature on poverty and entrepreneurship by highlighting other-oriented motivators (i.e., expected social outcomes) in addition to self-oriented outcomes (i.e., a desire to better one's income).

In the remainder of this article, we develop our argument as follows: first, we review the relevant literature on SEI and BoP perspectives. We then outline the methodological approach adopted in this study. This is followed by the presentation of the findings and the discussion thereof. We conclude with some implications and avenues for further research.

Theoretical framework

Social entrepreneurial intentions

Entrepreneurial intention (EI) has long been theorised to be the best predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour (Krueger, Reilly, and Carsrud 2000)—be it social or 'conventional'—and research supports the link between intention and actual entrepreneurial action (Kautonen, van Gelderen, and Fink 2015). Social entrepreneurial intention (SEI), i.e., an individual's "intent to pursue a social mission by starting a business or launching a social venture" (Bacq and Alt 2018, 334), has attracted increasing attention over the last fifteen years (Kruse, Wach, and Wegge 2021; Liñán and Fayolle 2015; L. P. Tan, Le, and Xuan 2020).

This literature has largely adopted the tools and concepts of conventional entrepreneurial models (L. P. Tan, Le, and Xuan 2020), with Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour (TPB) being the preferred purveyor (Kruse 2020). TPB suggests that individuals who have a positive attitude towards SE, who perceive the social norms toward SE to be positive, and who believe that they have what it takes (perceived behavioural control) to start and run a social enterprise are more likely to develop SEIs.

Mair and Noboa (2006) were the first to advance theoretical propositions about the antecedents of SEIs. Building on Ajzen's (1991) TPB and Shapero and Sokol's (1982) model of entrepreneurial event, they propose four antecedents to SEI. In their propositions they suggest two other-oriented antecedents of SEI: empathy—as a proxy to Ajzen's (1991) notion of attitudes toward behaviour—and moral obligation—as a proxy to Ajzen's (1991) notion of social norms. Together these shaped the perceived desirability of pursuing a social entrepreneurial career. In addition, they suggested self-efficacy and social support affect perceptions of social venture feasibility. Over the last decade, this model has been tested and extended by a number of scholars (Forster and Grichnik 2013; Hockerts 2017; Usman et al. 2022; Medyanik and Al-Jawni 2017; Ashraf 2021). For instance, Hockerts' (2017) findings

show that prior experience predicts SEI while self–efficacy shows the largest impact on SEI. Others added collective efficacy (Forster and Grichnik 2013), cognitive style (Tiwari, Bhat, and Tikoria 2017), personality traits (L. P. Tan, Pham, and Bui 2021) or altruism (Stirzaker et al. 2021) as antecedents to Mair and Noboa's (2006) model.

In addition to testing models developed outside the field of SE, researchers have also developed models for specifically predicting SEI (Kruse 2020). What is interesting here is that these models are largely centred on other-orientation as a key distinguishing characteristic of SEI (Grimes et al. 2013). Indeed, while EI is theorised to rest on self-interested beliefs and motives, it is argued that what makes SEI distinctive is its orientation towards a concern for others (Miller et al. 2012). For instance, researchers have shown how prosocial beliefs such as compassion (Miller et al. 2012; Grimes et al. 2013; Stirzaker et al. 2021; Yitshaki, Kropp, and Honig in press; Rieger et al. 2021), altruism (W.-L. Tan, Williams, and Tan 2005; Reynolds and Holt in press; Stirzaker et al. 2021), or empathy (Usman et al. 2022; Tucker and Croom 2021; Younis et al. 2021) shape SEI more than is the case in conventional EI.

While such prosocial beliefs might indeed play an important role as antecedents to SEI, at a fundamental level an individual's perception of her or his ability to perform an action is a crucial component of SEI. As is the case in the broader entrepreneurship literature (Zhao, Seibert, and Hills 2005), self-efficacy is a particularly important to EI and refers to "expectations of personal mastery that affect both initiation and persistence of behaviour" (Bandura 1977, 193). Applied to SE, it expresses the strength of an individual's "confidence in one's competences and abilities to perform SE activities" (Bacq and Alt 2018, 334). As such, it theorises that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to engage in creating a social venture. This assumption is well supported by the available evidence (Zhang et al. 2021; To et al. 2020; Hockerts 2017).

In addition to self-efficacy, the role of social support in enhancing individuals' SEIs has received considerable theoretical and empirical attention (Estrin, Mickiewicz, and Stephan 2013; Seyoum, Chinta, and Mujtaba 2021; Lan and Luc 2020). For example, Mair and Noboa (2006) state that successful social entrepreneurs rely on efficient networks and view social support as the trust and cooperation derived from these networks. As such, it is an enabling factor that facilitates the provision of resources needed to create a social venture. Yet, empirical evidence shows mixed results. For example, Seyoum and colleagues (2021) found a positive and significant relation between social support and SEI. Similarly, Yu, Ye and Ma (2021) show how family-to-work support promotes SEI. However, de Sousa-Filho, Matos, da Silva Trajano and de Souza Lessa (2020) caution that in lower income groups in developing nations perceived social support does not influence SEI, as individuals have low expectations on receiving support when resources in their surroundings are scarce. This is echoed by Usman et al. (2022) who found that the support from close ties has the least influence on young nascent social entrepreneurs in Pakistan.

What seemed more important in the case of Usman et al. (2022) is perceived social impact. They argue that individuals who are able to envision things from the perspectives of others are more likely to ascertain the positive consequences and impact of their actions on their beneficiaries. This was originally theorized by Tran and Von Korflesch (2016) who draw on social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, and Hackett 1994) and propose that expected social outcomes are an important antecedent to SEI. This is supported by Ip, Liang, Lai and Chang (2021) who found that outcome expectations act as critical mediators on SEI. However, both Usman et al.'s (2022) and Ip et al.'s (2021) studies do not take socio-economic status into account.

In fact, very few studies have considered this important contextual variable. For example, in their replication of Hockerts' (2017) study, de Sousa-Filho, Matos, da Silva

Trajano and de Souza Lessa (2020) highlight that in the case of individuals with very low income, empathy and perceived social support did not seem to be significant antecedents of SEI. This suggests that the results of the studies conducted in a high-income context are not always confirmed in a low-income context. This lack of theoretical consensus invites further research to deepen our understanding of the formation of SEI of less affluent segments of society, or, indeed, individuals living at the BoP. In the following section, we describe what we know about (social) enterprise creation at the BoP.

Base of the pyramid perspectives and (social) entrepreneurship

The notion of bottom or base-of-the-pyramid (BoP) refers to the lowest segment of the income pyramid, usually those living on less than 2 USD/day. Over two decades ago, Prahalad and Hart (1999) introduced the notion as a new promising market for multinational companies. Since then it has evolved from an exclusive emphasis on the business potential for multinationals to include perspectives on the entrepreneurial potential of the poor (de Soto 2000; Dembek, Sivasubramaniam, and Chmielewski 2020; Kolk, Rivera-Santos, and Rufín 2014), thus making the poor active participants in their socio-economic development (Simanis and Hart 2008).

Irrespective of one's socio-economic status, creating a new venture is a difficult undertaking, and even more so for those in living at the BoP (Morris et al. 2022). In addition to institutional voids (Davies and Torrents 2017; Mair and Martí 2009), the 'liability of poorness' (Morris et al. 2022), which centers on literacy gaps, a scarcity mindset, intense non-business pressures, and the lack of a safety net may pose additional challenges to enterprise creation at the BoP. Yet, despite these challenges, Morris et al. (2022) suggest that the most disadvantaged groups are also the most entrepreneurial. Acting out of obligation and constraint rather than opportunity (Slade Shantz, Kistruck, and Zietsma 2018; Banerjee and Duflo 2007), the poor start millions of ventures across the globe each year (Morris et al. 2022).

While some work has been done on enterprise creation at the BoP (Chatterjee, Gupta, and Upadhyay 2018; Rahman et al. 2015; Musona et al. 2021), scant attention has been dedicated to questions of SEI formation at the BoP. Therefore, in the following paragraphs we draw on insights from the general literature on enterprise creation at the BoP.

Recent studies at the intersection between poverty and entrepreneurship as well as studies focussing specifically on BoP entrepreneurs suggest that exogenous factors may act as triggers for entrepreneurial action (Kapasi et al. 2022; Yessoufou, Blok, and Omta 2018; Venugopal, Viswanathan, and Jung 2015; Marti, Courpasson, and Dubard Barbosa 2013; Shepherd and Williams 2020). For example, Yessoufou et al. (2018) propose that entrepreneurial processes at the BoP emerge primarily from challenging circumstances and disruptive events. Similarly, Venugopal et al. (2015) show how chronic consumption constraints amplify EI. Investigating subsistence entrepreneurs in Ghana, Acheampong and Esposito (2014) found that psychodynamic factors such as current economic circumstances, are more critical than trait factors as drivers of entrepreneurship. George et al. (2016) highlight how loss of social structure may act as a significant trigger that pushes people at the BoP towards entrepreneurial activity.

In addition to the push perspective outlined above, reducing economic vulnerability and the search for a sustainable livelihood is an important consideration (Verrest 2013). As such, research has shown that the search for reasonable income gain is a key driver of entrepreneurial action at subsistence level (George et al. 2016). This is echoed by Yessoufou et al. (2018), who contend that fulfilment of needs and bettering one's income are important drivers for BoP entrepreneurs. In addition to pecuniary outcomes, Tobias, Mair and Barbosa-Leiker (2013) as well as Kapasi, Stirzaker, Galloway, Jackman and Mihut (2022) highlight the role perceptions of increased quality of life, well-being and personal interest may play in shaping EI of the poor.

Achieving such outcomes will be dependent on, inter alia, the cognitive skills of the actors involved (Schjoedt and Shaver 2020). As highlighted above, self-efficacy (Bandura 1977) is an important antecedent to SEI and EI in general. However, research suggests that economically disadvantaged communities often suffer from deficits in self-efficacy (Krueger and Brazeal 1994; Kushnirovich, Heilbrunn, and Davidovich 2018). For instance, research on the psychology of poverty has shown that it has detrimental effects on, amongst other things, individuals' sense of self-efficacy (Carr 2013; Haushofer 2013; Sheehy-Skeffington 2020). As such, it may undermine people's goal-directed behaviours (Haushofer and Fehr 2014), such as social venture creation. However, research suggests this may be overcome through targeted training. Venugopal et al. (2015) report how marketplace literacy education enhances perceived self-efficacy. Similarly, Barrios et al. (2019) highlight how training impacts on the hope levels of subsistence entrepreneurs and enhances their business goal attainment perception levels.

Research has also shown that the poor tend to be risk averse, inhibiting their propensity to act upon entrepreneurial opportunities. Cieslik and D'Aoust (2018) found that farmers in Burundi living close to subsistence level are more risk averse in their decision-making and less likely to pursue entrepreneurial livelihood strategies. They also found that this risk effect is mitigated by the participation in formal and informal networks. Similarly, Yessoufou et al. (2018) suggest that the stronger the BoP entrepreneurs' ability to identify and create supportive networks, the more likely they are to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. They also highlight the importance of role models. Studying a successful social entrepreneur in a Latin American shantytown, Martin de Holan et al.(2019) show how 'known strangers' play a significant role in helping low-power actors to develop future-oriented projective agency, and in the case at hand, become social entrepreneurs. However, in the Indian context, Sarkar et al. (2018) found that greater differentiation into social or religious groups curtails the ability to cross the

entrepreneurial threshold, presumably by limiting the extent and benefits of social networks of value for entrepreneurship.

The empirical studies discussed above converge around the importance of push factors (current circumstances), the desire to better one's income and social networks as enhancers of EIs of poor individuals. They also show how risk aversion and low perceived self-efficacy may act as inhibitors of EIs. Some divergences can be drawn here with our earlier discussion on SEI.

A first divergence, between EI and SEI can be found in what pushes or pulls nascent entrepreneurs to create. Typically, social entrepreneurs are motivated by an opportunity to make some social improvement that is often personally meaningful to them (Stirzaker et al. 2021). In contrast, entrepreneurship at the BoP tends to be more necessity-driven (Amorós and Cristi 2011; Amorós et al. 2021), i.e., driven by the need to overcome a certain adversity.

Second, while there is some overlap in terms of the importance of social support, there might be some digression in terms of self- and other-orientation as motivators of entrepreneurial behaviour at the BoP. In a context of extreme poverty self-oriented motivators (e.g., a desire to better one's income) might be a stronger driver of entrepreneurial behaviour than other-oriented motivations as SEI literature suggests (Miller et al. 2012). As such, the expected outcomes of venture creation might be more self-oriented. Finally, self-efficacy is seen as a strong predictor of SEI. However, the literature on the psychology of poverty suggests that perceived self-efficacy might be lower in conditions of extreme poverty (Haushofer and Fehr 2014). Therefore, the main objective of this study is to deepen our understanding of how intentions to create social enterprises at the BoP emerge. In doing so, this paper answers to calls to pay more attention to the context in which SEIs emerge (Wach et al. in press; Kruse, Wach, and Wegge 2021; Stirzaker et al. 2021) and the cognitive antecedents of the social entrepreneurial process in contexts of poverty (Sutter, Bruton, and Chen 2019).

Methods

The research setting

This research is set in Southeast Asia in a local NGO. About 16% of the country's population was living in poverty in 2018, and almost 10% was not able to meet its basic food needs during the first half of 2018 (Country statistics, 2019). Since 2014, the NGO runs a mentoring programme that prepares BoP youngsters (18 to 25 years old) to create social enterprises with the aim of developing rural areas. Each year the programme takes on about 20 to 30 youngsters from all over the country following a recruitment boot camp. During the two-year programme, the youngsters take a variety of trainings that focus on 'character development', social skills, enterprise management, communications, business mathematics, and agriculture. After completion of the training, most youngsters enter into a 'gap year programme' where they become partners or apprentices of existing social enterprises the NGO is associated with. This is a year of incubation before the actual creation of their enterprises. Except for important holidays (Christmas and Easter), the youngsters remain on site during the whole time of the training. Most of the NGO staff also lives on site.

Data collection

We adopt a social-constructivist approach to understanding SEI at the BoP. Hence, a qualitative method involving participant observation, semi-directive interviews, as well as the capturing of life stories was used. Following a theoretical sampling (Morse and Clark 2019) approach, we conducted 20 narrative interviews with youngsters enrolled in the NGO programme. All the youngsters come from poor backgrounds, living on less than two USD/day and had often been confronted with violence and hunger from an early age. The need to eat and survive coerced them in some cases to lie, to commit and suffer acts of violence, to engage in prostitution or delinquent behaviour, and even to commit murder. They joined the programme

without any prior intention to create a social enterprise. Furthermore, the concepts of entrepreneurship were alien to them before joining the programme.

We mainly asked interviewees to talk about themselves, their SEI, and the ecosystem in which they found themselves. These data were supplemented with observation field notes and three interviews with people in charge. We asked the trainers to talk about how the training programme, teaching, and youngsters' support is organised. Most interviews lasted between 27 and 120 min. They were all digitally recorded and transcribed. Additionally, we collected secondary data from informal meetings as we stayed in the school for one week sharing the same restaurant and the same space with the BoP youngsters and trainers. Many informal discussions were initiated and enriched our study, mainly in terms of the identification and clarification of the cognitive dimensions and allowed comparison with the data of the formal interviews. Table 1 below summarises the youngsters' characteristics:

INSERT Table 1: Description of the sample HERE

Data analysis

This exploratory study is based on the principles of grounded theory in the perspective of Gioia et al. (2013). We take an inductive approach grounded in the lived experience of our respondents as well as how they make sense of these experiences to develop concepts that we subsequently put in dialogue with extant literature. We looked to identify significant recurrences. Therefore, we analysed the interview data thematically using a combination of manual thematic content analysis and more systematic content sorting using QSR NVivo 11. We devised a systematic inductive approach to concept development.

Thus, as required by this methodology, we first codified each idea with a concept and then modified the concepts as needed to ensure that the revisited data fitted well with the

category. Secondly, we used axial coding by identifying similarities between concepts in order to create consolidated categories of a higher nature. We then selected the central idea that emerged from the axial coding. Thirdly, we created the final aggregate dimension by gathering the theoretical categories from the second order. In parallel, we confronted these with the participant observations notes we took. Data were triangulated until saturation was achieved. The emergent concepts are presented in the data structure (Figure 1 below). This data structure overview is based on the three steps required by this methodology, from first-order codes to aggregate dimensions.

Finally, we provide a resulting grounded framework by oscillating between emergent data, concepts and the relevant literature (Figure 2). This framework describes the relationships among the emergent concepts and makes clear all relevant data-to-theory connections (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013). Our goal is to highlight new insights with regard to SEIs of BoP youngsters.

Findings

Three aggregated dimensions emerged as strong drivers of SEI of the BoP youngsters: social support, perceived self-efficacy, and expected social outcomes.

INSERT Figure 1: Data structure HERE

Perceived self-efficacy: entrepreneurial specific mentoring and prior experience with poverty

Many youngsters who join the programme are characterised by a '*slum mentality*' (Trainer 1), which entails that they have low beliefs in their ability to achieve something in life. In this regard, our data suggest that perceived self-efficacy is constructed through the

mentoring programme in which 'values transformation' is a key element. As one trainer indicated, "*the two-year programme pillars are these seven subject areas [social science, communication, life skills, character and values formation, agriculture, agro-processing and entrepreneurial development]. The [first] four months are mostly concerned with very foundational character building in terms of really attitudes and skills*" (Trainer 1). This character building refers to changing the 'slum mentality' and building youngsters' self-efficacy. In terms of building self-efficacy, another trainer shared that it "*is very crucial for us to be able to bring them to that point. Because otherwise all of this, we can teach them entrepreneurship unless they believe that they can end poverty, it is going to be very difficult*." Similarly, the youngsters indicated:

> *"So, I think it [social entrepreneurship] is about believing in yourself, believe in your capacity and your capabilities because in the world of business it is not all about the money." (B1)*
>
> *"Because [NGO] really helps me to grow my confidence and my character, and in terms of, business wise, some skills in e-mailing, in communication, in accounting." (B3)*
>
> *"I am changed because from being by-stander, for having a labourer's mindset. I always think that I can be successful someday; I can make opportunities by my talent or by other people's talent." (B2)*

While many also indicated that at this point in time, they felt that they did not have the skills or knowledge to become successful social entrepreneurs, they were confident that they would learn and acquire the knowledge, skills and expertise required to become successful social entrepreneurs through trial and error, perseverance and learning from their mistakes.

"Then, yes, we had also failure in cooking rice. That's our biggest failure, but then, yes, when the time goes by, we learn from that, everything, we learn from our failures, our experiences, together, so we don't leave anyone in that situation that we don't want to learn something else like that." (B8)

"For me, they [other youngsters] have to try and try and if they fail at this, they need to continue to try. The moment you keep trying, you are still succeeding, you just have to have it, just go if you believe you can do it." (B5)

"For now, I think I am not yet ready but I know I will learn how to make business, how to make social enterprises and how to produce a lot of products, how to handle as many enterprises as we have, so for me, because everything on this earth, you can learn from it if you want to, if you always want to, you can learn. So, even now, I am not ready yet, but I will be ready soon." (B9)

Some youngsters indicated that the lack of formal skills and knowledge was compensated by prior experiences, such as being a street vendor, that initiated them to the workings of market dynamics.

"But I think the skills we do have, because some of us worked before getting into this at school. I was a street vendor, so I know how to kind of market. It's not the standard marketing. What my point is, we have the initial skill, some of my classmates were salesladies at the mall, some of my classmates were call centre agents doing, promoting the products and advertising and then some of my classmates were cashiers. So, at that point, we have somehow the skills but not really putting up a business." (B4)

"Yes, we've been working so hard since an early age, and I learned at an early age that I need to survive whatever it takes. I always have to be street smart. I always

need to find solutions. You know, if your family do not have food in your table, then you shouldn't stay hungry. You should find a way. Just real experiences of suffering like before." (B3)

This building of self-efficacy, providing them with formal skills and knowledge and a space to experiment helps the youngsters to look at the future as social entrepreneurs. The NGO's mentoring programme helps the youngsters we interviewed to self-identify with SE and develop beliefs that they have the tools, abilities, and resources necessary to create their own social enterprise. When asked where they saw themselves five years from now, most youngsters saw themselves as being successful social entrepreneurs. As such, joining the programme functions as an exogeneous trigger of their SEI by stimulating their perceived self-efficacy.

Expected social outcomes: self-fulfilment and reciprocity

Our data showed that the BoP youngsters participating in our study are strongly motivated by expected social outcomes in terms of ending poverty, not only for themselves, but for their community and their country. Social enterprises are seen as vehicles through which these social outcomes may be achieved.

We found that "expected social outcomes: helping me and others" is the most important (most cited by youngsters) variable in starting to understand the emergence of SEIs of the BoP youngsters participating in our study.

"I can see that here in the [country] there are so many criminals here so that's why I want to help to end poverty by means of my enterprise, which is the [food project] to give them a better job to [to stop the] killing, stealing, drugs et cetera." (B13)

"So, my main goal is to build an enterprise that can give a big impact on my community and to help the farmers by providing them with the reliable market. And I want also to

help the mothers of my community by giving them a sustainable job by supporting them and helping them to show their talents, to show their skills, and giving value." (Life story)

Moreover, as demonstrated by the last statements, collective fulfilment and a common value creation motivate youngsters to find ways for themselves, for their families, and communities to escape from poverty and underdevelopment. This mindset is imbued by the NGO programme.

"And so even before they start creating their businesses, we want it to be grounded in very good values. And so that anything that they do whether it is business, or they pursue other things, it is in their heart that "I want to end poverty" and I want to help other people do it." (Trainer 2)

"Very simple, we want to raise individuals that's really would end poverty for themselves, their family, their communities and their countries." (Trainer 3)

As the last quote indicates, a central place in trying to achieve the expected social outcomes in terms of eradicating poverty and uplifting the community is taken up by the notions of *reciprocity.* Youngsters explained its importance as follows:

"Because we are the social entrepreneurs, we know that we are going to the top of the pyramid. Now, we are the bottom of the pyramid, which is the poorest of the poor, but if you go to that point where we are now at the top, it means that we going to lift up the others, also at the middle. We cannot leave the others at the bottom. We have to lift them up to the middle or the top as well." (B9)

"We can do this together that's why we have a, our code here is that no one is left behind. You have to live together." (B12)

"I chose to become a social entrepreneur not just for myself but also I have family waiting for me, I have communities and I wanted to become part of a game changer in this country." (B3)

Thus, the youngsters are imbued with a sense of community, which is also strongly present in the national culture and the 'moral economy' that govern relations in their communities. This also informs SEIs, and it functions as a strong motivating factor for the youngsters who want to lift their communities out of poverty through their social enterprises.

Social support

While the above fragments outlined some of the ingredients of the black box of SEIs at the BoP, these intentions emerge within a specific and nurturing social environment provided by the NGO and the mentoring programme. This environment not only provides access to learning or business opportunities, but most importantly helps with '*values transformation'*. This psychological and emotional support mechanism is instrumental in fostering and nurturing the emergence of their SEI. As a youngster explained:

> *"The mentors are not just teaching us in class. They are not just teaching us about the subjects that they are teaching, but they are also encouraging us, motivate us to just be a good student and really to be confident enough and the determination to become a social entrepreneur. They also teach us; they also taught us to dream for others, not just for ourselves, or for our family but for all the people around us*." (B7)

The youngsters interviewed evoke a mutual and reciprocal trust between them and the NGO members and staff, forming a community/family on which they can fall back. One important element in building this trust and intention is mentoring. Respondents indicated there are several institutionalised moments, both individual and collective that are instrumental. For

example, they organise a regular collective session where participants share their experiences and listen to the experiences of others in order to learn from each other's past mistakes and experiences and move forward, both collectively and as an individual.

Respondents (youngsters and trainers) also talked about the need to first overcome a 'slum mentality' or 'poverty mindset' that downgrades the poor to think that they cannot achieve anything in life. The youngsters indicated a sense of regaining a positive 'self-perception' to express their changing mentality and attitude.

> "*What ties us is the trust. The trust in each other because here we really came from different places and most of us, especially the students; most of us experience hunger in our, some of us need the skill in order to survive and feed their stomach. But then the trust; it always builds us.*" *(B12)*
>
> "*The kind of support that they really have is that we have the chance to show people my talent. At first, I wouldn't talk to you. That they [trainers] so believed in me that I can do it, rather than myself. It is when I also realized that there are these [members of the NGO] who helps a person like me to be a different and really show my potential in myself. That's why I'm here, now I can talk to many people and show that it can be done.*" *(B4)*

As one Trainer put it: "*Because every week we have the [meeting] where we start off Mondays at 7:30 just to talk about some values, to reflect on that. So, we reflect on them; so even those moments it's part of the curriculum so that we can engage them and try to develop the best out of them*" (Trainer 1). This mutual mentoring process enhances youngsters' self-regulation and builds their perception of self-efficacy.

In addition, they regain respect and recognition through the support of the ecosystem, which, in turn, helps them to develop a positive self-image. Many BoP youngsters indicated

that because of their background they were seen as ‘useless’ or ‘shy’. Hence, they stressed the importance of a supportive environment in transforming their ‘slum mentality’. Trust emerged as a key ingredient in organising social relationships and the sense of being trusted had an important influence in the development of their self-efficacy as they started thinking and dreaming about themselves as capable and efficacious individuals. As one youngster commented:

> *“Because it pushed me to believe that I can do that thing, I can make things possible.” (B1)*

This learning process enhances youngsters’ self-image and builds a positive self-perception of what they are capable of achieving. As such, developing individual discipline and collective formal sessions of entrepreneurial mentoring is a first crucial steppingstone in the emergence of SEI. The next section brings the different elements we discussed above together in a grounded model of SEI emergence at the BoP.

Discussion

This exploratory study set out to investigate the antecedents of SEI at the BoP. We propose the following grounded framework of SEI at the BoP that summarises our emergent concepts (Figure 2).

INSERT Figure 2: social entrepreneurial intention formation at the BoP HERE

We observe that while the BoP youngsters had no prior intention of creating a social enterprise, the programme they entered did trigger SEIs. It does so through a comprehensive mentoring programme that is based on social support, in which respondents come to grips with their earlier experience of poverty through intensive personal and collective mentoring. In light

of the context of extreme poverty and the liability it imposes on nascent entrepreneurs (Morris et al. 2022), this social support is also fundamental in building the perceived self-efficacy of the respondents through training, coaching and learning-by-doing (trial and error). In addition, the social support they get is instrumental in shaping both self-and other-orientated antecedents of the SEI of the youngsters as it imbues them with the idea that they can escape their poverty through setting up a social enterprise (self-fulfilment). At the same time, this social enterprise can also help address the needs of the community and help to lift them out of poverty as well (other-orientation). In sum, we observed that social support enhances perceived self-efficacy and creates social expectations that nourish the youngster's SEI.

Theoretical contributions

Our findings (Figure 2) extend both the BoP entrepreneurship and SEI literature in several ways. Firstly, it highlights the role of social support, not only in enhancing self-efficacy, but also in terms of triggering SEI amongst populations that do not project themselves as potential social entrepreneurs. While extant literature has indicated that social support is indeed an important aspect of the social entrepreneurial journey (Mair and Noboa 2006; Estrin, Mickiewicz, and Stephan 2013; Seyoum, Chinta, and Mujtaba 2021), it has mainly emphasised access to a variety of resources potential entrepreneurs can lean on. We add to this discussion the importance of cognitive mentoring in triggering SEI.

Social support and the strong role of specific training provided by the NGO is in this regard an exogenous factor or disruptive event (Krueger 2017; Yessoufou, Blok, and Omta 2018) that has an important impact on triggering the SEIs of the youngsters we studied. In fact, it is only through the programme that they discover the notion of SE. On the one hand, social support operates in terms of removing perceived barriers that are ingrained in a 'slum mentality' that limits what BoP youngsters can dream to achieve. As such, it helps in

overcoming some of the barriers related to the 'liability of poorness' (Morris et al. 2022) by helping to develop their abilities and instilling them with a sense of perceived self-efficacy that they can end poverty (their own and their community's) through SE.

On the other hand, the social support provides a facilitating factor through the nurturing environment it provides. By emphasising the potential benefits of social enterprise creation for themselves and their communities, this social support results in a personal desirability that BoP youngsters hold about their individual fulfilment as well as collective value creation. Here, social support triggers self-fulfilment as a self-oriented antecedent to SEI in the form of seeing SE as a pathway out of poverty. It does, however, go beyond a self-oriented 'desire to better one's income' (Yessoufou, Blok, and Omta 2018) and extends to an other-orientation in terms of helping the whole community escape poverty through SE.

The above also resonates with recent findings on the importance of social outcomes (Tran and Von Korflesch 2016; Usman et al. 2022; Ip et al. 2021) and suggests that in the context of extreme poverty the prospect of making a difference for others may also drive SEI. BoP youngsters are strongly motivated by expected social outcomes in terms of ending poverty, not only for themselves, but for their community and their country. Social enterprises are seen as vehicles through which these social outcomes may be achieved. While the study of Yessoufou et al. (2018) demonstrates that motivations of self-fulfilment, income generation and wealth creation are important drivers at the BoP, we add other-orientation (Miller et al. 2012) in terms of collective fulfilment and common value creation as a chief motivation of social entrepreneurs at the BoP. As such, our findings extend the conclusions of Usman et al. (2022) and Ip et al. (2021) by showing that in the context of extreme poverty expected social outcomes may also act as a motivator to create a social enterprise. As such, the common objective of eradicating poverty plays a strong role in driving SEI at the BoP.

However, we would argue that collective value creation or other-orientation in this case is not driven by compassion or empathy as the SEI literature postulates (Bacq and Alt 2018; Miller et al. 2012), but more by a 'moral economy' based on conceptions of mutual rights and obligations, and of reciprocity (Scott 1976). As our BoP entrepreneurs share the plight of the communities they intend to help by creating social ventures, compassion in terms of a "desire to help the less fortunate" (Yitshaki, Kropp, and Honig in press) is not what seems to be driving them. In the case of extreme poverty, we argue that a better measure might be reciprocity, understood as the social obligations of mutual help that govern relationships in contexts of subsistence. In the context of extreme scarcity, this 'moral economy' rests on mutual rights and obligations that iron out the troughs that might otherwise push them over the edge of famine and death (Scott 1976). In this regard, other-oriented motives might well be a self-serving strategy of survival.

Secondly, while the youngsters are attracted to the NGO by a desire to escape poverty and hunger, most of them arrive at the NGO without any prior intention to set up their own social enterprise. In the general entrepreneurship literature, Krueger et al. (2000) and Krueger (2017) state that personal and situational variables typically have an indirect influence on entrepreneurship as antecedents of EIs. However, our study shows that in our sample, mentoring (situational variable) and the desire to escape poverty (personal variable) are key factors in developing SEI at the BoP and may have a more important role to play than proposed by Krueger et al. (2000).

Thirdly, for the BoP youngsters in our sample, SEI depends on and is created through the NGO's mentoring programme. As such, our study highlights the importance of mentoring as an important step in developing perceived self-efficacy. Conventional wisdom posits a positive link between education and SEI (Naveed et al. in press; Seyoum, Chinta, and Mujtaba 2021; Smith and Woodworth 2012). While our study is in line with these studies, it posits the

importance of the cognitive mentoring in fostering perceived self-efficacy and the creation of SEI of BoP youngsters. This finding confirms Krueger et al.'s (2000) assertion that intentional behaviour helps explain and model why many entrepreneurs decide to start a business long before they scan for opportunities. As BoP youngsters create from scratch, cognitive coaching contributes to developing their self-efficacy to identify an opportunity and to be able to put it into practice. Cognitive mentoring directly impacts the emergence of intentions as a planned behaviour as the BoP youngsters slowly acquired confidence about their ability to become social entrepreneurs. This perception is enhanced by their belief in the NGO support and capabilities.

Managerial contributions

In terms of praxis, our main contribution lies in highlighting the role of social support in changing mindsets and building SEI at the BoP. Our findings suggest that social support mechanisms, such as cognitive mentoring, are crucial, not only for literacy and the development of competencies, but more importantly for the development of their perception of self-efficacy and their projection into entrepreneurial roles. Developing individuals' support would help to develop their perceptions of their capabilities and help them to project themselves as (social) entrepreneurs and agents of change for themselves and their communities.

As indicated above, our respondents' SEI emerge within the specific and nurturing social environment created by the NGO programme. This environment not only provides access to training or business opportunities, but most importantly helps with 'values transformation' and building the BoP youngsters' 'Self'. This social support system works on multiple levels. In the first place, it works as a system of individual and collective support. One the one hand, there is the individual support that is institutionalised in a strong mentoring programme, where at times the distinction between teacher, mentor and (surrogate) family members is blurred.

On the other hand, there is the collective support network that is institutionalised in the weekly 'collective meetings' that are designed to share joys, doubts, hopes and fears. In both cases the notion of *reciprocity* is strongly embedded in the values and modus operandi of the NGO and helps to build the mental comfort of BoP youngsters through intensive personal mentoring and what they call 'character development'. The second component of social support relates to knowledge transmission, which draws heavily on trial and error as a way for BoP youngsters to develop their entrepreneurial skills. While before they had no EI, they are now able to project themselves in a social entrepreneurial role.

Our study also presents some limitations. First, there is the risk of sample bias. Did the respondents tell us what they thought we wanted to hear? We believe not. By cross-checking the available evidence with organisational documents, our in-situ observations and the views of trainers, we triangulated our findings (Patton 2002). However, it might be that respondents who agreed to participate in our study may have different experiences or viewpoints from those who chose not to. A second limitation is linked to the fact our sample is drawn from a specific setting. As such, the nature of our qualitative study and the (extreme) context in which data were gathered cautions for generalizations beyond the current sample. Further research in other contexts, experimental or survey-based, might shed further light on the propositions we suggest.

Avenues for further research include a further investigation of the 'moral economy' and how its shapes SEI formation at the BoP. We also encourage testing our propositions on other disadvantaged communities such as refugees, immigrants, ethnic minorities, ex-prisoners, etc. In addition, our study also raises new questions on how to develop an entrepreneurial role identity among disadvantaged populations. It might also be worthwhile to include insights from other adjacent disciplines such as the work on the psychology of poverty to further deepen our understanding of the emergence of SEIs amongst disadvantaged groups. Recent research by

Santos, Nikou, Brännback and Liguori (2021) suggests the antecedents of EI and SEI might not be that different after all. While their sample was based on students from a private university in the US, this raises questions as to disadvantaged populations and the antecedents of EI and SEI in this context.

Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate the emergence of SEI among youngsters at the BoP. We conducted research in a Southeast Asian country in which one in ten inhabitants is not able to provide in his or her basic food needs. It draws on a the social-constructivist approach in trying to understand SEI at the BoP and proposes a grounded framework. Our findings shift the theoretical lenses of SEI formation by highlighting expected social outcomes as a strong salient antecedent of intention formation at the BoP. We also contribute to the general literature on poverty and entrepreneurship by adding other-oriented motivators (i.e., expected social outcomes) in addition to self-oriented outcomes (i.e., a desire to better one's income).

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