

The social constraints on entrepreneurship in a poor Ghanaian fishing community

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Abstract

This paper explores entrepreneurship in a novel context to establish the existence, nature and scope in conditions of poverty. It was found that enterprise was socially organised, but with a social focus rather than a background condition. It is entrepreneurship *for and in* the social, rather than entrepreneurship with social outcomes. It seems likely to be an evolved social system to alleviate the worst impacts of poverty. The social organisation of fishing is thus intended to create subsistence livelihoods for many. Essentially it is “necessity” entrepreneurship writ large, a communal enterprise or an authentic social enterprise. The socially situated nature of enterprise in Ocansey Kope is “mutual”, and not individualistic in the western sense. Importantly, it is poorly explained by “western” models that do not take account of local culture.

Keywords: culture; poverty; bounded entrepreneurship; Ghana; African entrepreneurship; social entrepreneurship

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This paper explores the commercial activities of a small fishing community in their social context. The study considers whether entrepreneurship is present and tries to establish the nature of this entrepreneurship. The rationale is that although entrepreneurship is often construed as a universal “solution” for economic development, the prevailing conceptualisation of entrepreneurship privileges individualistic and economic aspects to the detriment of the socially embedded characteristics of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs may enact their environment, but their environment is also cultural. Chamlee-Wright (1997) argues the mainstreams of economic enquiry offer few connections between cultural processes and economic development. Indeed, Takyi-Asiedu (1993) suggests that in many economic accounts, local cultures have been overlooked. Moreover, this dominant view incorporates a number of assumptions about the nature and practices of entrepreneurship which may, or may not, hold good in different, less developed, contexts. For example, Naudé (2009) points out how, despite the importance attributed to entrepreneurship for economic development, little of the entrepreneurship development literature even refers to the development economics literature. He concludes that the literature about the role of entrepreneurship has been largely confined to advanced economies. Accordingly, our understanding may be similarly constrained. This study argues that because the socio-economic context of a poor African village is so markedly different from most western contexts, we should not expect to find that western accounts of entrepreneurship have comprehensive explanatory power.

This study employs a case study approach to capture the essences and the nuances of how livelihoods are produced and reproduced in this rural African maritime village. In this way the paper contributes to the appreciation of the socially embedded practices of entrepreneurship and hence broadens the understanding of the entrepreneurial concept. This is achieved by examining entrepreneurship in a context that is less well known and less well examined by entrepreneurship scholars. The analysis shows that the type of entrepreneurship in Ocansey Kope, the fishing community, is qualitatively different. It is shaped and constricted by the social organisation of business and by the nature of social obligations that are woven into the social fabric of the village. In particular, the paper notes how poverty constrains enterprise. The explanatory strand is not individualistic economic maximisation, or even optimisation, in any conventional sense. Rather it has a focus on subsistence, security, sustainability and communal survival. Consequently, the paper argues that the “customary” conceptualisation of entrepreneurship is based on a western perspective that appears less appropriate in the context of underdevelopment. The western conception of entrepreneurship arising from the flux of self and circumstances (Anderson, 2000), needs to be reviewed to recognise the determining nature of some circumstances. Indeed, without taking account of the particularities of the socio economic context, the promise of entrepreneurship as a panacea for economic distress is less likely to be delivered.

The study is set in Ghana which has recently experienced unprecedented, but uneven, growth with GDP growth averaging about 6% since 2000; inflation and interest rates have reduced substantially with inflation at around 10% and interest rates down from 30% to around 15% (See World Bank Report, 2007). A report by the Ghana Living Standard Survey 2005/6 indicated that less than a third of the Ghanaian population now live below the national poverty line. Notwithstanding this recent growth, not all the country’s regions or communities have benefited. For instance, the Ghana Statistical Service (2007) reported the incidence of poverty in rural coastal areas only declined from 45% in 1998/99 to 24% in 2005/6.

African entrepreneurship and local cultures

Much of the literature on entrepreneurship has its roots in Europe and other Western cultures. Most analyses are primarily informed by western values and ‘Eurocentric’ epistemologies, using western methodologies that reproduce western theoretical frameworks (Chakrabarty, 2000). Consequently there is considerable interest in whether this has similar expressions in Africa (Spring and McDade, 1998). Takyi-Asiedu (1993) argued that the entrepreneurial spirit has been present in sub-Saharan Africa for centuries, noting how people of the ancient empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai were successful fishing, farming and trading entrepreneurs. More recently however, the prevalence of entrepreneurship is less obvious. Elkan (1988), for example, notes the widespread belief that indigenous entrepreneurship is less well represented in African countries than in other parts of the developing world. Nonetheless, Elkan claims the evidence shows no dearth of ability among Africans to identify business opportunities and to act upon them. This apparent paradox of the existence of entrepreneurial spirit, but lack of entrepreneurial outcomes, might be explained, at least partly, by the inappropriate application of western notions of entrepreneurship. Takyi-Asiedu (1993), for instance, suggests that not taking account

of local cultures may help to explain the apparent lack of entrepreneurial success. For example, (1993:85) because of the lack of a welfare system, social obligations may deter business growth. The paper proposes that examining the nature of entrepreneurial practices situated in their social and economic context may shed some light on this issue. As Naudé (2009) suggests, it may not be the lack of entrepreneurial talent that constrains development, but the way that entrepreneurship itself is constrained.

The social context, often manifest as culture, has often been related to entrepreneurship (Anderson and MacAuley, 1999; Anderson et al, 2000). Classically, Weber's Protestant Work Ethic is widely cited. Thus the idea of the solitary entrepreneur, isolated from culture and society has been broadly debunked (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson, 2007; Anderson and Starnawska, 2008). Indeed, the cultures of ethnic groups or religious groups have been shown (Shapiro, 1984; Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson, 2001) to encourage or deter enterprise. Arguing for the importance of culture and subcultures in the African context, Jenssen and Kristiansen (2004) claim that they shape development outcomes. But interestingly, the fulcrum of most of these arguments has been that cultures work to promote the attractiveness of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial propensity, rather than the direct affect of culture on activities. One exception is Dana (1995:67) who explains how "bounded" entrepreneurship can arise when "entrepreneurial decisions are circumscribed by family, government or other environmental factors". He goes on to demonstrate how the disadvantaged ethnic group he studied, Eskimos, had dominant values of working and sharing collectively. Nonetheless, Kristiansen (2001) argues that some African entrepreneurs have incorporated traditional values into modern businesses which are dominated by western rationalities.

In Africa, the potential role that entrepreneurship and small businesses could play in terms of poverty reduction, job creation, and income has been widely recognised by policy makers (McPherson, 1996; Trulsson, 2002; Chipika and Wilson, 2006; Ssendi and Anderson, 2009). Liedholm (2002) suggests that there are encouraging signs that people are finding opportunities to participate in ways that empower and nourish many, particularly including those who are otherwise most disadvantaged. More cautiously, Liedholm also suggest that this increase in the number of people engaged in micro and small enterprises is a sign of a failure of the economy to provide productive jobs; that is, people are forced to take refuge in activities that provide only minimal, subsistence support. Moreover, in many developing countries and African countries in particular, the role of entrepreneurship in promoting economic growth has been argued to be limited by environmental constraints such as the lack of human and financial capital, poor infrastructure and socio-cultural factors (Kodithuwakku and Rosa, 2002; Robson and Obeng, 2008). Netswera (2001) argued that the rapid growth of the economies of the South-East Asian countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong was due to the systematic external support services that the governments provided to the small businesses in those countries. Accordingly, Sriram and Tigineh (2006) take a very typical view of African entrepreneurship development, insisting that governments should stimulate enterprise by intervening to create friendlier entrepreneurship policies. Thus it seems that the lack of entrepreneurship in Africa is broadly attributed to both structural and personal characteristics. Notwithstanding these apparent limitations, there are success stories in many African studies (McDade and Spring, 2005). Nonetheless, it is evident that cultures and institutions vary across

countries and some are more supportive than others. As Chamlee-Wright (1997) claims, “the social institutions necessary for economic development emerge from and reflect a particular cultural context”. One such cultural context for economic activity is the fishing community.

Odotei (1990) argued that fishing as an economic activity was wrapped in a socio-cultural package which sustained its development. A careful observation of the operation of the traditional marine fishing sector demonstrated how fishing and the culture of the people in the coastal communities’ intertwined. In many fishing communities in Ghana, every member of the community is involved in the fishing sector, even children help to pull the nets from the sea. Overà (2000) noted that fathers, brothers and sons are more likely to be fishermen; mothers, sisters, and daughters trade the fish. Houses may be used as fish processing factories where all women and children and sometimes with hired labour clean, smoke and pack fish day and night.

Yet, socio-cultural factors have been considered by some studies as one of the factors that hinder the growth of small business in Africa (Takyi-Asiedu, 1993). Although the family support for new enterprises is well documented in the west (Drakopoulou Dodd et al, 2002), due to the extended family system and the social status that entrepreneurs enjoy in Africa, the majority of entrepreneurs commit a high percentage of their business resources to family matters at the expense of their businesses (Kiggundu, 2002). Similarly, Takyi-Asiedu (1993) reported that female owner-managers spend part of their business resources in supporting needy family members. Buame (1996) noted that social and family relations disadvantaged owner-managers in West Africa as they were obliged by society to take care of their needy family members.

However, other studies have drawn positive conclusions about the extended family systems of Africa and the social status of African entrepreneurs (Kiggundu, 2002). Dia (1996) observed that in Africa, social relations, social capital and social transfers serve as the building block for reconnecting Africans and their institutions, including indigenous firms. In the context of the traditional marine fishing industry in Ghana, the influence of the socio-culture factors on the development of the fishing industry is powerful. Overà (2000:13) observed in Ghanaian fishing communities that resources for the fishing business are mobilised through the extended family (called “Ebusua” system in Fante). For start-up capital, studies have shown that majority of entrepreneurs in Ghana, and Africa as whole, obtained their initial capital from their own savings and contributions from family members (See Obeng, 2007). Nonetheless small businesses in Africa lack access to formal finance because of: scarcity of finance, information asymmetry, high cost of credit, lack of collateral and lack of expertise to efficiently evaluate a project potential (Kasekende, 2001; Steel and Webster, 1992; Trulsson, 2002; Schiffer and Waders, 2001). But at the community level, Overà (2000) observed that in a Ghanaian fishing community, husbands serve as an important source of credit for their wives where the fish is sold to the women on credit basis. The women, on the other hand, serve as a major source of interest free loans for the fishermen to ensure that when fish are landed, they would be the first to receive their supply. Family and friends also serve as an important information sources for the majority of entrepreneurs in Ghana. This is due to the fact that small firms in many African countries lack access to formal institutional sources of

information; as Barr (1999) noted small businesses in sub-Saharan Africa have restricted access to formal market-supporting institutions than their larger counterparts. Buame (1996: 200) also observed that a lack of institutional support for small businesses in Ghana had led them to depend heavily on social networks to access resources such as information and materials.

Fishing communities in Ghana

Atta-Mills et al (2004) note that Ghana was considered a major fishing nation, but more recently artisanal catches have reduced in volume and value. Marquette et al (2002) explain that small scale fishery activity accounts for the majority of fish catches in Africa and provide about one quarter of the in take of protein. In Ghana, fish takes up 16.4% of food budgets (Mensah and Antwi, 2002). But Payne (2000) notes that the marine artisanal fishery is one of the poorest sectors in developing countries. Moreover, fishing communities have low incomes, about two thirds of national per capita income, and have less income stability because of wide seasonal fluctuations; such that fishing communities are amongst the poorest in Ghana (Bortei-Doku, 2000). Nonetheless, Marquette et al (2002) argue that fishing is not just a subsistence activity, but is a business and a component within an international marketing system. This view is similar to Dana's (1995) who distinguishes between hunting and fishing for one's own needs as subsistence and fishing for products to sell as entrepreneurship.

The vessels used are dugout canoes. Double ended, they are hewn from a single log of the *wawa* tree and vary from 3 to 18m long. Smaller canoes are powered by oar or sail, larger by 40hp outboard motors. Formal crew numbers vary from 4 to more than 20. But structural adjustments that begun in the 1990s have made fuel and equipment more available, but also more expensive (Mensah and Antwi, 2002) whilst also reducing the purchasing power of the Ghanaian consumer. Although some fish stocks (sardinella, known locally as "herring") have been reduced, probably by over fishing, ample stocks of other fish (seabream, triggerfish) exist. But these require new equipment and techniques which the fisherman cannot afford. Marquette et al (2002) note that many fishermen seasonally migrate, especially in the off season. As well as improving income, this strategy allows them to save by avoiding the social and economic obligations that normally prevent savings.

There have been some innovations in fishing techniques such as outboard motors and modern nets. Walker (2002) explains how Ghana's Fisheries Department has focused on improving fishing gear, but little effort has been made to strengthen fish processing or marketing. The fishing system is directed by long established socio-cultural practices. The fishing units often involve kin and there is a clear gender division of labour with men fishing and women as fishmongers, processing and trading the fish. Walker (2002:390) explains that women have served as "capitalists, entrepreneurs and innovators" throughout the development of the fishing sector. Fishmongers are exclusively female and are the main source of finance and loans for the fishermen.

The Study Area, Ocansey Kope

The study focus is a small fishing community called Ocansey Kope near Ada Foah, the district capital of Ga Dangme East, in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. According to the 2000 population census, the population of Ocansey Kope was about

1460. The vegetation of the area is coastal savannah interspersed with mangrove trees particularly around the Songor Lagoon and the tributaries of the Volta River. According to the 2000 census, 42.9% of the population in the area had never attended school, this compares very unfavourably with the regional literacy rate of about 81.6%. Less than 2.3% of the population has completed post-secondary education and only about 3.1% of the population has had any vocational and technical education. The community has electricity and telecommunications facilities, but the supply of potable water is a major problem. Most of the houses are built with mud or wattle and roofed with thatch or galvanised corrugated iron. Reflecting the low level of literacy, the main occupation available is small-scale marine artisanal fishing, supplemented by vegetable farming during the off fishing season.

Methodology

Given our research objectives of exploring the extent and nature of entrepreneurship in the fishing community, the researcher gathered data as a case study of the fishing village. Yin (1994) recommends this method when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This paper adopts a phenomenological approach by asking, what is going on here? The researcher selected a purposeful sample of respondents, “theoretical” cases (Anderson and Smith, 2007) that had the characteristics that interested him and were able to tell about the activities. Jack et al (2008) argue that conclusions reached in these circumstances are not generalisable to a wider population, but may be generalisable at a conceptual level.

The researcher visited the village on three different occasions. First (2005), to gather general information about enterprises in the village and their contacts; secondly (2008), to gather specific data about the fishing and trading practices and on the third occasion, (2009) to collect data about the nature of social constraints. The key respondents were the fishermen and the fishmongers in the Ocansey Kope rural community, with whom an in-depth interviews were conducted. Six fishermen, (the canoe operators), including the chief fisherman, and two fishmongers were interviewed in depth. All the fishermen and the fishmongers live and operate in the village. The interviews were conducted in their homes. They have no formal offices but undertake their business transactions either on the sea shore or in the compound of their homes. The researcher had first contacted the chief fisherman who introduced him to the other fishermen and the fishmongers. All the interviewees were first asked basic demographic questions and then asked to tell the researcher about their business practices, problems, strategies and performance. The data gathered were analysed by the constant comparative method, (Patton, 2002).

Our informants:

Table 1, The fishermen of Ocansey Kope

	Age	Education	Time in business	No of employees at start	Current employees (family)	Other employment
Chief - Domo	62	10 yrs	35 yrs	20	80 (15)	None, but originally farming
Oko	56	None	27 yrs	20	25 (10)	none
Annan	52	8 yrs	26 yrs	15	52 (15)	None, but originally farming
Tawia	60	None	30 yrs	30	40 (15)	none
Ataavi	45	None	20 yrs	15	50 (12)	none
Damo	50	8 yrs	30 yrs	25	60 (10)	None, but originally farming

Table 2, The fishmongers of Ocansey Kope

	Age	Educa tion	Time in business	No of employees at start	Current no of employees (family)	Other employment
Matta	38	2 yrs	20	2	6 (2)	Vegetable farming
Mina	35	5yrs	18	3	6 (3)	Vegetable farming

It is evident that the fishermen and fishmongers are very experienced, but with the exception of the chief, have little formal education or technical training. It seems that employment and business options are limited to fishing or farming, but that fishing is the most promising, despite the dangers. All of the respondents had always lived in the village but some had, on occasion, travelled to fish. Thus their life and business experiences were limited to village life. The number of employees indicates the extent of the labour intensiveness in fishing. Even at start up, all had at least 15 employees. In part, this is explained by the share “payments”, they only get paid a share of any catch. But it may also indicate a social responsibility to offer a job to family of fellow villagers. We provide an outline of the arrangements below.

Fishermen

All the respondent fishermen use a canoe with outboard motor, but line fishing is also used by other fishermen. The respondents catch sardines, mackerel, tuna and shrimps. Fish are sold, usually on credit, on landing on the beach to the fishmongers. These often include the wives and kin of the fishermen. The workers employed by the fishing boat owners do not received wages or salaries but receive a portion of the catch. The catch is divided as follows:

- 1/3 goes to the owner of the boat
- 1/3 is used to service the boat and crew
- The remainder is shared among the fishing crew.

Fishmongers.

The fishmongers process and market the fish caught by the men. Some fish are sold fresh, but if the catch is good, fish are processed by smoking or dried in the sun on the beach. The fisherwomen sell the fish locally or in nearby towns. Occasionally if they

have a good stock they will collaborate and hire a truck to take processed fish further afield. They use mobile phones to find out where the best price is being realised.

According to Domo, the Chief fisherman, there are two main net fishing techniques. The system used by our respondents is the seine net method, locally called 'wichie'. This off-shore fishing uses the larger dugout canoes with outboard motors that carry 20 to 25 crew members. This method is labour intensive and very traditional. For instance, when asked about how they find fish, he explained the colour of the sea indicates a shoal of fish. He also said that sea gulls eat fish, so when offshore, they follow the movement of the sea gulls to find fish. Apparently flying fish also indicate fish, as the big ones attempt to catch smaller fish. When fish are found, the crew members form into groups and about five of the crew swim out to the fish, so that the fishing net can be cast. Others then dive into the sea to position the fishing net. During peak season, fishermen can return to the shore, unload the catch and go back to the sea the same day.

The second fishing method used is shore casting, known as 'Adrian' by the Ga Adamgbe people. This is onshore fishing and the canoes are not fitted with motors. This involves tying one end of the fishing net to a coconut tree on the beach and the other end is hauled out to sea by the canoe and making a u-turn back to the shore. Both ends of the net are then pulled onto the beach by all manner of people (men, women, boys and girls). None of the fishermen use fishing detections devices or advanced navigational systems, nor do they know about such devices and equipment. This section examines the businesses, see table 3.

Table 3, The fishermen's businesses

	Original capital	Business Formality	Record keeping	General problems	Main problems
Chief - Domo	Savings and help from brother and sister	Bank account Deposits 1/3 of takings	Yes; Careful attention to honesty	Net mesh too small; Foreign trawlers	Lack of capital for replacing boat and gear
Oko	Family financed	No bank account	no	Dishonesty of fishmonger	Family demands, he has two wives Poor payment by creditors Lack of fish storage facilities Very old equipment
Annan	Savings and help from uncle	Keeps family and business separate	Yes, also maintain gear	Dishonesty of fishmonger	Lack of fish storage facilities
Tawia	Savings and help from uncle	Bank account but used for loans; Mixes family and business	no	Dishonesty of fishmonger and crew	No working capital; Family demands, has three wives and 16 children Interest on loans
Ataavi	Joint venture with 10 friends	Recent bank account to keep family and business separate (loans from mongers)	Book keeper	Cost and lack of fuel Dishonesty of crew	Bad fishing in off season Style of boat badly affected in poor weather
Damo	Savings and loan from other fishermen	Bank account Reliable hire purchase facilities	Yes	Cost of inputs	None discussed

The profitability of fishing depends entirely on the catch. A fishing expedition, the Chief fisherman explained, costs about ₺150.00 (\$100.00 exchange rate as at June, 2009) on fuel and food for the crew. The average daily catch during the peak season is about 200 boxes (2 foot square, depth about 4 inches) and a box is sold for ₺11.00 (\$7.35). On a good trip, a canoe can earn about ₺2,200.00 (\$1,466) per trip. This is obviously a substantial profit, albeit split three ways. However, during the lean season it is possible for the fishermen to go to sea and return empty handed. So over the year income fluctuates dramatically, but costs stay much the same. Moreover, in the long term, catches are reducing because of the impact of sophisticated foreign fishing boats intruding on inshore waters, but also the desperate fishing techniques of some local fishermen. A fisherman explained “some fishermen have introduced bad fishing practices such as the use of explosive, chemicals like carbide to kill the fish at sea and the use of light to attract fish. These methods lead to an abundant fish catch but harm us all”.

Although these are “business” profits, as Table 3 shows, many fishermen do not differentiate very well between business and personal affairs. For some, this is

because they lack the skills, even the literacy, to be able to distinguish and allocate, but it is also clear that the social system plays a critical role. The problem manifests in that the high rate of poverty means that the majority of the people in those communities depend on the few members of the community who are gainfully employed for their livelihood. Furthermore, the extended family system of Ghanaian culture implies that family members who are deemed successful in their occupation are obliged to provide for the needs of the less privileged members of the community. Annan explained, “It is difficult to separate family affairs from the business due to the nature of our culture; family and friends visit comes with the demand of business resources”. We were also told that during the peak season such demands do not affect their business finances as they are able to make a lot of money due to the bumper fish catch. However, during the lean season such demands affect their business substantially as they may have to borrow money from third parties to cater for the demands of relations and friends.

There are formal systems to address welfare. The respondents explained that when fishing was good, they created an “insurance” for leaner times by setting aside two boxes of fish from each catch. The proceeds were used during difficult times. But the system only worked when the catch was good, at other times immediate needs prevailed.

Some of the fishermen were more sophisticated; some had bank accounts and Ataavi had a good relationship with the bank manager at Ada Rural Bank, “regular contacts with the bank manager anytime I needed assistance”. Nonetheless, he also mentioned that he sometimes take loans from the fishmongers. Despite the range of business practices, we saw little difference in the material conditions of our respondents, except that Annan’s gear was in good condition. But he also told us, “I don’t behave like the other fishermen who spent their money on marrying more women during the good times”. Unusually in the village, he had only one wife and three children and they operated jointly to smoke and sell fish. We also saw how social demands shaped responses to bad business practices. Although some kept good records of credit extended, two respondents told us about how the fishmongers took advantage of the lack of proper records of credit. Indeed, Ataavi, one of the most sophisticated, told us about his crew landing and selling fish at another village without sharing the proceeds. It seems that the social environment somehow prevents them from taking any punitive action against other villagers.

The paper notes how most of businesses were started with a combination of own savings and family funding. Whilst this shows the benefits of social obligations, the researcher was also told how the fishermen felt obliged to help others to start in business. These revolving obligations can be a drain on working capital; the chief fisherman explained how difficult it was to refuse a loan to a son-in-law who wanted to start his own business. In some instances the fishermen borrow to fulfil social obligations. It was also found that money and credit circulates in the village. Fishermen extend credit to fishmongers to buy fish, but at times the fishmongers lend money to fishermen to finance fishing trips. Thus sales revenue circulates as loans, credit and unpaid debts. These circuits of credit offer a mechanism to even out fluctuations in income. Moreover, they provide a mechanism to cater for unexpected events as well as financing traditional family obligations. Domo explained “If my son wants to marry, I have to raise the money for the marriage ceremony and even when

the wife is pregnant, I sometime have to give the daughter-in-law money to attend hospital”.

For the fishmonger respondents, see Table 4. In contrast to the fishermen, both started the business without family help. Indeed there is a theme of financial independence that runs through their business dealings. Matta said that she does not like borrowing money, but does so to buy fish when it is plentiful and cheap. More often, she uses money from her vegetable farming to support the fish business. Indeed she also lends money with interest. Mina similarly dislikes borrowing and tries to avoid it, again using her vegetable growing to support her fish business. She has a bank account, but simply saves there and uses the money to buy fish during the peak season.

Table 4. The fishmonger’s businesses

	Original capital	Business Formality	Record keeping	General problems	Main problems
Matta	Own savings and credit	No bank account; Uses phone to get best prices	Limited; she likes informality	Cost of processing inputs	Seasonality of fishing
Mina	Own savings only	Bank account but dislikes borrowing	Invests profits in farming and loans to others	Input costs	Seasonality

Both respondents preserve fish by smoking. But Matta has a policy of storing the smoked fish. She sells it in the low season when prices are much higher.

Discussion

At one level, there is little evidence of entrepreneurship for the fishermen; clearly any entrepreneurship, albeit very modest entrepreneurship, is in the role of fishmongering. That said, opportunities do exist for the fishermen. There is scope for considerable technical improvement in their techniques; better vessels, fish locating devices and better tackle all offer scope, but the fishermen seem locked into traditions. This is qualitatively different from the flexibility (Anderson et al, 2010) and adaptability (Irvine and Anderson, 2004) of many western small businesses but mirrors the stickiness of tradition (Li et al, 2003). Moreover, as we have seen, there is very limited access to capital funding and there is probably a lack of skills to operate better equipment or learn new processes (Pyysiainen et al, 2006). Furthermore, it appears that the techniques are deliberately labour intensive, to provide some sort of income for many. We did see that a surplus was produced during the good season when the income per trip was substantial. However it seems that the social organisation of business, and village livelihoods, works to redistribute any apparent surplus, leaving little for depreciation and nothing for investment.

It is interesting to note how the women play out different social and business roles. In business they are the marketers and a primary source of working capital. It is they who determine the price paid for the catch and work to achieve the best final price for the product. Socially, they seem to have strong moral obligations to close family, but rather less to the extended family. Taken together, this seems to suggest that entrepreneurship might work best through these women in business; there is simply more scope for entrepreneurship. For example, if freezing facilities were made available this might operate collaboratively in the same way as they hire trucks together. This could enable participation in better markets where the price of fish is substantially higher than in Ghana. Moreover, if social obligations are lower for women, this would better allow the accumulation of capital for investment. It is very clear that our fishmongers were already much better at saving and investing.

Conclusions

Thus, this paper concludes that the social organisation of fishing is intended to create subsistence livelihoods for many. Essentially it is “necessity” entrepreneurship writ large, a communal enterprise or an authentic social enterprise (Diochon and Anderson, 2009). The socially situated nature of enterprise in Ocansey Kope is “mutual”, and not individualistic in the western sense. Whilst it can be argued that all entrepreneurship is socially embedded (Smith and Anderson, 2004), what was seen in the village is a social focus rather than a background condition. It is entrepreneurship *for and in* the social, rather than entrepreneurship with social outcomes. It seems likely to be an evolved social system to alleviate the worst impacts of poverty. Unfortunately, it works to deter individual capital accumulation to enable adaptation and change. Participants seem locked into the social system with little room to innovate or be enterprising. In practice, it maintains poverty rather than an escape from penury. The circularity of the poverty spiral deflects enterprise into subsistence.

It is conventional at this stage in a paper to conclude with a series of policy recommendations. It is preferred to highlight the implications of the analysis for policy and the practices intended to encourage entrepreneurship in conditions of extreme poverty. In common with many studies, it has been argued that the availability of resources limits enterprise. Indeed, a lack of resources defines poverty. Hence a typical solution is to make more resources available. An excellent example of breaking out of the vicious spiral of poverty in this way is micro credit. It is argued that injecting even very modest, but additional, amounts of capital in many cases work well, but in others much less well. This paper argues that in the extreme conditions of poverty such as the fishing community, the social system is focussed on mutual survival. In such deprived circumstances the benefit of additional resources is likely to be directed to general social well being and leached out of entrepreneurial multiplying benefit in the productive system. Their distribution system is, arguably, a form of welfare insurance. Catches are distributed, jobs are created, wealth is shared, so that risk and benefits are similarly shared in a way that is intended to aid survival in difficult times. There is little room in this socio-economic system for the individualism that permeates western versions of enterprise. Extreme poverty prevents opportunities being enacted. Solutions would need to address, or at least take full account of, and operate through the entire social system, rather than merely on aspects.

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