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Entrepreneurship as emancipation: a process framework for female entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments

Bede Akorige Atarah
University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana
Vladi Finotto
Department of Management, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice, Italy
Eimear Nolan
Trinity Business School, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland, and
André van Stel
Trinity Business School, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland and Kozminski University, Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this research is to determine the stages that women in resource-constrained environments go through in order to emancipate themselves through entrepreneurial activities. Based on their fieldwork, the authors develop a process framework of emancipation-through-entrepreneurship.

Design/methodology/approach – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 57 female entrepreneurs in two resource-constrained countries in West Africa. Non-participant observations were employed as a secondary data collection technique to provide important sources of information for triangulation.

Findings – This study's findings indicate that the process of female emancipation through entrepreneurship begins with the perception of one's personal motivations, followed by the choice of economic activities, the gathering of various necessary resources, and finally the commencement and running of a venture to bring about the desired emancipation. Various factors, such as family, the external environment, personal qualities and ease of operations, were found to influence the choice of entrepreneurial activities. We also found that human, social, cultural and political capital interact to produce economic capital, a central form of capital for the starting and running of ventures in resource-constrained environments.

Originality/value – Although extant studies have shown that entrepreneurship can be a vehicle for women to liberate themselves from various constraints, it is as yet unclear which process these women follow to achieve such emancipation. The development of a process framework of emancipation-through-entrepreneurship is the key contribution of this paper. Despite extant research demonstrating that entrepreneurship can assist women in financially limited settings to achieve economic independence, the specific steps these women take in the process remain unclear. Thus, this paper presents a process framework that focuses on women in constrained environments and their journey to emancipation through entrepreneurship.

Keywords Female entrepreneurship, Emancipation, Motivations, Emerging economies, West Africa

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1. Introduction

Globally, governments are promoting entrepreneurship as the means to solving the world's economic problems (Urbano *et al.*, 2019). Accordingly, the aim of entrepreneurship policy is typically wealth creation. But policy often overlooks that, in order to create wealth for people, a change has to be created in the enduring restrictive circumstances that many (poor) people find themselves in. Indeed, Rindova *et al.* (2009) propose that entrepreneurship research and theorizing be redirected from wealth creation toward change creation, the suggestion is to shift the current emphasis from opportunity identification and exploitation toward recognizing constraints and finding ways to overcome or dismantle them. Several researchers have responded to this call with an increasing number of empirical studies looking through the lens of entrepreneurship as a means to achieve emancipation. The majority of studies that adopt the emancipation perspective as their theoretical framework (e.g. Goss *et al.*, 2011; Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018) have focused on either poor women in developing country contexts or marginalized people living in developed economies (Jennings *et al.*, 2016). All these studies have given accounts of how the poor or marginalized have been empowered to seek liberation for themselves and for others from various constraints, thus pointing to the emancipatory power of entrepreneurship. While understanding the ability of entrepreneurship to lead to emancipation is crucial, it is even more critical to comprehend the process of transitioning from feeling constrained to achieving emancipation from those constraints. This is especially significant for women, who face considerable challenges as compared to men when it comes to establishing and running a business, including restricted access to information, finance and networks (Ughetto *et al.*, 2020).

Past studies report how individuals (particularly women in less-developed regions of the world) have been empowered through entrepreneurship to liberate themselves from these conditions. However, to the best of our knowledge, no research investigates the processes these women have followed from the state of being constrained to that of being emancipated. As Langley *et al.* (2013) concisely state, the desirable change from one state to another is only evidence of "what works" and can be transferred to cases in similar contexts. However, there is a dearth of information and knowledge surrounding how to produce the desired change—the process. Having the knowledge that situation B is better than situation A reveals almost nothing about how to move from situation A to B (Langley *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the nature of the desired change and the context in which it is expected to occur would require the employment of some forms of capital, including economic, human, social, political and cultural capital. Thus, we argue that knowing the process and the resources required to create the change has the potential to make the change transferable. Ultimately, in line with the argument of Langley *et al.* (2013), the "know-that" (knowledge that a change is desirable) of a desired change should be supported by the "know-how" (knowledge of how to affect the desired change). This "know-how", which is lacking from the entrepreneurship-as-emancipation literature, is what this study seeks to provide. We do this by seeking answers to the following question:

Q1. How do women in environments characterized by resource scarcity emancipate themselves from various perceived constraints through entrepreneuring?

We answer this research question through a qualitative study of 57 female entrepreneurs in two West African countries: Ghana and Ivory Coast, using semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observations. Both countries are patriarchal societies with distinct gender roles (Sikweyiya *et al.*, 2020), which for many women imposes restrictions on the roles they can play in the economy. Studying aspects of female entrepreneurship is important because of their increasing numbers, as nowadays two out of five early-stage entrepreneurs across the world are women (GEM, 2022). This share is even higher in West Africa, where female entrepreneurs outnumber male entrepreneurs (Kelley *et al.*, 2015).

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However, studying female entrepreneurship in the resource-constrained region of West Africa, and specifically how women emancipate themselves through entrepreneurship, is even more relevant for two reasons: first, the current socioeconomic realities in the African society have drawn women into playing breadwinning roles, which according to traditional patriarchal dictates used to be reserved for men (Akanle *et al.*, 2018). It is therefore interesting to investigate the processes through which they emancipate themselves from the burden of this new additional role through entrepreneurship. Second, the activities of female entrepreneurs, classified under "everyday" entrepreneurship, have not been the object of much theorizing compared to their male counterparts (Welter *et al.*, 2017). Welter and colleagues have therefore called for more research and theorizing on everyday entrepreneurship, including that of women. We respond to this call by exploring how female entrepreneurs in West Africa emancipate themselves through entrepreneurial activities.

Our study makes a number of significant contributions to the literature. First, we contribute to the emerging literature on entrepreneurship-as-emancipation (e.g. Rindova *et al.*, 2009; Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015), by developing a framework that outlines the sequential stages involved in achieving emancipation from perceived constraints through entrepreneurship. Second, we contribute to the literature on the roles of the various forms of capital (e.g. social capital) in creating other forms of capital (e.g. human capital), along with their role in venture creation and management. Third, notwithstanding the hardships faced by many women while entrepreneuring, especially in patriarchal societies (Barragan *et al.*, 2018; Marlow, 2019), we provide further evidence that entrepreneurial activities can and do liberate women not only from economic servitude but also from other prevalent constraints, especially in less-developed countries.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a theoretical background of how the concept of emancipation is used in the field of entrepreneurship. Next, Sections 3 presents the methodology, while Section 4 presents and discusses the study's findings. Finally, Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Resource-scarce environments

Entrepreneurial activity is widely considered to be a solution to poverty as it allows the entrepreneurs involved to provide for their families' basic necessities (Sutter *et al.*, 2019). Entrepreneurship also engenders economic growth when the required critical resources are available locally (Reypens *et al.*, 2021), and the right infrastructure is accessible to the entrepreneurs (Specht, 1993). When entrepreneurs do not have access to the right human capital, financial capital, markets for their products and services, and the required enabling infrastructure to support their activities in a particular environment, that environment is said to be a resource-scarce environment (Linna, 2013). Economies in Sub-Saharan Africa where we conducted our research are faced with acute resource scarcity of many and varied kinds. For instance, Atarah *et al.* (2021) report that women opting for entrepreneurship in this environment are forced to use financial resources from personal savings and/or loans from immediate family members and friends. This is caused by their inability to access funding from the conventional sources such as banks, resulting from a dysfunctional financial capital market. The region is additionally burdened with inadequate transportation due to poorly maintained roads and high traffic volumes, insufficient telecommunications infrastructure, inconsistent and unreliable power supply, and unreliable Internet connectivity (Peprah *et al.*, 2022). In addition to financial capital and markets, human capital is one of the most important resources to the growth of entrepreneurial ventures (Bates *et al.*, 2007). Developing economies including those in Sub-Saharan Africa face a scarcity of well-trained employees possessing

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both technological proficiency and essential business expertise (London *et al.*, 2010; Kandachar *et al.*, 2009; Chandra and Neelankavil, 2008), and the few high-skilled workers that are available are very expensive to employ. Given these circumstances, it is likely that entrepreneurs in these settings commence their businesses amid significant resource scarcities. This scarcity may be particularly amplified for female entrepreneurs, given the patriarchal nature of the environment (Sikweyiya *et al.*, 2020) and the resulting impact on women's ability to access specific resources. As a result, this may influence the steps they take in achieving emancipation through entrepreneurship.

2.2 Entrepreneurship as emancipation

Within entrepreneurship research, emancipation refers to the obtainment of equal rights or indeed equality in relation to social, economic or political facets (Roy *et al.*, 2021). Rindova *et al.* (2009) linked emancipation to entrepreneurship, noting that not all entrepreneurial activities derive from a financial/wealth motivation. These authors coined the term *entrepreneuring* defined as "efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or a group of individuals" (Rindova *et al.*, 2009, p. 477). Entrepreneurial activities emanating from these efforts could be emancipatory as they can aid in overcoming, or indeed removing, the perceived environment constraints placed on an individual. Rindova *et al.* (2009) introduced three core elements of entrepreneurship that account for the principles of emancipation: (1) *seeking autonomy*, conceptualized as the quest by the entrepreneuring individual(s) to break free from or break up the constraints that previously held power over them; (2) *authoring*, defined as the entrepreneur's actions aimed at taking complete charge of all the relationships, rules of operation and structures necessary for the success of the project undertaken; and (3) *making declarations*, which relates to the entrepreneurs' expression, through discursive and rhetorical acts, of their desire to create changes.

Following this re-conceptualization of entrepreneurship as a source of emancipation, a growing number of studies report how entrepreneuring in emerging economies, either in the business arena or in the social domain, can offer liberation to women and the environments in which they are embedded (e.g. Scott *et al.*, 2012; Barragan *et al.*, 2018). Marlow (2019) notes that context is important when investigating the endeavors of female entrepreneurs. For example, a longitudinal study of displaced Palestinian women living in Jordan (in the context of being refugees) who performed entrepreneurial activities at home, found that these women experienced an array of disadvantages stemming from their poverty, displacement and gender (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015). These women engaged in entrepreneurship activities to liberate themselves from the shackles of poverty and misery, and rightly so, considering the fact that they are excluded from other regular channels of earning income due to their being foreigners and also the fact that they are women in a society steeped in patriarchy.

The challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in developing and emerging economies differ from those of women in developed economies, as do their motivations for pursuing entrepreneurship (Solesvik *et al.*, 2019). Necessity, along with the need to survive, are cited as drivers for women in developing economies, while opportunities provided and independence are cited as motivations for female entrepreneurship in developed economies. Roy *et al.* (2021) and Sallah and Caesar (2020) are examples of entrepreneurship research conducted in developing and emerging economies that address these challenges and incentives, while Jennings *et al.* (2016) and Zboralska (2017) are examples of entrepreneurship research in developed country contexts. These studies have considered entrepreneurship as a means of emancipation and have emphasized the transformations brought about in the lives of entrepreneurs and their communities through entrepreneurship. Indeed, these studies have significantly enhanced our understanding of the relationship between entrepreneurship and

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emancipation, not only for individual entrepreneurs but also for entire communities in certain cases. However, to our knowledge no research exists that provides the *processes* that women entrepreneurs go through to emancipate themselves from perceived constraints. Our study seeks to fill this gap, in particular for the resource-constrained environment context.

3. Methodology

3.1 Context of the study

Our study focused on female entrepreneurs in West Africa, specifically in Ghana and Ivory Coast. There were several reasons for selecting this region. First, female entrepreneurs in developing economies are underrepresented in entrepreneurship research (Marlow, 2019). Second, recent research reports (such as Herrington and Kelley, 2013; GEM, 2021; Elam *et al.*, 2022) suggest that in West Africa, unlike other regions globally, there are more female entrepreneurs than male entrepreneurs. This may be because women in West Africa have been involved in trade more than men since the abolition of the slave trade (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1997). These intriguing revelations attracted our curiosity to investigate female entrepreneurs in West Africa. Third, most if not all countries in West Africa are classified as developing countries with high poverty and unemployment rates making them excellent subjects for exploring the framework of entrepreneurship as a means of liberation.

3.2 Country profiles

Ghana and Ivory Coast are two neighboring countries in West Africa. Ghana has a population of roughly 31.5 million while Ivory Coast had 27 million inhabitants in 2021. In terms of economic profile, both countries are categorized by the World Bank as lower-middle income countries. Per capita income levels are indeed similar: in 2021, GNI per capita was 2360 US$ for Ghana, and 2450 US$ for Ivory Coast. Average annual real GDP growth rates over the last five years (2017–2021) is also similar with 5.3% for Ghana and 5.9% for Ivory Coast (source for the above indicators: World Bank, World Development Indicators). Thus, both economies are characterized by relatively low income levels but also by relatively high growth rates in recent years, with Ivory Coast scoring slightly better on both indicators.

In terms of political stability, Ghana scores 0.13 on a scale from −2.5 to 2.5 while Ivory Coast scores considerably lower with −0.98 (for year 2020; source: World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators). Ghana also scores better in terms of corruption perception with an index score of 43 versus 36 for Ivory Coast (for year 2021, where a score of 100 is associated with “no corruption”; source: Transparency International).

Both countries are similar in terms of the ease of doing business. In a country ranking of 190 countries, Ghana ranked 118th and Ivory Coast 110th on the overall Doing Business index in 2020 (source: World Bank Doing Business data base). There were some differences on subcategories though: Ivory Coast scored considerably better on the ease of starting a business in the formal sector, whereas Ghana scored much better on access to electricity for businesses. Evaluating the above governance and doing business indicators, the formal institutional environments of both countries can be considered relatively weak.

In terms of gender equality, both countries are deeply patriarchal societies with distinct gender roles (Sikweyiya *et al.*, 2020), implying disadvantages for women relative to men in terms of access to education and associated economic potential. In patriarchal societies like these, husbands play a crucial role as stakeholders in their wives’ businesses, which can have both beneficial and detrimental effects (Wolf and Frese, 2018). Positive influences of husbands may include the provision of hands-on business support and the sharing of their networks (Wolf and Frese, 2018). Negative influences of husbands may vary from assigning household and family tasks to their wives, thereby limiting the time that the woman can

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spend on her business (Wolf and Frese, 2018), to causing limited access for the woman to the household's computer and mobile phone when these are being controlled by the husband (Elam *et al.*, 2022).

In terms of the level of entrepreneurship, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's well-known Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate is relatively high in Ghana, with about 25% of the adult population being involved in either nascent or young business entrepreneurship (Kelley *et al.*, 2015, p. 18). Remarkably, together with other African countries like Uganda and Zambia, Ghana belonged to the few countries in the report where the female TEA rate (28%) was higher than the male TEA rate (24%; see Kelley *et al.*, 2015, p. 18). Ivory coast did not participate in that research. However, GEM's 2021 report on women's entrepreneurship also indicates more female than male early-stage entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa (represented by Angola and Togo in this report; see GEM, 2021, p. 71).

Finally, the self-employment rate, which includes not only owner-managers of young businesses (as in GEM's TEA rate) but also owner-managers of established businesses, is high for both Ghana (72% of total employment in 2019) and Ivory Coast (71%), as measured by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in their ILOSTAT database.

These high entrepreneurship and self-employment rates should not be considered evidence of a thriving business sector though. Instead, these high rates tend to mask a severe lack of wage jobs available in the economy. In other words, these entrepreneurship jobs often stem from necessity (job scarcity) rather than opportunity motives (see GEM, 2021, p. 27). Indeed, with regards to the circumstances for entrepreneurship, the Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute, through GEDI's "2019 Global Entrepreneurship Index", ranked Ghana 91/137 with a score of 21.6 and Ivory Coast 100/137 with a score of 19.1 (Acs *et al.*, 2019), indicating relatively poor circumstances for conducting entrepreneurship (i.e. a relatively unhealthy entrepreneurial ecosystem) in the two countries compared to developed economies.

In sum, despite some differences, the two countries can be considered quite similar in terms of economic, political and cultural profiles.

3.3 Sampling

Ghana and Ivory Coast were equally purposively selected based on the linguistic competences of the researchers, as the first author is fluent in French, English and some local languages of the two countries; and also on the economic status of both countries (lower-middle income). We collected data from female entrepreneurs in 13 districts in Ghana and Ivory Coast. These districts are listed in the Appendix (Table A1), including the distribution of participants over the districts. These districts were also selected as they covered most if not all the economic, social and institutional dynamics of the two countries which constitute the contexts in which women are embedded. We employed purposive sampling to interview women who started and are running their businesses. As Miles *et al.* (2013) indicated, samples for qualitative studies are usually purposive rather than random since they involve dealing with small samples of participants embedded in their own contexts. The owners of these ventures are the key informants capable of giving us relevant information (Corley and Gioia, 2004). Due to lack of contact information (no known entrepreneur associations or databases) for female entrepreneurs in these regions, we started our research by using personal contacts and then employed the snowball technique to gain access to participants.

Our sampling procedure resulted in a total of 57 female entrepreneurs (33 from Ghana and 24 from Ivory Coast). Most entrepreneurs in our sample (25) were between 31 and 40 years of age, followed by the age categories 41–50 (16 respondents), 51–60 (13), 61–70 (2) and 21–30 (1 respondent). In terms of education, our sample is very diverse, ranging from no formal or

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only basic education (23 respondents) to university or other forms of tertiary education (25 respondents). For seven female entrepreneurs, secondary education is their highest level of education and for two others it is vocational education. Most of the female entrepreneurs in our sample run their business in the fashion industry (16 participants), followed by general commerce (14), agro-processing (11), food processing (10), construction (3), and the health and education sector (3). Finally, in terms of marital status, the vast majority of our sample (42 respondents) are married, 8 women are single, 6 are widowed and 1 is separated. Biographical data for each individual respondent are listed in the Appendix (Table A2).

3.4 Data collection

We employed two techniques to collect our data: (1) semi-structured, in-depth one-on-one interviews were used as our main source of information and (2) non-participant observations were used when possible. The data from the observations served as an important source of information for triangulation. Baxter and Jack (2008) observe that case studies depend heavily on data from multiple sources whose convergence through triangulation during analysis enhances the researcher's fuller grasping of the phenomenon under investigation.

As regards to the semi-structured interviews, 56 interviews were conducted face-to-face and 1 was conducted by telephone within a six-month period, between January and June 2018 inclusive. Interviews were conducted in English, in some Ghanaian languages (in Ghana) and in French (in Ivory Coast). To ensure consistency, the first author conducted all the interviews and was fluent in all languages. Informed consent was given by participants for the academic research. Interviews ranged between 25 and 60 min and interview guides with standard questions were used for each interviewee to ensure consistency. 51 interviews were audio-recorded and detailed notes were taken for five interviewees. All interviews were transcribed after the interviews to avoid loss of salient information through the time lapse. We transcribed the interviews verbatim to aid in our analysis.

Furthermore, we carried out non-participant observations at female entrepreneurs' work place where possible. We observed and took notes on the surroundings, the people that worked with or for them, and etc. Data from observations were used to triangulate information gathered from interviews.

3.5 Data analysis

We started our data collection and analysis concurrently; our focus of enquiry was the processual development of female ventures as vehicles of emancipation from perceived constraints. We started our analysis by performing open coding which involved looking for concepts and putting them into various categories (Corley and Gioia, 2004). We preferred open coding to other forms of coding such as abductive coding because, with abductive coding the researcher "does not enter the field with an open mind, as theoretical understanding sets parameters to what they are initially looking for" (Thompson, 2022, p. 1411). In our case, we went to the field with open minds seeking to find out the processes that women in West Africa go through to emancipate themselves through entrepreneurship, and what constitutes those processes. We began the open coding by using the language of the informants referred to as *in vivo* coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990), which gave priority to the voice of the participants (Saldaña, 2013). After grouping the concepts into categories, we completed axial coding by looking at the categories' similarities and grouping them into higher-order themes of similar categories (Corley and Gioia, 2004). The themes were then moved to the broader aggregate dimensions from which we drew theoretical insights. Each participant's interview transcript was coded separately. Following this, the codes were compared across all transcripts resulting in the creation of similar concepts, categories and themes across all participants.

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4. Findings and discussion

From the analysis of our 57 interviews, we identified four stages of how female entrepreneurs emancipate themselves through entrepreneurship: (1) the motivational factors stage, (2) entrepreneurial activity choice stage, (3) resource gathering stage and (4) the emancipation stage. Together, these four stages make up our process framework of emancipation-through-entrepreneurship. This framework, which resulted from the fieldwork that will be described in the current section, is summarized in Figure 1.

We will now present our findings including a discussion for each of the four stages of our process framework.

4.1 Motivational factors

We found six types of motivational factors that women in our sample used to emancipate themselves from various perceived constraints: economic motivations, social motivations, passion-related motivations, psychological motivations, intellectual motivations and political motivations (see Figure 2 for first- and second-order codes that emanated from our interviews, and Table 1 for representative quotations on the various motivational factors used by the women entrepreneurs).

Economic motivations were one of the dominating types of motivational factors in our sample. Women were motivated to enter into entrepreneurship to earn income to cater for their families' economic needs, thereby seeking to break free from poverty and unemployment. This finding is not surprising considering the low levels of development and high poverty rates in the countries from which our sample was drawn. Our findings confirm extant research showing that entrepreneurial activities may empower women economically (Mair and Marti, 2009; Datta and Gailey, 2012).

Regarding *social motivations*, some women indicated that they were motivated to become self-employed to be able to plan their activities to include raising and socializing their children their own way as they felt this was not possible when working for the government or corporate bodies. Our findings resonate with previous study findings that women go into entrepreneurship to have time to rear their children (Williams, 2004; Adom *et al.*, 2018).

A majority of the women in the fashion industry reported being motivated by their passion for the activities they are involved in to go into entrepreneurship. Thus, for these women, *passion-related motivations* were the main driver of their entrepreneurial journey. They sought to do what they were passionate about before thinking of the accompanying economic, social or financial benefits. Thus, for these women, gaining fulfillment by following their passion was the primary goal for going into entrepreneurship. This aligns with extant research where emotions and passion were found to be influential in entrepreneurial decision-making (e.g. Cardon *et al.*, 2013; Kuratko *et al.*, 2021).

Securing a comfortable future during old age, or compensating for the absence of a main source of support (e.g. through the loss of a husband) were classified under *psychological motivations* in this study. Uncertainty about one's future can result in worry. Notwithstanding the unpleasantness of worry, any worry can have positive effects including searching for solutions to the cause of the worry (Freeston *et al.*, 1994). Thus, we propose that at the time of worrying, these women were suffering from psychological constraints that needed liberation which came when they started entrepreneurial activities.

Regarding *intellectual motivations*, our results revealed that some women deemed doing business as an avenue to acquire practical management skills that cannot be acquired in the classroom. Hence, they started their own ventures to be able to fill this intellectual deficit. Women who went into entrepreneurship because they could not enter formal wage employment due to their limited educational attainment were also classified as driven by intellectual motivations in the study. Some women thus started a business because of their

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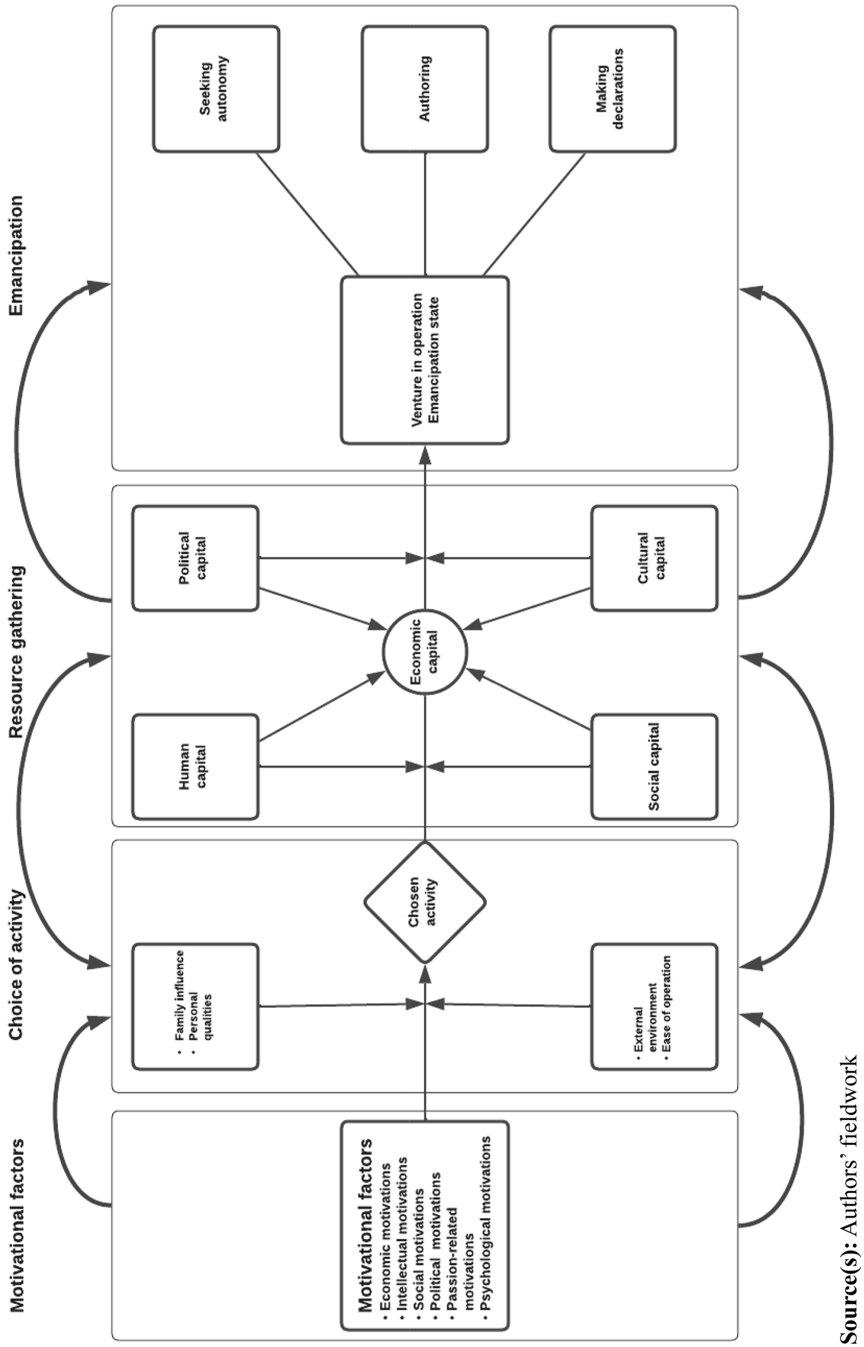

Source(s): Authors' fieldwork

Figure 1.
Framework of the process of emancipation

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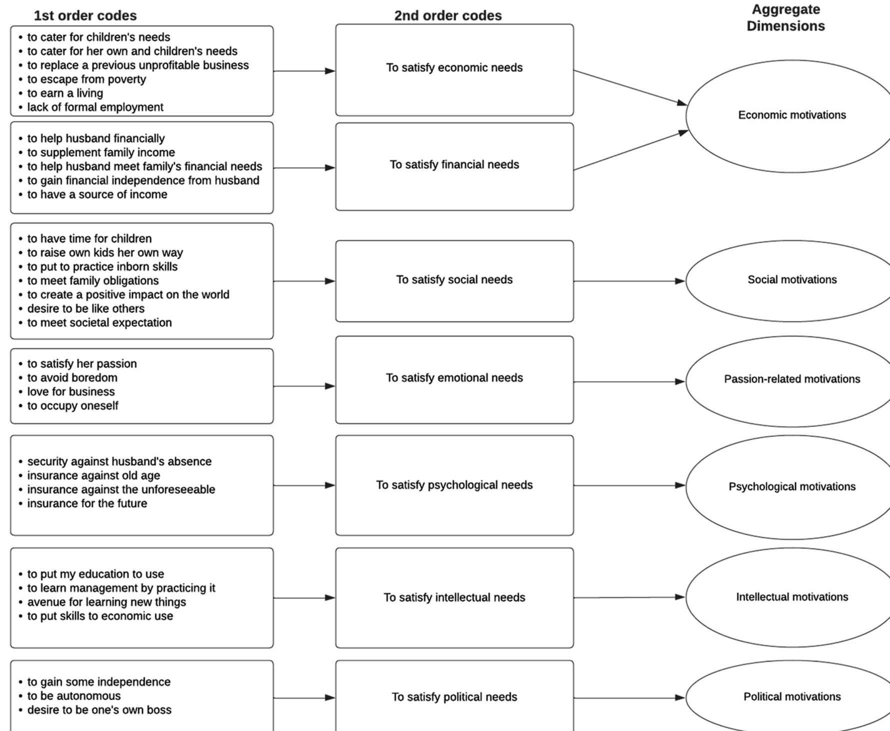

Source(s): Authors own creation

Figure 2.
Analysis structure for motivational factors

own lack of education. However, some other women went into entrepreneurship to break up the intellectual constraints of others. We put all these circumstances under intellectual motivations. For instance, a Ghanaian woman [GH9] who has formal education and calls herself a co-founder/manager of an enterprise said she got involved in the management of the business because she had formal education and her husband had not. Her intellectual abilities thus served to break up the intellectual constraint of her late husband.

The final category of motivational factors is *political motivations*. These motivations encompassed all reasons for going into entrepreneurship that related to the quest to be one's own boss, and indeed the motivational force behind this. Women reported going into self-employment to be free from the power of another person—the boss. Our findings indicate that the women saw going into entrepreneurship to be the only way of earning economic benefits and still be in the position to decide what to do and at what time. Several women in our sample expressed a desire for autonomy which is in line with extant literature stating that the quest for autonomy is an important motive to become an entrepreneur (e.g. Van Gelderen and Jansen, 2006).

Representative quotations for each of our six motivational factors are provided in Table 1.

The most important among the six types of constraints that female entrepreneurs in our study sought to break free from was the category of economic constraints perceived through the day-to-day interaction between women and their needs—children's school needs, food, clothing and healthcare. These daily realities laid-bare economic constraints from which women resolved to free themselves. The entrepreneurial activities therefore served as

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Theme	Representative quotation
Economic motivations	"You know if you have children and go to work for someone to pay you, how much will you get to take care of yourself and your children? So I chose to do my own business in order to get some income that will be able to take care of my children" [GH3] "I started this business to be able to take care of my needs. You know I am not doing any government work . . .. So I decided to start this business as a way to get income" [GH7]
Social motivations	"The formal employment I wanted to do I realized if I did it I wouldn't have time for my children, that's why I chose to do my own business" [GH18] ". . . when I got married and gave birth I felt it wouldn't be possible anymore to do that so I chose to get a shop and rather sell provisions so I can be at one place to take care of my children and still earn income" [GH8] ". . . with the school I have my children in the school and I raise them the way I want. I know their friends, their food, and so on. But if they are in a different school you can't know what they do and what happens to them there". [GH33]
Passion-related motivations	"I have the passion for this business especially designing and sewing. This desire has been in me since my childhood and so when I grew I decided to do what I like for fulfilment and also for a living" [GH27] "I like fashion and I am also very passionate about all that has to do with food and restauration. And so I decided into go into restauration business in addition to the sale of beauty products and the acting that I do. Fulfilling my passion is the main reason for my going into this business" [CI 21]
Psychological motivations	"I went into doing my own business to supply my needs . . . and to save as insurance for any unforeseen circumstances in the future and even build a house" [GH8] "You know as a woman with children you need to also be working to support your husband to take care of the children . . . I can't rely on my husband for everything. Besides you no one knows the future. So if you rely solely on him and something happens to him, what will you do?" [GH25]
Intellectual motivations	"I like business naturally . . . it permits you to know a lot of things, to a have a lot of relations with people [which] makes you learn a lot of things" [CI 7] "I went into business because . . . I thought to myself I will be able to . . . learn a lot about how to make other products that people come to request, learn management as I manage my business and others" [GH6] "today, it is not everyone who is raised to work in the offices as government functionaries or as bureaucrats. In that case if you cannot, and are not working in those places you cannot sit down doing nothing and waiting for your husband to take care of all your needs and those of the family" [CI 8] ". . . I was teaching at the time and he later asked me to stop the teaching and come and take over the management of the place since I am educated and can read and write, skills that are very necessary for this type of business" [GH9]
Political motivations	"I started doing business since I was very little. I have always liked doing business because doing business makes one autonomous, you don't have a director or a boss, you are your own boss" [CI 12] "As I said already, life has gradually become more expensive than in the past. And so if one wants to live comfortably without being a burden on someone else one has to work and so I have always decided to be in business in order to get myself the financial freedom I need to be comfortable." [CI 24]

Source(s): Authors own creation

Table 1. Representative quotations for motivational factors stage

employment to those women who were unemployed prior to becoming entrepreneurs with the aim of bringing in some much-needed income to cater for them and their families' needs. These findings corroborate those of previous researchers (e.g. Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015;

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Haugh and Talwar, 2016), who reported that entrepreneurial activities empower women economically and may ultimately free them from poverty and its concomitant ills.

Some women also embraced entrepreneurship to break free from social constraints. This supports the argument by Jack and Anderson (2002) that the creation of a new venture is not just an economic process but is also rooted in the social context which helps produce its identity and determines its outcomes. Chief among these social constraints was the need for women to control their own economic activities allowing them to rear their children. These child-rearing and household-related factors are those Brush *et al.* (2009) term the "motherhood" factors affecting female entrepreneurship. Based on our research findings, it appears that certain women opted to leave their formal employment because they felt it impeded their ability to fulfill their primary duties as mothers and wives within their families. Instead, they pursued entrepreneurship as it afforded them greater control over their work schedules. Women arrived at this decision due to mounting dissatisfaction with the lack of childcare facilities that adequately catered to their needs and standards, or the steep costs associated with the few options that were available. Our findings are in line with past studies (e.g. Williams, 2004; Rehman and Azam Roomi, 2012), which reported women's greater likelihood to go into entrepreneurship because of childcare than men.

As previously mentioned, our research also uncovered emotional, psychological, intellectual and political obstacles that female entrepreneurs aimed to overcome through their businesses. Drawing from this, it is clear that various types of limitations can serve as drivers for women to pursue entrepreneurship.

4.2 Choice of activity

Once women have realized they are constrained, the subsequent stage in the process of liberation involves selecting an entrepreneurial activity to pursue. We identified four broad themes that influence women's activity choice: (1) family influence, (2) personal qualities, (3) external environment and (4) ease of operation.

In relation to *family influence*, family played an important role in the women's activity choice process in two significant ways: imitation and family needs. First, we found women who imitated a successful family member, past or present, involved in the same business activity. This finding confirms the importance of (parental) role models in entrepreneurship (Hoffmann *et al.*, 2015). The most recurring cases in our sample are the daughter taking over her mother's activities, or the granddaughter taking over the business of her grandmother. This reinforces the findings by Greene *et al.* (2013) that maternal role models positively influence their daughters' self-employment propensities. Second, family need was another influence in the choice of business. Women who specialized in food and clothing mentioned their desire to use some of the products they trade to directly meet their families' needs.

The *personal qualities* theme represents two sources: First, it captures qualities acquired from experience through formal education, apprenticeship, family training or any kind of familiarity with the activity in the past. Apprenticeship is one common means that women use to acquire skills. The experience they acquire during their training becomes a quality that influences their choice of entrepreneurial activity. In some cases, women acquired the necessary skills for their chosen enterprise informally within their households, which directed their entrepreneurial sector choice. Second, personal qualities also capture qualities relating to one's feelings (i.e. passion for the activity, intuition, optimism, attitude toward challenges and stage in life). Despite the significant opportunity costs associated with foregoing formal employment for some women, the majority of women cited their passion for the entrepreneurial activity as the primary factor influencing their decision.

The *external environment* represents the market opportunities and the external forces that influenced women's choices of activities. In several cases, women, through interactions with

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members of their social environments, recognized products or services that had high market demand and took the entrepreneurial opportunity. Due to the large social and cultural capital that some of these women possess, information on the availability of demands and the profitability of some activities transcends generations. Such information is also passed around among members of the same social circles. This information sharing provides women with the needed market information to enhance their choice of activities. In addition, some women also noted a lack of local competition for certain products/services, which they evaluated as a favorable external environment to start a business.

The ease with which one could start and run a business activity also influenced women's choice of activities (themed *ease of operation*). This ease included the availability of raw materials, the imperishable nature of the products, the small start-up financial capital requirements, or even the availability of idle resources that one could fall on to start the business. Indeed, one woman who had an idle building chose to open a private school to make good use of the building [GH33]. This is in line with the findings by Baker and Nelson (2005) who note that in resource-constrained environments, entrepreneuring individuals make do with whatever resources are at hand to produce workable solutions instead of enacting limitations to the use of the resources they possess.

Regarding the initial financial capital requirements, the prevailing high interest rates on loans, including those from microfinance companies that are ubiquitous in developing countries (Banerjee and Jackson, 2017), makes borrowing unattractive. Women therefore chose businesses that require lower amounts of financial startup capital, allowing them to use their personal savings and small loans from family and friends to start. Indeed, many women in our sample were restricted in their choice of entrepreneurial activities by the amount of their own personal savings.

Representative quotations for each of our four broad themes are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Representative quotations for entrepreneurial activity choice stage

Theme	Representative quotation
Family influence	"I went into this . . . business because my father was into that business and I saw it would be beneficial to me" [GH1]
	"Cereals are food products. So I chose to go into that business with the knowledge that even if I don't get profit I will get food for my children to eat" [GH26]
	"I went into this particular business because . . . my mother was dealing in hair products and that took her to the USA and other places and back to trade in hair products like wigs mesh, artificial hair and many others. So I knew the inside out of that business". [CI 3]
Personal qualities	"I learnt the trade growing up, and so I felt it would be easier doing that than going to learn something new from somewhere else" [GH15]
	"I like this job a lot. It's been my interest since childhood . . . It's always been my passion to sew" [GH8]
External environment	"women like changing their hair styles and look for every occasion. So clothes and hair products will always be in demand" [CI 3]
	"I looked around here and saw there was no such business . . . so I decided to start selling these products here" [GH6]
Ease of operation	"In our area here we have a lot of shea nut trees and so I felt . . . that it would be beneficial to use the tree that is in abundance here to make money" [GH20]
	"I chose to go into jewelry because they never go out of fashion, and they don't rot. So one can put them down for several years and still have them intact . . ." [CI 13]
	"I went into this business because it didn't require a huge capital to start . . ." [GH19]
	"We had this building that we were not ready to move in so we decided to use it for a school" [GH33]

Source(s): Authors own creation

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4.3 Resource gathering

Once the decision to engage in entrepreneurial activity has been made, the subsequent step in the process of emancipation is acquiring the necessary resources to initiate the business. Important resources that women in our sample required to start their businesses are economic capital, human capital, political capital, social capital and cultural capital. According to our study, among all these resources, economic capital is the most crucial.

Economic capital encompasses various material resources including financial resources, land or property ownership that could be employed in the starting and running of a venture. Though not exclusively, the economic capital of the women entrepreneurs we analyzed included the financial resources required to purchase materials for initiating and managing their enterprises. The majority of the female entrepreneurs depended entirely on the personal savings they accumulated through their human capital over the years to establish and operate their enterprises. This finding is in line with a more general observation that access to finance remains a major challenge for female entrepreneurs (Khalid *et al.*, 2022).

Human capital refers to an individual's attainment of health, knowledge, motivation and skills (Becker, 1994). By utilizing their human capital, the women entrepreneurs in our study obtained economic capital, which allowed them to launch and oversee their businesses. They obtained this capital by engaging in either formal or informal work, which enabled them to set aside funds for their enterprises. Thus, the human capital that these women possess helped them to obtain the needed economic capital to start their businesses. As such, our findings are in line with Adom and Asare-Yeboa (2016) who provided evidence for the crucial role of human capital for female entrepreneurs in Ghana to achieve entrepreneurial success.

Political capital is defined as the resources used (actual or potential) by an individual to influence policy formation/political decisions and realized outcomes that subsequently serve the individual's perceived interests (Birner and Wittmer, 2003). In most patriarchal societies, traditional role-sharing is practiced with the man being the head of the family. Thus, the permission/blessings of the head of family is desirable, if not required, for a woman member of the family to start a business. In our research, we encountered female entrepreneurs who secured not only permission/blessing but also support from the head of family (father, husband, father in-law) in the form of economic capital to start their businesses. This clearly demonstrates the political capital these women possess by being able to lobby (a form of political capital) with male heads of family with desirable outcomes.

Social capital can be defined as the resources embedded in networks that individual members can readily access and use for their personal gains. Social capital, unlike other forms of capital, is intangible and exists in the network relations among persons (Lin, 2001). The female entrepreneurs in our study reported raising economic capital for their business from individuals in their networks, for example from suppliers who supply materials on credit, relying on trust alone as collateral. A private school owner got loans from friends in her network to start her school and paid them later when the school had picked up [CI 19].

Cultural capital can be viewed as something handed down from one generation to the other (DiMaggio, 1982). Thus, the knowledge of business management and the attitudes and behaviors necessary for success in business can be passed down from earlier generations to younger ones. This knowledge, credentials and goods can be a form of goodwill that can serve as collateral for entrepreneurs to get the needed economic capital (including loans and credit supplies) to run their businesses. It could also be a source of human capital for management purposes. Female entrepreneurs in our study revealed that they learnt to do business from their families. Management skills were passed down through generations to them, which ultimately aided their own ventures in terms of goodwill and management abilities.

Representative quotations for each type of capital are provided in Table 3.

Our research has identified that in settings with limited resources, women rely on five forms of capital to establish and operate their businesses. Among the five categories of

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Theme	Representative quotation
Economic capital/Human capital	"I went to work as a manual labourer at building construction sites and saved those wages I got to be able to start this business." [GH4] "I saved from the sewing business, used that money to trade in animals and when the animals were sold, capital and profit became sizable enough to start this business and that was what I used to start this business" [GH23] "I used the money I was paid when I lost my job to add to my savings to start this place" [CI 23]
Political capital	". . . I got a grant from the (Ivorian) government to start my business . . . In our part of the world, one needs to have some political links to be able to get money from the government" [CI 17] ". . . I also took a loan from a local government agency, National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) to start my business" [GH20] ". . . I went and told my father to help me to take care of my children and he didn't hesitate and helped me with the (financial) capital . . . he gave me the money to start" [GH1]
Social capital	"I took loans from friends to start the school. These I told I could pay them back with time and they agreed and so as the school grew I paid all of them back" [CI 19] ". . . But after passing out (graduating) from the apprenticeship I used the money I got from through the donations during the graduation ceremony to buy the things I needed to start this business here" [GH27] ". . .I also took credit from a well-wisher to add to my savings to execute a contract that I got" [CI 4]
Cultural capital	"When I was going to start, my mother gave me the first raw materials (leather) to start. I used her tools as well to start and when I sold the products I bought more leather and still worked with her tools till I finally expanded and acquired my own tools and leather to make products" [GH13] " this is a family business . . . The people of the whole place where I come from are into leather works . . . I got the initial capital from my mother to start the business" [GH14] ". . .my parents were business people especially my father. I learnt all from him" [CI 1]

Source(s): Authors own creation

Table 3. Representative quotations for resource gathering stage

capital, economic capital in the form of financial resources and other physical assets was the most crucial. This reflects that access to financial resources remains one of the most essential elements for starting and successfully running a venture profitably (Khalid *et al.*, 2022). To raise this central capital, however, women needed to employ the remaining four types of capital—human, social, cultural and political. This was particularly significant given the widespread institutional voids in developing nations that impede the effective operation of markets, making transactions among market participants cumbersome (Mair and Marti, 2009).

4.4 Emancipation

The next and final stage of the emancipation process is the actual emancipation in the form of the creation and running of a business venture. The very act of starting and running an entrepreneurial venture which frees one from constraints is emancipation. As noted previously, when entrepreneurship is considered from the emancipation viewpoint, three core elements need to be considered; seeking autonomy, authoring and making declarations (Rindova *et al.*, 2009). We found evidence for all three elements from our data.

From the emancipatory perspective, *seeking autonomy* is when individuals seek to escape from or remove perceived constraints in their environment. Indeed, all of the female

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entrepreneurs we interviewed aimed to overcome one or more constraints that limited their potential. By breaking free from these constraints, they sought to assume some form of autonomy over their own lives (Van Gelderen and Jansen, 2006). For instance, one Ivorian entrepreneur sought to liberate herself from the economic constraint of unemployment and to liberate her community from the cultural constraint of consuming unwholesome food—which had led to food insecurity—by going into natural food processing [CI 7]. Thus, she overcame unemployment and alleviated the food insecurity challenge in her community.

Through entrepreneurship, the women not only freed themselves from specific constraints but also liberated other members of their communities. In Ghana, a fashion designer who left school at a young age opted for entrepreneurship to generate her own income, thereby establishing financial security for her future, which liberated her from psychological constraints. Additionally, she trained other girls to become fashion designers, thereby helping them overcome comparable constraints [GH8]. By serving the interest of the broader community, the businesses of these women may be seen as social enterprises, as they combine profitability with a social goal (Rivera-Santos *et al.*, 2015). Indeed, social entrepreneurship may be a good instrument of emancipation, not only to escape from economic hardship but also other types of constraints. Moreover, it can serve as an instrument of emancipation not only for the entrepreneurs themselves but also for other stakeholders in the community, including but not limited to the employees of the social enterprises (Chandra, 2017). By empowering women, emancipatory social entrepreneurship may thus contribute to social change at the community level, i.e. the improvements of the social order in which women are embedded, particularly in developing countries (Haugh and Talwar, 2016).

Authoring involves creating and managing the relationships that are necessary to affect the desired change. These relationships often deviate from the status quo in order to bring about the desired changes, lest the status quo becomes an additional constraint. The female entrepreneurs in our study authored relationships that deviated from the “business as usual” ways to get their businesses going. A Ghanaian woman active in the meat processing industry gained access to animal suppliers through her father who introduced her to the business. However, after her father died, the suppliers would not give her animals on credit without a male guarantor. She fostered relationships with new suppliers who did not require such guarantors, she did this by convincing them that she was as worthy of doing business with as any man.

A group of women entrepreneurs in Ivory Coast recognized that continually obtaining micro loans from microfinance institutions implied “working for the banks,” and thus, they authored a novel approach to finance the growth of their businesses. They established a Cooperative Lending group that functions similarly to a credit union, wherein members contribute funds and subsequently lend money to each other at zero interest rates (Fieve and Chrysostome, 2022).

Authoring from the emancipation perspective is taking control over the rules of engagement in the entrepreneuring process and building relationships that will enhance the change process. Women entrepreneurs take charge of the creation of the relationships they feel promote their entrepreneuring agenda. They seek and establish relationships with suppliers who are willing to trust them and give them supplies on credit following terms that are agreed upon by both parties. Most women stopped taking loans from banks and microfinance institutions and authored groups that played the role of cooperative credit unions. Members of these groups contribute money from which they borrow to grow their businesses. These are new institutions engendered through trust to enhance the change processes. Such new trust-based institutions have been found to play increasingly important roles in countries with weak formal institutions, including African countries (Omeihe *et al.*, 2020).

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Making declarations is an essential part of the emancipation process which aims to create change. Declarations are made through "unambiguous discursive and rhetorical acts regarding the actor's intention to create change" (Rindova *et al.*, 2009, p. 485). The authors indicate that these acts could be actions or words that aim to position the change-seeking endeavor in contexts within which stakeholders interpret the value of products and activities. Rindova and colleagues propose that these declarations are likely to bring to light the differences between existing activities and those the entrepreneuring individual(s) are introducing, thus disrupting the status quo. These disruptions, according to the researchers, often meet with contestations from society and instances within our dataset provide substantiation of this. When an Ivorian civil servant declared that she was quitting her job to go into entrepreneurship [construction] that was a major disruption for two "good" reasons: first, it made little sense to quit a secured job and venture into the uncertain territory of entrepreneurship. Her elderly mother protested, questioning her motivation to quit a monthly paid job to create an enterprise. Second, the construction business at the time was male dominated. Thus, getting contestations from society was normal because she was declaring to do the "abnormal".

We found that women entrepreneurs made such declarations at the very beginning of their businesses and it were those declarations that set their ventures apart from those of their competitors. Those declarations in some cases attracted partners and external funding. Thus, making declarations of one's change intentions through words, actions and symbols, and the resolution to go by those declarations, crowns the emancipation process.

Representative quotations for each of the three core elements of emancipation are provided in Table 4.

Rindova *et al.*'s (2009) framework conceives entrepreneuring as a change-making activity which implies a movement from one state to another state. Our study endeavored to formulate a grounded model detailing the developmental process of female entrepreneurs' emancipatory journey within resource-limited environments. We identified four stages that female entrepreneurs go through to attain freedom from perceived limitations through entrepreneurship. Although we categorize them as stages, it is important to note that they are not necessarily independent of one another. The stages are interconnected and flow into one another as agents interact and engage in activities, transitioning from one stage to the other (hence the arrows between the different stages in Figure 1).

Theme	Representative quotation
Seeking autonomy	". . . first of all the job market is saturated, . . . Second, the prevalence of food insecurity based on reports and what I saw as a kid growing up and even what I still see around made me decide to undertake food processing to promote food security and healthy living through healthy consumption" [CI 7] ". . . I dropped out very early from school and so I had to look for a profession from which to earn income for my upkeep now and in the future . . ." [GH8]
Authoring	". . . these small banks came saying they wanted to finance our businesses but it wasn't easy with those ones so I have stopped taking money from them and now we contribute among ourselves and we kind of loan ourselves from that money . . ." [CI 2] ". . . with time I gained the confidence of the suppliers and now I take supplies on credit in addition to those I pay for with cash due to the good relationship that exists" [GH1]
Making declarations	"I wanted to make a difference in a field that was underdeveloped or where people did not consider to be important. I wanted to make an impact on society" [CI 15] ". . .I have always wanted to work for myself and not work for someone" [CI 12] ". . .at the time that I started it was almost entirely a male-dominated area . . ."

Source(s): Authors own creation

Table 4. Representative quotations for emancipation stage

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5. Conclusions

Among the developing regions of the world, West Africa has been found to have a relatively high prevalence of female entrepreneurship in recent studies (e.g. Herrington and Kelley, 2013). The present study investigated the processual steps that female entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments take in emancipating themselves from perceived constraints through entrepreneurship. We used Rindova *et al.*'s (2009) *entrepreneuring-as-emancipation* as our framework. We found that having perceived the constraints, women subsequently used these constraints as motivational factors to move through the process of choosing an entrepreneurial activity to engage in. The choice process is usually influenced by several factors either within the individual or in her external environment. The process then rolls on to gathering the required resources, the most important of which is economic capital. With the required resources in hand, they then start and run their ventures—the stage of emancipation. Venture creation and management to produce the desired results—emancipation—is the final stage and also the final goal. The development of a staged process framework of emancipation-through-entrepreneurship, a key contribution of our study, is summarized in Figure 1.

5.1 Policy implications

Our research carries implications for policy, particularly in the realm of entrepreneurial finance. Several of our participants who were seeking external finance for their micro business reported negative experiences with banks and microfinance institutions (MFIs) regarding repayment terms, repayment modes, amount of money one could borrow at a time, interest rates, etc. Although microfinance is often considered an important element of enabling women entrepreneurship in the poorest areas of the world (Adams and Raymond, 2008; Mahmood *et al.*, 2014), the experiences of some of the women entrepreneurs in our sample suggest that daily practices of microfinance institutions in developing countries are not always in line with their mission of helping poor women to set up small businesses. Owusu-Yeboah *et al.* (2020) report that the high interest rates and the requirement of guarantors and collateral for loans set by MFIs in Ghana is pushing the most constrained women away from using microfinance for their businesses. These authors recommend a bigger supervisory role for government to monitor practices by MFIs and the set-up of special MFI units focusing on female clients only.

However, in the absence of such measures, many women entrepreneurs are constrained in their choice of entrepreneurial activity to activities that require no or little start-up capital (see the Choice of activity stage in Figure 1). Alternative sources of finance often sought by women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained economies include gifts or soft loans from friends and family (Atarah *et al.*, 2021). However, this will not be a viable route for everyone, and the present study has identified a promising alternative source of finance for female entrepreneurs in West African countries. As reported in Section 4.4, a group of Ivorian women entrepreneurs formed a Cooperative Lending group to which members contribute and from which they loan out money to members at zero interest rates. Particularly in countries with weak formal institutional environments, such informal, trust-based institutions can be very effective (Omeihe *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, recent research shows that Cooperative Lending groups in developing contexts can help women entrepreneurs not only with obtaining access to finance (i.e. economic capital) but also with increasing their networks by becoming members of the Cooperative Lending groups (i.e. social capital). Finally, these lending groups also provide skill training (i.e. human capital) to their members (Fieve and Chrysostome, 2022) so that they facilitate women entrepreneurs in obtaining various forms of capital (see the Resource gathering stage in Figure 1) required for emancipation. Such training can be particularly useful to the lower educated women in our

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sample and in West African countries more generally. For instance, what training? In terms of our staged process framework of emancipation-through-entrepreneurship, the creation of such Cooperative Lending groups by constrained women entrepreneurs can be seen as an example of authoring (see the Emancipation stage in Figure 1), i.e. breaking the status-quo and allowing to break free from the initially perceived constraints (see the Constraints perception stage in Figure 1).

A second domain of policy implications concerns the emancipatory potential of social entrepreneurship (Chandra, 2017). Although most women entrepreneurs in our sample had started for-profit businesses, some of them also served a social goal, so that these businesses are in fact social enterprises (Rivera-Santos *et al.*, 2015). As explained in Section 4.4., social entrepreneurship may be a good instrument of emancipation, not only for the entrepreneurs involved but also for the broader community. As such, social entrepreneurship by women may contribute to social change at the community level (Haugh and Talwar, 2016), which, in turn, may positively influence economic development. Both federal and local governments in West African countries may therefore consider not only to support entrepreneurship in general (see Ghanaian Ministry of Finance, 2022, for a recent policy initiative) but also to design policy measures supporting emancipatory social entrepreneurship by women. In this regard, it has been suggested that various stakeholders including local institutions, domestic and foreign (Western) universities, corporations and NGOs, may play their own roles in building and strengthening social entrepreneurship ecosystems in Africa (Mirvis and Googins, 2018).

5.2 Limitations and suggestions for future research

A strength of our study is that we focus on women entrepreneurs in West-Africa, a context which has received limited attention (Adom and Asare-Yeboa, 2016; Ali, 2018), but where emancipation-through-entrepreneurship is pertinent given the challenging economic and social circumstances for women in this part of the world. A limitation of our study is that our participants had to recall some facts regarding the creation of their ventures from memory. This could be a source of possible retrospective bias.

For future research, we suggest that longitudinal studies be conducted with several rounds of interviews to determine how enduring one's emancipation can be and how this is related to the life-cycle of the business venture. It would also be interesting to find out if women's constraints evolve over time and whether the management of the business is tailored along these evolving constraints. At the society level, it will be interesting to see if, in the long term, the emancipation of women through entrepreneurship will contribute to alleviating the disadvantaged position of women in many developing countries (Marlow, 2019).

A final stream of important future research should focus on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women entrepreneurship. Recent research by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor consortium shows that businesses of women entrepreneurs in emerging economies have experienced a disproportionate negative impact from the global Covid-19 pandemic (Elam *et al.*, 2022), hence the emancipation from constraints is likely to become even more important for women entrepreneurs in these economies.

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Appendix

Background information on the study's participants

The participants for this study were drawn from the following 13 districts in Ghana and Ivory Coast.

Table A1. Distribution of respondents by district

District	Country	Number of participants
1. Bolgatanga Municipal	Ghana	8
2. Talensi	Ghana	3
3. Abidjan	Ivory Coast	24
4. Bongo	Ghana	2
5. Kumasi Metro	Ghana	2
6. La Nkwantanang	Ghana	3
7. Bolgatanga East	Ghana	3
8. Accra Metro	Ghana	2
9. Asokore Mampong	Ghana	2
10. Bawku West	Ghana	2
11. Bawku East	Ghana	2
12. Tamale Metro	Ghana	2
13. Adentan Municipal	Ghana	2

Source(s): Authors own creation

Table A2. Biographical data of the 57 female entrepreneurs in our sample

Respondent	Age range	Level of education	Sector of economic activity	Marital status
GH 1	51–60	Basic	Food processing	Married
GH 2	51–60	Tertiary	General commerce	Married
GH 3	31–40	Secondary	General commerce	Married
GH 4	41–50	Vocational	Food processing	Married
GH 5	31–40	Basic	General commerce	Married
GH 6	31–40	Basic	General commerce	Married
GH 7	41–50	Basic	General commerce	Married
GH 8	41–50	University (1st degree)	Fashion	Married
GH 9	41–50	Secondary	General commerce	Widowed
GH 10	51–60	Tertiary	General commerce	Widowed
GH 11	31–40	Tertiary	General commerce	Married
GH 12	31–40	No formal education	Agro processing	Married
GH 13	51–60	No formal education	Agro processing	Married
GH 14	31–40	Basic	Agro processing	Married
GH 15	41–50	Basic	Agro processing	Married
GH 16	51–60	No formal education	Agro processing	Married
GH 17	61–70	No formal education	Agro processing	Married
GH 18	31–40	Secondary	Fashion	Married
GH 19	31–40	Secondary	General commerce	Married
GH 20	41–50	Tertiary	Agro processing	Married
GH 21	61–70	No formal education	Agro processing	Widowed
GH 22	51–60	Basic	General commerce	Widowed
GH 23	31–40	Basic	General commerce	Married
GH 24	31–40	Secondary	Food processing	Married
GH 25	41–50	Secondary	General commerce	Married

(*continued*)

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Respondent	Age range	Level of education	Sector of economic activity	Marital status
GH 26	41–50	No formal education	Agro processing	Widowed
GH 27	31–40	Basic	Fashion	Single
GH 28	31–40	Basic	Fashion	Married
GH 29	41–50	No formal education	General commerce	Single
GH 30	51–60	No formal education	Agro processing	Separated
GH 31	31–40	Tertiary	Fashion	Married
GH 32	31–40	University (masters)	Construction	Married
GH 33	31–40	University (MBA)	Education	Married
CI 1	51–60	Tertiary	Construction	Married
CI 2	51–60	Tertiary	Fashion	Married
CI 3	31–40	No formal education	Fashion	Married
CI 4	51–60	Tertiary	Construction	Married
CI 5	31–40	Tertiary	Fashion	Married
CI 6	31–40	University (masters)	Food processing	Single
CI 7	31–40	Tertiary	Food processing	Married
CI 8	41–50	No formal education	Food processing	Married
CI 9	41–50	Secondary	Fashion	Married
CI 10	31–40	University (masters)	Fashion	Married
CI 11	31–40	No formal education	Food processing	Married
CI 12	41–50	Tertiary	Fashion	Married
CI 13	51–60	Tertiary	Fashion	Married
CI 14	31–40	Tertiary	Food processing	Married
CI 15	41–50	Tertiary	Fashion	Married
CI 16	21–30	University (1st degree)	Agro processing	Single
CI 17	31–40	University (professional)	Health	Single
CI 18	41–50	No formal education	General commerce	Single
CI 19	41–50	Tertiary	Education	Married
CI 20	51–60	Tertiary	Food processing	Married
CI 21	31–40	Tertiary	Food processing	Single
CI 22	31–40	Vocational education	Fashion	Single
CI 23	41–50	Tertiary	Fashion	Married
CI 24	51–60	No formal education	Fashion	Widowed

Table A2.

Source(s): Authors own creation

Corresponding author
Eimear Nolan can be contacted at: einolan@tcd.ie

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