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Aspirations to grow: when micro- and informal enterprises in the street food sector speak for themselves

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Abstract

The street food sector in Sub-Saharan Africa is a source of affordable and nutritious meals for the urban poor, while also being an important source of income for the women who dominate this sector. Despite the importance of this sector, many micro- and informal enterprises are labelled as “survivalist”, beyond the reach of common development policies, which give priority to so-called growth-oriented enterprises. When given the chance to speak for themselves, do enterprises express any aspirations to grow? Contrary to the literature, our findings show that necessity-driven enterprises do aspire to grow and that this is true for both those owned by men and women. Using contextual interaction theory, this paper explains why it is possible for previous authors to come to such a different conclusion.

Keywords: Gender, Entrepreneurship, Survivalist, Growth oriented, Informal

Introduction

The street food sector in Sub-Saharan Africa is a source of affordable and nutritious meals for the urban poor (Lues, Rasephei, Venter, & Theron, 2006; Namugumya & Muyanja, 2012; Ohiokpehai, 2003; Steyn et al., 2014), while also being an important source of income for the women who dominate this sector (Bressers, Mohlakoana & de Groot, 2017; Graffham, Zulu, & Chibanda, 2005; Nackerdien & Yu, 2017). In this study of the street food sector in Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa, micro- and informal enterprises are typically located in informal and formal trading areas along the streets and sidewalks near busy transport nodes and marketplaces. They operate in areas of heavy foot traffic where people can conveniently buy a meal or snack near or on the way to and from work or school during the day and into the evening (Battersby, Marshak, & Mngqibisa, 2016). From permanent stands provided by local governments, or from impermanent mobile carts or tables that are packed away each night, they process, prepare and sell a range of affordable food products such as traditional meals, sandwiches, fried food, boiled eggs, milk drinks and couscous. In Dakar, Senegal, a popular meal at lunchtime is *thiebou dieune*. A travel article explains that this fish and rice meal “can have a spicy stuffing, accompanied by veggies like carrots, potatoes or eggplant. The dish is cooked in a broth that makes it rich and flavourful.” (Shea, 2018). In Rwanda, a milk drink called *ikivuguto* is very popular. It is fermented milk similar to sour drinking yoghurt and is considered a

very healthy beverage, loaded with probiotics. Another travel article adds that it is served at street-side milk bars and that “snacks like samosas, muffins, hard-boiled eggs, and chapati are available too” (Feiger, 2018). And in South Africa, a deep-fried snack called *amagwinya* in Isizulu or *vetkoek* in Afrikaans is made from flour dough and can be served plain or with a savoury filling like vegetable curry or fried egg and cheese. Customers can take these snacks away with them or eat them at the seating areas provided.

Given the high proportion of informal enterprises that operate in the street food sector, it is difficult to measure the full size of the sector or the number of women and men who depend on the incomes that they generate in the sector. However, it is estimated that globally more than 60% of employed men and women earn their livelihoods in the informal economy (International Labour Organization, 2018). The informal economy is particularly important for women in Sub-Saharan Africa, where certain sectors are known to attract a high proportion of women. In Dakar, Senegal, 89% of employed women compared to 70% of employed men are in the informal non-farm sector (Herrera, Kuépié, Nordman, Ouidn, & Roubaud, 2012). In Nigeria, despite the significant formal economic growth, “the informal sector continues to be the greatest creator of jobs for women” (Ola-David & Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014, p. 20). These incomes contribute to food, shelter and children’s education and play a key role as food-energy support instruments in urban landscapes (Acho-Chi, 2002; Alves da Silva et al., 2014; Fasoyiro, 2011).

Despite the importance of this sector, especially for women, many micro- and informal enterprises in the street food sector are labelled as “survivalist” and consequently deemed necessity-driven and without potential to grow or contribute to economic growth. This paper examines the use and merits of the term “survivalist”, which has been used in the literature to distinguish between necessity-driven enterprises and opportunity-driven, growth-oriented enterprises (Berner, Gomez, & Knorrninga, 2012). The main aim of the paper is to provide evidence from a study on the street food sector in Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa, to show that, when given the chance to speak for themselves, enterprise owners express real aspirations to grow, despite being necessity-driven. With this evidence, it is argued that being necessity-driven or survivalist is not akin to having no growth aspirations and that the socio-economic value of these enterprises should not be underestimated or neglected. This evidence supports the entrepreneurship literature which questions the validity of the overly simplistic dualist typology of necessity-driven (survivalists) and opportunity-driven (growth-oriented) entrepreneurs (Margolis, 2014; Rosa, Kodithuwakku, & Balunywa, 2008; Williams, 2008) and importantly contributes to gender-disaggregated findings to the literature on self-employment in the informal economy.

The following section will begin with a brief review of the entrepreneurial logics, intentions and motivations ascribed to micro- and informal sector enterprises in the literature on informal entrepreneurship and how the category of survivalist can be discriminatory, especially for women. Section 3 presents the empirical findings from both the scoping phase and the main survey of the study, supported by the findings from in-depth interviews. This is followed by a brief discussion in section 4, and conclusions and policy implications in section 5.

The debate in literature

In the entrepreneurship literature and in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) conceptual framework, an entrepreneur’s motivation for starting a business can be described as necessity-driven or opportunity-driven. Necessity-driven entrepreneurs are forced to start a

new business in order to survive in the face of unemployment or poor alternative work opportunities, whereas opportunity-driven entrepreneurs are attracted to start a new business, leaving their existing employment, to take advantage of a new market opportunity (Cheung, 2014; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007; Rosa et al., 2008; Williams, 2008). Many other complex factors influence the motivations for starting a business, yet there has been much enthusiasm for the overly simplistic distinction between necessity- and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs to explain why developing countries experience high levels of entrepreneurial activity (Rosa et al., 2008). The necessity hypothesis explains why, in developing countries or poorer economies, where unemployment is high, there is a high level of entrepreneurial activity driven by necessity to survive; these enterprises are usually in traditional sectors (such as construction and retail) and the informal economy, not in innovation or growth-oriented sectors; they do not have much growth ambition and are unlikely to contribute to significant growth in new employment or high profits (Cheung, 2014; Williams, 2008). In contrast, the opportunity hypothesis expects that opportunity-driven entrepreneurs face higher opportunity costs (leaving formal employment) but, having identified a market opportunity, they are more likely to establish new firms, create new employment and contribute to overall growth in the economy (ibid).

In the literature on informal entrepreneurs, authors adopt the same dichotomy in entrepreneurial logic: they differentiate between survivalist (necessity-driven) and growth-oriented (opportunity-driven) entrepreneurial logics and find that entrepreneurs in the informal economy are predominantly survivalist (Berner et al., 2012; Friedmann & Sullivan, 1974; Gomez (2008), House, 1984). However, Williams (2008) points out there have been a number of empirical studies which show that many entrepreneurs in the informal economy are actually driven by opportunity and not necessity and that in his seminal study many entrepreneurs are driven by both.

This section reviews the literature where a distinction between survivalist and growth-oriented entrepreneurs is made in the context of developing economies and the informal sector. It also seeks out reasons given in the literature for women's high participation in the informal sector as survivalists and explains how the dualist notion can be misleading and potentially damaging for these enterprises. The literature review concludes with the observation that entrepreneurial motivation to start a business does not necessarily determine the aspirations to grow or potential for growth or the business's potential to contribute to economic growth.

Survivalist versus growth-oriented informal entrepreneurs

Based on the informal economy literature and findings from their own research projects across several developing countries, Berner et al. (2012) present a typology of characteristics of survivalist versus growth-oriented micro- and informal enterprises. The two types are based on three main differentiating characteristics: (i) individual motivation, (ii) ability to save enough to reinvest and (iii) access to appropriate development services, credit and social networks. They also observe a gender dimension to these categories, in that the survivalist category tends to be dominated by women, because more often than men they are over-burdened with reproductive tasks to be able to expand their business and "they have limited access to social support networks with economic relevance" (ibid: 8). Others also observe that women tend to dominate the survivalist category—driven by necessity, while there are more men in the growth category—driven by opportunities (Hernandez, Nunn, & Warnecke, 2012; Minniti & Nardone, 2007; Ramani, Thutupalli, Medovarszki, Chattopadhyay, & Ravichandran, 2013).

There is much overlap with the survivalist category and self-employment in the informal economy, as well as with the growth-oriented category and the formal economy. But survivalist vs growth-oriented and informal vs formal are different concepts and need to be understood in parallel. The former describes the likely growth or no-growth trajectory of an enterprise, while the latter describes the legality and legitimacy of an enterprise. Some formal firms may operate in a survivalist state while some informal enterprises may fit the growth-oriented category—earning significant profits, employing many workers and/or establishing new businesses. Based on a study of six developing countries, comparing employment status and household incomes using national statistics, Chen (2014, p. 404) concludes that there is a significant, but not complete, overlap between informality and poverty. In developing countries, most of the working poor are informally employed and most informal workers are poor. The notable exception is informal employers whose earnings, on average, are above a minimum wage or poverty threshold. However, informal employers represent a very small share of the total informal workforce: only 2% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

According to the Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing model of informal employment, informal employers are at the top of the pyramid, with higher incomes than own-account operators in the middle as well as unpaid family workers at the bottom (Chen, 2014). Margolis (2014) confirms that the majority of own-account operators or self-employed workers in the informal economy typically earn far less than informal employers at the top of the pyramid, and only a few will succeed in growing and expanding their enterprise. The question remains whether their potential to grow is determined by their personal aspirations to grow, by individual motivation, or by the circumstances and opportunities available to them.

Berner et al. (2012) stress that the categories of survivalist versus growth-oriented entrepreneurs are not stages on a growth trajectory; they argue that survivalist enterprises are not likely to “graduate” to growth-oriented enterprises and do not represent a natural business growth path. For this reason, they motivate that development policies should pay special attention to survivalists: “survival entrepreneurs are a different target group, requiring different interventions based on a different logic” (9). In contrast, other authors view the two categories on a continuum from survivalist to accumulation (Kabeer, 2012). Kabeer (2012) asks why women tend to dominate the survival end of the continuum and what it would take for them to advance towards the growth-oriented part of the spectrum. Based on the enterprise literature, she considers a few possible explanations. Individual motivation or ability is only one of the many factors that she identifies: a woman’s priorities may lie in ensuring the family’s survival and welfare over and above the success of her enterprise; a woman may find it difficult to hire and manage labour; she may find it difficult to exercise the requisite degree of mobility; and there is evidence that very poor women do not benefit from micro-finance in the same way as moderately poor women. It is therefore possible for survivalists (especially women) to have real aspirations to grow but face constraints. In a study of entrepreneurial spirit in a South African township, Preisendörfer, Perks, and Bezuidenhout (2014) found that, although most of the adults interviewed support pro-entrepreneurial values, there was also a low trust culture which contributed to the start-up barriers identified.

Some authors have found that informal entrepreneurs can be driven by both necessity and opportunity (Williams, 2008), while Rosa et al. (2008) found that in Uganda and Sri Lanka the two concepts do not sufficiently capture the motivations of entrepreneurs in the informal

economy. In both these countries, motivations to progress or improve one's social standing are apparent in entrepreneurs, but only a few are successful and many are trapped earning a survivalist living, which they explain as having limited ability to save, reinvest and grow.

Arguably, the survivalist and growth-oriented typology as portrayed by Berner et al. (2012) should not be defined by the individual motivation to start a business, since there so many factors at play; instead, it should be defined only by the ability to save enough to reinvest, and access to appropriate development services, credit and social networks.

Why are so many women “survivalists”?

The informal economy's ability to absorb semi-unskilled labour and the low barriers to entry are often cited as reasons for women's higher participation in the informal than the formal sector (Muzaffar, Huq, & Mallik, 2009). Self-employment¹ in the informal economy is also said to provide women with the independence and flexibility to balance domestic and business responsibilities (Dejene, 2007; Kabeer, 2012; Minniti & Nardone, 2007). Dejene (2007) identifies the following gender differentiated constraints to women's micro- and small enterprise growth: labour burden, skills, access to financial resources, weak infrastructure, limited access to markets, weak business organisation and limited enabling environment. Vossenbergh (2013) adds that women's safety, given gender-based violence, is another issue limiting women's access to markets and ability to enter profitable industries. For these reasons, women are over-represented in saturated markets, such as street food, that have few barriers to entry.

Xheneti, Madden, and Karki (2019, p. 3) endeavour “to explore why, beyond survivalist or limited choice factors, women entrepreneurs in developing countries choose to work and remain in the informal sector.” Having examined 76 articles with empirical findings, they highlight three issues: the importance of context, intersectionality and positionality, and epistemic limitations.

It is important to be aware of cultural contexts, which impact the relationship between barriers (perceived or otherwise) and the entrepreneurial intentions of women and men in different countries (Shinnar et al., 2012). For example, Venugopal (2016) observed in India that the entrepreneurial intentions of a woman are more likely to be realised if the woman's family are involved in the enterprise operations.

There are mixed findings in the literature relating to the value that informal workers themselves derive from their work. Temkin (2009), for example, found that informally self-employed respondents in Mexico tend to be poorer, older and less educated than those employed in the informal and formal sectors. They are also less satisfied with the economic situation of their household, among other things. This leads Temkin to conclude that the nature of informal self-employment can in most cases be described as survivalist and not a reflection of incipient entrepreneurship, individual choice, or potential agents of economic growth. Kabeer (2012) acknowledges that, given limited wage or formal employment options, many women depend on informal employment for survivalist reasons. In contrast, Monteith and Giesbert (2017) found that informal workers in Uganda, Burkino Faso and Sri Lanka value a combination of instrumental features of work relating to income, survival and health, freedom and independence, trust and relationships at work, and social recognition and respect.

Discrimination of survivalist enterprises

In the enterprise literature, absence of growth is often attributed to the fact that owners of survival-oriented businesses are generally not interested in expanding (Banerjee &

Dufo, 2007; Berner et al., 2012; Gomez, 2008), and the specialisation and skills necessary to operate at a larger scale is not what the poor are looking for. Gomez (2008, p. 10) found that “the main reason why micro-enterprises never grow out of their size category is, plain and simple, that their owners do not pursue expansion”. However well meant, the distinction between survivalist and growth-oriented mental logics, as put forward by these authors, could in a context of already existing prejudice against women turn into a situation in which gender discrimination is reinforced, for example, by leading to the idea that these informal enterprises do not need support for their development since that is not what the people themselves want anyhow. Rosa et al. (2008) also raise concerns about the implications of the term necessity-driven as an inferior form of entrepreneurship due to its association with poverty and developing economies.

In a thematic review of literature on gender and entrepreneurship, de Groot, Mohlakoana, Knox, and Bressers (2017) concluded that categorical definitions of survivalist versus growth-oriented entrepreneurial logics are potentially damaging or misleading and that assigning such entrepreneurial logics can discriminate against women who tend to dominate the category of survivalist entrepreneurs. In fact, common development policies and programmes as well as those specifically focusing on women’s entrepreneurship in Africa tend to support growth-oriented enterprises while neglecting survivalist enterprises at the macro, meso and micro levels (Berner et al., 2012; Choto, Tengeh, & Iwu, 2014; Dejene, 2007; Rogerson, 2017; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Not only are survivalist enterprises neglected, but at times they are also penalised through punitive policies and regulations, like municipal measures to “clean the streets” (such as the infamous “Operation Clean Sweep” by the City of Johannesburg in 2013). To illustrate, Skinner and Haysom (2016, p. 15) describe the South African policy environment for the informal food sector to be “at best, benignly neglectful and at worst, actively destructive”. Rogerson (2017) describes the planning policy response to urban informal street trading in African cities to be a complex mix of persecution, tolerance, regulation and promotion with the ultimate effect of *containing* street trading.

In addition to discrimination by government intervention and neglect, the label “survivalist” can also have a detrimental impact upon the subjective perceptions of individuals and the realisation of their own potential success. Langowitz and Minniti (2007) observe that subjective perceptions of their entrepreneurial environment influence whether men or women are likely to turn their ambitions into actual new businesses. For instance, they found that men and women perceived the entrepreneurial environment more favourably if they knew of other entrepreneurs and had positive perceptions of their own skills and existing opportunities. It is therefore important to recognise how labels such as “survivalist” or “growth-oriented” impact directly or indirectly on men and women’s perception of the entrepreneurial environment and therefore their potential to start new businesses or grow their existing business.

Survivalists’ aspirations to grow

The priority given to growth-oriented enterprises stems from the idea that they are opportunity-driven and thus more likely to create new growth from new opportunities they find in the economy. Necessity-driven entrepreneurs are believed to have less potential for growth—although Choto et al. (2014, p. 99) critiqued perceptions of

survivalist entrepreneurs in the academic literature, having found that “ninety per cent of the survivalist entrepreneurs that enrolled in incubator programs did so because of their aspiration to grow”. Unless there is more supporting evidence, it cannot be assumed that the individual motivation to start a new business determines the aspirations of an entrepreneur to grow or their potential to contribute to economic growth.

Neves and du Toit (2012) argue that informal economic activity should not be measured in relation to the maximisation of profit. Instead, enterprises should be valued in terms of the extent to which they balance the multiple objectives of securing resource flows (fiscal and otherwise), making investments (material and social) and mitigating risk. Although uncommon in African cities, “[i]nclusive planning for the informal economy, however, can be justified on grounds that whilst individual incomes are often low, the cumulative contributions to local economies as well as local revenues are not insignificant” (Skinner 2008 and David et al. 2013 in Rogerson, 2017). There is a need to consider the value of micro- and informal entrepreneurs not only for their potential contribution to economic growth, but also for their potential contribution to economic resilience, stability and welfare as well as urban food security.

Growth orientation is often associated with formality, which is what is desired by most governments and regulatory authorities, hence the efforts to formalise informal enterprises. Berner et al. (2012) stress that survivalist versus growth-oriented enterprises are categorically different entrepreneurial logics, with different measures of success, and hence argue that survivalist enterprises should benefit from promotional and protective policies as much as growth-oriented ones. In their opinion, enterprises should not be expected to “graduate” from survival to growth or from informal to formal. Opposing many development policies which promote formalisation of the informal and “graduating” survival enterprises to growth-oriented enterprises, Temkin (2009) and Berner et al. (2012) actually advocate that macroeconomic policies should focus on creating new formal employment opportunities to absorb the unemployed and those resorting to survivalist enterprises.

While the dualist notion of formal and informal economies is considered outdated by Skinner and Haysom (2016), development policies are persistent in the approach to formalise the informal, although there is little empirical evidence to say whether formalisation actually benefits women engaged in informal enterprises (Xheneti et al., 2019). To illustrate the point, policies aimed at formalising growth-oriented enterprises for the benefit of security and access to finance in Cairo were found to have a negative impact upon social networks and indigenous value systems (Elyachar, 2010).

In this review, it has been found that the literature tends to make rather hard division lines between survivalist (mostly informal) and growth-oriented (mostly formal) enterprises. There is much evidence that women tend to be over-represented in the survivalist category and that the majority of informally self-employed persons operate as survivalists—not able to save enough money to reinvest or access time and capital resource to invest in their enterprises. However, no evidence was found to support the assumption that survivalists do not aspire to grow. It is likely that some informally self-employed persons or micro-enterprises would opt for better wage employment given the opportunity (“survivalist” entrepreneurial logic), but it is also possible that others aspire to grow their enterprise (growth-oriented entrepreneurial logic). Some authors caution against use of term “survivalist”, as it has become synonymous with

poverty and an inferior form of entrepreneurship, which can reinforce existing gender discrimination. Turning to the empirical data gathered in the present authors' study of informal street food enterprises in three African countries during 2015 and 2016, it is asked: To what extent can a division between survivalist and growth-oriented entrepreneurial logics be demonstrated in the case of the street food sector in three African countries and how do these logics relate to gender?

Method and results

The empirical data presented in this paper was gathered as part of research project focussing on the gendered use of energy in the street food sector of selected urban locations in Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa. Cluster sampling was applied, due to the dispersed locations of the street food sector enterprises—interviewing all the respondents willing and available to be interviewed at a particular time and place. In each country, two cities were selected as primary sites of data collection and within those sites specific neighbourhoods were targeted depending on factors such as energy access, energy used, time of enterprise operation and food processing activities taking place. The sample was deliberately not disaggregated during the selection process, to ensure that it represents the true form of gendered enterprise ownership and employment dynamics. The scoping phase targeted micro-, small and informal enterprises, defined as informally employing² one to five people at any given time and having little access to capital to cover their costs due to their informal nature. The main phase targeted informal (not paying any fees and not tax-registered) and semi-formal micro-enterprises (paying for local permit and/or licence fees but not tax-registered). For the purpose of comparison, a smaller sample of formal micro-enterprises operating in the same selected sites was also targeted—they were defined as tax-registered and paying to the national revenue services, and employing one to five people at any given time.

In the project, two rounds of survey and of qualitative data-gathering were conducted. The scoping phase research questions aimed to test the first-level assumptions made about the impacts of modern energy sources on the street food sector. The purpose of the scoping phase was to pilot the questionnaire and gain greater understanding of the operations of the informal food sector and the issues pertaining to productive uses of energy, as well as the gender considerations that shape this sector. In the scoping phase, the questionnaire included both open- and close-ended questions. In total, 179 respondents were surveyed (62 in South Africa, 61 in Senegal and 56 in Rwanda). Subsequently, during the main phase, a total of 751 enterprises were surveyed at the same sites and 105 in-depth interviews were conducted, also at the same sites, to complement and clarify the survey findings. The main phase survey was designed to include ordinal variables where possible, so a five-point Likert scale was often used. During this phase, a digital questionnaire was used, for consistency across the countries, and where needed the questionnaire was translated into local languages. Data was analysed using a combination of software such as Excel and SPSS for the quantitative data and NVivo for the qualitative data.

Although the research project was focused on gendered energy use, the results pertaining to entrepreneurial motivation and aspirations to grow were significant and worth sharing. This paper concentrates on the results of the surveys, illustrated and clarified with data from the qualitative study. To repeat, in all data-gathering, there was no pre-selection of male or

female workers as interviewees, so the proportions reflect those found in the street food enterprises in the sample locations. The next subsection first reports on the empirical evidence from the scoping study, then on that from the main survey.

Scoping survey results

Of the enterprises interviewed during the scoping phase, 68.8% ($n = 62$) were female-owned in South Africa, 88.5% ($n = 61$) in Senegal and 64.2% ($n = 56$) in Rwanda. Tables 1 and 2 summarise the sample interviewed during this phase of the study.

In the scoping survey, respondents that owned the enterprise were asked whether they would like their business to grow. Those not owners were excluded, but they were employed by an owner, and it is unlikely that they would be less likely to grow their enterprises than the respondents. Given the nature of the informal food sector (micro-enterprises, low entry barriers, largely female), one might expect on the basis of the literature that the vast majority of the 109 owners to answer the question would show a “survivalist” logic and be negative or at least hesitant towards growth. However, the women and men in our sample answered quite differently. When asked the question: “Would you like to grow your business?” just four people answered “no” (two), “do not know” and “not applicable to me”. All of the others said “yes”. Three of the four who gave negative responses gave the following reasons for not wanting to grow their enterprise: “Because she finds it almost impossible”, “I can’t manage anymore because of my poor health”, and “I’m looking for something better to do”. These statements do not indicate lack of ambition, but mention valid reasons that could equally be given by someone in the formal sector. Only two women and two men did “not really” want to grow. Overall, not only does this finding indicate a strong willingness to grow among respondents, it is also not true that women are less inclined to pursue growth than men.

Having analysed the four that do not clearly want to grow, it is important to learn about the reasons given by the vast majority, which claim that they actually do want to grow. Is it possible that they misunderstand the real growth opportunity of their enterprise given oversaturated markets or do they know of other ways to attract more customers and grow their business? Even if their enterprise activities are constrained by the inability to save enough to reinvest or access capital, could their statements show that they do have the growth-oriented entrepreneurial logic and aspirations to grow?

Table 1 Age of enterprise; percentage of male- and female-owned enterprises per country

	< 1 year	Between 1 and 5 years	Between 5 and 10 years	More than 10 years
South Africa				
Male owned	22.2%	50.0%	11.1%	16.7%
Female owned	11.9%	23.8%	23.8%	40.5%
Rwanda				
Male owned	65.0%	25.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Female owned	50.0%	47.2%	2.8%	0.0%
Senegal				
Male owned	14%	28.5%	43%	14%
Female owned	7%	26%	22%	44%

Table 2 Permit and rental payments; percentage of enterprises per country

	Paying for a permit to operate		Paying rent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Rwanda	76.8%	23.2%	80.4%	19.6%
Senegal	24.6%	75.4%	39.3%	60.7%
South Africa	24.2%	75.8%	33.9%	66.1%

Most of the pro-growth owner-respondents gave reasons for their aspirations. The original question was: “Explain why do you (not) want to grow this enterprise”. While the noted statements on their motivations vary enormously, they do not convey the assumption that the majority of informally self-employed women and men have a survivalist entrepreneurial logic and do not aspire to grow their business.

The statements on the reasons to want to grow were coded on the dimension of their orientation to growth or survivalism. A five-point coding scheme was derived from the variety of statements actually received rather than from a pre-conceived categorisation. The five values are consequently defined by the typical statements that are included under these scores, as shown below. However, some caution is warranted, as some level of subjective interpretation was needed to classify the responses. When someone spontaneously stated, “To fulfil my needs”, that sounds like a “survivalist” reason to want to grow. Nevertheless, this can also be interpreted in terms of a desire to grow the enterprise. But what we actually do not know is whether those needs are modest or actually strive for real prosperity. On the other hand, when someone states, “I want to expand, make fried potato chips, hot dogs, hire more people”, we do not know whether that is just a dream or a real goal. Nevertheless, we propose to take the statements seriously at face value, as they are the real stakeholders talking about their personal motivation, instead of outsiders just assuming what their motivations are.

The five values are named and explained below by typical motivation statements.

1. *Survivalist growth*: fulfil (daily) needs, paying rent and needs for children, to have a livelihood.
2. *Develop activities* to earn more: develop the activity (nicer room) to attract more customers, increase profits, increase daily production, sell more maize.
3. *Invest in new (energy) equipment*: buy a fridge, need oven at home to bake, establish a diary unit, get adequate (cooking) equipment, widen and decorate the room, microwave.
4. *Expand with new products or location*: train in local juice processing, train in catering, formalise, another (more visible) location, a place other than my home, loan to start selling other goods on the market, other products (that clients ask for), more capital to produce more for market day.
5. *Create new business*: combine canteen with a restaurant, open new restaurant, make fried potato chips, hotdogs and hire more people, start factory for banana and sorghum drinks, buy own cows to have milk for supplying to customers, open own restaurant and employ assistants.

Table 3 shows the frequencies attached to each of those categories among the 94 owners that mentioned reasons to want to grow their enterprise. It shows little evidence of a binary position on “survivalist” or a “growth-oriented” logic. Instead, growth is seen as desirable by almost all street food micro-enterprise owners surveyed. When

exploring their motivations, only a small minority of the cases gave “survivalist” motivations (in the meaning as explained by the typical statements above). For the rest, the motivations unfold as positions on a dimension rather than as fundamental and qualitatively different logics as Berner et al. (2012) propose.

The variable presented in Table 4 (the explanations for why they want to grow the enterprise) does not correlate with the age of the respondents or with the length of time that the business had been in operation—nor, more importantly, with the sex of respondents and owners (Spearman’s Rho .027, sign .399). This finding further contradicts the idea that the poor women who dominate the street food sector tend to adopt a survivalist logic.

Table 5 shows that there is also no relation between aspirations to grow and the preferred energy source (which was a focus of the greater study). Even when this variable is simplified into traditional versus modern sources of energy, the relation is weak and not statistically significant (Spearman’s Rho = .144, sign .083). Thus, the motivation to grow is hardly related to the preference for different energy sources, or the other way around. The exception to this is electricity, which appears to be preferred by respondents with more ambitious motivations. Charcoal and even wood are about equally popular in all categories of motivation.

When stating their reason for wanting to grow, many spontaneously also mentioned conditions that they feel would support them. Of the 94 persons that gave reasons, 23 mentioned supportive conditions, as reported in Table 6. These show that the enterprises are constrained by factors which could classify them as survivalist but not as having a “survivalist” logic. This list does not indicate that the others would not be helped by such supporting conditions or that they did not desire them too, just that they did not mention them spontaneously. As noted above, energy use was a focus of the greater study and respondents were asked many questions relating to energy use and energy preferences. It is therefore not surprising that energy-related responses such as electricity (for preserving milk) feature significantly up in the supportive conditions mentioned.

Main survey results

The main survey had 751 respondents, 63% of them female. Of the respondents, 75% identified themselves as the main breadwinner in their household, scarcely differentiated by sex, with 74% of women and 77% of men identifying thus. Although data on household income was not gathered, the high proportion of breadwinners reinforces the observation that incomes derived from the street food sector, meagre or otherwise, are important for the urban poor.

Of all respondents 75% were owners of the enterprise (not employees) and an additional 6% were co-owners, and questions on aspirations to grow were only posed to these categories. Of the 618 (co)-owners, only four responded negatively on the question whether they would like to expand their enterprise if that option would be available, two men and two women. Thus, the picture of the scoping phase is confirmed. Among both men and women in the street food sector, there is an almost general wish to expand the enterprise; Table 7 goes deeper into this. Unlike in the scoping phase, respondents were not asked *why* they would like expansion but *how*. Expanding the range of products is most popular, followed by investing in new equipment, increasing production and getting a more permanent and solid structure to work from. While not all statements are equally ambitious, they hardly show a picture of just survivalists’ dreams. There are also no significant differences between women and men.

Table 3 Frequency of various types of explanations for why they want to grow the enterprise

Survivalist growth	9
Develop activities	28
Invest in new equipment	18
Expand with new products or locations	24
Create new business	15
Total	94

Table 4 Explanations for why they want to grow the enterprise, by gender

Sex of respondent	Survivalist growth	Develop activities	Invest in new equipment	Expand with new products or locations	Create new business	Total
Male	1	10	3	3	5	22
Female	8	18	15	21	10	72
Total	9	28	18	24	15	94

Table 5 Preferred energy source and survival or growth motivations

	Survivalist growth	Develop activities	Invest in new equipment	Expand with new products or locations	Create new business	Total
Wood	1	5	3	3	3	15
Charcoal	5	14	8	10	5	42
Gas	3	9	6	5	5	28
Electricity	0	0	0	4	1	5
Total	9	28	17	22	14	90

Table 6 Supportive conditions mentioned

Financial means in general	6
Specifically (bank) loans	6
Electricity (preserving milk)	4
Training (various skills)	3
New location	2
Equipment	1
Business partner	1

Table 7 Types of aspired expansion and gender

	Gender of the owner		Total
	Female	Male	
Expand the range of products the enterprise offers	148	103	251
Increase production	52	25	77
Invest in new equipment	66	28	94
Improve to a more permanent/solid structure	46	14	60
Increase the size of the enterprise (e.g. bigger space)	27	15	42
Move current enterprise to a better location	26	13	39
Hire staff/hire more staff	2	5	7
Open another enterprise in the area	19	16	35
I never considered what I would do	4	3	7
Refused to respond	0	1	1
Total	390	223	613

In addition to the quantitative surveys, similar evidence was found in the 105 qualitative interviews. For example, Fatim,³ a Senegalese widowed woman (aged 45–54, no education, informal enterprise) indicated that:

“I would like to move the business to a more formal, well-structured building where I could do other activities, such as trade of fabrics, shoes and others. Thus, I would be able to recruit a person who would ensure the catering, and as I grow older, I will limit herself to sale only.”

Similarly, Edward (Rwandese, single male, aged 18–24, primary education, semi-formal enterprise) said that:

“To grow my business, I plan to buy new and modern appliance like fridge, microwave to heat some of my product in order to deliver better service.”

That is, he wanted electricity to grow the business.

Muteteli (Rwandese married woman, aged 25–34, primary education, formal enterprise) said:

“Of course, I do have projects within the next years to open other shop of milk processing. I would like to have a structure large enough to offer other kinds of products.”

Knowing that almost all want to grow and even have concrete ideas on what their priority investment or next steps would be, the next question is what prevents them from doing so. They were asked about the barriers they met when becoming an entrepreneur. The issues that respondents agreed and strongly agreed to are given in Table 8. There were hardly any differences between women and men in these answers. Slightly more men perceived problems with local regulations, while slightly more women perceived problems with lack of space and strong competition. However, these correlations are very small and only statistically significant because of the large numbers in the survey. The issues that gender stereotypes would expect to show a difference (pressures by family responsibilities and disapproving surrounding people) were not often mentioned, and when they were, they were mentioned proportionally by women and men. Access to capital seems to be the main bottleneck. These survey findings are supported by the

Table 8 Barriers to growth

Statements to which respondents agree and agree strongly	Count
No access to capital	275
Lack of space	77
Local regulations make it difficult	76
Too much competition	75
Surrounding people disapproved	27
Limited time because of family responsibilities	26
Lack of skills	23
No barriers encountered	101

qualitative data. Lesedi (South African single woman, age 54, secondary education, semi-formal enterprise) indicates that money is the main inhibiting factor for growing her enterprise: “Without money, it won’t grow”. If money were available, she explained that she would move to a better location.

Similarly, Viviane (Senegalese married woman, aged, no education, informal enterprise) said:

“If I could, I would increase the size of my business as soon as possible. I have the ambition but the financial means are lacking. I would run a big formal restaurant with modern equipment and all possible amenities. A [LPG] stove cooker would make it easier for me because I could prepare several dishes at one moment but I can’t afford it nor can I afford to bear the cost of gas.”

Correspondingly, Mukantagara (Rwandese married woman, 35–44 years old, secondary education, formal) highlights that:

“The main problem we focus [on] is financial, but when I get more capital nothing can stop me to continue my business, after that I will increase the number of sales.”

Amahle (South African single woman, 34 years old, secondary education, informal enterprise), indicated that in order to grow she would have to move to better location with more customers and water from taps because for now they buy litres of water from shops. She would appreciate having a gas stove or electricity. Her male counterpart, Leon (South African single man, 32 years old, secondary education, semi-formal enterprise), stresses that even though he wishes to grow his business, competition is hitting him, as everyone wants to sell chicken wings and at a very low price.

Respondents were also asked to what extent they agree with a number of statements indicating their growth aspirations. Table 7 shows that indeed many owners of the enterprises mention that they are necessity-driven. But this is not more so among women than men, which disproves the popular assumption that more women are represented in survivalist, necessity-driven enterprises than men. In fact, the correlation here is the reverse, more males strongly agreeing with the statement than women (Spearson’s Rho is $-.116$, sign. $.004$). Moreover, their agreement does not imply a sharp dividing line in entrepreneurial logics at all. Respondents may strongly agree that their motivation for operating an enterprise is necessity-driven while they also strongly agree that they would like to ultimately develop their enterprise into a formal business. Being necessity-driven does not appear to have any bearing upon the entrepreneurial logic of an enterprise owner or their aspirations to grow.

Table 10 shows that a large majority, men somewhat more than women, would like to ultimately develop into a formal business (Spearman’s Rho is $-.096$, sign. $.017$). Even though the two statements in Tables 8 and 9 look contradictory in terms of entrepreneurial attitude, they correlate positively (Spearman’s Rho $.210$, sign. $.000$), indicating that being necessity-driven and aspiring to grow are not mutually exclusive. A person can have both feelings at the same time, and being necessity-driven can positively affect aspirations to grow and develop one’s business. The survey’s qualitative data supports this finding; for instance Sentwali (Rwandan single male, aged 25–34, no education, informal enterprise) states that:

Table 9 Statement on being necessity-driven, by gender

	I am self-reliant out of necessity				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	
Gender of the owner					
Female	140	218	32	3	393
Male	111	94	18	2	225
Total	251	312	50	5	618

“Of course, I do have the project of creating a restaurant in the next couple of years and we actually also plan other things. It is my dream to have a restaurant.”

His female counterpart Uwimana (Rwandan married woman, aged 25–34, no education, informal enterprise) expresses a similar desire:

“Yes, because my dream is to have a big known restaurant in my country, with my dreams I cannot wait those years. If I have money, I can start now.”

These ambitions are broadly shared and go well beyond a subsistence or survival orientation. There is hardly a difference between women and men. The only gendered difference is that men are slightly more eager to develop into a formal business (see Table 11) (Spearman’s Rho is just $-.084$).

A large portion of the (co)-owners also agreed with the statement that they would like to hire more people to expand their enterprise (77%) but some disagreed (15%). Employing people to expand their enterprise was also seen by some in the qualitative data as contributing to the country’s economic development. For example, Diana (Senegalese widowed woman, aged 55–64, no education, informal enterprise) explains:

“If I could develop my business, I would buy modern equipment to improve profitability and diversify the range of products. I will increase the size of the business, hire more employees in order to contribute in the growth of the country’s economy.”

Aya (Senegalese divorced woman, aged 25–34, no education, informal enterprise) expresses a similar desire and indicates that:

“To develop my company, I would like to change location, have equipment and modern energy sources. I would also like to recruit young girls in order to contribute to my country’s development by helping women to be self-reliant.”

As can be expected, the answers to all the statements reflected in Tables 10, 11, and 12 are significantly correlated with one another (all sig. = .000). Most correlations have Rhos between .3 and .4. Even stronger are the correlations of wanting to grow into a formal business with seeking financial support to invest in new equipment (Rho = .440) and a nicer stand or structure (Rho = .430). The latter two correlate Rho = .540 among each other. The implication of this is that the aspiration to grow coincides with quite rational sub-goals towards investment. This also emerged in the qualitative interviews. Abongile (South African married woman, aged 53, secondary education, semi-formal enterprise) said that:

Table 10 Statement wish to develop into formal business and gender

		I would like my enterprise ultimately to develop into a formal business like a real restaurant or food product factory					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Gender of the owner							
Female	211	144	18		16	4	393
Male	143	66	7		8	1	225
Total	354	210	25		24	5	618

Hopefully the business will have grown in two to five years' time and will be using a different energy source like gas stoves and better equipment. Would love to move to a better location and some capital would be ideal.

In Rwanda, Ranihura (Rwandese single man, aged 18–24, primary education, semi-formal enterprise), confirms:

“To grow my business, I plan to buy new and modern appliance like fridge, microwave to heat some of my product in order to deliver better service.”

Similarly, Titi (Senegalese married woman, aged 55–6, no education, informal enterprise) said that:

“Yes, of course I intend to change production scale first by exporting my products abroad. Then, I plan to set up other sites in the other regions of Senegal while taking their needs into account. In order to develop this business, we intend a change of scale of production by increasing our production capacities. To develop my business, we need modern equipment so as to be able to export our products. To achieve this, we will need a gas oven and an electric oven for couscous drying.”

Table 12 above has shown that the (co)-owners of street food enterprises also want to invest in their business. This is consistent with what has already been shown: that access to capital is the main bottleneck. Again, the differences between women and men are very small. Men are slightly more inclined to want to reinvest profits ($Rho = .096$), but the difference is very small, with 83% of women and 86% of men strongly agreeing with that statement. For all practical purposes, like designing support schemes, there is no difference here between female and male owners in the street food sector.

The broader research project was interested in the productive use of energy among men and women and the impact of modern energy services upon the empowerment of

Table 11 Statement hiring labour, by gender

		I would like to use hired labour to expand my enterprise					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Gender of the owner							
Female	130	158	32		54	18	393
Male	107	82	12		16	7	225
Total	237	240	44		70	25	618

Table 12 Statements reinvesting profits and seeking financial support and gender

I reinvest profit in my enterprise						Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Gender of the owner						
Female	153	173	35	20	12	393
Male	110	83	23	6	3	225
Total	263	256	58	26	15	618
I seek external sources of capital to expand my enterprise						Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Gender of the owner						
Female	170	167	18	22	16	393
Male	115	70	19	11	10	225
Total	285	237	37	33	26	618
I would like financial support to invest in improved equipment						Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Gender of the owner						
Female	205	164	6	7	11	393
Male	138	70	6	5	6	225
Total	343	234	12	12	17	618
I would like financial support to invest in a nicer stand/structure						Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Gender of the owner						
Female	198	163	9	10	3	393
Male	135	74	5	5	1	225
Total	333	237	14	15	4	618

micro- and informal enterprises in the street food sector. Three sources of energy stand out in the answers to this question (multiple entries were possible: gas, mentioned 401 times, charcoal 367 and electricity 172; wood was the runner-up, mentioned 75 times). Interestingly enough, there were no correlations between the preferred use of electricity and the ambition statements from Tables 8, 9, and 10. The wish to develop into a formal business correlated $Rho = -.192$ with preferring charcoal, indicating that charcoal preference coincided with more often (strongly) agreeing with the statement. There was no such correlation with gas or electricity users. Seeking external capital to expand correlated with the preferred use of charcoal ($Rho = -.202$). Gas users are relatively less inclined to (strongly) agree ($Rho = .213$). However, still the majority of gas users and non-users would like to find external capital for this purpose (see Table 13 and the

Table 13 Preference for gas for cooking and seeking external capital for expansion

I seek external sources of capital to expand my enterprise						Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Gas						
No	171	94	9	13	11	298
Yes	114	143	28	20	15	320
Total	285	237	37	33	26	618

supporting statement from the qualitative data below). Gahji (Rwandese married woman, 18–24 years old, secondary education, formal enterprise), stated:

“Yes, I want to expand this restaurant by increasing the number of services and next year I will start to use gas cooker because I want to improve service and to reduce the energy consumed.”

A number of the enterprises have already a formal (paying taxes) or a semi-formal (paying rent for the place or permits fees, but no taxes) status. There are big differences between the three countries in this regard. In Rwanda, informal enterprises are illegal; therefore, all enterprises are pushed into at least a semi-formal status, but this has not been very successful in achieving any better circumstances for informal enterprises. In Senegal, the semi-formal category cannot be separated from the informal one—both those that declare that they are informal or semi-formal pay some form of tax, rent or fee to the authorities. In South Africa, the informal enterprises are just a small majority and the semi-formal sector is the largest of the three countries. This shows how some African cities tolerate street vendors by issuing permits or offering rental options to informal traders (Rogerson, 2017). All respondents to the ambition statements do not differ much between those types of enterprises, mostly shifting between agreeing and strongly agreeing. If anything, it is not the informal sector that is least ambitious but—by small margins—the semi-formal sector (see Table 14). Even after recoding the type of enterprise variable to reflect this, the only significant correlation ($Rho = .145$, $p = .042$, $n = 198$) on a country level was that of South Africa on the statement on wishing for financial support to invest in a nicer stand. It can be concluded that the ambition to grow is widespread over all categories of enterprises, including the informal sector.

The results from both the scoping phase and the main survey suggest that being necessity-driven or constrained by the inability to save enough to reinvest or access capital has no bearing on the entrepreneurial logic of the individual and that there is no difference between women and men in this regard. Contrary to the assumptions of the necessity hypothesis, it is possible to be necessity-driven, surviving on the income generated by one's enterprise, and still have aspirations to grow. The assumption that survivalists have no aspiration to grow is proven false by the present study. Statements such as this below by Constance, a Senegalese woman in her early twenties support this argument, as she explains that:

“Of course, I have considered changing production scale. I plan to open within 3 months another place in the main market located in downtown, Kaolack. With this

Table 14 Type of enterprise and wish for financial support to invest in a nicer stand in South Africa

	I would like financial support to invest in a nicer stand/structure					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Type of enterprise						
Formal	9	8	1	1	1	20
Informal	25	62	4	8	1	100
Semi-formal	14	51	2	2	9	78
Total	48	121	7	11	11	298

site, I will look for a new manager and I will recruit 2 or 3 people for the kitchen. To change scale of production, I would also like to have clients all over the city of Kaolack. I would like to prepare the lunch and dinner for the 4th of April celebration of the Independence Day for the staff of the Governance service and other officials in Kaolack. If I had the means to develop my business, I would look for new materials such as electric or gas cookers, microwaves and other electronic kitchen equipment. I would also buy a generator to avoid production disruptions in case of electrical failure.”

This statement shows that even women in the street food sector who may or may not be necessity-driven do aspire to grow their business. It is almost offensive to assume otherwise. There is no evidence as to whether those engaged in these enterprises would opt for better wage employment given the chance, but from the data gathered it cannot be assumed that they have no aspiration to grow or that the one determines the other. Furthermore, the enterprises have concrete ideas of the steps that they would take to expand their business.

Discussion

In the literature, survivalists are assumed to have little aspiration to grow because it is likely that they would opt for better wage employment given the chance. Female-operated micro- and informal enterprises in sectors with low barriers to entry are thought to be prone to coincide with a “survivalist” orientation, and to be constrained not only by the inability to save enough to reinvest or access capital to grow their business but also by a survivalist logic and a lack of aspiration to grow. This could be a counter-argument against policies or support schemes trying to stimulate the development of micro- and informal enterprises in sectors dominated by women such as the street food sector, for instance, with soft loans and training. In this sense, it would be a pessimistic view. However, letting the women and men that are operating and owning such businesses speak for themselves shows a different picture. Almost all interviewees in this survey claim that of course they want to grow their enterprises. Furthermore, when it was tested whether this wish is superficial, they offered a great variety of reasons, often ambitious ones, and clear ideas on how to expand their business. They are not held back by lack of ambition, but by barriers and lack of resources. As for gender differences, surprisingly (given the expectations in some of the literature that female owners are even more survivalist-oriented than men, and given the gendered stereotypes on male and female behaviour in general), remarkably *little* difference between female and male owners was found—hardly any, in fact.

It is unfortunate that for so long it has been assumed that necessity-driven entrepreneurs earning a basic livelihood to survive have no aspiration to grow and that this assumption has justified the “containment” of street traders in many African cities (Rogerson, 2017). Given the evidence that actually these enterprises do aspire to grow, how is it possible that engaged observers arrived at the conclusion that “survivalist” entrepreneurial logics are so widespread among necessity-driven informal and micro-enterprises, especially women? These authors are not accused of being narrow-minded or prejudiced. What then could explain such vastly different results?

A first answer might be implied in this study's methodology. The study is not based on observations and case studies; in the surveys and interviews, the enterprise operators and owners were allowed to speak for themselves. But why would observations give different interpretations of reality than when you ask the people themselves? In other words, if these authors were right that they *observe* a lot of survivalist behaviour, how could that be explained? For that, we turn to the contextual interaction theory (CIT) (UT et al., 2016; Mohlakoana, 2014) and especially the notion of "self-efficacy assessment" (Bandura, 1986) that is incorporated in it. In CIT, three characteristics are discerned that drive peoples' actions and interactions: motivation, cognitions and resources. These three not only impact on the process, but over time also on each other. In CIT, motivation is produced by (a) own interests and values, (b) external pressures, and (c) self-efficacy assessment. Bandura's notion of self-efficacy assessment means that people assess to what extent the action they like to undertake (for instance on the basis of their own interests and values) is anywhere feasible, given the supportiveness of their environment (available resources). If not, they will not try and fail, but even be demotivated to try at all. In the present research, a lot of ambition was expressed, but it was sometimes phrased in conditional terms: "if only I had the access to investment money" and "if only I had the better location". Thus, it is very possible that researchers *observe* a lot of survivalist behaviour, which they interpret as lack of intrinsic motivation. It is then not the observation that is wrong in those cases, but their interpretation of it. The deeper cause is not the lack of intrinsic motivation, but the lack of supportive circumstances that make their ambitions more feasible and visible. This is nicely illustrated by the words of one of our interviewees: "The main problem we face is financial, but when I get more capital nothing can stop me ...". These women and men are not held back because they have a "survivalist logic" but because they are deprived of resources that could assist them to realise their ambitions to grow. The difference between the observations of some authors and the results when the people speak for themselves is that the latter gives a totally different picture of reality, with very different implications.

The way survivalist enterprises are characterised in the typologies proposed by Berner et al. (2012) leads observers to believe that they are hopeless, with no potential for growth—ignoring the fact that some enterprises may provide the financial stability, flexibility, and/or independence desired by the entrepreneur. Almost all respondents in this study indicated a willingness to grow and have calculated ideas of how they might expand the size of their enterprise. But does their ambition to grow contradict the reason they entered this sector or started their business? Does it indicate that since starting their business or entering the sector, they have evolved or graduated from necessity-driven to now also opportunity-driven? This question cannot be answered without longitudinal research, but it is shown here that the majority of men and women in the sample simultaneously agree to being necessity-driven and wanting to "develop into a formal business like a real restaurant". It is also shown that limitations by family responsibilities are among the least-mentioned barriers (only by 4%, no difference between women and men). While the majority of respondents claimed to be risk-averse, they also want to invest and hire more people as soon as they can. Even when adverse circumstances limit their options to grow their business in the real world, it is those circumstances and not their "entrepreneurial logic" that holds them back.

One could argue that ambition to grow and the “real” potential for economic growth in the street food sector are not matched. Some would say the market is oversaturated and that, even with the right micro-finance and favourable policy support, the growth of one enterprise would squeeze out another—resulting in zero net growth. However, it can be argued that there is real potential for inclusive economic growth, particularly growth in employment and income-generating opportunities for women. This study shows that informal and micro-enterprises want to employ more people, invest in new equipment, have more sites, and attract more customers. Studies in urban food systems and food security acknowledge that urban populations in African cities are growing and so too is the demand for affordable nutritious meals (Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Thus, a growing market for street food can sustain the growth that enterprises aspire to. Perhaps not growth in profits per unit of production, but certainly growth in market size and employment. The street food sector already supports an increasing circulation of money in the cash economy and reaches poorer neighbourhoods than many other economic activities. If allowed, this sector can respond to growing urban food insecurity identified in various studies as well as generate informal self-employment opportunities, especially for women.

What determines men and women’s growth intentions in the street food sector requires further research, and there is also a need to measure the potential for these intentions to be realised as growth in income and growth in employment in specific local contexts.

Conclusions and policy implications

This paper explored the aspirations of the micro- and informal enterprises in the street food sector in South Africa, Rwanda and Senegal. The research question behind it was: To what extent can a division between survivalist and growth-oriented entrepreneurial logics be demonstrated in the case of the street food sector in three African countries and how do these logics relate to gender? The results provide a clear answer to both parts of this question: the vast majority do aspire to grow their enterprise, despite constraints on investing or growing their business. However, it is not possible to determine whether they would opt for better wage employment given the chance and it is therefore not possible to demonstrate a division between survivalist and growth-oriented entrepreneurial logics as prescribed in the literature. The majority who agreed with the statement: “I am self-reliant out of necessity” also agreed strongly with multiple statements about aspiring to grow and had clear ideas of how to do so. This was true for women as much as men.

The policy implications of these findings are large. Instead of being a marginalised branch of the economy that just has to be phased out in the advance of modernity, the street food sector can be a source of growth and a way for development policies to reach the women who dominate it. At present, development policies prioritise opportunity-driven enterprises over those driven by necessity because in the literature the former are deemed growth-oriented and the latter are categorised as survivalist with no aspirations for growth. The present study findings show that, on the contrary, necessity-driven enterprises in the survivalist category do aspire to grow. Furthermore, policies that discriminate against survivalist enterprises

in the street food sector inadvertently discriminate against the women who dominate it. The study shows that women derive multiple benefits from working in this sector—none of which make them any less ambitious than men.

It is argued here that the categorical definitions of survivalist versus growth-oriented entrepreneurial logics are potentially damaging or misleading and that assigning such entrepreneurial logics leads policy-makers to discriminate against low profit and livelihood strategies. The term “survivalists” is only useful in describing the inability of many micro- and informal enterprises to save and re-invest in their enterprise; it is not useful in describing the motivation of the entrepreneur. Policy responses should focus on improving the ability of such enterprises to save and reinvest or to access appropriate investment. Determining whether they have any real growth potential requires locally appropriate assessments. However, the informally self-employed should be valued for the social safety net they provide the poor and the opportunity for the few to pursue successful entrepreneurship.

This is the conclusion of this paper, but it is not the end of the work to be done. While the street food sector operates in a very local setting, an integral, multi-sectorial, and development-oriented policy approach is necessary and will also need to be tailor-made to local circumstances. Both the feasibility and the implementation of such policies are often problematic (Ramani et al., 2013; Skinner & Haysom, 2016). Last but not least is the relevance of this analysis for the debate on entrepreneurship in microbusinesses and gender across all sectors. If the common assumptions on divided entrepreneurial logics and gender in microbusinesses proved wrong in the present case, perhaps they are wrong in most cases.

Endnotes

¹Chen (2014) defines self-employed persons as those who mainly work in unincorporated small or unregistered enterprises.

²In most cases of micro- and small enterprises, employees tend to be relatives of the enterprise owner and may be paid in cash or in kind.

³Respondent names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

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Availability of data and materials

The anonymised dataset analysed during the current study are available in the Data Archiving and Networked Services (DANS), an institute of KNAW and NOW, <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-z33-jcrd>

Authors' contributions

AK contributed to the design of the study, data collection, data analysis, and, for this paper, drafting of the manuscript and position within the literature. HB conducted the statistical analysis and contributed to the design of the study and

the sequence alignment of this paper. NM conceived of and led the design of the study, conducted the data collection and data analysis and helped to draft this manuscript. JdG participated in the data collection, data analysis and coordination of the research project and contributed to research outputs, which inform this manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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