

**DISADVANTAGED ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF CIVIL  
SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE SIERRA LEONE PETTY TRADING  
ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM**

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## ABSTRACT

The current chapter is one of the first studies to specifically address the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) for entrepreneurship development in the disadvantaged context of Sierra Leone. It specifically highlights the important role of CSOs in the petty trading (disadvantaged) entrepreneurial ecosystem. Based on the qualitative analysis of interviews undertaken with two CSOs and three entrepreneurial firms from disadvantaged backgrounds, our findings offer interesting insights into this phenomenon. We find that in the context of disadvantaged entrepreneurship development, CSOs are seen as more trustworthy by the general population than the government (public bodies). The government, through the national youth commission, also tried to collaborate with CSOs regarding entrepreneurial skills development in disadvantaged entrepreneurs. The findings further reveal that despite the appreciation of the role of CSOs for disadvantaged entrepreneurship development by public authorities in recent years, they still face many bureaucratic hurdles and delays in operations. Finally, our chapter reveals several dynamics associated with skills and competencies development in disadvantaged entrepreneurship in Sierra Leone specific context, where skills such as basic business planning, livestock handling, and financial management emerge as being highly useful.

**Key Words:** Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, Civil Society Organisations, Disadvantaged Entrepreneurship, Skills Development, Sierra Leone and Petty Trading.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, entrepreneurship research has increasingly focused on its role in uplifting people from poverty, improving their lives and contributing to the broader society (e.g. Bruton *et al.*, 2013, 2015; Sutter *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, it has been argued that entrepreneurship is perhaps the most efficient tool to help disadvantaged members of society (Thurman, 2016). Being disadvantaged has, however, also been linked to potential hurdles in the development and growth of such entrepreneurs, where appropriate skills and competencies are essential (Albareda, 2018; Bates *et al.* .2018; OECD, 2019).

Notably, in developing countries, these disadvantages are often compounded due to minimal skills development programs and training possibilities (e.g. Kelley and Thomas, 2011;

Gölgeci *et al.*, 2020). Also, restrictions based on political favouritism appear to be barriers for disadvantaged entrepreneurs in developing countries (Bennell, 1999; Chinen *et al.*, 2017). As a result of these challenges, most disadvantaged entrepreneurs engage in petty trading activities for their survival as in most cases; this is the only option for them (Kamara, 2008; Mnyawi & Benedict, 2014). In the specific context of Africa, scholars have highlighted activities like being a street vendor as the most common form of petty trading (e.g. Kamara, 2008; Mbisso, 2011). In fact, across most regions in Africa, broad dependent on agricultural and necessity focused entrepreneurial behaviour are the main impetus of entrepreneurship undertakings (Beynon *et al.*, 2020).

A critical question for disadvantaged entrepreneurs in such contexts is, therefore, how they can develop (or improve) their entrepreneurial competencies and skills to firstly survive and then grow. At the same time, the petty trading entrepreneurial ecosystem (hereafter denoted EE) is a significantly less explored area of research (e.g. Kamara, 2008) compared to significant research undertaken on other kinds of entrepreneurship (e.g. Yitshaki and Kropp, 2016; Striebing *et al.*, 2019). Recognising this gap in the literature, our chapter focuses on petty trading EE and entrepreneurial skills development in disadvantaged entrepreneurs.

EEs tend to be made of interrelated and coordinated factors that enable entrepreneurship in a specific context (Isenberg, 2010). These factors include finance, knowledge, culture, infrastructures, institutions, legal and regulatory environments (e.g. Nicotra *et al.*, 2018). However, in the specific context of petty trading (subsistence entrepreneurship) which is a most common source of earning in most developing countries, the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) is of paramount importance as they help to develop entrepreneurial competencies in disadvantaged entrepreneurs (Serrano *et al.*, 2006; Biswas and Rao, 2014). This discussion forms the starting point of our chapter, where we aim to undertake an exploratory multiple case study of disadvantaged entrepreneurs in the under-researched empirical context of Sierra Leone and analyse the role of CSOs in entrepreneurship development concerning the petty trading EE.

Sierra Leone is situated in the sub-Saharan African (hereafter denoted SSA) region, referred to by IMF (2019) as having a substantial potential for entrepreneurial growth. The literature review reveals that there are a limited number of studies focusing on entrepreneurship and EE in the SSA region in general and Sierra Leone in particular. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, the petty trading EE is also an under-researched area. Hence, there is a clear

gap in the literature, which we aim to fill in the current chapter. What makes Sierra Leone an important and exciting research context is because most entrepreneurs operating there are disadvantaged. Eleven years of civil war, Ebola outbreak, along with lack of economic opportunities and volatility, has forced many to take on basic entrepreneurship activities (Kamara, 2008; M'cleod and Ganson, 2018). Besides, public sector mismanagement and political favouritism by the governmental bodies contributes further to the problems faced by most of such entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone (Kamara, 2019). Due to these factors, CSOs emerge as the most important player in the petty trading EE in Sierra Leone due to public trust in them as well as their role in capabilities' development of such disadvantaged entrepreneurs (e.g. John *et al.*, 2006; Thomson *et al.*, 2008; Diallo and Diallo, 2019; Kamara, 2019).

We contribute to the extant disadvantaged entrepreneurship and EE research by being the first study to specifically highlight and analyse the role of local and international CSOs in the development of entrepreneurial competence for subsistence entrepreneurs operating in the petty trading EE. To-date no other study has undertaken such an analysis in the context of Sierra Leone (at least to our knowledge). Our empirical sample, based on qualitative data (case studies), comprises three entrepreneurial firms engaged in small-scale trading, and two CSOs, one local and one with international links. Two of the case firms are located outside the capital and operate in the agricultural sector, which is the primary source of employment for the whole country, while one is a handicraft maker operating in the capital city. By incorporating case firms located outside the capital, the current chapter further addresses another notion of being disadvantaged, which is being away from the centres of economic activities (e.g. Commins, 2004; Meagher, 2005; Anosike *et al.*, 2018). It should further be noted that as we interviewed CSO directors as well, their insights about disadvantaged entrepreneurs (engaging in petty trading) in other contexts are also incorporated as these interviewees refer to them in the process of sharing their experiences. Hence, we also contribute to the nascent petty trading EE literature.

Data collection via interviews of both entrepreneurial firms as well as CSOs is valuable as it allows the incorporation of perspectives from both sides in the analysis and discussion. As the focus of the chapter is on the development of entrepreneurial competencies, the incorporation of CSOs' views on this topic was necessary. CSOs deal with a range of disadvantaged entrepreneurs regularly and can offer insights, which the overview of the limited number of case firms may omit. Hence, we believe that both academic, as well as practitioner

audiences, will find our chapter of relevance, particularly in the context of EE development for disadvantaged entrepreneurs in such challenging economic and social contexts.

The rest of the chapter is organised as follows. The next section offers a brief contextual overview on the EE, CSOs role within it, and their influences on disadvantaged entrepreneurship. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology, including the research setting and case firms' background. After that, study findings are presented. The chapter concludes with the presentation of study implications and future research directions.

## **2. CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW**

The debate on entrepreneurial skills development in disadvantaged entrepreneurs is linked to the broader discussion on the dynamics and practicalities of entrepreneurship education in different contexts. Prior scholars have referred to different kinds of entrepreneurship education (including specific skills development) targeted towards different groups in poor and disadvantaged settings (e.g. Bae *et al.*, 2014). At the same time, there is an increasing recognition in the literature that for a petty trading EE to function well, CSOs are equally and in some cases more important than the state functionaries to mitigate the problems of unemployment and poverty among the disadvantaged population (e.g. DeJaeghere and Baxter, 2014; Albareda, 2018).

CSOs have been defined and interpreted in a variety of ways in the extant literature because of variety of roles they play in different societies as well as in different practical contexts (e.g. Van Dyck, 2017). OECD defines CSOs as "...all non-market and non-state organisations outside of the family in which people organise themselves to pursue common interests in the public domain" (Atwood, 2012).

In recognising CSOs as critical intermediaries that link the citizens with policymakers (Albareda, 2018), the Africa Development Bank defines CSOs based on three broad types of civil society formations. First, as formal groups whose organisational forms and operational logic closely align with western notions of civil society. Second, as neo-traditional groups which combine both western and indigenous modes of operation. Finally, as traditional indigenous groups in which organisational forms and operational logic reflect indigenous cultural practices (e.g. Sesay *et al.*, 2007).

Prior research has found that CSOs' contributions to economic and societal development vary. They range from lobbying governments on issues related to employment and establishing coalitions with organised labour (Williams *et al.*, 2011), through to acting as pressure groups for the public sector to improve accountability and governance (Scholte, 2011), and developing human capital to boost entrepreneurial and business opportunities (Auplat, 2006; Valdez and Romero, 2018). Hence, in the African context, CSOs are an essential part of any ecosystem, including the petty trading EE to help the disadvantaged section of the population.

Disadvantaged entrepreneurs have been defined as including “women, youths, seniors, unemployed, disabled, ethnic minorities and immigrants who run a business” (OECD, 2019). This broad definition goes beyond the subsistence-based definition of many prior studies because being disadvantaged can come from a variety of sources. Prior studies have referred to lack of access to financing (e.g. Rouse and Jayawarna, 2006; Jayawarna *et al.*, 2013), discrimination or restrictive access (e.g. Portes, 1995; Bates *et al.*, 2018; Valdez and Romero, 2018), and lack of skills for development (e.g. Marivate, 2014; Bates *et al.*, 2018; Valdez and Romero, 2018) as the primary sources of being disadvantaged entrepreneurs. It has further been argued that disadvantaged groups also have difficulties accessing quality education and training that could enhance individual productivity and, thus, their likelihood of finding decent work or starting a business is reduced (e.g. Freedman, 2008; Walker, 2009).

Specifically, in the SSA context, the need to develop the primary skills and competencies of entrepreneurs is particularly acute. Over 80 per cent of the labour force is still engaged in informal activities, and 23.5 per cent are disadvantaged entrepreneurs, whilst 54.5 million young people have no access to education, employment or training (Chigunta *et al.*, 2005; ILO, 2019). Despite entrepreneurs' eagerness to develop and create new opportunities for fostering economic growth (Packham *et al.*, 2010), a study by Herrington and Coudras (2019) found that weak institutional development, lack of finance and lack of entrepreneurship education are challenges facing disadvantaged African entrepreneurs. Therefore, understanding the different dynamics of entrepreneurship skills development and the role of different players, including CSOs, play in it, is very important, especially in the African context.

## **2.1 The EE in Sierra Leone**

The EE, as a concept, has multidisciplinary roots and its perception (conceptualisation) is linked to context. For this chapter, we conceptualise EE "a set of interconnected entrepreneurial actors, organisations, institutions, and entrepreneurial processes which formally and informally coalesce to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment" (OECD, 2014). While the term EE is hard to grasp (e.g. Sheriff and Muffatto, 2014), recent development in EE for formulating and implementing state entrepreneurial policies is characterised by Daniel Isenberg six actors of EE: (1) policymakers and public leaders, (2) financial actors, (3) culture impactors, (4) support organisations, event organisers, (5) educators and developers of human capital, and (6) corporations (Grigore and Dragan, 2020). Each of these areas interacts in a very complex and peculiar way and provides a novel, cost-effective approach for stimulating regional economic growth and prosperity (Isenberg and Onyemah, 2016).

Isenberg's model of EE tries to capture the underlying dynamics of sustainable regional development (Khatab and Al-Magli, 2017), by focusing purely on the openness of entrepreneurship, access to resources along with market effectiveness and business opportunities as critical factors for fostering entrepreneurship, innovation and SMEs growth (Grigore and Dragan, 2020). For this reason, how state policymakers frame EE policy issues are crucial to understanding the varying policy responses (Herweg *et al.*, 2018), as there are individual actors with a real or potential interest in entrepreneurship growth (Isenberg and Onyemah, 2016).

For example, policymakers and public leaders benefit significantly from entrepreneurship growth through regional and national SMEs growth (Audretsch *et al.*, 2006), while financial actors like local banks and corporations benefit directly from local firms' growth and growing firms to partner with or acquire respectively. Similarly, the sources of human capital like universities and vocational schools can potentially benefit if students or alumni get research funding or local jobs, and journalists benefit from publishing reputable news to attract or retain readers (Isenberg and Onyemah, 2016.) The key policy challenge that Isenberg's EE domains try to address is that even in environments conducive to business start-ups, there is a lack of high growth firms (e.g. Arabi and Abdalla, 2020). For example, although Finland EE is generally considered positive in the EU due to low regulatory burden and some favourable support mechanisms, the perception among Finnish people to create new businesses is low, and in most cases, support for the disadvantaged and underrepresented population is lacking (OECD, 2018). Therefore, what remains lacking is an EE framework that nurtures, support,

and develops the interactions that can lead to more all-round sustainable entrepreneurship growth (Lichtenstein, 2011).

In the case of Sierra Leone, entrepreneurship faces enormous problems related to EE, as the country is ranked 131/137 based on 14 components that influence global EE development (GEI, 2019). At the same time, issues such as lack of trust in policymakers and public leaders, and limited access to entrepreneurial resources (Kamara, 2019), low level of credit penetration (SCBD, 2018), and restrictions on entrepreneurial education (Mbeteh and Pellegrini, 2018) hinder Sierra Leone EE.

## **2.2 Relationship between CSOs and the Disadvantaged EE in Sierra Leone**

This section reviews what we already know about the relationship between CSOs and EE in the disadvantaged entrepreneurship settings, like Sierra Leone. It is important to mention that CSOs are an essential player in disadvantaged (particularly petty trading) EE contexts like Sierra Leone as they can potentially influence all other EE elements (as identified by Isenberg and colleagues). Prior studies have also highlighted that national governments are increasingly appreciating the critical role CSOs play in fostering EE (Meyer, 1995; Essia and Yearoo, 2009; Biswas and Rao, 2014; Banakar and Yatnalli, 2018). It has further been argued that the CSOs cannot be viewed in isolation from entrepreneurship growth in the developing countries (Biswas and Rao, 2014; Sigalla and Carney, 2012; DeJaeghere and Baxter, 2014).

Along with financing practicalities, the role of culture, human capital, as well as corporations, and policymakers for EE growth (Isenberg and Onyemeh, 2016), CSOs play probably the most crucial role when it comes to disadvantaged entrepreneurship. Specifically, CSOs in Sierra Leone act as providers and enablers of disadvantaged EE development through the creation of free business support services, as 94 per cent of small business entrepreneurs cannot afford the business support they need (SOBA, 2014). While other support actors such as mentors, incubator providers, event organisers and foundation managers serve the local market, the disadvantaged entrepreneurs, particularly petty traders in Sierra Leone are unable to use those services in most cases (SOBA, 2014). Hence, CSOs emerge as the only support source for disadvantaged entrepreneurs. Figure 1 below shows the relationship between CSOs and other EE actors in Sierra Leone.

**INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**



Keeping in mind the limitations of the public sectors and other entrepreneurship support providers, the role of CSOs becomes even more critical for the development of entrepreneurial skills in the African context, particularly in Sierra Leone. In the particular context of SSA including Sierra Leone, in the eyes of most respondents in different surveys, CSOs have been found to offer better social services including healthcare compared to the state (e.g. John *et al.*, 2006; Thomson *et al.*, 2008; Diallo and Diallo, 2019). Concerning entrepreneurship development, most people view CSO activities to be more legitimate than the state (Kamara, 2019). Therefore, for subsistence level entrepreneurship, which is a visible element of petty trading EE, CSOs are the most critical and visible player. In Sierra Leone, the government of Sierra Leone established the National Youth Commission (NaYCom) by an Act in 2009. The main aim of its formation was to create sub-provisional training and incubation centres for young, disadvantaged entrepreneurs across the country (NaYCom, 2014). As CSOs are trusted more by the populace as well as have better capabilities for entrepreneurial skills development (training), NaYCom also collaborates with them. Along with CSOs, other vital players in Sierra Leone petty trading EE are international donors who provide funds both for NaYCom as well as CSOs, and relevant public bodies and regulative agencies which deal with issues like permits, licences and permissions in this context.

Keeping in view, the above-mentioned importance of CSOs in Sierra Leone petty trading EE, it is rather strange that there is a visible lack of specific research on the role of CSOs in that context. Therefore, our chapter aims to specifically explore the role of CSOs in the skills development of disadvantaged entrepreneurs as well as analyse CSOs' interaction with and influences on other elements of petty trading EE in Sierra Leone.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This research was carried out through a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data offers detailed descriptions and real-life accounts of practices occurring in the local context by people experiencing the phenomenon (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Lee and Lee, 1999; Myers, 2019). It is essential to mention that most of the existing data on CSO contributions and disadvantaged entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone are either fragmented or scarce. Reliance on secondary data in Sierra Leone can, therefore, result in inconsistent findings (e.g. Mbeteh and Pellegrini, 2018).

Moreover, as we are interested in incorporating the views of local as well as international CSOs along with disadvantaged entrepreneurs, undertaking quantitative survey research is not possible because of the relatively limited number of CSOs, and particularly international CSOs which are operating there. Finally, keeping in view the subjectivity of the topic (i.e., disadvantaged entrepreneurship development), qualitative methods are more useful as many of these aspects cannot be easily quantified due to their contextual and subjective understanding. We employed purposeful sampling technique because it fitted with the focus of our chapter, where respondents need to share certain characteristics (Suri, 2011), so that they understand the context and focus of research being carried out. All petty traders in our sample are representative of the population as they share similar characteristics to the majority involved in such entrepreneurial ventures. It is further important to note that judgement and understanding of researcher of the research context is important while using such sampling strategy (Flick, 2017). One of the co-authors is from Sierra Leone and has observed petty trading closely in his life; thereby making the choice of purposive sample further applicable for the current study.

Telephone and/or zoom contacts were undertaken with each case firm and CSO respectively by one of the researchers who is originally from Sierra Leone. All interviews were conducted during March 2020. Keeping in view the focus on the current chapter, we chose the CSOs and the firms based on specific criteria. The firms were chosen because petty trading activities in Sierra Leone is regarded as a catalogue of development (Kamara, 2008), and agriculture and artisan entrepreneurs are representative of the economy.

Also, to get a diversity of perspectives, we chose one local and one international CSO. Moreover, the case-firms were chosen on the condition of a minimum of two years' experience in cooperation and collaboration with international and local civil society organisations in Sierra Leone. In order to ensure comparative analysis, the case firms chosen are all micro-enterprises (less than ten employees). This perspective is significant because such micro firms are illustrative of most businesses in developing countries (Liedholm and Mead, 2013). Moreover, micro-enterprises tend to face disadvantages due to lack of resources as well as competencies in many cases for survival and growth (e.g. Marivate, 2014; Arslan *et al.*, 2020).

In summary, a total of 5 interviews were conducted across 5 cases (one at each micro firm and one at each CSO). Given prior management scholars (e.g. Chetty, 1996; Lee and Lee 1999) contributions towards qualitative research, the number of case firms and CSOs in our

study provides adequate data to evaluate the impact of CSOs on disadvantaged entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone. To maintain anonymity, we have not divulged the names of the interviewees and the case firms and CSOs. Table 1 below offers a summary of the CSOs and case firms as well as of the interviews conducted.

### **INSERT TABLE 1 HERE**

Researchers across a broad range of scientific fields are increasingly using different software tools to analyse the data and finish their research effectively (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2011). We used NVIVO software for data analysis. Although there are relatively few observations, the reason for using NVIVO software analysis is because, as Siccama and Penna (2008) stated, "the cross-examining of research data using NVIVO software accessible coding tools allow researchers to create categories and coding-on to develop layered dimensions for coding themes". To this end, the analysis started with the creation of a new project in NVIVO, and the researchers went through the following processes.

1. Firstly, comparative coding to identify possible themes or patterns in order to establish viable linkage across raw data.
2. Secondly, identified coded data were gathered to recognise potential themes to get a conceptualised perception of our research observation.
3. Finally, potential themes were further reviewed, defined, and named to develop ideas for the research analysis.

#### **4. CASES DESCRIPTIONS**

The first case firm "A" is local clothes and handcraft manufacturing enterprise located in Freetown. The firm was established in 2017 and currently employs three individuals with an annual average turnover of 5.5 million Leones (Approximately 510 Euros). The owner of the case firm "A" is one of the few artisan entrepreneurs currently supported by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and its Commission office in Freetown.

The case firms, "B" and "C" are both small-scale Agri-production firms located in BO and Bombali districts, respectively. Case firm "B" is a rice production firm founded in 2015 initially engaged in subsistence farming practices. At the time of the interview, it employs four casual employees. The owner of the case firm "B" is part of the mapaki women's group in Bo, Southern Province of Sierra Leone. The group is part of thirty-five (35) women's groups supported by local and international CSOs in the Southern region. The addition of this case

firm further adds value to our empirical context, as women entrepreneurs are disadvantaged in the African context, generally due to cultural perceptions (Amine and Staub, 2009). In 2019, firm "B" achieved a turnover of over 3 million Leones (Approximately 290 Euros).

The third case firm "C" is a family business established in 2017. The firm has served as a crucial provider of livestock in Makeni, Bombali District, Northern Sierra Leone. The firm raises hens and roosters. To date, the owner of the case firm "C" owns two chicken coops and employs two individuals with an estimated annual turnover of 1.5 - 2 million Leones. Keeping in view the sizes, and annual turnover, all three case firms are representatives of disadvantaged entrepreneurs engaging in petty trade.

The first case CSO is Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA), which is a local NGO, formed by ex-university student leaders wishing to contribute to the long struggle of restoring stability and democracy to Sierra Leone. Since 1998, CCYA has focused on critical issues across Sierra Leone; providing humanitarian services to the thousands of displaced people in the capital Freetown, provision of commercial spaces for the disadvantaged young people affected by the long years of brutal civil war and tyranny that created a massive army of employed youth. Furthermore, CCYA focuses on mobilising youth towards more fruitful engagements, promoting inclusion and social justice among Sierra Leonean youth.

The second case CSO, ActionAid Sierra Leone (AASL) is a country branch of ActionAid International. AASL key activities in Sierra Leone focus primarily on disadvantaged and small-scale entrepreneurs particularly women on issues related to promoting adult education, Agri-women's livelihoods, facilitating community interaction and creating market access, improving water and sanitation, the rights to food, as well as restoring democratic governance, and women's right. AASL, country strategy from 2018-2023 focuses on building the resilience of women, girls, and communities through continuous engagement and participation. Table 2 below gives a summary of our case firms, CSOs, and functions.

**INSERT TABLE 2 HERE**

## **5. FINDINGS**

The study findings indicate that our participants regard CSOs as efficient actors to support entrepreneurship development as well as improve the entrepreneurial skills and capabilities of disadvantaged entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone. Hence, our study supports the

notion highlighted in prior studies where the role of CSOs has been referred to as critical for disadvantaged entrepreneurs (e.g. Serrano *et al.*, 2006; Biswas and Rao, 2014; Valdez and Romerao, 2018). At the same time, the importance of CSOs in petty trading EE was affirmed in our findings as well. The respondents highlighted the institutional challenges, which restrict the development of entrepreneurial skills and competences by these CSOs. However, in the specific context of institutional challenges, it is important to refer in recent years the Sierra Leone government has realised the importance of CSOs to empower and train disadvantaged entrepreneurs, including women and has undertaken some reforms as well as removed some obstacles to CSOs' operations. Therefore, the critical role of CSOs for petty trading EE is receiving official backing as well. Specifically, the country director of CSO with international linkages (AASL) pointed out that "*to some extent, we do work freely [...] we have access to every part of the country*".

AASL continues to advocate for further reforms as well as grow their entrepreneurial programs and activities. The country director of AASL added, "*...we continue to grow our programs and activities across Sierra Leone to strive for women's right, governance, and the disadvantaged in rural communities*". Since 1988, AASL has expanded to 8 districts in Bo, Bombali, Kambia, Port Loko, and Western Area. In Kambia for example, SSAL provided over 4 000 000 Leones to "*indigenous civil society groups to advocate for the right to information for the disadvantaged, provide small scale loans, and support livestock petty trading*". Access to such critical information as well financing has been found as a significant hindrance for entrepreneurship development by many prior researchers (e.g. Duncombe and Heeks, 2002; Rose and Jayawarna, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2019). Hence, these activities even though they may appear minor still play an essential role by entrepreneurship development for the disadvantaged section of the population.

These views were echoed by the other CSO interviewee, i.e. the executive director of CCYA as well by saying that "*The government of Sierra Leone, local authorities, other developmental organisations and community people are increasing the capacity of us (CSOs) to perform our functions. For example, between 2014-2017, we expand our operations to six (6) chiefdoms in Port Loko, Moyamba and Bo districts, [and] as a result, we capacitated and supported 18 youth clusters (comprising of 500 disadvantaged young women and men) in small micro-grants to undertake agricultural and small scale enterprise development*". Hence, it is quite visible that CSOs are focused on disadvantaged entrepreneurs across the country and not only focusing on the capital city. This is an essential point because the location in peripheral

locations has been found to further contribute to entrepreneurial disadvantage in prior studies (e.g. Commins, 2004; Anosike *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that CSOs are playing an important and visible role in the extension of petty trading EE to peripheral regions as well, along with the capital city.

Despite these positive developments, CSO interviewees highlighted the problems that still exist and hinder their operations. The case CSO with international roots i.e. AASL faces the bureaucratic hurdle of license renewal. The interviewee says explicitly that "*the issue of renewal of a license is a tedious process that is slowing our operations and activities [...] we proposed that licenses are renewed every five years instead of 2, but the development cooperation framework offers no changes to that submission*". Moreover, the bureaucracy in Sierra Leone is hindering CSOs operations that target youth training and education explicitly. To this end, the country director of AASL pointed out that "*You have to visit the Ministry of Education to sign a service level agreement; visit the Ministry of Land to have necessary paperwork done; and before the project is undertaken, a member of the parliament must be on the premises to authorise the project*".

Identifying that the majority of disadvantaged entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone have been victims of either Ebola disaster and/or civil war, along with poverty; this finding also supports the notion referred to in some earlier studies focusing on CSO operations in developing countries, that administrative and bureaucratic burdens influence the efficiency of their operations (e.g. Brown, 2016; Lovan *et al.*, 2017). Hence, the skills and capabilities development possibilities for disadvantaged entrepreneurs could be even more vital if such hindrances are removed. Also, the removal of such hindrances will strengthen the effectiveness of nascent petty trading EE.

During the discussion with CSOs' interviewees as well as case firms' interviewees; the role of culture and cultural perceptions also emerged concerning skills and competencies development in disadvantaged entrepreneurs. Specifically, the country director of AASL pointed out that "*the thinking that women and girls are supposed to lag in education and training is a worrying issue facing entrepreneurship growth among women and girls in the country. [For example,] women and girls are encouraged to stay home with the kids...and expected to provide minimal support in the field of farming and harvesting*". Hence, our findings support the notion that stereotypical perceptions can potentially limit the possibilities of development, including entrepreneurship (e.g. Cabrera and Muricio, 2017), despite efforts being made by external stakeholders like CSOs. The owners of the three case firms also

acknowledged the issue of cultural perception and its effect on entrepreneurship and small-scale business operation in Sierra Leone.

Another issue that emerged from the discussions was linked to access to state-sponsored entrepreneurship resources and materials. According to the country director AASL "*youth and disadvantaged believe opportunities and resources are only attainable to politicians and communities affiliated with the ruling government*". In a similar vein, the owner of firm C stated, "*access to entrepreneurial resources and materials in this country are treated as a political issue*" [...]. *So, what is the point to even try to seek support from the government?*". Due to these political aspects associated with state help for entrepreneurship development, CSOs appear as the most trusted resort to the disadvantaged entrepreneurs.

The dependence on CSOs for skills and competencies is also linked to the accessibility of CSOs compared to politically influenced and difficult bureaucratic government support sources. The owner of the case firm A stated that "*it is difficult to reach our community counsellor or get government support [...] civil society workers are always in this community and they constantly provide adult education and training for us through REFLECT*". Also, the interviewee from case firm B re-echoed that "*before my business, I have no business education or training. Thanks to our mapaki group, I have the training and skills I need to do my own business [...] with just six months of training, I was confident to seek a small loan from the group to start my farming business which is growing today*". Also, the interviewee from case firm C re-echoed that "*we do not trust politicians anymore, they only visit us when it is time for election [...] if not because of NGOs groups that are providing us training on taxes, livestock, saving, and granting us loans, some of us could have disgraced in this community*". *We have the opportunity to save money, pay teachers to teach our kids, and provide food for our families*". These findings are in line with prior studies where CSOs are highlighted as being efficient in the use of resources as well as more accessible by disadvantaged sections of the population compared to state functionaries in developing countries (e.g. Karnani, 2016).

To further highlight the importance of CSOs in skills development, the country director of AASL, stressed that "*there is a hefty reliance on civil society for social delivery provisions like building schools, taps, and training centres for most small-scale farmers and other petty traders in rural communities*". The executive director of CCYA added, "*the vast majority of CSOs programs and activities across the country go hand-in-hand with the government priority on skills delivery and training for young people; so most young people in the rural regions strictly rely on us (CSOs) for support*". These findings further substantiate prior Sierra Leone

focused studies addressing the importance of CSOs (e.g. Thomson *et al.*, 2008; Diallo and Diallo, 2019) by explicitly highlighting their role for disadvantaged entrepreneurs. The high degree to which disadvantaged entrepreneurs depend on CSOs across Sierra Leone for skills training and education is apparent.

To further explain the types of skills and training that CSOs provide, the executive director of CCYA stated that “*we have been providing series of training for young people across the country since the inception of the organisations [...] training in business planning and financing, saving, micro-credit loans, human right based approach for disadvantaged entrepreneurs with disabilities, governance and election observation*”. This finding is in line with some prior studies where primary business planning skills and financial management competencies have been referred as a key for entrepreneurship development in the deprived contexts (e.g. Karlan and Vladiviva, 2011; Anosike *et al.*, 2018). All three case firm interviewees also supported this specific point and referred to the importance of such basic skills for the development and growth of their businesses.

The executive director further stated that even though the training manuals are developed by CCYA staff in their areas of expertise, in most cases, “*we have to hire external expertise to provide basic adult education training for most disadvantaged entrepreneurs*”. The country director of AASL echoed these views. According to the country director, “*although we provide relevant training in livestock, saving, and taxation (for disadvantaged entrepreneurs), we also have to improvise [...] establish a tailoring resource centre for skills training, and provide minor training in maintenance and chlorination of the well*”. The reason is that the needs and wants of disadvantaged entrepreneurs across Sierra Leone are obvious as further stated by the country director of CCYA “*most disadvantaged groups across the country lack not only the basic knowledge to undertake business but also the necessary facilities they need so we have to provide training, skills and facilities that are immediate to them*”. From these discussions, it is quite evident that for some disadvantaged entrepreneurs in the developing country context of Sierra Leone, issues like better management of livestock, skills to search and access business-related information and financial management skills can be instrumental in their development. Figure 2 below illustrates our key findings and the link between CSOs, disadvantaged entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders in nascent petty trading EE in Sierra Leone.

**INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE**



## 6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The findings of this chapter offer both theoretical and practical implications. A key theoretical implication relates to the need for developing economic-context specific theorisation of disadvantaged entrepreneurship and EE when analysing the role of CSOs for skills development. The findings revealed the factors associated with political parties' affiliation as well as cultural barriers and tribalism concerning entrepreneurship development. Such elements may be visible in disadvantaged entrepreneurship contexts of other African and developing countries but are less likely to be visible in developed or advanced economies' contexts. Also, lack of trust (and legitimacy) in central government and institutional voids make the role of CSOs even more critical in countries like Sierra Leone. Along these lines, the findings of this study also provide new insights that deepen our understanding of the role of CSOs as an effective business support alternative in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone, like other developing countries (see, e.g. Rana and Elo, 2016; Zaki and Rashid, 2016; Arabi and Abdalla, 2020), is experiencing a mismatch between the demand and supply for entrepreneurial business support services within its EE. In most mature business ecosystems, for-profit actors such as incubator managers, mentors and even organisers are specialised service providers that help develop the EE. In developing countries and Sierra Leone's nascent EE, the provision of business support services to boost the ecosystem is mainly dominated by non-profit business enablers such as CSOs, bilateral agencies and government agencies. Recognising the irregular and unsustainable service provisions and absence of motivation towards government programmes in enhancing SMEs business performance (SOBA, 2014; Jones *et al.*, 2013), we contribute to the emerging 'new actors' like CSOs domain in business and society, which are relatively less studied in management studies (Kourula and Laasonen, 2010). Although disadvantaged entrepreneurs are confronted with unfavourable and inaccessible business support services from established actors in developing countries like in Sierra Leone (SOBA, 2014), CSOs actors continue to provide free access to resources and expertise (Dahan *et al.*, 2010), global value creation (Teegen *et al.*, 2004), and missing capabilities for an established EEs (Dahan *et al.*, 2010).

On the other hand, CSOs, even though important for disadvantaged entrepreneurs, tend to have a supplementary role in developed economies. Also, petty trading EE needs specific

theorisation, especially in the context of volatile and (post) civil war economies like Sierra Leone. Prior literature has established the importance of petty trading as a survival mechanism in such contexts (e.g. Kamara, 2008; Welter *et al.*, 2018), there is a lack of specific framework or theoretical paradigms which explain the role as well as the interrelationship between different EE elements. Hence, entrepreneurship scholars need to pay attention to this aspect.

The study findings also reveal interesting practical implications for CSOs' administrators and managers that along with focusing on basic (primary) skills development and offering access to easier financing, they should also consider actively addressing cultural barriers to entrepreneurship development. For the governments in countries like Sierra Leone, reducing regulative barriers for CSOs especially the ones with international links is important so that they can focus on their core job, rather than being stuck with issues like permit or license renewal. Such initiatives by the governments (public bodies) will also enhance the effectiveness of nascent petty trading EE evolving there. Also, if the governments undertake relatively transparent and long-term strategic partnership with established CSOs with international links like Action aid; this can potentially help governments to overcome some of the public trust barriers which have been highlighted earlier. Also, such a partnership can help the public resources dedicated to entrepreneurship development in deprived communities can be utilised better. Such cross-sector strategic partnerships have also been found to be very useful in prior studies focusing on poor and deprived contexts (e.g. Goldsmith, 2011; Van Tulder *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, the effectiveness of petty trading EE (as well as of other ecosystems linked with disadvantaged population segment's poverty alleviation) can be further enhanced by such partnerships.

Our chapter has several limitations, as well. First, we only focus on the role of CSOs in disadvantaged entrepreneurship development. Other factors (of which there can be many depending upon the context) are not considered in our study. Also, we interviewed representatives of two CSOs and three case firms in Sierra Leone, so their evaluation of these topics can be subjective, and views of other CSOs (and firms) can somewhat differ from their assessment. Finally, there are several other players, including international donor agencies, as well as public sector bodies, important in petty trading EEs. However, our research has not incorporated their views, which can be considered a limitation.

However, we believe that keeping in view the dearth of research on Sierra Leone, and our chapter does highlight important elements which influence disadvantaged entrepreneurs

and their skills development, building bases for future studies to probe different aspects more in-depth further. Future studies can also contribute to the extant literature by going into specificities of entrepreneurial skills and competencies development (needs) in different sectors in SSA countries, and how CSOs can play a role in this concern.

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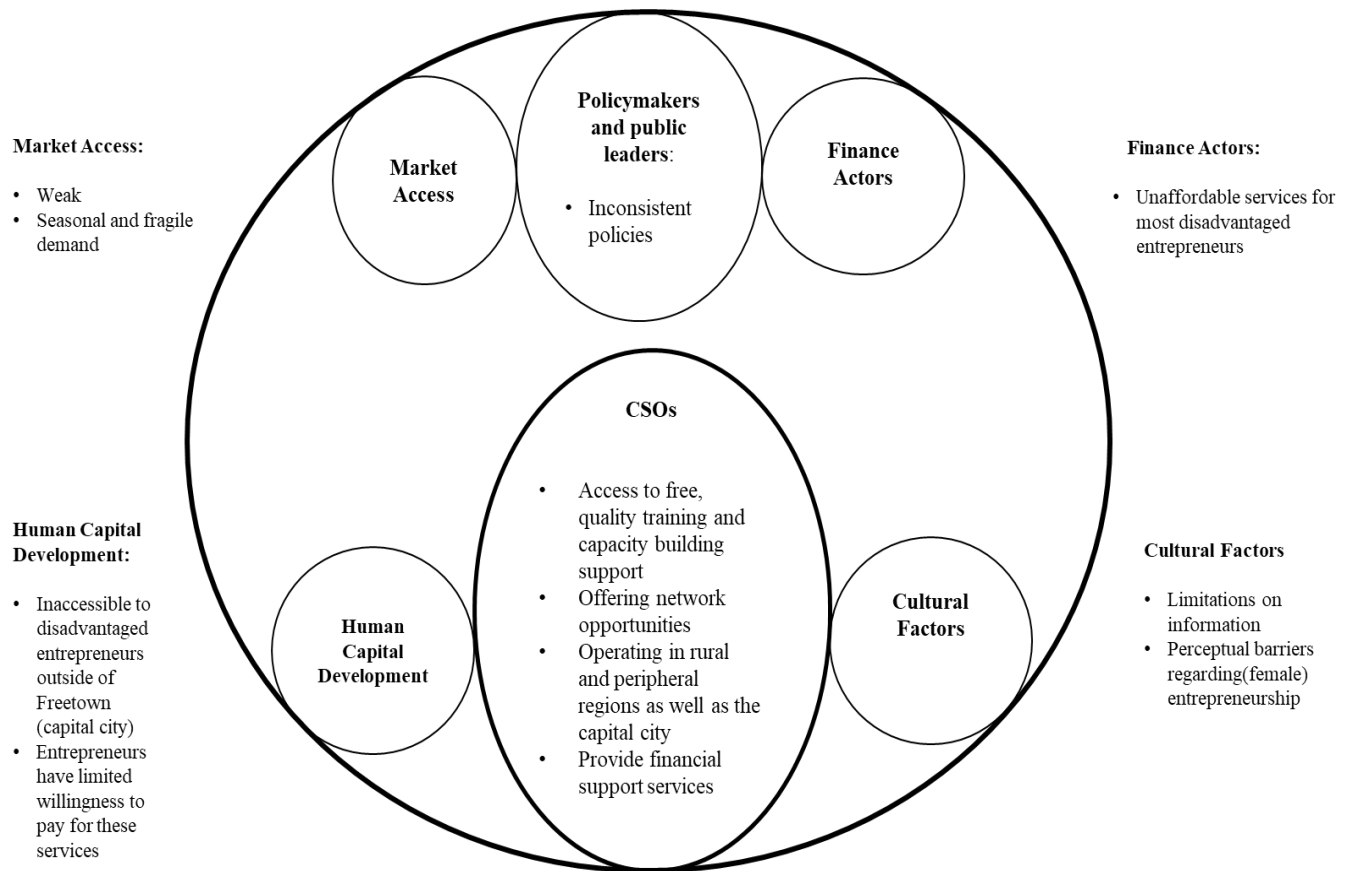
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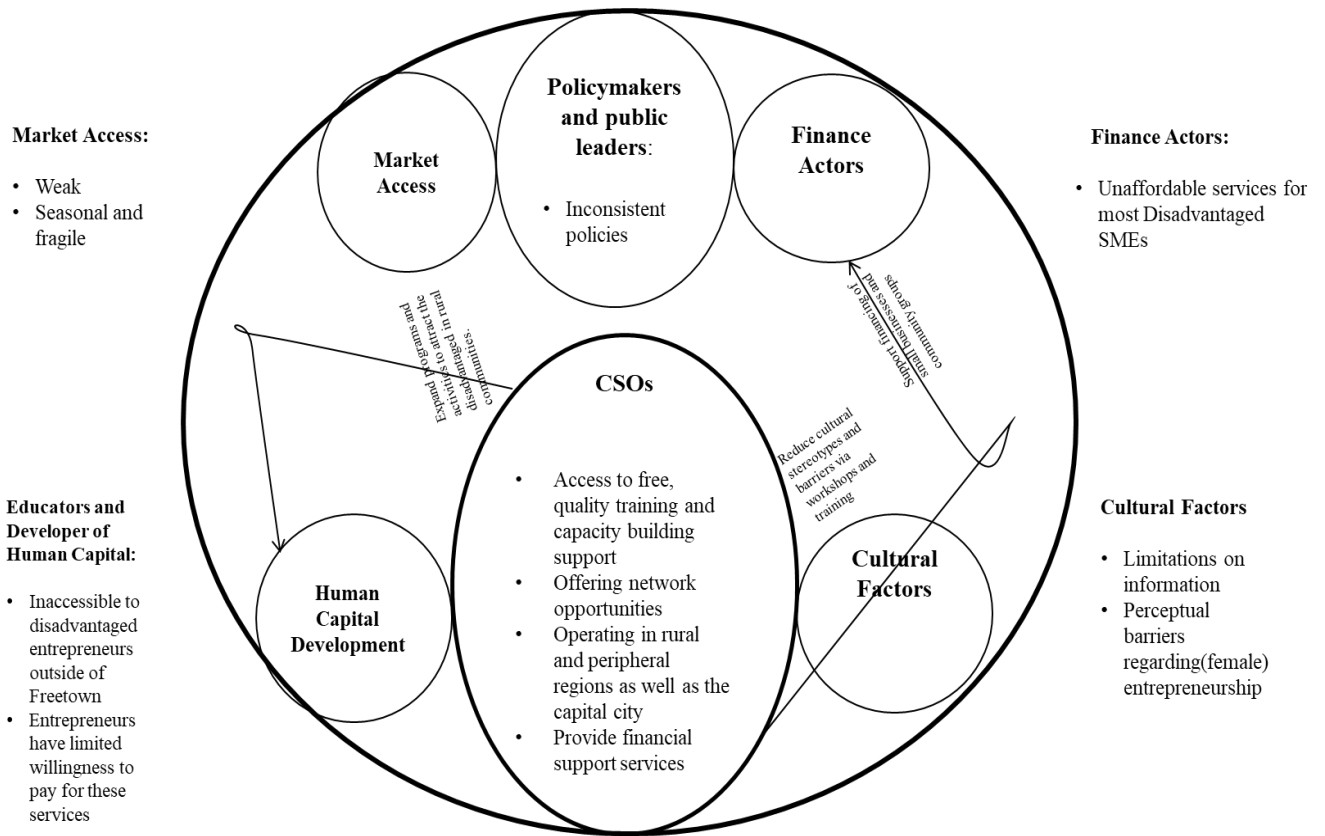
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**Figure1: Disadvantaged (Petty Trading) Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Sierra Leone**



**Figure2: Disadvantaged (Petty Trading) Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Sierra Leone and Specific Role of CSOs**



**Table 1: Summarised Description of Case CSOs, firms and Interviews**

<b>CSO</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial Firm</b>	<b>Focal Issues/Industry</b>	<b>CSO/Firms Age</b>	<b>Number of employees</b>	<b>Number of people interviewed</b>	<b>Interviewee position</b>
<b>Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA)</b>		Livelihood security and entrepreneurship skills for young people  Human right-based approach advocacy for youth, PWDs and youth people	25	22	1	Executive Director
<b>ActionAid Sierra Leone (AASL)</b>		Livestock ActionAid Scheme  Village saving and loan scheme	32	59	1	Country Director
	A	Manufacturing	3	3	1	Owner
	B	Agriculture	5	4	1	Owner
	C	Agriculture	3	2	1	Owner

**Table 2: Cases description**

<b><u>Firms, establishment, and estimated turnover</u></b>	
<b>Firm A</b> , established in 2017 by an artisan entrepreneur with an estimated annual average turnover of 5.5 million Leones*	Manufacturer of clothes and handcraft
<b>Firm B</b> , founded in 2015 by an agricultural entrepreneur with a turnover of over 3 million Leones in 2019*	Agriculture (Rice production)
<b>Firm C</b> , established in 2017 as a family business with an estimated annual turnover of 1.5 - 2 million Leones*	Agriculture (Raises hens and roosters)
<b><u>CSOs and establishment</u></b>	
<b>CCYA</b> founded in 1998 by ex-university students	Provision of commercial space for the disadvantaged population in Sierra Leone
<b>AASL</b> , been working in Sierra Leone since 1988	Building the resilience of women, girls, and communities

\* We use the XE exchange rate in Sierra Leone for March 2020, i.e., 1€ = 10, 784.313725 Leones.