Facilitating Youth Entrepreneurship at the Bottom of the Pyramid: A Proposed Research Agenda

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Abstract

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the process of facilitating youth entrepreneurship among impoverished communities at the "Bottom (base) of the Pyramid" (BOP). A review of the extant literature on BOP suggests that there has been relatively little research work undertaken on the process of entrepreneurship amongst youth within the BOP, or the appropriateness of contemporary approaches to the facilitation of entrepreneurship within this target community. The paper is conceptual in nature and draws on the literature to identify where gaps can be found, highlights the main units of analysis that would need to be examined in order to gain a better understanding of how to facilitate youth entrepreneurship at the BOP, and presents a research agenda for addressing the gaps in the current body of knowledge.

Background Literature

Entrepreneurship is recognised as a tool for enhancing economic growth and prosperity (Kuratko, 2005). However, the World Bank estimates that 14.5 percent of the world's population still make less than $1.25 USD (PPP) per day (Worldbank.org). These impoverished people are also called the BOP (Prahalad & Hart, 2002). Both the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) have acknowledged the need to apply government policy to facilitating economic self-determination among disadvantaged communities via entrepreneurship programs (OECD, 2013). However, Europe accounts for only 0.5 percent of the world's BOP population (Worldbank.org). So, how might entrepreneurship serve as a tool for poverty alleviation in South East Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa where between a quarter to a half of the world's BOP population are under the age of 25 (Banerjee & Dulfo, 2007)?

The plight of the world's youth, particularly those in the BOP, is a matter of global concern as it not only impedes economic development, but creates undesirable spill-over effects such as illegal migration, crime and political unrest. For this reason, attention needs to be given to understanding how entrepreneurship and enterprise education and support programs targeted at youth from the BOP might be used to help alleviate poverty. However, youth-based enterprise learning activities within the BOP require better definition and have been largely ignored within the extant literature (Kolk et al., 2014).

The challenge of youth unemployment within the BOP

Unemployment or under employment affects nearly two-thirds of youth (defined as aged 15-24) within most developing countries (Haftendorn & Salzano, 2003). Nearly 73 million youth are unemployed, accounting for some 13 percent of the world's population (Global Employment, 2013). An estimated 90 percent of youth live in developing regions where quality employment opportunities are limited. Developing regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa, report youth unemployment rates of 28 percent and 24 percent, respectively.

Governments of both developed and developing countries have responded to this youth employment crisis within the BOP by supporting education and training programs. This has led to the "NEET" (Not Employed, Educated or Trained) rate, which indicates developing countries have high rates, with Latin America and the Caribbean estimated at 20 percent in 2008 (Global Employment, 2013). These responses were fuelled by research indicating that entrepreneurship and new venture creation are linked to economic growth (Reynolds et al., 1994; Kuratko, 2005; Acs, 2006; Acs et al., 2008; O'Connor, 2012), and entrepreneurship education programs are seen as tools used to alleviate youth unemployment (von Graeventiz et al., 2010).

However, there is a lack of research on entrepreneurship generated within the BOP (Kolk et al., 2014; Acheampong & Esposito, 2010), and an even larger gap related to the suggested solution to the problem of youth unemployment in the BOP, youth-based entrepreneurship. A study on the importance of youth and

entrepreneurship concludes youth are part of an underutilised productive part of society within the BOP, and not having this group reach its potential is detrimental to the social and economic development of these communities (Kacou, 2010). This potential is the rationale for investigating youth entrepreneurship within the BOP. Additionally, it was the author's experience working with an entrepreneurship training organisation geared towards youth in the BOP that revealed there is a need to investigate and potentially improve the current systems around entrepreneurship education programs currently being delivered.

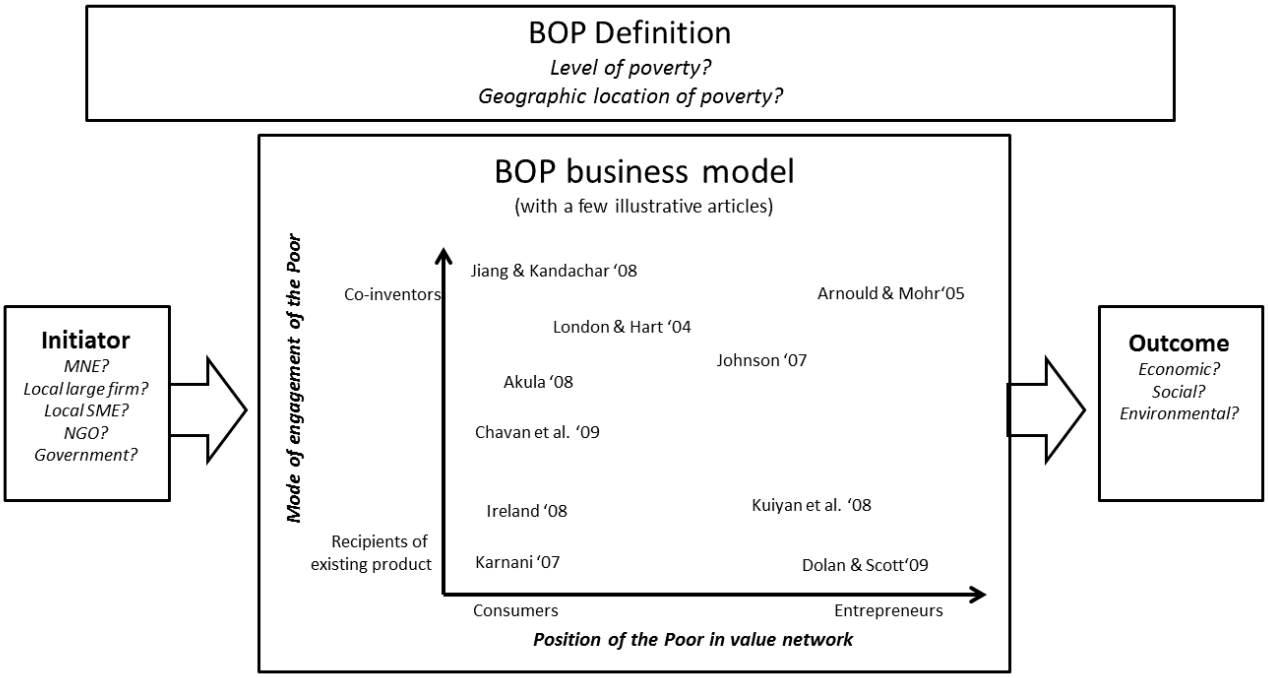
Well intended programs exposed at-risk youth (15-35) to short, two- or five-day, entrepreneurship training programs with limited practical application due to the short duration of such programs. Upon completion of these programs and their related requirements, they were eligible for government guaranteed loans up to a specified amount. Ill prepared participants often spent what little money they possessed to have a business plan prepared for them, which they did not fully understand. If they were able to obtain a government guaranteed loan, these youth often ended up worse off than before as they had an unprofitable and unsustainable business due to factors such as limited basic business knowledge, undeveloped life skills, and additional debt to repay.

A lack of extant research in entrepreneurship at the BOP

Kolk et al. (2014) reviewed the academic literature relating to the BOP over a 10-year period and found that people at the BOP were viewed either as consumers (first generation) or as producers and co-creators of new business ventures (second generation). This shift to viewing the BOP community as potential consumers and producers, along with suggestions to utilise the BOP to develop co-created ventures, highlights the importance of researching entrepreneurship within these communities (Simanis & Hart, 2008; Follman, 2012). However, there is limited extant research on co-created ventures within the BOP (Kolk et al., 2014). This confirms a suggestion by Acheampong and Esposito (2010) that it is still not fully known what relationships exist between entrepreneurship and poverty and how they influence each other.

Our review of the academic literature relating to youth-based entrepreneurship within the BOP identified a further gap in relation to the co-creation of ventures. This is highlighted in Figure 1 which is drawn from the study by Kolk et al. (2014) with the potential knowledge gap added by the authors. The current BOP literature has not explored youth related co-created ventures. Recent studies exploring poverty alleviation via entrepreneurship suggest that co-created ventures have the potential to overcome some of the challenges faced by nascent entrepreneurs within the BOP (Alvarez & Barney, 2014). However, co-creation within this context has never been used in Venezuela, although multilevel marketing and other applied models have been used (Ireland, 2008).

Figure 1. Organising Framework (Kolk et al. 2014)



Facilitating BOP entrepreneurship through stakeholders and social capital

One of the major challenges to BOP venture creation relates to the limited barriers of entry that allows for duplication of ventures until profit margins reach unprofitable levels (Alvarez & Barney, 2014). It has been suggested that by using multiple stakeholders both inside and outside of the BOP, new ventures can overcome these barriers (Simanis & Hart, 2002; Liao & Welsh, 2003; Davidsson & Hoing, 2003; Karnani, 2006). This is demonstrated within the BOP by scholars Peredo & Chrisman (2006); however, the effect on the development of social capital with the BOP has received limited investigation (Ansari et al., 2012).

Social capital within BOP communities is typically the glue that simultaneously holds them together and holds them back (Ansari et al., 2002). One of the concerns of developing social capital is that the approach to entrepreneurship programs is often focused on an individualistic engagement with new venture creation (Adler & Kwon, 2002). This individualism would contradict Ansari et al. (2012) in relation to the role played by social capital within the BOP. From reviewing the literature, there is a gap in the knowledge base about how social networks and social capital are used within the context of new venture creation for the BOP. This is true both in general and more specifically as it relates to youth, which hinders understanding of how stakeholders looking to co-create new ventures within the BOP should approach social networks and social capital.

The challenge identified by Alvarez and Barney (2014) for successful new venture creation with the BOP could be overcome by utilising social capital. Social capital has been demonstrated to have a strong correlation to new ventures and a somewhat weaker relationship with human capital (Davidsson & Hoing, 2003). Alvarez and Barney (2014) suggest the limited human capital posed by some individuals within the BOP does have an effect on new venture creation, yet with traditional education within the BOP is labelled as dysfunctional (Banejree & Dulfo, 2007). The lack of formal education within developing countries creates a general lacking of business skills to help ensure a successful business (Ghina, 2014). This can create challenges for stakeholders who want to co-create ventures and not just apply an existing model to the BOP. For example, Kolk et al. (2014) suggest that most ventures created with outside stakeholders were not co-created but outside models applied to the BOP.

Entrepreneurship education for BOP youth – what models to use?

Pittaway and Cope (2007) have demonstrated that entrepreneurial skills can be taught. This indicates the potential for entrepreneurship related education to assist with the development of basic business skills within the BOP. However, the approach best designed to facilitate these skills is open to question.

Unfortunately, the concept of what constitutes "entrepreneurship" remains rather vaguely defined (Kilby, 2003; Shane, 2012). This also relates to how best to teach entrepreneurship and even whether it can be taught (Rae, 2000; Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Crispin et al., 2013). Entrepreneurship and enterprise education are somewhat ambiguous terms as these terms are considered by some as two terms with the same meaning (Jones & Iredale, 2010). Enterprise education is used primarily in Europe and the United Kingdom, while "entrepreneurship education" is used primarily within North America (Gibb, 1993). However, in general entrepreneurship education is considered to have a more narrow focus on business development, while enterprise education provides a wider skill set to use throughout various aspects of life (Jones & Ireldale, 2010). This more holistic approach to education has been indicated by scholars for at-risk youth (Duckenfield & Sawanson, 1992) indicating the more holistic enterprise education approach could be more appropriate for BOP youth.

Despite these issues, our review of the academic literature suggests that this area has not been adequately explored in relation to entrepreneurship education for youth within the BOP. Even the underlying concept of what constitutes the BOP is ill-defined (Kolk et al., 2014). This creates a challenge for educational programs aiming to develop the skills needed for new venture creation within the BOP. It has been indicated that this type of education program should be geared towards specific groups to meet their specific needs (Raffo et al., 2000). However, with various definitions of the BOP concept, the development of programs designed to meet the needs of this group is hindered. As Shane (2012) acknowledged in his review of the field of entrepreneurship, there remains a lot that is unknown or yet to be explored.

Contemporary theories of entrepreneurship and their value to youth within the BOP

Despite the limitations of the academic field of entrepreneurship highlighted by Shane (2012), there are several extant "theories" that have captured the attention of entrepreneurship researchers and educators. These include "Effectuation Theory" (Sarasvathy, 2001) and the concepts of "Creation Opportunities" (Alvarez & Barney, 2010). These might be relevant to the facilitation of entrepreneurship amongst youth within the BOP. For example, the principles of Effectuation Theory and the ability of Creation Opportunities may help overcome some of the previously stated challenges of BOP ventures.

How a novice or nascent entrepreneur identifies and screens potential opportunities is important to future new venture creation success. Creation Opportunities are formed through the entrepreneurial process (Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005; Corner & Wu, 2011; Alvarez & Barney, 2010). Creation Opportunities are not pre-existing and waiting to be discovered and exploited. Through actions to create new ventures, such as interacting with stakeholders, entrepreneurs create situations where unique organic opportunities do emerge (Sarasvathy, 2000; 2001; Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005). This appears to match the intent behind co-created ventures.

Rasmussen and Sørheim (2006) suggest that while some participants of business generation programs might determine they cannot be solo entrepreneurs, they can be part of collaborative startup enterprises in key team roles. This relates to the discussion that creation opportunities are developed from interaction between stakeholders, which then helps develop the unique opportunity (Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005; Corner & Wu, 2011; Alvarez & Barney, 2010). Sarasvathy (2008) uses the terms "Crazy Quilt" or "Patchwork Quilt" to describe where self-selected stakeholders become partners to create unique opportunities. Team-based approaches as discussed by Harper (2008 p. 624) suggest, "some profit opportunities can only be discovered and exploited when entrepreneurs combine with others in the pursuit of common goals." Similar research focusing on the team as community-based enterprises demonstrates other possible ways to create profitable, sustainable enterprises (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). Self-employment can limit the potential for larger opportunities that can arise when combining multiple stakeholders working as partners to co-create unique opportunities (Alvarez & Barney, 2014). Because of the lack of youth-based entrepreneurship literature in the BOP, there is a need to investigate how concepts such as Effectuation Theory and Creation Opportunities might be relevant to understanding the co-creation of new ventures within this cohort and then applied within suitable education and support programs.

Who are the main stakeholders and what are their roles?

Another import unit of analysis in facilitating entrepreneurship amongst youth within the BOP is the role played by stakeholder networks within whom these nascent and novice entrepreneurs might collaborate. Our review of the literature suggests that there are at least three key stakeholders or "actors" in this network. The first of these are the novice and nascent youth entrepreneurs within the BOP. The second are businesses within their task environment, and the third are government agencies that seek to foster enterprise amongst this target community.

Novice and nascent youth entrepreneurs within the BOP. This group of actors is clearly fundamental to the development of entrepreneurship amongst youth within the BOP. However, a feature of this community is their lack of resources and social disadvantage. What they do possess is social capital and strong community networks that can provide a useful "resource set" of available means upon which to build a future business venture. Prahalad (2006) notes that women-based self-help groups in India have been effective in fostering economic self-determination. Peredo and Chrisman (2006) have provided their thoughts on the conditions that need to be available within a community to foster the development of community-based enterprises, but this analysis provides little direct evidence of its application to youth within the BOP. Do youth within these types of communities have the same or a different mindset as seems to be the case for youth within developed economies (Arenius & Clergu, 2005)? While the role of the novice and nascent youth entrepreneur within the BOP is clearly fundamental, there is a paucity of academic research to provide a clear understanding of their needs, behaviours, and capabilities. Little is known about the relationships they require and use to co-create new ventures. This lack of research into the factors influencing co-creation of new ventures by youth within the BOP, the role of networks in this process and how such a process might be facilitated are key areas for future study.

The role of businesses as network actors for youth entrepreneurs within the BOP. The emerging interest in the BOP as a focus of academic research for business studies was initially driven by authors such as Prahalad (2005) and Hart and Christensen (2002) who suggested that the huge but relatively impoverished communities within the BOP were an untapped market that could be leveraged for future economic growth. The alleviation of poverty has been a feature of many corporations who have embraced this within their programs of corporate social responsibility (CSR). However, this area remains ill-defined with little consensus on what roles and responsibilities corporations should have in relation to poverty alleviation (McWilliam & Siegal, 2001; Orlitzkey et al., 2003; McWilliam et al., 2006). The notion that corporations, particularly multinational corporations (MNCs), might seek to profit from BOP communities whilst also enhancing their economic development has been challenged by many (Pitta et al., 2008; Ansari et al., 2010; Arora & Romjin, 2012). There is also a question as to whether the BOP community is worth the investment (Karnani, 2006). Of particular importance is the need to shift BOP communities from being consumers to becoming producers (Follman, 2012). Simanis and Hart (2008) developed a BOP Protocol 2.0 that calls for businesses to link with BOP communities to collaborate with entrepreneurs in the co-creation of new ventures. It proposes that MNCs should use their resources and global marketing and distribution networks to help entrepreneurs in the BOP access previously inaccessible markets. Despite such initiatives, there remains relatively little research on how the ideas outlined in the BOP Protocol 2.0 have been adopted by larger firms and whether these might be used within programs to facilitate youth entrepreneurship within the BOP.

The role of government agencies as network actors for youth entrepreneurs within the BOP. Most governments are concerned with economic development and poverty alleviation within their communities. Many have turned to entrepreneurship as a potential mechanism to help achieve these ambitions (Minniti & Levesque, 2008; Graeventiz et al., 2010). Yet, despite claims that entrepreneurship can be a major force in the fostering of economic growth (for example, Pittaway, 2005; Perren & Jennings, 2006; O'Conner, 2013), there remains little hard evidence of its value in helping create employment for youth within the BOP (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010).

Directions for future research

To better understand the nature of youth entrepreneurship within the BOP and how this might be facilitated, we suggest a future research agenda that will focus on addressing the three research questions outlined at the start of this paper. Our view is that any future research adopts a case study methodology as Yin (2014) suggests this is a preferred method where the primary research questions are "how" or "why" in nature,

where it is not easy to control the behavioural events, and where the research study is focused on contemporary rather than historical phenomena. It is also suggested that this methodology be based on multiple case studies as this will provide deeper understanding of the processes and outcomes being observed and the ability to offer a "good picture of locally grounded causation" (Miles, Huberman & Salandra, 2014). We recommend that the general approach to be taken in any future case study research follow the suggestions of Eisenhardt (1989) who provides an eight-step approach to the development of theory from case study research. Using this approach, we offer the following research agenda.

Getting Started: This stage requires the development of research questions and the identification of any "a priori constructs". Our review of the literature leads us to propose the following research questions:

1. How relevant are the current theories of entrepreneurship to the development of youth entrepreneurs within the BOP?
2. What role does social capital play in the facilitation of youth entrepreneurship within the BOP?
3. Who are the key stakeholders who might facilitate youth entrepreneurship within the BOP and what is their role in the co-creation of opportunities for such youth?

In addressing these questions, the key units of analysis will be: i) the key stakeholders (for example, novice and nascent BOP youth entrepreneurs, businesses, and government agencies); ii) theories of early stage entrepreneurship (for example, Effectuation, Creation Opportunities); iii) social capital; iv) co-creation opportunities; and v) outcomes, both social and economic.

Case study selection: The selection of cases is one of the most important aspects of this type of research and Eisenhardt (1989) recommends that this should be driven by theory rather than a random sampling paradigm. Ideally, cases should offer a range of dimensions that will encompass all the main units of analysis to be examined by the research (Garson, 2013a). It is likely that such cases will need to be drawn from existing entrepreneurship programs targeted at youth within the BOP. The authors are aware of several such programs and it is these that should be selected due to their ability to provide all the units of analysis outlined above. A particular challenge in selecting examples of a BOP youth entrepreneurship program is to ensure that it provides meaningful lessons of what might or might not be considered "successful". Past personal experience of working within such programs suggests that the assessment of "success" is likely to be viewed differently by each stakeholder. For example, government agencies tend to view "success" less in terms of what these novice and nascent youth entrepreneurs actually achieve as a result of their participation in the program, and more in terms of how many people went through the training. For many of the BOP youth who attended the programs, "success" was often measured in terms of the opportunity to receive a daily meal and have something to do. To fully explore the research questions, the number of cases required for this study will depend on the data that can be obtained and whether there is sufficient evidence of a strong pattern across the cases examined.

Data collection and analysis: The challenge of collecting meaningful data from these youth-focused entrepreneurship programs within the BOP will require an understanding of the local situation and culture of each case. How cultural differences approach challenges and expectations of solutions needs to be considered when interpreting the collected data. As cases will be obtained from various countries, the knowledge of local languages and dialects will be critical. With agencies prompting such programs often relying on outside funding, such as grants, a strong positive bias from key stakeholders within these agencies will be something that the researcher needs to look potentially for and control in any subsequent analysis.

The process of engaging with these programs to collect data should utilise both quantitative and qualitative data sources (Yin, 2014). This triangulation should be achieved by using sources such as observations, interviews, surveys, and historical data. Using these various data sources should help to ensure all the units of analysis outlined above will be investigated and help to build the strength of the potential theories generated from these case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). The use of multiple investigators familiar with local culture and language of each case should be used to help capture different perspectives and any novel insights of the data collected.

Field collection: While collecting data, researchers who are unfamiliar with local culture and context will need to immerse themselves into that culture to gain a deeper understanding. For non-local researchers, the time requirements should be considered as they are likely to be substantial, particularly in relation to

understanding the local context. This includes culture as well as allowing for contingency plans for delays. Also of importance is the researcher's ability to win the confidence and trust of the local participants, in particular the nascent and novice youth entrepreneurs. As a number of the agencies that provide such education rely on grant funding or donations, future planning of programs can be limited as funding is insecure. Another challenge that will increase the time needed is the lack of infrastructure. For example, the authors are aware of participants traveling for three hours to a program that was less than 30 kilometres away, along with participants of an international competition unable to attend due to an unannounced change to their scheduled flight as a result of an insufficient number of passengers to justify the cost for the airline!

To help document the information obtained while collecting data and its surrounding context, researchers will need to develop and maintain field notes as a running commentary of impressions to document what they are learning and experiencing. This is important as the context involved within the BOP is unique to that of the commonly researched developed world. These notes should be shared among researchers to get a jump start on analysis but also to take advantage of the flexible nature of case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). Field notes will help the researchers make use of unique situations within cases and themes that emerge during data collection. Hard copy and electronic devices should be used to record and share field notes between researchers. However, the researcher will need to be aware of the potential lack of resources available and be prepared for this. Depending on the time available for the field research, an ethnographic approach is likely to yield rich data (Garson, 2013b). This could be particularly useful as the importance of social capital and the foundation of how the social structure are configured are likely to be key to gaining the right insights as this approach has been identified as useful in entrepreneurship policy studies (Arshed, Carter & Mason, 2014).

Conclusions

Research into youth-based entrepreneurship within the BOP is important as it offers an opportunity to unlock the economic potential of a large proportion of the world's most disadvantaged people. It is also a research frontier that has not been adequately explored. The experience of the authors in working within a program targeted at this group suggests that while well intentioned, the net effect was more harmful than intended and actually trapped the youth further into the poverty cycle. The provision of micro-loans to facilitate new venture creation when the participants lacked the human and social capital to make full use of their training and funds compounded their problems. Further research is required to understand better the context in which these novice and nascent youth entrepreneurs can build sustainable business ventures. The design of better, more appropriate programs for education and support will have significant and beneficial outcomes. It is unlikely that any "magic bullet" solution will be found, and likely that what may be found will challenge some of the existing paradigms of entrepreneurship currently developed within the advanced economies. Even if a single "best practice" model cannot be found, the data from this research is likely to be of value to policy makers and those seeking to provide education and support to disadvantaged communities. The fundamental aim of any research should be "to make a difference" and to help improve our understanding of the world. If it can also make a contribution to improving the lives of the world's most disadvantaged people, it would seem to be a research agenda worth pursuing.

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