Chapter 6. Stimulating Social Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: explaining the process and exploring theory

Abstract
Social entrepreneurship is seen as an answer to many problems, especially in developing countries, and consequently is the subject of intensive study by both academics and practitioners. Many of these studies focus on either theory building or describing practice. In this article, we combine these two, exploring the use of strong structuration theory (Stones, 2005) as an explanatory tool for entrepreneurship at the Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP). Over two years (2009-2010), we gathered longitudinal data on 57 Bangladeshi social entrepreneurs, using interviews, questionnaires, group interviews, field visits and a monitoring scheme.

We found that strong structuration theory can explain the development of social entrepreneurship, illuminating cause and direction in the interaction between social entrepreneurs and their environment. However, strong structuration cannot explain differences in success between entrepreneurs, nor identify when people make a change from a more managerial to a more entrepreneurial mode of economic action. Building on theory and our data, we hypothesize that strong structuration, enriched with specific concepts from social cognitive theory, can explain not only the development of social entrepreneurship at the BoP but might even be able to predict its emergence. Our findings also indicate that the individual entrepreneur’s development precedes capital development which has implications for development practitioners.
Chapter 6

Introduction

Entrepreneurship in general has long been seen as a panacea for the economic problems in developing countries (Naudé, 2009) and the best way to combat poverty at the grassroots level (Kolawole & Torimiro, 2005). Social entrepreneurship is even more promising. Kickul et al. consider that social entrepreneurs can ‘act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss in order to improve systems, inventing and disseminating new approaches, advancing sustainable solutions that address some of society’s most pressing problems, and creating long-term systemic change’ (Kickul et al., 2012, p. 481). This promising statement reflects some important elements of social entrepreneurship. First, social entrepreneurship is inherently embedded (S. L. Jack, 2002) and builds on idiosyncratic knowledge of local challenges and available resources. Second, this idiosyncratic knowledge is often tacit (Zahra et al., 2009), and therefore hard to transfer to others, limiting outsiders’ possibilities to engage in problem definition and resolution. Third, social entrepreneurial opportunities are created in a specific window of opportunity where the idiosyncratic insights, skills and general dispositions of the entrepreneurs match a need in the environment in which they are embedded and which is itself changed by the very entrepreneurial actions (Baker et al., 2005; Sarason et al., 2006; Stones, 2005). As a result, the social entrepreneur is ideally suited to address problems in her environment that both purely commercial entrepreneurs and public organizations are unable to address (Santos, 2012; Zahra et al., 2009).

Finding ways to stimulate entrepreneurship and harvest its ascribed benefits is the object of a vivid academic discussion. Research has focused on teaching entrepreneurial behaviour to Western students, (Fayolle & Gailly, 2004; e.g. Haase & Lautenschläger, 2010; Krueger, 2007), the individual entrepreneur from the perspective of behaviour and traits (Frese et al., 2002; Gartner, 1988; Uy, Foo, & Song, 2012), and on how social, economic and political environments and networks influence entrepreneurs (Dennis Jr., 2011; S. H. Lee & Phan, 2008; North & Smallbone, 2006).

However, a search of the Web of Knowledge28 yields only a small number of papers on stimulating social entrepreneurship. One describes how legal structures and incubator programmes help ventures with a social goal in Madrid, Spain (Fernández, Martínez, Herrero, & Juan, 2012) and another considers how local government helped social entrepreneurial initiatives in several municipalities in the USA (Korosec & Berman, 2006). More recently, though, there is a growing academic interest in teaching social entrepreneurship, mainly focused on Western students, covering the search for the best teaching methods (e.g. Pache & Chowdhury, 2012), enhancement of students’ social entrepreneurship self-efficacy and identity (I. H. Smith & Woodworth, 2012), and increasing

28 http://apps.webofknowledge.com, on 18 April 2013, search words: (stimulating OR facilitating OR emerging OR teaching) AND “social entrepreneurship”
students social entrepreneurship self-efficacy by teaching the ideas of bricolage (Kickul et al., 2012). We also found another article focusing on aspects of social entrepreneurial opportunities (Zahra, Rawhouser, Bhave, Neubaum, & Hayton, 2008) and one on the influence of personality factors on social entrepreneurship start-up intentions (Koe Hwee Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010).

All of these studies are, justifiably, based on the assumption that certain elements enhance the chance of social entrepreneurship, for example, teaching the values of bricolage because these values are seen in social entrepreneurial practice (Kickul et al., 2012). However, they all remain descriptive with regards to the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship itself. With this article, we want to go beyond description and contribute to theory building by identifying factors that explain the emergence and development of social entrepreneurship.

The tacit knowledge involved in social entrepreneurship, its embeddedness and its time bound characteristic of acting on windows of opportunity can all be addressed in empirical studies of social entrepreneurship in its natural environment. Structuration theory provides a promising theoretical perspective to study this: it recognizes that entrepreneurs and their actions create their environments and, at the same time, are directed by them (den Hond et al., 2012). It provides insights into how entrepreneurs explore and influence their environment, and why they take certain decisions (cf. Sarason, Dean, & Dillard, 2006). In addition, it combines the level of analysis of sociological theories, namely groups or society, with individual cognition, individual processes of ascribing meaning and individual behaviour (cf, Stones, 2005, pp. 84–86). Despite the potential explanatory power of structuration theory, putting it into practice has been notoriously difficult (e.g. Whittington, 1992). Stones’ (2005) adapted structuration theory to make it more precise and applicable on micro- and meso level, zooming in on a focal actor embedded in her environment.

This adapted version of structuration theory is used here as a lens to study 57 entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, with a specific focus on explaining the emergence of social entrepreneurship. We first define the social entrepreneur as we see her, and follow with a description of the research setting and the environment of the 57 entrepreneurs. We continue with our explanatory framework, based on Stones’ (2005) strong structuration theory, and describe the data used in this study. Finally, we reflect on the explanatory power of strong structuration, and the implications of our findings for both practitioners and academics.

**The social entrepreneur**

Social entrepreneurs are sometimes seen as having social change as their primary focus (Seelos & Mair, 2005a; Weerawardena & Mort, 2006), rather than financial goals (N. Thompson et al., 2011). Although attention for a social agenda is essential when studying social entrepreneurs, there should be an equally strong focus on income generation from
the social entrepreneurial activities (Maas et al., 2014a). Many authors (e.g. Dorado, 2006; Santos, 2012; Seelos & Mair, 2005b; J. Thompson & Doherty, 2006) recognize different gradations in social entrepreneurship that can be typified by the concepts of value creation and value capture (Maas et al., 2014a). Value creation refers to the total added value created at an aggregate level (for example, new product creation, improved livelihoods), while value capturing refers to the appropriation of that value by the entrepreneur in the extraction of personal income (Mizik & Jacobson, 2003). In this study, we consider the social entrepreneur as having predominantly social goals, while capturing sufficient value to be able to continue creating it.

The social entrepreneurs in this study are creating value in the resource-constrained environment of rural Bangladesh. This sets them apart from entrepreneurs in more privileged environments, who have access to subsidies, business networks and capital. The entrepreneurs in Bangladesh need to ‘make do’ with the resources at hand, using creative ideas and approaches to use available resources in a new manner. In other words, they need to engage in a process called bricolage (Baker et al., 2005). The interest in bricolage in recent studies of social entrepreneurship is inspired by Hayek’s (1945) work on the idiosyncratic nature of the entrepreneurial process. Especially in resource-constrained environments, local knowledge about these resources provides advantages (Gundry et al., 2011). This local knowledge is often tacit and therefore hard to transfer to distant actors, limiting outsiders’ recognition of opportunities (Zahra et al., 2009) and benefitting the embedded social entrepreneur.

Di Domenico, Haugh and Tracey (2010) gave an extended bricolage to describe the social entrepreneurial process, that further emphasizes the dialectical relationship between a social entrepreneur and her environment. In addition to ‘making do with resources at hand’ (using untapped or underused sources to create a new service/product), they include ‘refusal to be constrained by the limitations’ imposed by their environment (trying out solutions to counteract or subvert limitations of the local environment) and ‘improvisation’ (improving through best-fit approaches, trial and error) (Di Domenico et al., 2010, p. 698). They further argue that social bricolage entails three processes unique to social entrepreneurship: social value creation, stakeholder participation and persuasion of other actors to contribute to social value creation (Di Domenico et al., 2010, p. 698).

**Research setting**

The social entrepreneurs of our research are situated in the larger context of Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world (UNDP, 2012). It is characterized by intense competition for resources, such as agricultural land, because it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Given that 70% of its population resides in rural areas (United Nations, 2012), its society is highly dependent on land exploitation as a means of...
income. Local elites are extending their control over private and public land (Mair & Marti, 2009), leaving little for the ultra-poor. Traditional network structures like patron-client relationships are breaking down (Rozario, 2002), further reducing the poor’s access to formal institutions and networks (Thornton, 2002). The people working in the SEL approach are mostly ultra-poor, lacking productive assets, having low education, being socially marginalized, living below the World Bank’s ‘dollar a day’ poverty line, and at best having an irregular income (Islam, 2002; Korosec & Berman, 2006; Thornton, 2002). Although traditional gender roles are changing (Toufique & Turton, 2002), Bangladeshi women still face additional problems like more restrictive social and cultural norms (Mair & Marti, 2009; Rozario, 2002), limiting their freedom to work (Feldman, 2001; Karim, 2001).

PRIDE started working with the ultra-poor in west Bangladesh in 2004. From 2006 to mid-2009, the authors of this article worked with PRIDE, designing an approach to stimulate social entrepreneurship among at the ‘Bottom of the Pyramid’ (BoP) (Prahalad, 2004), among the poorest of the poor. This resulted in the so-called Social Entrepreneurial Leadership (SEL) approach that has been applied from 2009 onwards. In the SEL approach, PRIDE trains rural women to become social entrepreneurial leaders (SELS). In the poorest upazillas (low level of Bangladeshi administration), 26 to 32 villages are selected to take part in the SEL programme each year. In each village, one SEL is sought in consultation with the village leaders. Initially, PRIDE worked with both men and women but the men dropped out for a variety of reasons, for example other jobs inside or outside of the village. Women usually stay within the village, close to their homes, and were found to have more time to develop entrepreneurial activities. For these practical reasons, PRIDE decided to select only women for the SEL programme.

The SELs are selected on certain criteria, derived from earlier research, both to include the poorest and to optimize potential entrepreneurial success. The most important are some organizing skills (judged by, among other things, a clean household), interpersonal skills (being open to other people), the ability to move around in the village at will (meaning that women have to have been married for at least 5 years or are widows or above 30 years of age). In line with local socio-cultural customs, the family of the prospective SEL (husband, mother-in-law) is first asked for permission, after which the woman is asked whether she wants to participate.

After selection, the SELs receive their first training in income generating activities in groups of 13-16 women. The first topic is vegetables cultivation and seed production. These activities are easy to do, provide food, save money from the household budget and can be a source of income. In the subsequent months, four more training sessions are held on other income generating activities such as poultry vaccination, fish production and goat rearing. In total, a cycle of five training sessions is given that is repeated once. The skills and knowledge of the SELs are reinforced, and they all learn to some extent to apply Bricolage and find new
entrepreneurial opportunities (see Maas et al. (2014) for an extended description of the SEL programme).

The social entrepreneurial goal of the programme is reflected in the SEL’s task to organize an entrepreneurial network of women in her village. Within this network, the SEL is required to disseminate part of the skill-set and knowledge she learned during the PRIDE training sessions, allowing other women to engage in income-generating activities too. Continuing the learning process in the field and supported by PRIDE, the SEL goes literally from door to door in order to convince other women of the benefits of joining her entrepreneurial networks. From an entrepreneurial perspective, these networks serve two goals. First, the SEL creates a market for her produce because, for example, the more women she teaches to produce vegetables, the bigger the market will be for her vegetable seeds. Second, she organizes a work force for commissioned work like embroidery. As these work orders are usually too large to be fulfilled by a single person, the SELs have to teach others to do embroidery at a level that it can be sold back to the person commissioning the order.

As the examples above show, the people in the SEL’s network have different, sometimes parallel, relationships with the entrepreneur: they are both customers (buying seeds) and suppliers of labour (for embroidery). Although these relationships might have differing characteristics in terms of hierarchy and expectations, they are both entrepreneurial relations in which opportunities are exploited and profits made.

**Structuration theory**

Since Giddens (1984) published ‘The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration’, structuration theory became a mainstream idea in sociological research. This is not to say that all embraced the theory; it has both been praised and criticized\(^{29}\). Giddens’ version of structuration theory incorporates both structures and actors, and their dialectical relationships. It recognizes the actor’s embeddedness within the structure, the guiding capacities of those structures and, at the same time, recognizes that human agency has the power to change structures (den Hond et al., 2012; Stones, 2005).

Critiques of Giddens’ structuration theory focus on three main arguments (den Hond et al., 2012), namely that it underestimates the influence of existing structures on agents, mainly by neglecting temporality and seeing structures as strictly virtual, needing actors to instantiate them (Archer, 1982; Hodgson, 2007); second, that it is a meta-theory, philosophical and non-falsifiable, which leads to the third critique: that the relation between structuration theory and empirical research is, at best, problematic (den Hond et al., 2012; Stones, 2005).

\(^{29}\) It is beyond the scope of this article to provide an exhaustive overview of these critiques. Interested readers are referred to den Hond et al. (2012), Jack and Kholeif (2007), Stones (2005) and Pozzebon (2004) for more elaborate argumentations.
Despite these critiques, structuration theory has been widely used in qualitative research in organization, management and accounting (Baxter & Chua, 2003; Englund & Gerdin, 2008; L. Jack & Kholeif, 2007). The theory has also been applied in information technology (IT) research (Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005), and other information and communication technology (ICT) related fields (Golden, 2013; Puron-Cid, 2013). It has even been used to describe the field and knowledge of entrepreneurship research (Déry & Toulouse, 1996) and the narratives used by entrepreneurs (Luoto, 2010).

Structuration theory in the field of entrepreneurship has, to date, mainly been used by authors studying opportunity as a process of creation. Chiasson and Saunders (2005) credit Anderson and Jack (2002) with introducing Giddens’ structuration theory to the field of entrepreneurship. Interestingly, while Anderson and Jack focus on the entrepreneur in her environment, and the implications this view has for entrepreneurship research, all following studies (including that of Chiasson and Saunders) have focused on the creation of entrepreneurial opportunity (Bhowmick, 2007; Fletcher, 2006; see e.g. Sarason et al., 2006; M. S. Wood & McKinley, 2010). Cajaiba-Santana (2011) focuses on opportunity creation specifically in social entrepreneurship. In addition, structuration has been recognized by Martí and Mair (2006) as a promising lens to study social entrepreneurship.

To date, structuration theory has not been used to explain social entrepreneurial behaviour or to explain the emergence of social entrepreneurs, possibly because Giddens’ structuration theory is indeed hard to apply to empirical research and, because of this, it has been generally been used as a sensitizing device (L. Jack & Kholeif, 2007). Stones (2005) recognized these and other points of criticism, and adapted Giddens’ framework into a theory called ‘strong structuration’. Stones’ strong structuration theory ‘shifts the emphasis from the largely abstract and philosophical level toward the specific that, in turn, provides greater explanatory utility at the empirical level’ (Edwards, 2006, p. 911), and promotes ‘good research practice based on a well-argued ontology and epistemological practice…. [that] also allows researchers to experiment with the theory, to test it and in so doing, to contribute to the on-going debate, to develop theory themselves’ (L. Jack & Kholeif, 2007, p. 222). This is fully consistent with our intentions in this article. We will therefore provide a concise overview of Stones’ strong structuration which we will then use to analyze the development of social entrepreneurs.

**Theoretical framework: strong structuration**

Strong structuration seeks to move beyond the abstract philosophical concepts of Giddens’ structuration theory, and aims to explore empirical situations of particular agents and structures. This is apparent by Stones’ focus on the action horizon of the particular agents of study, taking into account institutional and structural frames in which the agent is embedded (Stones, 2005, p. 83). This embeddedness, and the forces that dialectically
influence the actor, are phrased in terms of position-practice relationships (Stones, 2012). A position practice is a social position with its associated identity and practice, placed in a network of social relations that recognize it (Greenhalgh & Stones, 2010; Stones, 2005, pp. 61–66 and 89–94). It could be compared to the roles people have in their wider society, with the addition that these roles are not just slots filled by largely interchangeable people, but are continuously perpetuated and changed by active agents, agents that are influenced by structures and in turn influence structures, based on the choices they make. In addition, people can have multiple position practices, for example being both senior executive and mother, with different attached networks and practices.

Applying the concept of position-practices to our research means that that, although the focus may be on a specific SEL, she cannot be regarded as a lone individual operating in a vacuum. Every SEL is also embedded in networks of other people (e.g. family, neighbours, village leaders), each with their own position in relation to the SEL and to society as a whole. These position practice relationships are part of the external structures that influence the SEL. For example, there are social norms in the village with which she has to comply and that delineate her space for action. The second component of the external structures are the larger socio structural forces that play a role in her society at large, and shape the context in which particular structuration processes take place (Stones, 2005, p. 127). Stones illustrates these large socio-structural forces with Michael Mann’s studies of The Sources of Power focusing, in particular, on the ideological, economical, military and national and international political spheres. This leads to a complete picture of external structures and the embedded agent, see Figure 11.

Figure 11: Agent and position practice relations for a SEL (adapted from Stones, 2005 pp. 94 and 128)
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To describe how the active agent operates and dialectically influences this environment, Stones provides the ‘quadripartite nature of structuration’ (Figure 12); four interlinked aspects that express the dialectical relation between agent and structures (Stones, 2005, p. 84). The external structures (1) exist autonomous of the agent, and define the structural context in which the agent operates. Stones distinguishes two levels of external structures. The first are ‘independent causal influences’, that are reproduced entirely independently from the agent, like structures of politics, health care, military escalation, and religious practices (cf., Stones, 2005, p. 111). These independent causal influences overlap with the larger socio-cultural forces in Figure 11. The second, which he calls ‘irresistible causal forces’ are localized closer to the agent in focus and can be seen as the agents’ position practice relationships.

We focus on the SELs and follow Stones’ recommendation to stay within the action horizon of the agent in focus. That means that we will regard the larger socio-structural forces like Bangladeshi policy, widespread poverty, and law as given structures that the SEL cannot influence. For the process of structuration, and the changes that the SEL as a social entrepreneur brings about, we focus on changes to her various actions and position practice relations in the village.

Figure 12: The quadripartite nature of structuration (adapted from Stones, 2005 p. 85 and Greenhalgh and Stones, 2010 p. 1290)
The Internal structures (2), within the agent, are further divided in two. ‘Conjuncturally specific knowledge of external structures’ (2b) covers the agent’s sense about the normative expectations that come with her position. It also covers the capacities embodied within that position. This knowledge of the environment, and how one is expected to act within it, can analytically be divided in three aspects. First, knowledge expressed in interpretative schemes: the way people ascribe meaning and attribute significance to the actions and utterances of others. Second, knowledge of power: how agents perceive their context-bound power. Third, knowledge of norms: agents have a picture of how other people would react, based on the ascribed normative beliefs and perceived pressure to conform (Stones, 2005, pp. 91–93). All three types of knowledge contribute to action informing interpretations: judgements about what (not) to do, based on experiences from the past and expectations of the future (Stones, 2005, p. 92). In our case: the SEL knows which people have a higher status than her, knows it is not well perceived to initiate a conversation with them, especially when they do not look happy, and waits for them to start talking to her.

General dispositions and habits (2a) encompass ‘transposable skills and dispositions’ (Stones, 2005, p. 88), including world-views and cultural schemas, classifications, typifications of things, peoples and networks, moral and practical principles, discourses, attitudes, ambitions, and technical and other embodied skills. It is best conceptualized as a taken for granted, unnoticed state, or tacit knowledge: we do not even know that we have it and we are not aware that we base our action on it. In our research, this covers for example the ingrained male-female role-pattern that prescribe that women are supposed to take care of the children.

Active agency (3) is the way the SELs either routinely or critically draws upon her internal structures and is the active, dynamic moment of structuration. This encompasses reflections on the knowledge they have, actions and choices to act or not to act. The SEL could start new entrepreneurial activities, or refrain from it.

Outcomes (4) of active agency can be intended and unintended. The active agency exerted by the SELs is embedded in the external structures (or, as Stones puts it: structure is the medium of practise (Stones, 2005, p. 5) and informed by the SEL’s internal structures. The better the agents understand these structures and the way they work, the better they can steer intended outcomes (cf., Stones, 2005, p. 92). Outcomes include the alteration or reinforcement of external structures, and agents can be frustrated or facilitated. These outcomes or practices provide the ‘hinge’ between structure and agency (Stones, 2005, p. 4), and constitute the point of action for change or reinforcement, as the arrows in Figure 12 depict. These outcomes for the SEL could be higher income, and fame, or defeat.
Stones points out that active agency against extant structures is difficult. The independent causal influences are macro-level external structures that are far beyond the SEL’s influence and which can exert severely restraining force on a SEL also within the position practice relationships. When it comes to the irresistible causal forces, she might have the physical capacity to resist the external influence but does not feel like she can change anything. This covers situations where she might have a choice in absolutist terms but, due to other pressures, loyalties or fear of unwanted consequences for herself or others, she bows to external pressure and does as she has always done before, consequently reinforcing that external pressure (Stones, 2005, pp. 111–113). In other words, people compromise their ‘set of [ideal] wants, desires and principles in order to be realistic. They sacrifice some things in order to safeguard others’ (Stones, 2005, p. 112). For example, a SEL might have had the dream to study in Dhaka but never went there because she feels it would have reflected badly on her family.

Stones further elaborates on the difficulties of going against extant structures, stating that people who might resist would require three properties: adequate power in her position practice relationships to resist, without endangering other core commitments she has; adequate knowledge of alternative courses of action and their probable consequences; and adequate critical distance to take up a strategic stance in relation to the situational pressures she experiences (Stones, 2005, p. 115).

**Applying the strong structuration framework in research**

Stones insists that any structuration research should analyze both the actions of an actor and the structures in which they are embedded. Moreover, to get an understanding of the interplay of structure and action, both need to be analyzed at different points in time, in order to be able to identify changes\(^\text{30}\) (Stones, 2005, p. 82). Next, to meaningfully investigate the interplay, he states it is important to apply an ‘austerely delimiting focus of attention on a restricted number of germane points’ (ibid) that should be within the action horizon of both the SEL and the researcher (Stones, 2005, p. 83). This is a logical restriction, given the impossibility of investigating everything about the SEL, and because any influential events outside the action horizon of the SEL would not provide information about her actions in the structure. In our research, the questions were restricted to the development and the facilitation factors of social entrepreneurship.

As a starting point for research, Stones suggests the internal structures, such as the conjuncturally specific structures (2b), would lead to questions like ‘what is possible to do?’ and ‘what would be possible if...?’, thus leading to the identification of possibilities, impossibilities, constraints, and sanctions (Stones, 2005, p. 117). The general dispositional

\(^{30}\) Instead of longitudinal studies, he also indicates the possibility to study e.g. two actors divided by geographical distance. As this is not relevant for this article, we will not discuss that methodology.
structures allow for an understanding of the SEL’s ‘more or less taken for granted world view’ and bring to the fore what they find important, how attached they are to particular elements of their world view, and what would be needed to change for them to see the world differently (Stones, 2005, p. 117). This starting point fits our research, as PRIDE also focuses on the SELs. Furthermore, as Stones states, ‘the focus on one aspect will lead, logically and systematically, to other specific aspects [of the framework]’ (ibid). So in the next step, relevant external structures with their constraining and restricting influences are identified, and typified as independent causal or irresistible causal.

Subsequently, the SEL’s actions and their outcomes are identified (L. Jack & Kholeif, 2007). In a later publication (Greenhalgh & Stones, 2010), Stones provides a number of questions that help guide the study of these outcomes: What are the immediate consequences of specific actions (intended and unintended)? How do these consequences feed back on the position-practices in the network and wider external structures? What significance, both positive and negative, do these consequences have for others in the network in terms of power, legitimacy and other factors? What role has the intervention played in the production of these positive and negative consequences? (Greenhalgh & Stones, 2010, p. 1291). Finally, to describe the external structures, the most important customs, agents, events, organizations and their interactions were also analyzed in our research.

**Methodology**

The empirical results presented in this article are based on the experiences of 57 entrepreneurs in total, divided into two batches by starting year: 31 in 2009 and 26 in 2010. The methods used for collecting information differed slightly. Both batches were interviewed at the beginning by PRIDE, and have been monitored for two years on their entrepreneurial progress, the outcomes, the hindrances they experienced, and the factors that facilitated their development. The results of the monitoring were analyzed monthly and in discussions with the authors of this article and PRIDE. These discussions were done during visits to Bangladesh, over the telephone and via e-mail.

In addition, the authors of this article held group interviews with the 2009 batch a year after they had started, again focusing on the outcomes, facilitating elements and hindrances of their entrepreneurial activities. The authors further gathered and verified data during 30 days of field visits to SELs of the 2009 batch, their family, customers and village leaders. In addition, two Master’s students supervised by the authors both did three months of field work involving a subgroup of 13 SELs who were selected by convenience sampling. Finally, all SELs were interviewed by PRIDE staff after two years, based on a topic list comprising

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31 They were female students using local transport, and had a strict time window in which they could do field work. This time window restricted their action radius to the working areas of 13 SELs.
topics like the outcomes of their entrepreneurial activities, the changes they experienced, the challenges they experienced and solved.

Based on the continuous analysis of the data from the 2009 batch, a questionnaire was developed for the 2010 batch and administered upon selection of the SELs and after one and two years. Topics included the nature and diversity of their entrepreneurial activities, the outcomes, their self-confidence, and the number of people on whom they can rely. SELs from the 2010 batch were deliberately not visited by the non-Bangladeshi authors so as not to introduce artefacts inadvertently. Only after two years were they interviewed by the first author, who also conducted four group interviews with them. Again, the topics were effect, impediments and facilitating elements of entrepreneurial behaviour, and focused specifically on pivoting points to become an entrepreneur. In addition, SEL’s family members (26), customers (78) and village leaders (14) were interviewed. The questions asked of the 2010 batch were more in-depth and specific, based on the earlier analysis of the 2009 batch and the on-going monitoring.

Outcomes seen through the lens of strong structuration
We present the data of the 57 entrepreneurs in the form of a storyline over two years, demonstrating the interaction between SEL and her environment and showing three distinct phases.

The beginning of the project
The SELs are embedded in their village structure as ultra-poor women. They married into their husband’s family and have to take care of the household (doing tasks like cleaning, cooking and taking care of the children). Widowed SELs had the same tasks and, in addition, had to earn the full family income. In the highly stratified Bangladeshi society, these women had little to no dealings with any governing bodies or commercial parties, although some of the SELs had been in contact with micro-credit organizations for loans. These loans were used to pay for funerals, pay for the school fees of children or to pay intermediaries who might find a job for their children. Some also used it to buy a cow to fatten and sell again.

The women identified themselves with their roles, and most did not see possibilities of changing this. They did what was expected of them and felt safe in that position. Some explicitly said that they did not want to move around the village for fear of being harassed by other people, or for fear of damage to their personal and their family’s reputation. In addition, they did not trust organizations like PRIDE, external to the village, because they already had seen many organizations working in their village and cheating people.

For the SELs, it took a considerable time before they trusted PRIDE and agreed to take part in the program. One SEL said it took nine consecutive visits from PRIDE staff before she was convinced of their good intentions. Their husbands and families were also wary of PRIDE in
the beginning but they became more prepared to take the risk of working with the organisation when they saw how PRIDE respected existing hierarchies. PRIDE first talked to the village leaders and the elites, explaining about the programme and about the work the SELs could do. In this sense, PRIDE created space in the external family and village structures and in the position practice relations of the SEL, making it possible for them to take part in the SEL programme.

From the first training, the SELs were told that they had knowledge, that they were capable people and that they would be able to undertake entrepreneurial activities. The SELs were asked for their knowledge, they did tests and saw their scores improve, and they had other women to talk to during the training. They learned new knowledge and skills that they put into practice immediately after the training: they started making vegetable beds and sowing vegetables, continuously coached and monitored by PRIDE. Simultaneously, they were helped by PRIDE to start organizing their networks. The SELs had relations in their position practice that mainly, if not exclusively, served a social purpose. As part of the programme, the SELs had to approach their neighbours, families and acquaintances with a new goal: to develop entrepreneurial activities. This proved difficult and created a lot of gossip about the SEL, about her apparent ignorance to get involved with new things initiated by an NGO that would surely be untrustworthy.

The SELs also faced difficulties from their husbands and families who told them they would never be able to do the proposed activities and that they were simply not smart enough to make money. The women themselves were convinced that they would not be able to live up to the task, because it was men’s work, and because they had planted vegetables before but had never produced enough to compensate for their time invested. Their vegetable beds attracted amused, condescending comments from their neighbours. The continued support of PRIDE, repeating that they would just need to complete their activities, kept them involved.

Relating to our framework, we see that the SELs learned new skills (2a) and were supported by PRIDE to use this in active agency (3), while they experienced restraining influence from their extant position practice relations (1).

**After about five months**

Change started occurring after the first visible success of the SELs. Their vegetables grew and produced a good harvest, something the SELs had never done before. This was a proof of their own capabilities to at least grow vegetables, and produce a harvest. What is more, they produced seeds that they could sell to the people in their networks, and that they could use to plant vegetables again. The vegetables meant less out of pocket expenses, as the household did not need to buy the season’s vegetables but could eat the home-grown produce.
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This first tangible result proved a pivoting point at several levels. First, the SELs got more self-confidence. A few literally said ‘I did not know women could do this’, let alone poor women in rural Bangladesh with little education. They become keen to try other income generating activities which they learned about during the training sessions (such as chicken vaccination or starting a tree nursery). Their motivation to learn more increased significantly. As one person put it: ‘We were in the dark but now we are in the light’. The SELs’ husbands and families were also impressed when they saw that their wife or sister or daughter-in-law could make money and contribute to the household income. For the neighbours, the SEL became a woman that could help them in improving their own situation. She also quickly learned that she was now a woman with something to offer to her neighbours, and experienced that she now had considerably fewer difficulties in organizing her network. Although the SEL still continued with house visits, people now also started coming to her, asking her for advice. It also became easier for her to organize group meetings in her network, where she explained her activities and how they might benefit other people.

In other words, the outcomes (4) of the SEL’s active agency affected her position-practice (1), and her knowledge (2a) and self-image. She also starts adjusting her world view (2b): She experiences that people react differently to her now (2b) and understands that her actions (3) not only benefit herself, but also other households (4). Interestingly, almost all SELs indicated that their interpretation (2b) of external structures (1) stimulated them to further distribute the skills and knowledge they learned: they felt it was their religious or social duty. As a direct outcome (4) of the growing networks, the SELs created more income (e.g. by selling seeds or vaccinating chicken).

After two years
The process slowly progressed and all SELs implemented income generating activities from which they could immediately benefit. For all SELs, their position practice changed further. All of the women reported that their status rose and that people showed them more respect, indicated by people greeting them and asking them for advice. The SEL was ascribed the role of a trustworthy, capable person, and two SELs were even asked to become members of the village council. When asked during the interviews, all of the SELs reported being asked for advice by the village council, and they also provided support or intervened in cases of disputes between families. In at least two cases, men even came to the SELs for advice on setting up a joint group for rice cultivation.

All SELs also quite literally changed their external structures: they set up entrepreneurial networks, ranging in size from 60 to 150 people. These had significant entrepreneurial impact as they could now take on, for example, work orders for embroidery. Within these networks, subgroups evolved (usually around the SEL, but sometimes without her membership) that together leased land from ‘rich people’ to cultivate cash crops or to
exploit a fishpond. These are activities that could not have been started by any of the women alone, because they never had the network, the skills, or the courage to approach rich people of socially higher rank. The networks started serving as vehicles for socializing and increased the power that the members had in their village. As a group, the police would listen to them when they filed complaints, while as individuals they had been chased away before. Two SELs even participated in local elections, using their entrepreneurial networks to generate votes.

The pattern we described before, that the outcomes (4) of the SELs’ actions (3) influence internal structures (2a and 2b) continues. In addition, these actions and their outcomes increasingly influence external structures (1), even creating new networks and changing their network’s members’ position practices.

**Differences in entrepreneurial effectiveness**

After two years, there are significant differences in the actions of the SELs. At one end of the spectrum, we saw two SELs only applying part of the activities they learned from PRIDE, and no longer holding any group meetings. At the other end, a number of SELs are continuously increasing their networks, connecting to commercial parties in nearby cities, trying out new, innovative entrepreneurial opportunities, and having set up rotating savings funds that help its members with cash for their entrepreneurial ideas.

Those SELs who were more successful (defined as having larger networks and more entrepreneurial activities) as social entrepreneurs were, according to PRIDE, more pro-active, more eager to work, and more brave and courageous. When SELs and the people in their networks were asked how they had changed since being involved in the SEL programme, they answered that they were now more capable, more knowledgeable and that they were more courageous, more daring. The now knew more people and dared to speak to them. The most successful ones said they now dared to experiment, they were no longer afraid that they would fail because they would come up with something new and, in any case, they were already successful.

Although we did not yet find a tool to measure ‘entrepreneurial bravery’ with the SELs in Bangladesh, we did find some indications that the most successful SEL are indeed the most daring. In Bangladesh, it takes courage to talk to people from a higher social status and those SELs who were most successful talked freely to the interviewer. They came up with their own entrepreneurial activities (like producing and selling baby food and flowers) and had a vision of a better future. Less successful SELs stuck to only some of the entrepreneurial activities they learned from PRIDE, would not answer open questions of the interviewer, but only use ‘yes’ and ‘no’, and did not voice any thoughts about the future other than obtaining more of what they already had. These differences in success and the
rather personal notion of bravery are concepts that cannot be brought back directly to the framework of strong structuration.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The framework of strong structuration can explain the progress the SELs made. ‘Active agency’ recognizes the influence of entrepreneurs on structure, and interprets the effects (outcomes) in the environment. This has the possibility to explain the interaction of the SELs, their actions and the structures in which they are embedded, such as the way they form networks that, in turn, provide them with larger markets and personal gains. Stones’ strong structuration model is also able to explain how the SELs, through learning new knowledge and skills, are able to choose alternative courses of action. They acquired the knowledge to regard the environment and existing structures from another perspective, as an environment that can be changed, one with imperfections that can be altered.

Strong structuration further explains how PRIDE was able to help the SELs to go against their exert agency against the extant structures by creating the adequate criteria distance (Stones, 2005, p. 115) to their hitherto normal actions and by providing them with adequate power to (ibid) perform new actions without endangering their personal, or their family’s, reputation. Having learned new skills and having realized that they, as women, can do something, unsettled their ‘taken for granted mode [and] made them suddenly conscious of that which previously was pre-reflective’ (Stones 2005, p.88). Strong structuration also provides sufficient explanation for most of the actions described under social bricolage: they created social value by teaching the people in their networks, providing them with a means to improve their situation, involved stakeholders in their networks and persuaded them to contribute, and made do with the resources at hand, combining them in new ways. They created entrepreneurial opportunities within their networks, and exploited them.

This would be sufficient explanation if it the topic of our study had been about learning one demarcated, new set of information and behaviour, like how to manage a fishing pond, or how to produce and sell handicrafts. However, social entrepreneurship and social bricolage are more than that. They involve embracing uncertainty as a facilitating condition for learning and nevertheless progressing, experimenting and finding new opportunities in old challenges, and upsetting the status quo – as we said in the introduction, social entrepreneurs are change agents. The distinction between these different types of behaviour is not new and can be traced back to the distinction Schumpeter (1911) made between the ‘static person’ and the ‘person of action’. This distinction is still used in contemporary literature (Beckert, 2003; Ebner, 2000; e.g. Wennekers & Thurik, 1999) and it reinforces the distinctions that we have identified between the successful and less successful entrepreneurs in our study. The static person performs ordinary economic action, follows what has already been done, engages in repetitive actions, seeks equilibrium and
accepts existing ways of doing things, while the person of action performs entrepreneurial actions, is dynamic, creative and breaks out of an equilibrium, looking for new combinations (Schumpeter, 2002).

Using this typification in our research setting, we see that the model of strong structuration cannot explain why some people, at a certain time, decide to become social entrepreneurs instead of simply applying their newly acquired knowledge in a new, repetitive habit. In more detail, strong structuration alone lacks the explanatory power to clarify why, after the first cycle, the SELs shift from an ‘ordinary type of economic action’ (routine, motivated by habits and adaptive in reproducing the activity learned) (Beckert, 2003; Ebner, 2000, p. 7) to an entrepreneurial type (new, spontaneous action, motivated by ideas and creative in finding innovative solutions (ibid). It cannot explain the differences between a SEL who will continue to be an entrepreneur and develop new opportunities by herself, without the need for repeated external interventions like PRIDE’s SEL programme, and someone who can best be described as a ‘serial NGO-client’, continuously returning to an NGO, asking for similar input and similar ideas, remaining depending on the presence of that NGO. In other words, it cannot explain why the most successful SELs continue to challenge their internal and external structures, when they did not do that before. Neither can it explain why some entrepreneurs are so much more effective than others in very similar circumstances.

In his theory of strong structuration, Stones took to heart Cohen’s critique that general structuration theory regarded people too much as actors filling slots and saw them, instead, as being capable of reflection and personal choices, although constrained by their position practice. However, in its present form, strong structuration fails to explain why people with the same knowledge and skills, in similar circumstances, perform differently. This argument echoes an actor-structure discussion in psychology, where Bandura (Bandura, 1989) argues that people’s actions cannot be conceptualized as ‘mechanical agency’ (filling slots), but rather as ‘emergent, interactive agency’ (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175) where, ‘within a causal structure, behaviour, cognitive, and other personal factors and environmental events operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally’ (R. Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 361). Bandura states that the most central mechanism for personal agency is an individual’s belief in their capacities to exercise control over events that affect their lives. People with a stronger belief in their self-efficacy set higher goals, are more committed to obtaining them and persevere longer in the face of obstacles. People with strong belief in their capacities exert greater efforts in conquering challenges, and ‘the successful, innovative, the nondespondent and the social reformers take an optimistic view of their personal efficacy to exercise influence over events that affect their lives’ (Bandura, 1989, p. 1177).

These theoretical additions resound with both the SELs’ and PRIDE’s arguments provided to explain the differences in success between the different entrepreneurs. With the addition of
the development of an agent’s self-efficacy, strong structuration theory could well be able to go beyond explaining the emergence of social entrepreneurship at the BoP in our study, and also explain the differences noted between the individual entrepreneurs. With accurate measurement of the entrepreneur’s self-efficacy, it might even be possible to predict, in an early stage, the emergence of successful entrepreneurs. We call for research to further explore these opportunities.

Our findings indicate that the entrepreneurs initially needed an external actor to act as a broker between themselves and their environment. They also needed to change their ideas about their own roles and self-value before they could start to build a network and overcome impediments of the social structures in which they live. This is controversial to mainstream ideas that focus on changing the external structures in order to stimulate entrepreneurship and group formation among at the BoP (see e.g. Kirchgeorg & Winn, 2006; Thorp et al., 2005). It was rather the complex interplay of an NGO providing knowledge and the ability to adjust social structures on the one hand, providing a temporary reduction of environmental forces, and the actions of the entrepreneurs, reinforced by their changing position-practices, on the other.

In addition to indicating that the theory of strong structuration has considerable explanatory power for the emergence of social entrepreneurship, our findings also have implications for practitioners. They call for more attention to the interplay between entrepreneur and her environment, and to the way the entrepreneur personally experiences her own environment. There is a lesson to be drawn that is best illustrated with an example. Sine and Lee (2009) studied the effect of social movements on nascent entrepreneurial activity in the US wind energy sector, based on longitudinal historical data. They ‘theorize that through the construction and propagation of cognitive frameworks, norms, values, and regulatory structures, and by offering a pre-existing social structure, social movement organizations influence whether entrepreneurs attempt to start ventures in emerging sectors. (...) Greater numbers of environmental movement organization members increased nascent entrepreneurial activity’ (Sine & Lee, 2009, p. 123, emphasis added). What is implied here, and elaborated upon in the remainder of their article, is a focus on entrepreneurs that are already active in the energy sector, and on how they can be influenced to pursue different entrepreneurial opportunities. In other words, the entrepreneurs exist, they know how to work in a certain sector, they know the playing field and they know what it is like to be an entrepreneur. Although this was a very legitimate assumption in that context, entrepreneurs are lacking at the BoP in Bangladesh.
There are over 2200 international NGOs working in Bangladesh\textsuperscript{32}, and thousands more that only work locally. Many of them have an entrepreneurial focus or micro-credit component. Despite these numbers, there are few local success stories of entrepreneurs in rural Bangladesh. Our model suggests that this is because they mainly focus on changing a part of the external structures and do not pay enough attention to the individual. If the individual lacks bravery, or self-efficacy, or a positive self-image, she might never become an entrepreneur. She might become a ‘serial NGO-client’, repeating the same activities that she knows and that are profitable for her, but she is less likely to recognize new opportunities, face adversity and persevere. Our framework calls for more attention to the individual, and for policy makers to first consider that these individual change agents might need training and personal support. We saw social entrepreneurship evolve at the BoP in slowly expanding networks, loosely correlated with the personal development of the nascent entrepreneur. Only when these entrepreneurs are present, does it make sense to adapt the external structures, like Sine and Lee (2009) described, to stimulate their further development. With no entrepreneurs present, providing credit, facilitating regulations and other incentives will, at best, be inefficient.

\textsuperscript{32} According to the website of the NGO Affairs Bureau: http://www.ngoab.gov.bd/Files/NGO\_LIST.pdf, visited on 26 June 2013.