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African microentrepreneurship: The reality of everyday challenges

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the everyday challenges to microentrepreneurship in Ghana, West Africa. Everyday challenges are problems, including events, conditions, and people, that impair the ability to conduct daily business operations and are characterized by frequent occurrence, disruption, and idiosyncrasy. A qualitative study of arts and crafts microentrepreneurs (ACMs) was conducted and the findings from this study expose the relationship between everyday challenges and long-term barriers and how the approaches entrepreneurs use to ameliorate daily problems may hinder their ability to overcome long-term barriers. They also demonstrate the need for a broader theoretical framework for the study of microentrepreneurial problems—one that extends beyond current macro-level barriers to incorporate the micro-level, tactical difficulties of microentrepreneurship that are an essential component of the African entrepreneur's experience.

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1. Introduction

Selling arts and crafts? Well, it's hell. That's all. Everybody wants to survive. It's frustrating. That's all. It requires a lot of sacrifice. It's very difficult. You have so many things you have to face: the weather, the temperature, the dust, no water, the setup, the clean-up, the carvings' cracking, the hawkers, the mouse and pest attacks, and *all*—It's almost everyday there's something. If it's textiles, it has problems. If it's carvings, it's problems. So, the mindset always has to be “*anything* can happen.” You can meet so many challenges and you just have to face it. You just have to be high inspiration and prayer... (Seidu, carving microentrepreneur)

“Entrepreneurship in Africa is a reality” (Spring & McDade, 1998, p. ix), and Seidu's remarks capture the frustration microentrepreneurs working in African markets experience and illustrate the reality of everyday challenges to microentrepreneurship. Existing research discusses barriers to microentrepreneurship in African markets, focusing on factors related to goals such as exporting, internationalization, economic development, etc. (e.g., Henrique & Herr, 2008). However, research on the subject suffers from a number of deficiencies: it is too broad in its categorization of the types of problems micro-entrepreneurs face; it minimally addresses the practical problems microentrepreneurs encounter as they pursue their short-term

goal of achieving daily sales; it provides limited insight into the relationship that exists between the approaches microentrepreneurs implement with short-term tactical problems and those they use to address longer-term strategic barriers. Together, these shortcomings form the basis of this research, which explores the ‘everyday challenges’ to microentrepreneurship in Ghana, West Africa.

This research provides an account of the daily problems African microbusinesses confront by presenting the experiences and stories of arts and crafts microentrepreneurs (ACMs). The goal is to take a bottom-up approach by focusing on microentrepreneurship from the perspective of the microbusiness owner. This contrasts the more top-down, macro approach that many economic and policy-related studies undertake and that historically dominates much of the literature on developing countries.

Thus, this qualitative research gives voice to the microentrepreneur and to the problems faced in daily business operations. The study findings demonstrate an interdependent relationship between everyday challenges and long-term barriers and the need for a broader theoretical framework for the study of microentrepreneurial problems—one that extends beyond current macro-level barriers to incorporate the micro-level, tactical difficulties of microentrepreneurship that are an essential component of the African entrepreneur's experience. The findings also reveal how the approaches these entrepreneurs use to ameliorate daily problems may hinder their ability to overcome long-term barriers.

The organization of this paper is as follows. The next section provides a brief overview on microentrepreneurship and arts and crafts in African markets, followed by a review of the existing literature on barriers facing microentrepreneurs and the introduction of everyday challenges. The sections that follow address the study methodology

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and then provide a presentation of microentrepreneur narratives. The final section offers concluding remarks.

2. Microentrepreneurship and arts and crafts in African markets

Microenterprises are small, informally run, and employ nine or fewer people (Robson, Haugh, & Obeng, 2008); though in Africa, these businesses usually have one to three employees. In most African countries, microenterprises represent more than 90% of the private business sector and contribute to more than 50% of employment and gross domestic product (GDP) (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 1999). Because 98% of all African businesses are microenterprises (Spring & McDade, 1998), they are a vital source of employment, income, and poverty alleviation (Rogerson, 2001).

The term “arts and crafts” refers to a host of activities that both individuals and firms make and sell, including carpentry, wood-working, ceramics, decorative objects, and so forth. In African markets, arts and crafts most often refer to objects that are culturally inspired and mostly handmade but may also involve use of machines (e.g., woodcutting). The importance of the arts and crafts sector is well established (Fillis, 2010), with the worldwide market for artisan handicrafts estimated at US\$30 billion (Fowler, 2004). For some countries, handicraft production and sales represent a sizable portion of GDP (e.g., Burkina Faso at 70% and Morocco at 10%) (Merriam, 1997), and play key roles in other business sectors, such as tourism (Christie & Crompton, 2001). Arts and crafts are also important for their cultural significance, because they promote local and national cultural traditions within global arenas and help preserve indigenous art and culture (Fowler, 2004). Despite this significance, marketing research with arts-related microentrepreneurs remains scarce (Paige, 2009).

3. Barriers and everyday challenges to microentrepreneurship in subsistence markets

The literature on barriers to microentrepreneurship in subsistence markets, which includes Africa, is both multidisciplinary and in-depth, ranging from debates on the absence of economic policies to discussions on the role of social capital. The aim of the review in this section is to provide general knowledge on the categories and types of barriers documented in current literature. This section makes a contribution to conceptual knowledge in the construction of Table 1, a framework organizing different barriers to microentrepreneurship drawn from disparate literatures. In addition, this section introduces microentrepreneurs' everyday challenges, the focus of this study.

3.1. Barriers to microentrepreneurship

Substantial streams of literature exist on microenterprises in subsistence markets and reveal a host of factors that constrain microentrepreneurship (see Table 1). These factors include but are not limited to, lack of financial capital (Henrique & Herr, 2008) and cash reserves (Viswanathan, Rosa, & Ruth, 2010); deficient managerial skills (Abor & Quartey, 2010), inadequate advisory services (Robson et al., 2008), deficiencies in technology (Fafchamps, 1994), insufficient support services (Mead & Liedholm, 1998), ineffective property rights or license protection (Fowler, 2004), lack of access to credit (Fafchamps, 1997) and difficult access to export markets (Tybout, 2000). Factors also include inadequacies in learning and knowledge development (Viswanathan, Sridharan, Gau, & Ritchie, 2009), social networks (Arnould & Mohr, 2005; Robson et al., 2008) and infrastructure (DeBerry-Spence, 2010).

Microentrepreneurs working in the arts and crafts sector encounter most of the same barriers; yet unique nuances also exist. For example, ACMS in Africa, whose primary markets are often foreign tourists and export markets, are severely hindered by the

lack of shipping and packing facilities, as well as industrial counterfeiting and lack of legal protection (Fowler, 2004). Language differences also present greater difficulty for crafts sellers (Ashley, Goodwin, & McNab, 2005), because the traditional stories associated with cultural products are not always easily translated. Finally, a significant barrier to arts and craft microenterprises is limited formal training, which inhibits the microentrepreneur's ability to mass produce quality products (McDade, 1998).

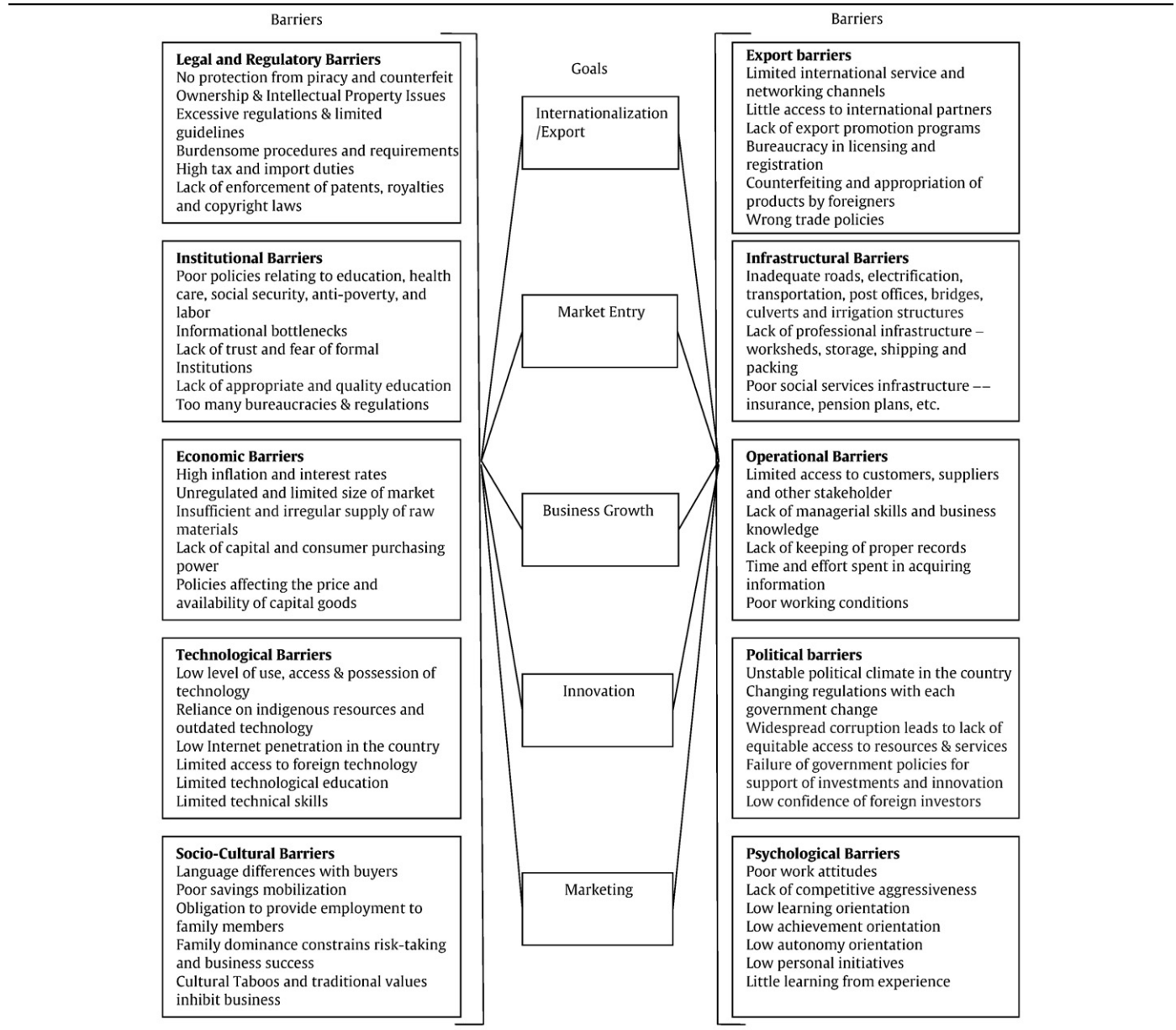
The breadth and depth of barriers informing the current literature highlight the daunting backdrop in which African microentrepreneurs operate. These barriers also underscore the complexity of the situation and the heterogeneity of the landscape. Clearly, however, not all barriers are the same. For example, some barriers are more likely framed by individual circumstances, while others are shaped by institutional factors. Similarly, variations exist in the frequency in which barriers occur and the ways in which microentrepreneurs deal with them. Together, these differences suggest the current conceptualization of ‘barriers’ too broadly categorizes the types of problems microentrepreneurs face, and by implication, provides limited insight into the relationship that exists between the approaches microentrepreneurs use to address them. These limitations suggest opportunity for further clarification and refinement of the types of problems categorized as barriers.

3.2. Everyday challenges

This article introduces the concept of ‘everyday challenges’ in an effort to tease out important nuances between types of microentrepreneurial problems and to highlight the importance of the practical problems microentrepreneurs face when conducting daily business operations. Everyday challenges are problems, including events, conditions, and people, that impair the ability to conduct *daily* business operations. These challenges are characterized by frequent occurrence, disruption, and idiosyncrasy. In terms of idiosyncrasy, everyday challenges are highly contextual and vary depending on the type of business; however, businesses operating in similar environments and under similar circumstances likely share many of the same challenges. In the context of Ghanaian ACMS, examples of these challenges include packing/unpacking difficulties, high dust levels, hawkers, pest destruction, small currency denomination shortages, and so forth. Although these types of problems might seem trivial, yet in a hostile market environment, they take on greater significance and consume a substantial portion of the already resource-constrained microentrepreneur's time. For example, high dust levels in an open market require that textiles be packed away every night, which consequently require the microentrepreneur to dedicate a sizable amount of time (e.g., two hours) unpacking and ironing product. Thus, the microentrepreneur has less time to deal with more strategic issues, such as inventory management and sourcing.

Several possible reasons inform why existing research overlooks issues related to microentrepreneurs' everyday challenges. First, in business research the definition of a barrier is seldom given and instead assumes the concept of a barrier is well understood and agreed upon. When a definition is given, it is usually very broad and refers to obstacles of varying severity and significance that adversely affect business success (Leonidou, 2004). Thus, research often collapse issues related to everyday challenges into the broader group of barriers rather than consider them a distinct category. Second, the routine nature of everyday challenges may lead researchers to merely consider them part and parcel of doing business. While everyday challenges are indeed common, they remain important disruptions that require microentrepreneur time and purposeful attention. Third, the local and socio-cultural specificity associated with everyday challenges makes them less responsive to popular economic and policy efforts attempted over the past decades (e.g., micro-credit programs, trade preferential agreements). Therefore, scholars and policy makers

Table 1
Microentrepreneurship barriers.



Because a single barrier often impairs more than one goal, the figure shows example goals to which barriers may relate and does not imply each barrier impairs *all* of the same goals.

may view them as less attractive topics of interest because their solutions are less obvious and do not come in the form of ‘quick-fix’ band-aids.

A key point of differentiation between everyday challenges and barriers concerns the specific goals to which each relates. In general, barriers to microentrepreneurship often relate to achieving long-term or strategic goals. For example, limited access to credit and the lack of training inhibit African microenterprises from business growth (Roy & Wheeler, 2006). In contrast, everyday challenges relate to short-term goals. In other words, these challenges are the daily, ongoing disruptions the microentrepreneurs encounter while pursuing tactical objectives, such as opening the shop on time, having product ready when customers arrive, and educating customers about product quality and value during the selling process. In some cases, barriers and everyday challenges are interdependent; some problems are not wholly confined to one category. For example, water shortages represent a type of

infrastructure barrier, but in some instances, such as in the case of batik makers, this problem also causes daily disruptions because it hinders dye making.

Another distinction between barriers and everyday challenges is evident in the way microentrepreneurs deal with each. Barriers are viewed as problems that must be removed to accomplish a desired objective. For example, prior research widely reports limited capital as a barrier to participate successfully in export markets (e.g., Hite, 2005). Therefore, microentrepreneurs try to remove this barrier via loans, credit, and other financing options to garner needed capital. In contrast, with everyday challenges, the emphasis is less on permanent removal; rather, the focus is on limiting these challenges' impact or, according to the vernacular of informants in this research, on “managing them.” For example, on a daily basis almost all Ghanaian business-to-consumer businesses encounter the problem of not having coins or small denomination bills to provide change to customers.

Microentrepreneurs recognize the systemic nature of this problem and therefore tend to share coins to limit shortages, but these actions in no way eliminate the problem.

Everyday problems are important for several reasons. First, they carry both short- and long-term financial implications. For example, some ACMs in the current study on average missed sales of 4GH¢ (approximately US\$2.70) each day because of the lack of coins/change. Over the course of a year, this amounts to US\$843. In a country with a gross national income per capita of US\$1530 (World Bank, 2010), the significance of this figure is obvious. Second, microentrepreneurs dedicate a significant amount of time to these challenges. The ACMs in this study report spending up to 30% of their working hours addressing matters related to these challenges. Third, everyday challenges affect the microentrepreneur's goals and motivations. In their study of French West African countries, Roy and Wheeler (2006) report that microentrepreneurs' primary motivation for entrepreneurship was to provide for their own physiological needs and those of their families; that is, their vision pertained less to the future and emphasized short-term business goal achievements. Therefore any long-term approach to microenterprise success must account for short-term goals and address the related challenges.

4. Methods

4.1. Research context

The context herein for exploring everyday problems of ACMs is Ghana, West Africa. A subsistence market with a population of 24 million and an annual GDP of \$15.6 billion, Ghana exports of goods and services are 42% GDP (World Bank, 2009). The country has a long and rich history of entrepreneurship, with the concept of business enterprise existing in Ghana before the Europeans arrived in the fifteenth century (Buame, 1996). Today, Ghana is among the fastest-growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa (O'Driscoll, Holmes, & O'Grady, 2003) and boasts a vibrant market for its cultural arts and handicrafts.

4.2. Data collection and informant selection

This study employs a series of phenomenological interviews with eight ACMs working in the country's largest crafts market (see Appendix A). The choice for this qualitative research method lies in its effectiveness in exploring the lived experience of ACMs, providing an in-depth understanding of the nature of their everyday experiences and the significance of these experiences from the participants' viewpoints (Cope, 2005). Each informant was interviewed a minimum of three times, and each interview lasted between 30 and 90 min.

A snowball sampling procedure helped recruit participants, and interview questions involved an interview guide with open-ended questions that centered on informant experiences of everyday problems. Interviews were tape-recorded and some were videotaped to facilitate accurate data gathering, transcription, and analyses. In addition to the eight core informants, supplemental interviews were carried out with ACM employees and others working in the crafts market. The research also included extensive field notes based on observations and photographs of ACMs in situations involving everyday problems. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms replace actual names of informants.

4.3. Data analysis

Data followed four levels of analysis as described by Sanders (1982). The first level contained a description of the phenomena. The second level identified emerging themes from the descriptions. Themes are the similarities within and between narratives and are "based on the importance and centrality accorded to them rather than on the frequency with which they occur" (p. 357). The third level of analysis developed subjective reflections of the emergent

themes. Finally, the fourth level abstracted the essence from the reflections, where "essence may be described as the *why* of experience" (p. 357). Overall, the method of analysis was repetitive and inductive, with the process of moving to an etic interpretation continuing until an in-depth understanding of the data occurred.

5. Ghanaian ACM narratives to everyday challenges

This section journeys through the present-day realities of Ghanaian microentrepreneurship. Capturing all the everyday challenges ACMs face is not possible, so the data center on a 'typical' workday. Using a 'day-in-the-life' approach highlights the challenges ACMs encounter during different aspects of the day, including business setup, customer selling, and closing. Data on each portion of the day intentionally flow into the next, without summaries, to provide real-world examples of the ACMs' challenges. This procedure sheds light on microentrepreneurship from the eyes of the ACMs. From this perspective, the scale and scope of everyday challenges become clear and set the stage for further discussion of their importance and relationship to long-term, strategic barriers.

5.1. Unpacking the day, detangling disorder

Friday, 4:00 a.m.: Wake, pray, bath catch the *tro tro* (a local transportation van) and arrive by 5:00 a.m. at work. This is how each day begins for Kwame, a jewelry maker, who for the past six years has run his own business. His shop is a small two-room building, with a covered porch where refreshments are sold. On arriving, Kwame finds several people who stay in the market overnight sleeping on the shop porch. Scattered around are emptied water sachets, leftover food containers, dirt, and several dried urine puddles that have begun to attract flies. Kwame remarks that he encounters this situation most mornings. He describes the first problem that greets him each day:

In the Centre [market], a lot of people live here in the night. Many people are sleeping here. Even my premises, they sleep here. I tell them [here] to wake up, that I'm coming to sweep. But the guys who [are] sleeping here, they give us a lot of problems. They eat and just leave the bowls there. [What] they did here is very rough. Sometimes, when you pack the fridge [in the evening] and then you come [in the morning], the fridge is not packed well [and the bottles inside are turned over]. They just move [the fridges] to the side, and you see they are charging their phone there. And, I talk to them..."

On this occasion, the bottles are still intact; however, in pulling the refrigerator out to charge their phone, the night dwellers have twisted the cord, causing a short in the electrical board used for all three refrigerators. Today, Kwame's beverages will be warm and difficult to sell, he will incur repair expenses, and he will spend much of his morning finding an electrician. Before attending to this matter though, Kwame must first clean the porch area. As usual, water pipes are turned off, making cleaning difficult. He will buy small water sachets and make do.

Disruptions caused by overnight dwellers, such as those Kwame experiences, are common, but one cannot upset them too much because they may set fire to one's place at night. Mariam, a microentrepreneur who sells fabrics took a different approach from Kwame. Tired of cleaning refuse off her kiosk, she threatened the night dwellers. Shortly thereafter, her business was robbed and vandalized. Microentrepreneurs recognize they occupy a position of both authority and vulnerability. On the one hand, they are business owners and have rights. On the other hand, they are part of a community and therefore are not immune to the impoverished circumstances surrounding it. Microentrepreneurs must manage both positions, being careful not to exert too much authority and not to acknowledge too

much vulnerability. Balancing the two, the microentrepreneur maintains an air of tolerance, which makes the environment ripe for non-resolution and contributes to the ongoing nature of everyday challenges.

Friday, 6:00 a.m.: At another textile shop Akua is busy unpacking two heavy metal crates containing her goods, each approximately 5 ft × 3 ft × 2 1/2 ft (see Fig. 1). Her shop is an average-size shop, measuring approximately 6 ft × 5 ft, with a concrete floor and walls that consist of plywood placed horizontally, with nails for hanging products (Fig. 1). This shed-like structure has a roof but provides little protection for her products from weather elements and absolutely no means of storing items safely overnight. Thus, she must fold and pack away all her items every evening. Mornings find her mired in the time-consuming and cumbersome task of unpacking and ironing. She states, “No matter what, you need to be ready when they [customers] come.”

However, routine power outages, or “light off” as the locals refer to these, hamper shop owners’ efforts to prepare for the day’s business. Today is a “light on” day, but the electrical current is low, which means choosing between having light or operating the iron. Using the fan is completely out of the question. Customers who visit her shop will be able to see her items but probably will not stay long because of the intense heat. For Akua, a generator is not feasible, because of the high purchase price, the fuel cost, and the loud disturbing noise it makes. She is not alone in her frustration. When ACMS are faced with these challenges, making trade-offs between sub-optimal alternatives often becomes their *modus operandi*. Akwasi, like most of the carving-related ACMS and employees, reports that dust and rodents lead to significant product replacement and require him to repolish his goods each day *one by one*, a painstaking process that takes “no less than three hours.” Despite committing tremendous resources to address these issues, both human and financial, ACMS refer to these major problems as “normal,” and the frequency with which they occur makes them routine. Thus, given the dynamic of being both significant and typical, rather than seek solutions to

these everyday challenges (i.e. removing them), ACMS finds solace in the trade-offs they make managing them.

5.2. Counting coins

Friday, 12:30 p.m.: The market is visibly vibrant, as local hiplife music booms loudly, and young women bustle through the aisles carrying lunch trays. The morning was quiet, so Ben, an entrepreneur who sells various textile and touristy items, is grateful customers are now coming. Two American tourists look through a small pile of wallets. The following reconstructs the events that transpired:

Tourist 2: How much are they?

Ben: 2GH¢

Tourist 1: For two?

Ben: No, 2, 2. One is 2GH¢

Tourist 1: Two dollars?

Ben: Twooo cediis (said drawn out), so all would be 4GH¢.

Tourist 2: So, I’ll give you 3GH¢ for both.

Ben: No. The price is 2GH¢. In the whole market, the price is 2GH¢.

Tourist 2: So, you won’t take 3GH¢

Ben: (Smiles) No.

Tourist 1: Let’s just get one and go.



Fig. 1. Market setup and closure.

[Tourist 2 then digs around in her backpack and pulls out a 50GH¢ bill.]

Ben: Do you have any smaller?

Tourist 2: No, sorry.

Tourist 1: [Turns to Tourist 2] I don't have any money. I need to change some.

Ben: You wait. [Pulls money out of his pocket and counts, but doesn't have any 1GH¢ bills. He takes the 50GH¢ bill from Tourist 2 and then races away and asks three other vendors if they have "one, one cedis"]

Ben: [Arrives about a minute later] Your change. Thank you.

Ben was lucky this time; after two unsuccessful attempts, another shop owner had 1GH¢ coins. Difficulty making customer change is common, as small denomination currency (e.g., 50p, 100p, and 1GH¢) is always in short supply. Most foreigners convert large bills (e.g., \$100) to local currency and therefore get only a few small local denomination bills or coins and rarely get small foreign denomination bills. Local consumers and merchants also lack the needed currency. Because local transportation providers and roadside hawkers rely heavily on lower denominations, a secondary market of currency sellers that hoard coins has arisen. This further contributes to market shortages and disruptions in microenterprise daily operations.

For ACMs, missed selling opportunities convert to lost revenues, and over time, lost revenues contribute to a lack of capital—a critical component of microenterprise long-term growth and success. This situation begins to reveal the web of relationships that exist between tactical everyday challenges (e.g., lack of change) and long-term strategic barriers (e.g., lack of capital) and illustrates how everyday challenges can become barriers over time.

5.3. Calculating culture

Friday, 3:00 p.m.: Traffic on the main road will begin to build shortly, making it difficult for customers reach the market. Fred, a shop owner who deals in paintings and related items, comments how "making sales" is a priority late in the day. A group of Chinese customers has assembled to look at paintings. Fred attempts to explain the cultural meaning behind the symbols but stops when he realizes they speak little English. Fred's employee offers a few common Chinese phrases and the customers smile, but are no closer to understanding the product. Fred cannot tell the local story that accompanies these paintings and instead must simply give a price. For ACMs and other market workers, the cultural difference between them and buyers creates significant challenges. The stories and histories behind their cultural works and even basic transactions are not easily translated and sometimes take on unintended meanings when translated. Sellers then wonder how customers can appropriately value their works. Seidu, a well-respected wood-crafts microentrepreneur, elaborates on this problem:

Transacting business with them [customers] becomes very difficult, though we try to manage it, but not to our best satisfaction. Both parties are not fully satisfied. You cannot fully express yourself as far as the transaction is concerned. You cannot fully explain to the customer what he is buying. Most of them don't know about arts a lot, which needs to be explained. But just because they cannot speak the language or understand you and you also don't understand them, they just pick up something and they bargain for it on the calculator and then they pay for it... We use calculator as a means of communication. You only do that [communicate] by pressing figures. [Also], most of the customers that come here are not from this bargaining culture, whereby whatever you buy you have

to bargain for it...So, you just pay whatever you think is okay and the person also just takes whatever comes his way. Then, that is it, which is not good for any business. Because in every business, you find that you get value for your money. But now it seems [sighs], the value for money doesn't come in [to the equation].

This excerpt reveals the discontinuities that cultural differences create and how communication and transaction processes are clouded and product value lost. It also illustrates that culturally related everyday challenges are not limited to differences in language but also include a variety of cultural practices, such as bargaining. In any circumstance, cultural differences between buyers and sellers present challenges, but when the items being sold are cultural products, these are more pronounced. Difficulty ensues not only in executing the transaction (e.g., negotiating) but also in understanding what is even being sold (e.g., the culture and the product). These incongruities expose the interdependent relationship between everyday challenges and barriers and suggest that some issues, such as language differences, that are seemingly barriers are instead everyday challenges that must be continuously managed.

5.4. Hawking, hustling, and the communitas of poverty

Friday, 4:30 p.m.: A large bus rolls into the market and is likely the last for the day. The market will soon close. Adjoa, a market seller of four years, laughs and says, "Public enemy number one!" She is referring to the crowd of hawkers who are rushing toward the bus. Hawkers are mobile sellers who do not own or have a permanent place to conduct business and thus walk around carrying items for sale. In this market they are illegal, yet hawking is rampant. Hawkers are notorious for harassing and "duping" customers; that is, selling poor-quality products and engaging in a host of undesirable tactics and dealings. ACMs in this study view them as one of their biggest problems.

Adjoa moves toward the front of her shop and calls out, "Hello, please, we have nice things in here. Come in and have a look. It's free looking." Her calls are drowned out by the loud voices of the hawkers who seem virtually attached to visitors. This scene plays out all day but as closing time approaches, the behavior is worse because "they [hawkers] need to get something [money] for their stomach [pocket]." Exasperated, Adjoa pauses and then continues,

They play tricks. They confuse the customer. They touch them and follow them around. They say I have a shop here, but they don't. Lying to them about the things they have, but they don't have it. Telling the person "let's go to this place," but the person wants to go to another place. [Telling them] "I have a nice shop here and this [other] place is not nice." Just lying to them...

Despite having only a few cultural handicrafts each on hand to sell, hawkers have managed to successfully create disruptions in market information flow and interactions between ACMs and their customers. This is perhaps one of their greatest accomplishments and one of the ACMs' most worrisome daily troubles. Much of the hawkers' effectiveness has to do with their sheer numbers in places in which cultural handicrafts are sold and the many different types of hawkers (see Table 2). Hawkers are also very crafty and use an array of techniques, such as blocking access to ACMs' places of business with their bodies (see Fig. 2); badgering customers until they finally agree to listen; misrepresenting themselves as "official" guides, thus convincing customers they should be trusted; impersonating shop owners; and intentionally disorienting customers (e.g., giving the customer wrong directions; see Fig. 3). These tactics provide insight into why hawkers are effective, but they do not fully explain hawker persistence as an everyday challenge.

ACMs and other marketplace workers seem to vacillate between total disapproval of hawking and acceptance of hawker presence.

Table 2
Example sub-categories of hawkers.

Hawker categories	Description
Sunday-only hawkers	People who come to work as hawkers only on Sundays when most of the shop owners are off work.
Part-time hawkers	People who hawk on a part-time basis to supplement their income.
Rasta hawkers	People who try to sell only to Rastafarian and “gipsy”-type customers.
“Poor-me” hawkers	People who use some kind of vulnerability; they have a tragic story to tell to get customers to buy their products.
Quick-service hawkers	People who sell quick-services items, such as sunglasses.
Foreign hawkers	Hawkers from neighboring African countries.
After-school hawkers	Adults who come to hawk after attending classes, such as trade school courses.
“Boyfriend” hawkers	People who rhapsodize with female customers to get them to buy their products.
Sub-contractor hawkers	People who other hawkers have asked to hawk for them when they are sick or for other reasons cannot be present.
Seasonal hawkers	People who only work as hawkers during high tourist seasons.
School boy hawkers	People who only come to hawk during school breaks (e.g., Christmas break and summer break).

One explanation for this indecisiveness is that some shop owners take money from hawkers, and as one microentrepreneur describes, “they all become one and this thing keeps recycling itself.” Another explanation is that beneath microentrepreneur frustration with hawker-related problems lurks a strong sense of individual and communal empathy. In almost every discussion of hawkers, ACMs acknowledge the poverty facing all of them and the desire and need to “survive,” thus causing a struggle between not wanting hawkers in the market for business reasons and the shared poverty as an instrument of *communitas*. Viewing the microentrepreneur hawker problem through this dual lens reveals how everyday challenges are grounded in both the economic and socio-cultural circumstances that affect not only the ACMs but also those with whom they routinely interact. These considerations lead the ACM to adopt an attitude of tolerance and to exercise a degree of leniency. Consequently, problems such as hawking perpetuate and become embedded in everyday life.

Friday, 6:00 p.m.: Everyone is now busy packing. The walls of the market are coming down, and shop owners with permanent structures



Fig. 2. Hawkers blocking access to ACM places of business.



Fig. 3. Hawkers disorienting customers.

remove items from doors to close and lock them. Soon the market will be filled with night dwellers. Kwame has left the porch tables and remaining drinks for the two shop employees to finish putting away. He now stands a quarter mile away in a cue waiting for the *tro tro*. He will then ride in heavy traffic and reach home by 8:00 p.m. Another day has passed.

6. Discussion and concluding remarks

6.1. Contributions of research

There are no simple or simplistic solutions to the problems and crises that confront Africa, but most likely the energy of entrepreneurs will be the fuel that drives the continent forward into the future. (Spring & McDade, 1998, x)

Findings from this research unequivocally demonstrate the challenges of African microentrepreneurship. This study sought a greater understanding of this adversity by engaging in a bottom-up perspective of crafts microentrepreneurship. The real-world events, experiences, and stories that unfold in the data unravel the complexities associated with microentrepreneurship in African markets and also expose the myriad difficulties woven into the fabric of daily business operations. This research reveals that a broader theoretical framework for the study of microentrepreneurial problems is needed—one that extends beyond current macro-level barriers to incorporate the micro-level, tactical difficulties of microentrepreneurship. This study makes such a contribution by enhancing current understanding of microentrepreneurship in multiple ways.

First, this study establishes that everyday challenges influence microentrepreneur work routines on a daily basis and thus resonate in the behaviors, ways of thinking, relationships, and contingencies of the local culture and realities on the ground. Therefore, these challenges are important components of the African entrepreneur’s experience that should not be ignored. This is consistent with Frese and de Kruijff’s (2000, xii) perspective on African entrepreneurship that “one cannot achieve economic progress by working against those people who are most important in developing economic progress...”

Second, this study shows that everyday challenges tax the microentrepreneur’s physical, psychological, emotional, and material efforts in such a way that his or her approach becomes one of making trade-offs between sub-optimal alternatives versus seeking ways to maximize opportunity. This approach can be crippling to the microenterprise

because it forcibly anchors the entrepreneur in the day-to-day activities, leaving little time and few resources to develop what [Viswanathan et al. \(2009\)](#) refer to as marketplace literacy and to envision beyond the immediate. This has obvious implications for business survival and sustainability.

Third, this study sheds light on the ‘invisible’ difficulties associated with microentrepreneurship—that is, matters that are not well evident through the top-down, macro lens of microentrepreneurship and may even go unrecognized by the microentrepreneur him- or herself. For example, researcher observations and field notes recorded how Ghanaian ACMs in this study spent countless hours attending to difficulties associated with business setup but initially did not report these matters as problems. Only after they carefully detailed the specifics of the day and week did it become clear, for example, that money lost as a result of coin shortages constitutes a serious everyday challenge. This inconspicuousness and typicality makes these challenges alarming and allows them to pose as great or greater threat to microenterprise growth and success than the more salient barriers.

Fourth, this study illustrates the interdependent relationship between the short-term tactical problems microentrepreneurs experience and the long-term strategic barriers they face. The dynamics associated with this relationship are complex and raise issues on how best to address these everyday challenges and long-term barriers. As this study shows, microentrepreneurs devise effective strategies or coping mechanisms ([Moser, 1998](#)) to “manage” everyday challenges; these strategies minimize the impact of but do not fully remove the problems. However, these coping strategies also create disadvantages related to barriers in two ways. First, if everyday challenges continue, they often develop into barriers. Second, microentrepreneurs become so involved in managing these challenges that they are unable or do not recognize the need to deal with long-term barriers. Ultimately, a continuous cycle develops of challenge, barrier, challenge, and thus perpetuates.

Fifth, this study reaffirms that microentrepreneurship is contextual and that microentrepreneurs operate in relationship systems that are embedded within sociocultural macrosystems ([Viswanathan, Rosa, & Ruth, 2010](#); [Viswanathan, Sridharan, & Ritchie, 2010](#)). It therefore theorizes the difficulties microentrepreneurs encounter must be firmly grounded in the economic and socio-cultural circumstances of that particular market. For example, subsistence markets, such as Ghana, involve “relational” marketplace exchanges ([Viswanathan, Sridharan, & Ritchie, 2010](#)) and therefore exhibit lower tolerance to issues such as stealing but exhibit higher empathy on matters involving livelihood, such as hawkers’ actions. In subsistence markets, poverty is also an overriding factor that affects motivation, risk tolerance, and subsequent barrier development ([Roy & Wheeler, 2006](#)). These considerations imply that a more holistic perspective must be adopted to support microentrepreneurs, one that includes the microentrepreneur and others involved in the immediate business environment.

Sixth, this study brings the business of arts and crafts further into discourses on microentrepreneurship. ACMs highlight the idiosyncrasies of everyday challenges and how these differ from those at the macro level. In addition, because their primary customers are often tourists or foreign markets, they engage in marketplace relationships that are both symbiotic and non-symbiotic. Consequently, ACMs are often subject to dynamics not experienced by their non-ACM counterparts. For example, in addition to those related to conducting basic transactions, discontinuities occur when translating the stories behind cultural products. This experience brings another view of everyday challenges, one that both complements and contributes to those currently understood.

7. Conclusion and future directions

This study calls for further research on subsistence market microentrepreneurs and their daily business challenges. Understanding

the different types of microentrepreneurial difficulties is important because it helps identify the characteristics underlying these problems and their relationships, in turn providing opportunities to help overcome them. This study demonstrates such understanding by disentangling everyday challenges from barriers.

The study also makes clear that even in the absence of systemic change, acknowledging microentrepreneurs’ common practical limitations may help identify ways for assisting microentrepreneurs to succeed ([Roy & Wheeler, 2006](#)). To this end, policy research must consider both the strategic and the tactical problems facing today’s microentrepreneurs; and efforts must be made to identify how long-term objectives may be achieved within the context of and/or in conjunction with the entrepreneur’s focus on short-term goals. This most likely requires critically examining microentrepreneurial problems from both a top-down and bottom-up approach. Subsequently, this may lead to the development of educational programs aimed at helping microentrepreneurs better understand the types of everyday problems having a higher propensity to become barriers and those that do not; and when displacement versus coping strategies are more appropriate.

Appendix A. Core informant profiles

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Type of microenterprise	Number of years as ACM
Akua	40	Female	Middle school	Textiles	5
Adjoa	32	Female	High school	Textiles	4
Akwasi	33	Male	Middle school	Carvings	7
Ben	34	Male	Middle school	Textiles	10
Fred	32	Male	Middle school	Paintings	3
Kwame	36	Male	Primary school	Jewelry	14
Mariam	25	Female	Primary school	Textiles	16
Seidu	43	Male	High school	Carvings	15

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