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How Social Enterprises Nurture Empowerment: A Grounded Theoretical Model of Social Change

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ABSTRACT

Our understanding of how social enterprises enable social change is still limited. Empowerment could be a valid mediating construct to explain the processes occurring between entrepreneurial practices and achievement of social goals. Based on an ethnography case study in a South African social enterprise, this study reveals the entrepreneurial practices that contribute to women's empowerment and the power-accruing processes that provide female workers access and control over resources and a sense of individual and collective achievement that facilitates the rupture of patriarchal gender roles. This empowerment-based model contributes to explain social change processes inherent in the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship.

If you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.

Toni Morrison

Introduction

Although all forms of entrepreneurship produce social outcomes (Korsgaard and Anderson 2011), social entrepreneurship is distinguished by its explicit intention to bring about social change (Narangajavana et al. 2016). However, the practices and processes whereby social change is created are not entirely understood, which has prompted calls for more research (De Bruin and Lewis 2015; Wulleman and Hudon 2016). Extant explanations have focussed on what social entrepreneurs do to enact social change, such as crafting an innovative social value proposition (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2017; Kullak, Baker, and Woratschek 2020), adopting innovative processes (Luke and Chu 2013) or providing different forms of capital to beneficiaries (Lumpkin, Bacq, and Pidduck 2018; Weaver 2018).

If we understand that social change is the process mediating between the actions of social entrepreneurs and the effects of these actions on beneficiaries, it is apparent

that these explanations enrich our understanding of the first part of the process; however, absent is a complementary explanation centred on beneficiaries. To adequately depict how social change occurs, a model that integrates both entrepreneurial practices and their effects on beneficiaries is necessary. This integration will prevent idealised theorizations of social change (Kimmitt and Muñoz 2018; Shaw and de Bruin 2013) as it will allow examining whether social entrepreneurship effectively solves beneficiaries' problems.

Past work has suggested that power levering could provide such an encompassing explanation for how social entrepreneurship enables social change (Haugh and Talwar 2016; Kimmitt and Muñoz 2018; Von Jacobi and Chiappero-Martinetti 2017). Indeed, empowerment is a much-used discourse by social entrepreneurs to explain their goals (Chandra 2017). However, our understanding of the empowering process enabled by social enterprises is still limited.

Empowerment is defined as 'a process by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them' (Zimmerman 1995, 581). We propose that empowerment could be a valid mediating construct to explain the relationship between entrepreneurial practices and achievement of social goals, for two reasons. First, it allows for capturing the effectiveness of social enterprises' efforts to solve beneficiaries' problems. Studies in development have shown that empowerment is a fundamental prerequisite to achieve other social goals, such as poverty reduction, improved health or children's literacy (Al-Shami, Razali, and Rashid 2018).

Second, empowerment is a multi-level, multidimensional and contextually-grounded construct (Peterson and Zimmerman 2004; Valsania, Moriano, and Molero 2016; Zimmerman 1990); thus, it will serve to encompass different routes to social change undertaken by social enterprises. Namely, its multilevel nature allows explaining social change intended at the individual, organisational or community level (Lumpkin, Bacq, and Pidduck 2018; Von Jacobi and Chiappero-Martinetti, 2017). Because of its multidimensional nature, it may accommodate the different strategies for social change and different forms of value created identified in previous work, namely, the provision of resources to beneficiaries (Luke and Chu 2013; Lumpkin, Bacq, and Pidduck 2018), the nurturing of self-beliefs so that beneficiaries take advantage of and use these resources for their own benefit (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2017; Korsgaard and Anderson 2011), and the creation of mutual-help networks (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2017). Finally, empowerment is an 'open-ended' (Zimmerman 1995, 587) and 'dynamic contextually driven construct' (Galiè et al. 2019, 588) that takes different meanings in different times and contexts. For this, it may be a suitable concept as it may reflect the local embeddedness and dynamic nature of social enterprises' activities (Narangajavana et al. 2016; Sengupta et al. 2018).

To advance an empowerment-based model of social change, this study conducts an ethnographic case study of a South African social enterprise whose social mission is to achieve gender equality in the community in which it operates. Gender equality is one of the Sustainable Development Goals that has attracted attention from social entrepreneurs and impact investors around the world (Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle 2016). Gender equality is an especially relevant social goal due to its repercussions on other sustainable development goals, such as poverty reduction or children's literacy (Zereyesus et al. 2017).

The case study has three distinctive features that are worth noting. First, whereas past research has examined social enterprises whose targets have been outside the organisations (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2017; Kullak, Baker, and Woratschek 2020; Lumpkin, Bacq, and Pidduck 2018), this social enterprise targets internal stakeholders. Second, the profit-generating activities of this social enterprise are not linked to its social goal (Bacq and Janssen 2011). Third, this case study explores a social enterprise in a very poor community in an emerging country, where social entrepreneurship has received less attention (Sengupta, Sahay, and Croce 2018). Expanding the types of contexts where social entrepreneurship research is conducted has been deemed a condition for theory advancement (Shaw and de Bruin 2013).

This study unveils five entrepreneurial practices that lead to greater decision-making power of disenfranchised women over their life choices and offers a multidimensional, multicausal and contextually-grounded framework to explain how these practices empower their intended beneficiary and bridge the gender gap (Welsh, Kaciak and Minialai 2017). More specifically, it identifies three power-accruing processes (power to, power over, and power with) in three domains (psychological, economic and social) that give female workers more material and immaterial resources, more control over those resources and a sense of individual and collective achievement that facilitates the rupture of patriarchal gender roles (Goktan and Gupta 2015).

This study contributes to past literature by proposing a processual explanation for social change, based on empowerment or power levering. The proposed model depicts social enterprises as empowering organisations (Yukl and Becker 2006) with a relational, expressive, and affective management style (Riger 1993) that is reflected in the identified empowering practices. With these practices, social enterprises provide beneficiaries with resources, ensure that the beneficiaries have control over those resources and develop self-beliefs among beneficiaries so that they use these resources for their own benefit. Moreover, they break cultural or social barriers and encourage collaboration among beneficiaries (Wu, Li, and Zhang 2019; Yukl and Becker 2006). Thus, our empowerment-based model could provide an explanation for how value is created at the horizontal and vertical levels (Korsgaard and Anderson 2011). These insights may be valuable for policy makers and intermediary organisations, such as impact investors, in their support of social enterprises and social innovation.

Theoretical framework

As has been much repeated, there is no consensus on a definition of social enterprise (Narangajavana et al. 2016). Following Huybrechts and Nicholls (2012, 2), we define social enterprise as 'a subset of such activities in which commercial models are used as the vehicle by which social objects are achieved'. A social enterprise is understood as any organisation pursuing a social goal that trades for a profit, combining market and social values (Sparviero 2019), even when the profit-generating activities are not linked to the social goal of the enterprise (Bacq and Janssen 2011).

When describing the social aim of social enterprises, past studies have hinted at the empowerment of beneficiaries as a more concrete outcome sought by social entrepreneurship. For instance, Akter et al., (2019, 1) define social enterprise as 'an

entrepreneurship-based profit-maximising business model that is primarily focused on self-sustainability and empowerment'. Similarly, Mair, Battilana, and Cardenas (2012) assert that social entrepreneurship aims to mobilise power. Additionally, Tracey, Phillips, and Haugh (2005) refer to empowerment to distinguish social entrepreneurship from philanthropic ventures: whereas social entrepreneurship aims to change power relations and empower beneficiaries, philanthropic ventures do not necessarily do so. Empirical studies have also offered evidence of social entrepreneurs' formal goal of accruing power to their intended targets (Chandra 2017; Prahalad and Hart 2002). In short, social entrepreneurship has been depicted as 'emancipatory' (Haugh and Talwar 2016). However, although this work suggests that empowerment is a fundamental aim of social enterprises, empowerment has seldom been used as a mediating process in social change.

Given our focus on gender equality, the notion of women's empowerment serves as the springboard for this research because past studies have established an association between women's empowerment and gender equality (Jayachandran 2015; Zereyesus et al. 2017). Women's empowerment is defined as 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them' (Kabeer 1999, 437). To achieve the final outcome of greater decision-making ability, the seminal work of Kabeer identified three elements of women's empowerment: resources, agency, and achievements. 'Resources' comprise the necessary preconditions, which are both economic and non-economic (e.g. education or health). The 'agency' element indicates that it is not the possession of or access to a resource that is a determinant of empowerment (Kabeer 2012) but rather the control over it. In patriarchal societies, women encounter barriers not only to accessing resources but also to managing them with their own will (Datta and Gailey 2012). Finally, 'achievements' refer to the milestones that women progressively achieve as they gain the ability to make choices in different domains in life. Kabeer's model has been widely applied in development studies to explain the processes whereby interventions contribute to gender equality (Jayachandran 2015; Kabeer 2011). It has also been used in entrepreneurship studies to understand the relationship between entrepreneurial practices and improved women's welfare (Hughes et al. 2012; Poggesi, Mari, and De Vita 2016) and to emphasise the role of female entrepreneurs in developing countries (Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle 2016; Roomi 2013).

Most studies have examined how enabling access to resources nurtures women's empowerment. Economic resources are fundamental to gain status and more decision-making power in the household (Datta and Gailey 2012; Poggesi, Mari, and De Vita 2016), Yet, as it has been shown in other domains, economic resources are not sufficient unless accompanied by capacity building. (Molnár, 2017). Acquisition of skills increases women's employability (Sengupta, Sahay, and Croce 2018), which, in turn, provides them with economic resources and nurtures self-efficacy and autonomy (Von Jacobi and Chiappero-Martinetti, 2017). Access to other resources has also been found relevant for gender equality (Welsh, Kaciak, and Minialai 2017). For instance, control over fertility and health is crucial to reducing the gender gap (Upadhyay et al. 2014).

Despite the centrality of resources, we agree with Duflo (2012) that there is a risk of overemphasising access to resources and deeming it a necessary and sufficient

condition for empowerment. This overemphasis on resources would not fully reflect Kabeer's theorisation of women's empowerment. Her model emphasises that acquisition of resources may not ensure empowerment unless institutional barriers that prevent individuals from effectively using these resources for their own benefit are removed (the agency condition) and unless individuals nurture self-beliefs about their own worth and efficacy so that they tap into these resources (the achievements condition). In fact, Kabeer's model emphasises the intrapersonal processes that need to occur for women to have greater decision-making ability (Poggesi, Mari, and De Vita 2016). Progressive control over resources and greater awareness of women's accomplishments would build internal power, an internalised belief in one's own capacity (Kabeer 1999). Kabeer's model relies on the belief that building this internal power reinforces women's empowerment because it fuels their capacity to access and control other resources and perform a more active role in social life. In Kabeer's model, there is an intimate connection between building 'internal power' and achieving 'external power'.

Without denying that such intraindividual processes are fundamental for women's empowerment, empowerment cannot be considered purely an intrapersonal process (Zimmerman 1990). Rather, it requires participatory processes or the so-called interactional component (Zimmerman 1995), reflecting collaboration with various organisational and community members (Christens 2012). Women's empowerment demands not only a shift in individual beliefs but also a shift in social norms and social beliefs. This shift demands mobilisation of resources and the concerted action of individuals (Zimmerman 1995). In this respect, Maton (2008) emphasised the role of so-called empowering community settings, defined as '[a] group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalised or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment' (Maton 2008, 5). In particular, the importance of mutual help groups (Zimmerman 1995) or women's self-help groups (Galab and Rao 2003) in empowering processes has been repeatedly shown. Empowerment has an interpersonal dimension so that collaborative, solidarity and mutual aid practices facilitate individual empowerment (Christens 2012).

To conclude, we propose using empowerment as a mediating construct between entrepreneurial practices and the improved welfare of beneficiaries (Haugh and Talwar 2016), while paying attention to the wider influence of entrepreneurial practices on institutions and society (Lincoln et al. 2002; Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002; Maton 2008; Poggesi, Mari, and De Vita 2016; Zimmerman 2000). Using empowerment as a mediating construct, this study examines how social enterprises provide women with resources, ensure that they have control over them, and nurture self-beliefs, with the ultimate aim of conceptualising the underlying social change process.

Method

This study uses an ethnographic case study approach (Visconti 2010). Ethnography has long been applied to entrepreneurial research (Mauksch et al. 2017) it is especially appropriate to study multidimensional, complex phenomena as the object of research

(Yanow, Ybema, and van Hutst 2012). More specifically, ethnography has been recommended for the study of processes leading to women's empowerment (Phan 2016), and it is an appropriate method to study the contextually-embedded practices and processes characteristic of social entrepreneurship (Shaw and de Bruin 2013). Moreover, because empowerment takes different forms for different individuals in different contexts and times (Zimmerman 1995, 587), it demands research methods that are contextually sensitive (Galiè et al. 2019).

The ethnography was conducted by the first author in a social enterprise called Avinier. This farm is dedicated to growing blueberries and is located near the city of Lydenburg in the province of Limpopo in northwestern South Africa. It was founded in 2009 by a female social entrepreneur who, after working in a major city of the country for many years, returned to her hometown and set up the farm with the aim of contributing to the social and economic development of this community. Specifically, the enterprise's core social goal is to contribute to gender equality in the community.

At the time of the study, Avinier had a total of 46 permanent employees, of whom 40% were women. Due to the nature of its business, it employs a high number of seasonal workers. In September 2019, it hired 310 part-time employees, of whom 90% were women. The main job of farm employees is the maintenance of the farm and the harvesting of the plantation. The majority of Avinier workers have their homes in the farm environment. The villages where workers live have a structure of scattered, semi-grouped houses. Most villagers have the same tribal origin and belong to Baconi-Bacha, and their mother tongue is Sapedi, one of the eleven indigenous languages of South Africa (Annex 1). This farm is one of the main organisations in the region, a rural area where it is difficult to find work.

South Africa has the second largest economy in Africa, but 28.3% of the population is at risk of hunger and 26% is food insecure (Ntsepe et al. 2014). South Africa is still considered a patriarchal society (Stichter and Parpart 2019). Female-headed households receive less income and have more difficulty meeting basic needs than male-headed households (Rogan 2016), and this situation is aggravated in rural areas (Tibesigwa and Visser 2016). Although progress has been made in terms of women's human rights in recent decades (Mutua 2013), according to the World Bank (Hurlbut 2018, 16), '[p]overty is more pronounced among females compared to males'.

Different sources were used in the case study: in-depth interviews with managers, employees and community members, participant observation, and archival data (see Table 1). With this approach, the views of different constituencies – and especially the experiences of the intended targets of the enterprise – were included in the analysis (Verreynne, Parker, and Wilson 2013).

A combination of semi-structured interviews and conversational interviews was used. Different actors were interviewed, namely, managers, female workers, and community members. The interviews were largely conversational, lasted between 20 and 60 min and were often conducted with the aid of a translator (a local employee) if the informant did not speak English. Workers were chosen on site with the aid of the translator and had different profiles with regard to civil status, household size, and tenure in the company, inter alia. None of the invited informants refused to participate in the interviews. To preserve confidentiality, managers were not present during the

Table 1. Sources of data.

Data source	Data points
Semi-structured in-depth interviews	30 Female workers (19 permanent and 11 part-time employees)
	3 Male workers (all permanent employees)
	3 (All female) managers
	2 Community members (school teacher and head of school)
Participant observation	First author's field diary totalling 34 entries
Corporate reports	Avinier Social Issues Document (2019)
	Corporate Presentation (2018)
	Avinier, ESG Report (2019)
	Avinier, Social Impact Assessment Report (2019)
	Avinier, Training Courses Matrix Document (2019)

interviews and did not know who the informants were. Informants were encouraged to talk about their experience with the company and the consequences, if any, they attributed to working there. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the informants and transcribed for future analysis. All informants are referred to with pseudonyms. For the participant observation, a field diary was used. The first author wrote twice a day, collecting information on activities, comments heard from workers, and the researcher's impressions of what was being observed. These data sources were complemented with corporate reports.

All the data sources were converted into text and analysed using NVivo. For the analysis of these texts, we followed the procedures established in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), going from the smallest units of data (concepts) to categories and subcategories and the relationships between them. For example, the quote, 'Since I have worked at Avinier, I feel more confident about myself' was coded as 'self-confidence'. This code was grouped with others into the category 'positive beliefs' and identified as a process in the psychological domain (*power to*).

Findings

The analysis identified five entrepreneurial practices oriented to women's empowerment: pledging, bridging, coaching, accruing, and peer bonding. These practices can be portrayed as the visible manifestations of the founder's values and worldviews, reflecting a relational, expressive, and affective management style (Riger 1993) that emerges as a fundamental driver of the reported outcomes. As Figure 1 shows, these five practices trigger three pathways labelled *power to*, *power over* and *power with*. Together, these pathways affect the three elements of women's empowerment as per Kabeer's model: they provide resources, build agency and create achievements. This section explains the conceptual model that emerges from the data by describing each of the elements (entrepreneurial practices, pathways and outputs) in turn.

Organisational practices

Pledging
Pledging refers to the practices whereby managers express their commitment to work on women's empowerment. This practice reflects the moral discourse of the enterprise (Dion 2014), whereby social entrepreneurs depict their envisioned model of social
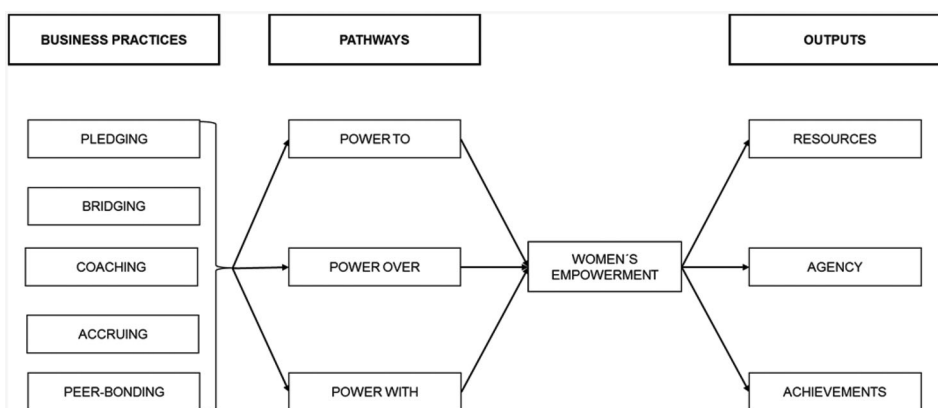
Figure 1. Summary of the conceptual model.

change and share it with their constituencies. This practice is formally observed in corporate documents. For instance, the Social Impact Assessment Report (2019, 24) says, 'Women's empowerment is our main focus as women's empowerment will lead to social development'. The formalisation of this commitment in corporate reports institutionalises the mission of the firm. This expressive practice is not only symbolic, as it communicates the social proposition to stakeholders (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2017), but also substantive since it serves to coordinate organisational members and their practices for the achievement of this mission. For instance, this goal guides internal policies and procedures, as acknowledged in the Social Impact Assessment Report (2019, 6): '[w]e use this view of women's empowerment when we compile and implement our policies and procedures'. Because women's empowerment is the fundamental goal of Avinier, resources are mobilised and practices are established to achieve it.

Pledging practices are not restricted to the formalised commitment in corporate documents; they are also observed in informal practices. The support for women's equality permeates daily interactions, demonstrating that it is a collective goal. An entry in the field diary attests to this (July 21, 2019): 'during the visit of the client, the co-founder repeatedly expresses the commitment of the company to women's empowerment'. It is also found in the routinised conversations between managers and workers. To illustrate, a field diary entry (July 24, 2019) reflects how managers constantly communicate their commitment to female workers. By repeating the firm's commitment to women's equality, the firm makes a clear and credible intention to redress the situation of local women (Dion 2014).

Bridging

We label as bridging practices those by which Avinier relates its work to the wider context to address the rupture of gendered roles. In particular, we have identified community-oriented activities as bridging practices in which workers are asked to perform community work during their working hours, usually applying the skills acquired in the organisation. For instance, in 2018, workers created a vegetable garden for the community under the direction of managers. It also includes activities in which community members – e.g. schoolchildren – are invited to observe the activities of the farm.

Participation in community work reinforces the self-esteem of female workers and avoid marginalisation (Maestripieri 2017), as the following quote shows: '[b]efore working in Avinier, I was ashamed; I didn't talk to my neighbours. Now they all know where I work, and I am proud of saying that I work here' (Rebeca). Beyond the intra-personal feelings of self-worth, these practices enhance the women's social status in the community. With these activities, female workers are rendered visible in the community. Moreover, these practices enable female workers to demonstrate that their skills and capabilities match those of male workers and male community members, which contributes to undermining patriarchal roles assigned to women and increasing their social status, a necessary condition for women's empowerment (Haugh and Talwar 2016). When schoolchildren visit the farm, they see male and female workers on equal footing, which provides role modelling that may affect their perceptions of gender roles. Indeed, field observations (e.g. July, 17, 2019) show that female workers are respected by the community. Avinier's male workers also acknowledge the important role of female workers in the community. One of them said, 'Avinier's women are highly respected in the community, and it is even easier for them to find a job here'.

Coaching

Coaching refers to the identification, follow-up and personalised support of female workers by the company. This process is usually done with all permanent employees, and special attention is paid to new female workers assessed as highly vulnerable (e.g. victims of rape, very impoverished, or sick female workers). Field observations demonstrate that this is a routinised practice, although it is not recorded in corporate reports.

The identification of vulnerable workers is usually conducted with the aid of other female workers. As the co-founder explains, 'The Avinier women are called upon so that they help us identify vulnerable women'. Once they are hired, managers arrange follow-up meetings with workers. 'We meet with them, we explore how they feel, if they have any needs, and we also provide psychological support', explains the director of personnel. This ongoing personalised support contributes to instilling beliefs of self-esteem and self-worth in female workers. After weeks of coaching, women experience a process of personal transformation: 'I have witnessed how these women change radically and even how their voice grows stronger', explains the co-founder. Similarly, workers believe that these chats with managers play a key role in their life: 'We talk a lot with the managers. They trust us. I feel very secure and confident here' (Sophia).

Accruing

This practice comprises all policies and procedures whereby the organisation provides female workers with resources and ensures their control over them. All these practices are reflected in corporate reports and formal corporate procedures. The resources provided are of different types, namely, economic resources, health-related resources and skill sets.

Regarding economic resources, to ensure that women have control over their salary, Avinier opens a bank account in the name of the female worker through an agreement with a local bank. The co-founder of Avinier justifies this practice in these terms: 'women need to know that the money is theirs and that they can spend it as they want'. To facilitate the process and due to the rampant illiteracy of female

workers, bank employees travel to the farm to settle the account (Social Impact Assessment Report 2019, 6).

Regarding health-related resources, workers are offered an annual check-up for both physical and mental illness (Social Impact Assessment Report 2019, 3). The results are confidential. The check-up is performed on the premises because the health department of Avinier arranges for an ambulance to come to the farm during working hours. This service is fundamental because the nearest hospital is 40 kilometres away. Moreover, health-related talks are offered throughout the year. These talks cover different topics, such as personal hygiene and healthcare, healthy eating and mental health. Each year, there is a specific training model in sex education intended to give women greater control over their reproduction. As part of this course, female contraceptives are freely distributed.

Finally, Avinier has established a participatory learning program. According to the Training Courses Matrix Document (2019, 2–6), all courses are adapted for illiterate women. On average, each woman receives approximately 30 hours a year of professional and personal training. In 2019, the courses covered on one hand, hazardous chemical training, quality metrics and harvest protocols, and on other hand, personal training to improve women's self-confidence. This program is provided by the company, but women can suggest topics of their interest. The manager of personnel justifies the policy in these terms:

> In this farm, women are our priority. That's why we ask about their interests and what training needs they have. It's not just about work; they also need many other personals tools and knowledge.

With this approach, they ensure that female workers are capable of autonomously managing their life projects.

Peer bonding

Avinier encourages and nurtures mutual-help fora (Galab and Rao 2003), where women organise to share concerns and seek joint solutions for work-related problems and/or for their family and community life. To illustrate, a weekly formal meeting takes place at the company's premises where female workers meet and discuss their own problems without the presence of managers. The co-founder believes that these meetings help women feel more secure and have wider repercussions for their personal and family well-being. These groups are led by female workers with supervisory roles. These practices are reflected in formal documents, such as the Social Impact Assessment Report (2019, 5–6).

Female workers also act as recruiters of other female workers. 'Most of the female workers live in the area. Existing workers look for new workers when they are needed', says the co-founder. By allowing female workers to recruit, the company ensures that vulnerable or disenfranchised women enter the organisation, thus providing access to resources to those most in need of them. As the workers' supervisor explains, 'When they need more workers, I ask in the community and select those that most need a job'. This practice creates a dynamic of mutual solidarity in the community.

In addition to this formal practice, we observed other informal but routinised peer-bonding practices initiated by the workers themselves. For example, women share

their food with other female workers who did not bring any and lend money to each other (field diary entry July 22, 2019). These mutual help practices improve the feeling of belonging to the group and create mutual trust among female workers (Peterson and Zimmerman 2004).

Pathways

These five practices trigger three pathways that together impact women's empowerment. Drawing from studies on community and organisational empowerment (Eylon 1998; Zimmerman 1995), we have labelled these three pathways *power to*, *power over* and *power with*. These three pathways co-arise and mutually interrelate rather than displaying a one-sided causality.

First, *power to* refers to the sense of personal control over their life projects (Zimmerman 1995). This pathway mediates entrepreneurial practices and the construction of beliefs of ability and worthiness; as other studies have shown, beliefs of self-esteem, perceived competence and hopefulness are fundamental elements of empowerment (Zimmerman 1995). Indeed, before demonstrating *power over*, it is necessary that women have positive beliefs about themselves and about their ability and right to make decisions; otherwise, women do not attempt to gain greater control over their choices or seise the resources offered to them.

Coaching practices contribute to creating beliefs of self-worth and self-efficacy. When a manager has a conversation with a female worker with low self-esteem and periodically asks about her, the manager is helping to improve the worker's self-confidence. Managers are aware of their capacity to create these positive beliefs and use it. Additionally, *pledging* helps to nurture these beliefs because the company communicates a clear position regarding the role that women should have in society. *Accruing* also contributes to developing skills and nurturing perceptions of competence that are fundamental aspects of *power to*. Importantly, female workers at Avinier do not only acquire skills for the working context; rather, the training strategy ensures that they develop other skills that are relevant across work-life domains. Moreover, *bridging* practices enable feelings of control over a particular domain (e.g. farming) to spill over to other domains (e.g. community), thus expanding female workers' sense of mastery.

Together, the identified practices facilitate the improvement of female workers' perceptions of self-mastery. This is what Zimmerman calls 'learned hopefulness' (Zimmerman 1990, 73). By working in the farm and participating in the activities described in the previous section, female workers nurture beliefs in their self-capacity for decision making. The organisation grants economic and non-economic resources, ensures control over them and creates opportunities for decision making. For instance, Melissa says, 'Since I have worked in Avinier, I have more confidence in myself and I know now that I can get many things that I could not before'.

Coaching practices not only improve emotional deficits but also positively affect the performance of employees. A worker who is emotionally stable will work more comfortably. An example of this practice is noted by the co-founder:

> A woman went to work after suffering a violation and was quite depressed; she was traumatized. We got involved, we talked to her, and she changed. You could even see

her changing in her tone of voice. Now, she is an example for other women and works very efficiently.

The second pathway, *power over,* refers to 'actual decision-making control over resources' (Riger 1993, 282), even in the face of opposition from other people (Kabeer 1999). Power over necessarily implies a redistribution of power (Riger 1993). As described, Avinier operates in a patriarchal, highly unequal society where men have control over decision making. We can speak of *power over* when decisions usually made by males are shared with or transferred to women. Indeed, the identified corporate practices allow women to gain greater control over decision making in their family life, thus contributing to this power redistribution. In particular, *accruing* practices are fundamental to give women control over resources and, with this, greater decision making. For instance, having their own bank account enables female workers to have control over their salary, which in turn gives them autonomy to make decisions, even with the opposition of their partners. To illustrate, Lucy explains, 'Now I can decide about the future of my children because I have money to pay for their school'. In rural communities, men, as the heads of the family, usually prefer their children to work rather than attend school. This view is not consistently shared by women. Having control over their salary gives them power to make a decision against their partner's will. Similarly, health training expands women's knowledge about healthy practices, especially concerning sexual practices. The incidence of AIDS in this community is high, and contagion is mostly due to unsafe sex practices because men reject the use of prophylactics. Health training makes female workers aware of the risk of AIDS and gives them greater control over protective practices, as workers explained during the interviews: 'thanks to this training, I can better know the risk of sexual relationships and the need to be careful' (Lucy).

Additionally, *pledging* and *bridging* not only nurture a sense of mastery among female workers but also enhance their social status in the community. This is reflected in their greater participation in community decision making. The co-founder acknowledges that 'The women working in Avinier have achieved a very strong voice in the community schools. They have influenced decisions, for example, about the school bus route'. Female workers speak and act as knowledgeable individuals and are thus perceived as capable; they therefore gain greater voice in the community.

The third pathway by which women's empowerment is constructed is *power with*. *Power with* 'emphasises the collective forces, where people cooperate with each other to solve problems and attain goals. It is mainly concerned with a sense of solidarity, capacity building, social networks and organisational strength' (Wong 2003, 311). Whereas *power over* understands power as a finite commodity that it is granted from 'the haves' to the 'have-nots', *power with* foregrounds a joint development of power, an understanding that 'all have the right to be active and interactive participants of organisations and power' (Eylon 1998, 22).

Power with is facilitated by the organisational practices that construct synergic relationships where the group achieves more than would do their members acting individually. *Bridging* and *peer bonding* are examples of *power with* building; however, other practices also contribute to this pathway insofar as they construct an in-group identity of Avinier female workers. Female workers belong to the same ethnic group

and live close to each other, around what they call community. This undoubtedly facilitates internal cohesion, and working in Avinier becomes an additional source of group identity. The field observation shows that female workers feel they are part of a strong social network. Within the organisation, female workers reproduce cultural solidarity, mutual help and social cohesion systems, dimensions that past studies have called interactional components of empowerment (Speer, Jackson, and Peterson 2001). Entrepreneurial practices are then nested in this cultural understanding of mutual care and help create a sense of community and in-group identity (Speer et al. 2013). The enterprise not only takes advantage of these cultural practices but also encourages them within the workplace by enabling peer-bonding practices. This reflects the local embeddedness in which social innovation occurs which is a characteristic of social entrepreneurship in South Africa (Sengupta, Sahay, and Croce 2018). Moreover, these practices create links between the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of empowerment and the contextual social and political dimensions (Wong 2003) that need to be integrated for actual empowerment.

Thus, *power with* reflects a dynamic of mutual care among female workers as well as among managers and workers. Human beings are interdependent; therefore, true empowerment cannot occur if interventions target specific individuals (Riger 1993). Peer-bonding practices trigger group dynamics that facilitate individual change. For example, in the weekly women's meetings, women talk about their problems and help each other. We have observed how these meetings, where female workers share their problems and help is mutually offered, enable women to increase their confidence and self-esteem because the women do not feel alone. Women recognise that the relationship created with other colleagues is fundamental for their own change; as Lucy says, 'When I arrived at the farm, I did not dare to talk with my partners … now we all work as a team to say together what to do'. Likewise, one of the managers suggests that mutual help is a fundamental instrument to acquire power ('you see how they help each other; when they don't have a meal, there is another one that offers theirs'). This shows that the enterprise's efforts to unite the group and facilitate women's meetings contribute to a sense of solidarity, capacity building and social capital creation (Sengupta, Sahay, and Croce 2018).

Reported outputs

Our analysis shows that these three pathways positively affect the three elements that constitute women's empowerment. Regarding resources, Avinier provides female workers with three types: psychological, skill-based and material. Psychological resources comprise positive beliefs about themselves concerning their ability, sense of worth, security or rights in participation and decision making. For example, a woman stated the following: 'When I was at home all day, I felt undervalued. Now I am happy. I feel much better about myself since I have worked at Avinier' (Rachel). The enterprise also expands the skill base of female workers, facilitating their learning of work-related skills as well as transferable social skills, such as team management or conflict resolution (Social Impact Assessment Report 2019, 7) that can be applied to other domains. In this regard, Jenna, a female worker, said, 'We learn a lot in Avinier about

collection and pruning, but the company also gives us a lot of training that will be very useful for the future, whether in Avinier or in another company'. Finally, the entrepreneurial practices provide female workers with material resources, such as salaries and medicines (ESG Report 2019, 3).

Agency is built through the practices that increase women's control over resources. With greater control, female workers exhibit greater mastery over their life choices (Poggesi, Mari, and De Vita 2016). More importantly, their greater participation in decision making transcends the boundaries of the workplace and expands to the family and community domains. In the family domain, female workers acknowledge that the resources obtained in Avinier enable them to make decisions regarding household spending and children's education. 'Now I feel safe because I am not obliged to use the money I earn for what my husband says. I can save it and give it to my children to buy clothes, go to school or buy food', said Rachel (similarly, Emma said, 'Since I have worked at Avinier, I have my own salary; now I can decide what to do with my money and buy clothes for my children'). As these quotes show, female workers not only develop a sense of control but also have a greater influence on decision making, which they usually take from their husbands.

Additionally, women increase their participation in decision making in the community. To illustrate, women have gained influence on school decisions as they have become part of the school council. In an interview, the principal of the school said, 'The women of Avinier have a voice in the community. They have recently become part of the school board, and they help us make important decisions'. This shows how Avinier's practices not only provide greater control for workers over their jobs but also have wider social repercussions and provide workers with greater power in the community.

We have provided several examples of achievements reported by managers and female workers that reflect their mastery over decision making. Achievements also work as a feedback mechanism so that the perception of achievements increases workers' positive beliefs about themselves, their sense of freedom, and their perceived social status, which further increase their psychological resources ('I feel that my life has progressed. Before, I had no job and I felt guilty for not being able to buy food and clothes for my children. Now I feel like a good mother', Jenna). The recognition of achievements also lubricates the solidarity networks among workers and between managers and workers. These achievements are interpreted as a result of the mutual help dynamics that reinforce the women's commitment to the group: 'The work at Avinier has changed my life and that of my children. Now I feel safe and confident. I am happy to work at Avinier, and I feel proud to work at Avinier' (Olivia).

Discussion and conclusion

This study has explained the processes of social change brought about by social entrepreneurship integrating what social enterprises do and what beneficiaries experience. Using empowerment as a mediating construct, it has identified five entrepreneurial practices and theorised the pathways whereby they empower women. As a result of three power-accruing processes (power to, power over, and power with) in three domains (psychological, economic and social), female workers acknowledge having

more material and immaterial resources, more control over resources and a sense of individual and collective achievement. Our proposed model depicts social entrepreneurship as a process of empowerment and social enterprises as empowering organisations.

This paper makes a threefold contribution to the literature. First, the identified entrepreneurial practices reflect a relational, expressive, and affective management style (Riger 1993) that emerges as a fundamental driver of the reported positive outcomes, enabled by greater empowerment. This management style could be seen as part of the entrepreneurial capital necessary for institutional change in this particular context.

Scholarship has identified several differences between female and male managerial styles (Goktan and Gupta 2015), with the female managerial style being more social-oriented, relational, and affective (Riger, 1993; Zhou, Vredenburgh, and Rogoff 2015). Whereas past research has emphasised impact sourcing as a characteristic of social entrepreneurship in South Africa (Sengupta, Sahay, and Croce 2018), our study shows that it is not only the provision of employment that creates change but rather the management style of employees. This management style can be seen as a form of gendered social innovation, as conceptualised by Lindberg et al. (2015). This style entails a more cooperative and participative orientation towards female employees that underpin the process of social change. Furthermore, these empowering practices reveal a relationship of mutual trust between managers and employees that enable exchanges of psychological resources such as self-confidence (Brown et al. 2015). In turn, these resources facilitate other practices, such as coaching, requiring affective and mutual respect to be effective (Kim et al. 2013). These practices are not different from those used to empower employees for better corporate financial performance (Hardina 2005). The innovation lies in the affective orientation and the social goal they pursue (Lortie and Cox 2018).

A second contribution of this study is the proposal of a multidimensional, multicausal and contextually-grounded model to explain how empowerment is enabled by social enterprises. This empowerment-based model is appropriate to explain social value creation, as it fits the multidimensional, multicausal and idiosyncratic nature of the social value concept (Narangajavana et al. 2016). In particular, we draw from a multifaceted view of power (Eylon 1998; Riger 1993) to show that empowerment is the result of three pathways or mediating processes that contribute to beneficiaries' greater power: psychological (nurturing positive beliefs among beneficiaries: power to), economic (granting access to resources that enable beneficiaries to have greater control over life projects: power over), and social (creating networks of mutual support and a strong in-group identity: power with). The power dynamics enabled by these three pathways could also explain the horizontal and vertical value creation processes identified in past studies (Korsgaard and Anderson 2011) and thus could provide a complementary explanation for past models of social change.

Indeed, our model highlights that the provision of economic resources is not the only central causal mechanism leading to spill-overs to the psychological and social domains, a conclusion found in other case studies (Datta and Gailey 2012). Rather, we contend that three domains – economic, psychological and social – are nurtured

simultaneously with the identified practices. This study reinforces past arguments that economic resources and capacity building are fundamental to change power dynamics (Molnár 2017) but extends the notion of capacity to include beneficiaries' self-views and self-worth. Anyway, we emphasise that greater agency cannot be clearly attributed to a single practice or process; rather, empowerment demands the simultaneous activation of the three pathways, which mutually reinforce one another. This multi-causal model may explain the mechanisms behind other relations observed in other studies (e.g. Zereyesus et al. 2017) by showing that greater power is the result of three interlinked processes: developing positive self-beliefs, having control over resources, and being embedded in a mutual help network.

However, the psychological dimension has been overlooked in past research, although analysis of past results shows traces of it. For instance, past studies show that social entrepreneurship nurtures self-esteem and provides different role models for beneficiaries (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2017), which enable personal development (Haugh and Talwar 2016), and that it nurtures self-realisation and personal growth (Korsgaard and Anderson 2011). However, when systematising social change processes, this dimension is deemphasized. Lumpkin, Bacq, and Pidduck (2018) established that social entrepreneurship enables social change by providing four types of capital to beneficiaries. Our study unveils a fifth type of capital – which can be labelled identity capital – that is necessary for social change, especially when social change demands changing social or cultural roles attributed to the beneficiaries. Identity capital comprises all the resources provided so that beneficiaries can understand 'who they are' (Côté 1996) that work alongside economic capital, instrumental skills provided (human capital) and access to social networks (social capital). Social entrepreneurs provide identity capital when they nurture positive self-beliefs among beneficiaries so that these positive beliefs undermine the patriarchal role attributed to women in the community. Moreover, we assert that value capture (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2017) could be concomitant with developing these beliefs among beneficiaries. Internalising beliefs about their own capabilities and social worth is fundamental for beneficiaries to tap into the resources that social entrepreneurs put at their disposal so that they can effectively capture the value created by social entrepreneurship.

Third, this research shows the appropriateness of empowerment to explain processes of social change inherent in the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship. Scholars have extensively studied the process through which empowering organisations contributes to empowerment, in terms of exchange of power and modification of beliefs and structures (Christens 2012). Although scholarship has articulated the need for empowering community settings for social change (Cornwall 2016; Maton 2008), the role that social enterprises play in the development of social change had not been identified. The model proposed in this study fills this gap by explaining the links between entrepreneurial practices and creation of social value, with empowerment a mediating mechanism in this process. The power-triggering dynamics identified explain why this social enterprise creates social change both from a vertical perspective, with practices aimed at employees, and horizontally, promoting a process of peer change. In addition, past work has shown that social enterprises mobilise

economic and social resources to achieve their social objectives, usually emphasising the formation of alliances with other stakeholders. Our study reinforces the idea that social change is enabled by the identity and social capital created by entrepreneurs (Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle 2016). We show that through their practices, social enterprises stimulate a community spiritedness that eases social change.

Every study has limitations. To increase replicability, further research is necessary in other sociopolitical contexts to examine the contextual boundaries of the proposed model. It would also be interesting to study whether the same practices and pathways are fundamental for the empowerment of other vulnerable groups, such as smallholders farmers or homeless individuals (Mair, Battilana, and Cardenas 2012). Moreover, it is important to establish whether other practices characterise the 'empowering social enterprise' in highly unequal countries (Torre, Braccini and Spinelli 2016) and examine the relationship between entrepreneurial practices and entrepreneurs' leadership styles (Poggesi, Mari, and De Vita 2016) The effects of empowerment on both the economic and social goals of social enterprises deserve further exploration. We used a phenomenological assessment of social change as our aim was to conceptualise social change processes. Future studies could use quantitative indicators of social change and measure the cause-effect relationship between entrepreneurial practices and the dual economic and social objectives of social entrepreneurship. Finally, future research should study the long-term impact of the social processes triggered by the identified practices.

Disclosure statement

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