



## Construction of female informal entrepreneur profiles in the towns of Bafoussam and Mbouda

NGOUYAMSA Valentin<sup>1</sup>, KAMDOM NGUEMDJOM Rita Charlie<sup>2\*</sup>

Senior lecturer, Université de Dschang, Cameroun

Student, Université de Dschang, Cameroun.

### \*Corresponding Author

KAMDOM NGUEMDJOM  
Rita Charlie

Email:  
charliekamdome@yahoo.fr

### Article History

Received: 07.03.2025  
Accepted: 19.04.2025  
Published: 11.05.2025

**Abstract:** This study explores the impact of social relationships on economic activities within the entrepreneurial landscape of Cameroon, focusing on female entrepreneurs in the cities of Bafoussam and Mbouda. The dichotomy between the formal and informal sectors highlights accessibility challenges, particularly in the informal sector, where networks of solidarity play a crucial role. Through qualitative research, including interviews with 30 female entrepreneurs, the study examines how these women navigate the obstacle posed by these networks. Grounded in Granovetter's theory of embeddedness, the research analyses the socio-professional profiles of these entrepreneurs, highlighting the interplay between social capital, human capital and entrepreneurial success. The findings reveal that while social network facilitate access to resources and opportunities, human capital remains essential for resilience and success. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial dynamics within Cameroon's informal sector, emphasizing the importance of social embeddedness.

**Keywords:** female informal entrepreneur, informal entrepreneurship, profiles, construction and informal sectors.

### Cite this article:

Valentin, N, Charlie, K. N. R., (2025). Construction of female informal entrepreneur profiles in the towns of Bafoussam and Mbouda. *ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(5), 55-59.

## Introduction

The study of social relationships in economic activities has become a central subject in academic research, underscoring its importance in understanding and managing contemporary economic dynamics (Bureau of Economic Research 2020). The entrepreneurial landscape in Cameroon is marked by an apparent duality between the formal sector, often perceived as open to all (Fostso et al. 2016), and the informal sector renowned for its closed nature and opaque solidarity network. This dichotomy raises vital questions about the accessibility and challenges faced by entrepreneurs particularly women in cities such as Bafoussam and Mbouda. While research such as (Fondo 2018) and (Ndambomo 2017) highlights the openness of the formal to a diversity of actors, a contrasting reality emerges in the informal sector, where new entrepreneurs often encounter insurmountable obstacles to integrate into established networks of solidarity.

As economic conditions in Cameroon become more challenging, an increasing number of women engaging in income-generating activities within the informal sector where they made up 85% of the total population (Nyemb-Wisman 2011). Despite the

apparent entry facility, there are notable barriers to establishing oneself in this sector. Our observations in Bafoussam and Mbouda reveal a dualism in the experiences of female entrepreneurs. Some women manage to start their business and establish themselves as informal entrepreneurs, even without belonging to established networks of solidarity, eventually becoming key members of these networks. Conversely, others women abandoned their businesses after a while due to immense difficulties they encounter when operating outside these networks.

In an environment characterized by solidarity networks, women enter a space they do not fully comprehend, necessitating the development of survival strategies. While some succeed, other does not. This raises several questions; what is the typical career trajectory of women who establish their entrepreneurial profile in such a confined environment? How do educational levels and other social factors influence this process? It is within this particular context that our research is situated, aiming to explore entrepreneurial profiles of women operating in the informal sector of the cities of Bafoussam and Mbouda. We seek to understand how these women overcome the obstacles inherent in an economic environment where networks of solidarity play a crucial role in



accessing business opportunities. By closely examining their experiences, strategies and successes we aim to trace the construction of their entrepreneurial profiles and contribute to a better understanding of the entrepreneurial dynamics within the Cameroonian informal sector, particularly in the towns of Bafoussam and Mbouda.

## 1. Methodological frame

This study is essentially qualitative, aimed at understanding the socio-professional profiles of women engaged in informal entrepreneurship. Data collection is conducted using the interview and documentary review techniques. The interview guide facilitated interviews with 30 female entrepreneurs of the informal sector in west region of Cameroon precisely in the towns of Bafoussam and Mbouda.

In an academic context, this study is grounded in Granovetter's theory of embeddedness, which serves as analytical framework. This theory helps to understand the extent to which an entrepreneur's habits are deeply ingrained in the social structures that govern their environment, shaping their entrepreneurial profile. Granovetter's work in economic sociology, particularly on the importance of networks in entrepreneurial development, posits that "one cannot analyze behavior and institutions without taking into account the current social relation which exerts very strong constraints on them"<sup>1</sup>. Essentially, the connections between merchants are deeply intertwined with social aspects.

Using the case method, this research will examine the construction of the entrepreneurial characteristics of women in the informal sector in Bafoussam and Mbouda, focusing on how their entrepreneurial characteristics influenced social networks and structures.

## 2. Theoretical frame

Two concepts are highlighted in the context of this study: the concept of entrepreneurial culture and the embedded entrepreneur.

### 2.1. Entrepreneurial culture

The definition of informal entrepreneurship has for decades now been the point of focus of many academic researchers in disciplines like economics and social sciences. Therefore, there are numerous definitions of this concept, such as those provided by Simen S. (2018) and EU and OCDE (2015).

Factors that promote the entrepreneurial culture and thus the act of creating an entrepreneurial activity are divided into two categories; the intrinsic and the extrinsic motivational factors as established by Laurice Alexandre (2016). On the other hand, Dension & Spreitzer (1991) defines entrepreneurial culture or adhocracy culture as being characterized by dynamism, entrepreneurship, creativity, risk-taking and focus on the external environment. As for Davidsson (1995), the influence of institutional and macroeconomic variables on entrepreneurial vitality is moderated by cultural specificities. In other words,

Fayolle (2003) believes that, entrepreneurial culture is associated with various environments that individuals are familiar and frequent with, which can influence their inclination to engage in entrepreneurship. These environments, such as schools, universities, society, businesses, professions and territories exert numerous influences on individuals that can have positive or negative effects when the entrepreneurial event arises in their lives. Thus the entrepreneurial culture in another sense as asserted by Mazghani (2008) quote by Nsana Mutapayi is a culture of creation and construction. Thus, behavior and esprit guide the entrepreneurial culture and contextual elements influence this spirit which is determinant of the ability to entrepreneurship of the individual as exposed by Hayton, et Cacciotti (2003), Davidsson (2006), and Fredin et Jogmark (2017).

Summarily, entrepreneurial culture is those aptitudes instigated in the individual during the process of entrepreneurial socialization which influence female informal entrepreneur in Bafoussam and Mbouda to have an inclination to engage in entrepreneurship. Thus, if we have chosen to define entrepreneurial culture in this study, it was with the intention of accurately understanding how the acquisition of this culture enables female entrepreneurs to initiate their entrepreneurial activities. This will subsequently facilitate the task of outlining their socio-professional profile. This task cannot be done without examining what we call the embedded female informal entrepreneur.

### 2.2. The embedded entrepreneur

Embeddedness refers to the fact that economic activities are embedded in networks of social relationships. Interactions and personal connections play a crucial role in how entrepreneurs identify opportunities, mobilize resources and make decisions<sup>2</sup>.

To better understand the concept of the embedded entrepreneur in our context we have to associate it with Mercklé's (2004) social network theory and Bourdieu's social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Integrating the concepts of social capital and social network with Granovetter's theory of embeddedness provides a more nuanced understanding of how economic actions are shaped by social contexts. This association highlights the importance of relationship, trust, and information flow in economic activities, offering a comprehensive framework for analyzing economic behavior beyond traditional market mechanism. Thus, the decisions and successes of the entrepreneur are not solely the result of their individual skill, but also of their ability to navigate and leverage the social relationships surrounding them. In essence, the embedded entrepreneur is an actor whose actions are entirely linked to the network and social resources they possess.

## 3. Results

The presentation of our results is as follows: the entrepreneur's profile and the entrepreneurial profile of female informal entrepreneurs in Bafoussam and Mbouda.

---

<sup>1</sup> GRANOVETTER, M., *sociologie économique*, seuil 2008, 306pages

---

<sup>2</sup> Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic Action and social structure: The problem of Embeddedness. *American Journal of sociology*, 91,(3),481-510

### 3.1. The entrepreneur's profile

Here, it is a question for us to establish the socio-economic characteristics of female informal entrepreneurs in Mbouda and Bafoussam based on: age, matrimonial statue, educational level.

#### Age of maturity

Most of these women who already had a large responsibility in childhood through commercial activities in order to help parents meet the precarious conditions in which they lived, a situation aggravated after adulthood and motherhood.

Table 1: matrimonial statute of the female entrepreneurs

Items	Married	Divorced	Spinster	Widow	No answer	Total
Number	11	4	8	5	2	30

**Source:** survey data conducted in Mbouda and Bafoussam in August and September 2023

More than 70% of our sample is married women, the remaining 30% is divided between the divorced, window and spinsters see table below.

Table 2: ages of the respondents

Items	25-35yrs	36-45yrs	46-55yrs	56-65yrs	66-75yrs	No answer	Total
Number	7	7	9	5	1	1	30

Source: survey data conducted in Mbouda and Bafoussam in August and September 2023

Table 2 shows that our sample is constituted of women aged between 25-70 years old, so majority are of adults.

Table 3: Ethnic identity of the informants

Items	Mifi	Bamboutos	North west	Menou	Bafia	Haut plateau	Koung-Khi	No answer	Total
Sum	7	7	4	5	2	6	5	0	30

Source: survey data conducted in Mbouda and Bafoussam in August and September 2023

The previous table show a culturally diversified ethnic profile of female entrepreneurs of our sample. This translates a cultural mixture of the entrepreneurial milieu of the informal female entrepreneurs in the town of Bafoussam and Mbouda.

Table 4: Distribution of certificates obtained by the female informal entrepreneurs

Items	CEP	BEPC/CAP	PROB	BAC/GEC AL	Licence	Master	Total
Sum	9	6	6	5	3	1	30

**Source:** survey data conducted in Mbouda and Bafoussam in August and September 2023

The above table highlights the different certificate obtained at school level by the female entrepreneurs of our sample, more that 90% of women of our sample went to school and had obtained at least the first school leaving certificate (CEP equal to the first school leaving certificate of the Anglophone sub- system of education). However, more than 40% who had a secondary school certificate/professional certificates and the rest of 20% had a higher education certificates.

### 3.2. The entrepreneurial profile

In analyzing the construction of entrepreneurial profiles of women in Mbouda and Bafoussam, we deemed it necessary to present three cases, though not exhaustive.

Case 1: Falone is a young entrepreneur ("buy and sellam") in Bafoussam, aged 28, who faced enormous difficulties in her beginnings because her neighbours were sabotaging her business. At her beginning she had a small amount of capital gotten from her previous job as a house-help, the person who was supposed to train her by showing her all the techniques of the trade, was the same one who misled her. She had to fight against odds by herself and

faced many failures and losses to reach the level she is today (wholesaler). These Difficulties made her to leave this milieu for many times.

Case 2: Diane is a former teacher in Mbouda, who did not have any difficulty in starting her business, she had her network, and her in-laws were in that market. They showed her suppliers and since every holiday she worked in the market it facilitated things for her added to the fact that, many were already acquainted to her, she already had good knowledge on how things worked.

Case 3: Antoinette aged 40; this other female entrepreneur explains that when she started her business, she did not have any capital. So, when she arrived at the market, she first created a relationship that would help her find a location and then secure a space to store her goods. After that, she needed to find a reliable person to guide her on buying and selling, and finally look for a guarantor to be able to obtain goods on credit from supplier. This is how she managed to accumulate capital and enough connections to establish her own "camp" and had the opportunity to buy in bulk and directly from supplier. Her secret is just to be polite, strategic and honest.

### 3.2. Entrepreneurial process and profile

From the above cases, the entrepreneurial process of each entrepreneur differs from the other but we were able to group those who use similar skills and strategies to navigate through the various stages of the entrepreneurial process. Based on the opinions of our interviewees, we had identified several stages that help shape an entrepreneurial profile: the first stage is where the entrepreneur makes the first physical contact with the entrepreneurial environment; the second stage is that of the integration into networks of solidarity and the last stage is the mobilization of the network.

#### 3.2.1. Construction of ties

At this stage of the entrepreneurial process the entrepreneur needs two essential things; an access to knowledge and skills through informal formation and a store. In Falone's case, she trusted a colleague with whom she had no prior ties, as she explains further by saying "no I did not know her I came here I explained my situation to her, I she said she will take me like her daughter I trusted her but at last I saw she was duping me". This translates the relentless pursuit of profit that characterizes the entrepreneurial environment and what compels the entrepreneur to forge social network to succeed.

From the speech of Antoinette, Granovetter's theory of embeddedness takes all his sense, as social relations shape economic opportunities in entrepreneurial context (Granovetter 1985). Antoinette was able to start her business thanks to social network, she found someone to teach her the basic of buying and selling highlighting the importance of social ties in acquiring entrepreneurial skills. Then, she received support from a guarantor who allowed her to obtain goods on credit, showcasing the role of trust network in accessing financing.

#### 3.2.2. Integration into network of solidarity

The integration of a new entrepreneur implies, as a female entrepreneur in Mbouda explains: "when you are new, it is your behavior that determines whether we see you as one of us or not ...when we talk of integrating someone, it simply means telling them that about the opportunities available, introducing her to suppliers, assisting one another and solving problems together, that is how it works." From the above we observed that if the social network of the entrepreneur is important the human capital is also essential. That is, if the social capital of the entrepreneur enables her to join the solidarity network, it is only her human capital which can guarantee her resilience and acceptance in the group evidenced in case 3 of the above extracts. However, note should be taken that in case three the entrepreneur made use of her human capital to integrate this network.

Also, the balance between weak and strong ties is essential. While strong ties provides a support system and foundation of trust, weak ties offer access to new opportunities resources and knowledge Uzzi B (1996) like it is the case in Diane's speech. The integration into the circle of solidarity is facilitated by family connections and lays the foundations of trust between Diane and her commercial partners.

From various the speeches, the integration into belongings network can guarantee a resilience facility to the entrepreneurs

because it provides social security and support to the entrepreneur, economic opportunities and prevent social exclusion. In the three cases above we observe that it is only after the integration into entrepreneur's network circle that an individual has some facilities like access to credit from the wholesaler, the building of working group "camp" which can guarantee her resilience through independence/interdependent and financial security.

The numerous failures highlighted by Falone in her speech is as result of her none integration into the network of solidarity. Consequently she had no support and limited opportunity which could make her enlarge and maintain her business. She was a threat to the social cohesion of this network circle and as a result, the woman responsible for her training duped her.

#### 3.2.3. Mobilization of the network

The resource mobilization stage comes after the fully integration of the entrepreneur into the solidarity network. Initially unrepresented, they become essential actors in the solidarity circle, even going as far as creating working groups called "camps" like it is the case of Antoinette. A "camp" is an informal cooperation formed by entrepreneurs with the objective of been more productive. These women engaged selling a certain quantity of goods together bought by one of them and share the profit equally after the sale and after reducing the initial buyer's cost price. They usually do this for perishable goods like vegetable, fruits tomatoes. An informal entrepreneur says: "my mother is a tomatoes wholesaler, so when she enters the bush and see vegetables she will call for me I will go and buy in bulk and since it is perishable I cannot sell it alone. That's why I will call the members of my camp to come and help me sell it quickly. At the end of the day we share all equally removing what I spent initially, each member can buy in bulk and we will sell, here everybody has his own camp, here is mine".

These camps, besides their function of increasing gains, constitute a network for the entrepreneur stemming from the general solidarity network composed of a large number of women. Furthermore, these "camps are weak ties that allow information to circulate and new resources to be mobilized beyond one's immediate circle (Granovetter, M 1973). Also, from Bruts, R. S. (2004) perspective, occupying strategic position in the network these entrepreneurs can mobilize opportunities through bridges between groups

## Discussion

The analysis of the female informal entrepreneur's entrepreneurial path and characteristics reveals that, solidarity network and human capital do not operate independently of each other in informal endeavors of female entrepreneurs in Bafoussam and Mbouda. Instead, they are often interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Solidarity networks and offer opportunities for learning and mentorship, thereby enriching women's human capital (Granovetter 1985). Similarly, the skills and knowledge acquired can enhance women's ability to significantly expand their business by creating "camps" by sharing information and advice based on their experiences (Mercklé 2004). Thus an entrepreneur can have a high level of human capital, but without the appropriate social capital and network they may struggle to effectively implement their skills. Social network and social capital facilitate the practical



application of human capital, thereby increasing the chances of success.

Moreover, the findings suggest that age and educational level may not be significant determinants of success in this milieu. This finding suggests that informal training and practical experience in managing informal settings often surpasses formal school certification in contributing to success (Luthan and Ibrayeveva 2006). Women who have specific skill acquired through informal education, or on-the-job training, have a significant advantage in creating and managing informal settings. In addition, strong ties provides an atmosphere of trust and sense belonging among individuals, as most female entrepreneur prefer to join network of solidarity composed of members from ethnic group..

Furthermore, informal female entrepreneurs' solidarity network helps them mitigate risk and promote their resilience. Access to capital is vital for the establishment of commercial activities, and since most of these women are poor they rely on the capital these network provide to them. Hence solidarity network provide the necessary support to enter into entrepreneurial activities and scale their business (Maegher 2005), which can facilitate access to credit as trust is established since formal credit access is difficult. Thus, these networks enable entrepreneurs to pool resources and reduce individual risk.

## Conclusion

In a nutshell, the entrepreneurial landscape in Cameroon's informal sector is heavily influenced by social dynamics. The integration into and mobilization of solidarity network are essential for overcoming barriers and achieving business success. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how female entrepreneur in Bafoussam and Mbouda builds their entrepreneurial profiles and navigate the challenges of informal economy, providing valuable insights for policies and interventions aimed at supporting informal entrepreneurship in similar contexts.

## Bibliography

1. BATIBONAK, S., 2000, Discrimination et entrepreneurialité des femmes au Cameroun dans *OFIG cahier de recherche*, No 05-2022
2. BATIBONAK, S., 2000, « J'entreprends donc je suis. La médiation entrepreneuriale de l'affirmation de la femme », *La*

*Biographie sociale du sexe. Genre, Société, et politique au Cameroun, dans Luc Sindjoun (dir.)*, Paris/Dakar, Karthala/CODESRIA, pp. 232-271.

3. BRUT, R.S. (1992). Structural holes: the social structure of competition, Harvard University Press.
4. BRUT, R.S (2004). Structural holes and good ideas. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110 (2), 349-399
5. FAYOLLE, A. (2003). *Le métier de créateur d'entreprise*. Paris : Organisation.
6. GRANOVETTER.M, (1973), *les force des liens faibles*, in GRANOVETTER M, 2000, *le marché autrement*, Paris Desclée de Brouwer.
7. GRANOVETTER.M, (1985). Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. *American journal of sociology*, 91(3), 481-510
8. LAURICE ALEXENDRE. « Typologie des entrepreneurs, une approche par le genre » d !ans *revue de l'Entrepreneuriat*, 3/4 (vol.15), pages 109 à 127 2016.
9. NGOUYAMSA, V., (2019). « Logiques entrepreneuriales et représentations imagées de l'école chez les jeunes entrepreneurs sous-scolarisé de la ville de Bafoussam-Cameroun » /*Revue échanges*, n°13, décembre.
10. NGOUYAMSA, V., (2021). Socialisation entrepreneuriale en milieux universitaire camerounais : modèles et perspectives des étudiants entrepreneurs, *Revue Territoires Sud, Au cœur des mutations au Sud. Page 43 n°2*
11. NGOUYAMSA, V & F. Meutchieye., (2021). La formation entrepreneuriale des jeunes, un impérative au-delà des mots, *Revue Territoires Sud, Au cœur des mutations au Sud. Page 7 n°2*
12. NSANA MUTAYI, E. (2022). Culture entrepreneuriale et survie des micros entreprises en milieu urbain : enquête réalisé dans la commune de Limete. *Mouvement et enjeux sociaux*, 122, 128-139.
13. SAGODIRA, G. (2011) la formation professionnelle à l'entrepreneuriat par-delà le déterminisme social de l'acte entrepreneurial. (Thèse de doctorat), université de la Réunion, Réunion, sans diffuseur éventuel
14. SALI BOUBA. Cameroun : pourquoi les Bamiléké réussissent-ils? Dans *Un Monde Libre* 2012