

Moral Economy Meets Social Enterprise Community-Based Green Energy Project in Rural Burundi

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Summary. — The development sector is constantly looking for new models to address the many challenges of the Global South in a sustainable way. The aim of this study is to investigate how the agrarian communities in rural Burundi accommodate the model of a social enterprise: a market-based community organization with a social mission.

We conduct an explorative study of a pilot development intervention in rural Burundi. Nine participating village solidarity groups (child protection committees) have been equipped with energy generators. By selling energy, the groups become self-sustainable economic structures. The profits of the micro-enterprises support the villages' orphans' funds, used to equip the orphan children with uniforms and school supplies. Accordingly, the intervention assumes deep participation (project ownership) on the part of the community and also holds the promise of future economic sustainability (earned income).

Using a mixed-method approach, we examine the perceptions, behaviors, and actions of the participating community members. Drawing on the theory of moral economy, we argue that subsistence communities in Burundi are governed by reciprocal and hierarchical relationships that may both enable and hinder social enterprise initiatives. Our results suggest that the social enterprise model may increase the sustainability prospects of the interventions but question its capacity to achieve transformational change.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Development organizations around the world are increasingly applying participatory approaches that, in varying degrees, engage the local populations in project design, implementation, and monitoring (Enns, Bersaglio, & Kepe, 2014; Labonne & Chase, 2011). Participation is believed to increase the sustainability prospects of the interventions, transforming the beneficiaries into stakeholders, and at times also shareholders, of the locally implemented projects. At the root of this approach lies the assumption that local communities can be effective channels of development if they receive a genuine delegation of powers and responsibilities (Sheely, 2015; Platteau & Abraham, 2002). One of the novel forms of participation is the community-based social enterprise: a form of community venture that advocates social mission through entrepreneurial earned-income strategies (Chikadzi, 2014; Kerlin, 2010; Santos, Pache, & Birkholz, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to analyze *how the rural communities in Burundi accommodate the development model of a social enterprise*. The project builds upon the provision of green energy generators to the village child protection committees in the energy-deficient rural regions of the country. The electricity-producing machines are also a new income source for the groups, transforming them into economically viable community enterprises. Importantly, as opposed to several similar projects already underway in the developing world (Jain & Koch, 2009; Thompson & Doherty, 2006; Torri, 2009), the revenue earned is not redistributed among the group members but saved toward fostering the group's social mission—the orphans' fund. As such, the communities in question engage in a true post-development venture: they gradually assume the role of the aid-provisioning organizations.

The conceptual framing of the research builds upon the notion of moral economy.¹ The theory of moral economy assumes that economic activities are defined and legitimized by moral beliefs, values, and norms (Sayer, 2007; Scott, 1977; Thompson, 1971; Tönnies, 2002). In particular, agrarian

communities are said to share a set of normative attitudes concerning the social relations that surround their local economies. Social networks and culturally legitimized dealings tend to prevail over market-efficient behavior, as they promote the survival of the community under the conditions of scarcity (Fafchamps, 1992). The concept of a social enterprise, on the other hand, is based on the principle of addressing social issues by applying market-based solutions (Haugh, 2007; Thompson & Doherty, 2006). It is via the market mechanisms that social enterprises manage to sustain themselves and foster their socially oriented mission. The two approaches (moral economy and social enterprise) share the common principle of restraining the economic actors from maximizing individual profits. At the same time, they exhibit a number of contrasting features in terms of organizational logic, guiding principles, and objectives.

In this paper, we study how the social enterprise model establishes itself within traditional agrarian communities in

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Burundi and assess its potential as a new approach to engaged, community-based development. We contribute to the literature on participatory development by profiling the community-based social enterprise as one of the strongest forms of participation. Secondly, we take a social and cultural look at a traditionally economic subject. We explore the peoples' understandings of supply and demand mechanisms in places where a large number of trading operations have not been financial. The study of communities as spaces and contexts for change has largely been neglected in social entrepreneurship literature (Gras, Mosakowski, & Lumpkin, 2011). This is especially true for Burundi, a country whose socio-economic reality has been relatively unexplored by the academia.

In addition, the paper brings together the social economy and development studies literatures. The economic model of a community-based social enterprise seems to be effective in addressing some of the social problems in the Western societies² but the literature on its applications in the developing world remains scarce (Ratten & Welpe, 2011). At the same time, acute social, environmental, and economic conditions of Sub-Saharan Africa are opening up "opportunity spaces" for social enterprises (Littlewood & Holt, 2015). In the times of the global economic crisis, the accommodation of new, sustainable economic structures by underprivileged societies seems necessary to sustain valuable partnerships and access to resources (Kolk, 2013). In our study, we attempt to shed light on these processes by conducting a fine-grained empirical analysis focusing on people's perceptions, behaviors and actions.

The paper is organized as follows. In the opening section, we briefly outline the evolution of the participatory approach. We then argue that the social enterprise model under study represents one of the strongest forms of participatory development. The subsequent section introduces the context of our empirical study: rural Burundi, a setting that exhibits a number of features of a moral economic order. We then proceed to presenting the two-stage results of our investigation: first, we outline the challenges faced by the newly-created micro-social enterprises. Second, we analyze these problems with reference to three themes (I) the operational context for the social enterprises (actors/setting), (II) the norms that govern it (rules/management) and (III) the ends it serves (outcomes/objectives). The final section includes conclusions, discussion and recommendations for further research.

2. FROM PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT TO COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Most commonly understood participatory development is the process of engaging the recipient populations in the externally-applied programs aimed at improving their socio-economic wellbeing (Willis, 2005). In this section of the paper, we present a brief overview of the participatory approach, situating it within the wider context of the development debate. By profiling the successive forms of participation, we argue that the model of a community-based social enterprise represents one of the strongest forms of engaging the concerned populations in development interventions.

(a) Participation in the development debate

In development theory, participation is believed to bring better outcomes through localized problem identification, reduced project costs, improved maintenance and allocative

efficiency, and prospective self-reliance (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Importantly, participation in development is always embedded within the wider context of initiatives, undertaken independently by the recipient populations to increase control over their socio-economic situation (Kleemeier, 2000; Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Among other interventions, microfinance provides an illustrative example of how participation induces entrepreneurial propensity (Bruton, Ketchen, & Ireland, 2013; Collins, Morduch, Rutherford, & Ruthven, 2009). In microfinance, the quest for sustainability has already imposed the increased involvement of the clients, turning beneficiaries into program stakeholders (Hulme, 2000).

While the literature on some of the benefits stemming from stakeholder involvement is substantial (Khanna, Kochhar, & Palaniswamy, 2015; Labonne & Chase, 2011) there is little evidence on what happens when the beneficiaries become shareholders of interventions, i.e., share the costs and participate in the decision-making processes regarding the projects. Participation remains the selling point for development programs, but more often than not it is limited to its weak form (Kumar and Corbridge, 2002; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Nuttavuthisit, Jindahra, & Prasarnphanich, 2014). As argued by Michener (1998), the distinction between weak (consulting or informing) and strong (partnership and ceding control) participation is crucial for the process, as it marks the degree of autonomy that the beneficiaries can exercise over agencies (Marti, Courpasson, & Dubard Barbosa, 2013; Sheely, 2015). In particular, researchers have stressed the essential role of the sense of project *ownership*, engendered in community members by means of strong participation (Marks & Davis, 2012).³ In order to induce such sense of ownership, it is argued, the beneficiaries are to be involved in key decisions related to the project, contribute toward its funding and participate in planning, implementation and monitoring activities (Biradavolu, Blankenship, George, & Dhungana, 2015). In the next section, we argue that the social enterprise model can serve as an example of such an approach: by means of strong participation, it evokes the sense of ownership and autonomy, transforming the beneficiaries into first stakeholders and then shareholders of projects.

(b) Community-based social enterprise as strong participation

Even though the understanding of a social enterprise varies across contexts (Defourny & Nyssens, 2012), for the purpose of this paper, we adopt the definition of social enterprises as organizations seeking market-based solutions to social problems (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Dart, 2004; Santos *et al.*, 2015). Conceptualized as such, social enterprise needs to be distinguished from other socially-oriented organizations and initiatives that contribute to the well-being of communities but are not seeking to be businesses (Thompson & Doherty, 2006, p. 362). We follow Haugh and her clear-cut set of criteria, consenting that:

"(...) 'social enterprise' is a collective term for a range of organizations that trade for a social purpose. They adopt one of a variety of different legal formats but have in common the principles of pursuing business-led solutions to achieve social aims, and the reinvestment of surplus for community benefit. Their objectives focus on socially desired, non-financial goals and their outcomes are the non-financial measures of the implied demand for and supply of services"

[Haugh, 2007, p. 5]

In the development sector, social enterprise situates itself between a community-driven development model (CDD) and a bottom of the pyramid venture (BoP). Both of these

approaches claim participatory credentials, as the concerned communities have direct control over the key decisions (Nkonya, Phillip, Mogues, Pender, & Kato, 2012; Weidner, Rosa, & Viswanathan, 2010).

Early BoP supporters argued that donor organizations, businesses and governments victimize impoverished communities, underestimating their potential as value-demanding clients, a “fortune” to be discovered and utilized by businesses (London & Hart, 2004; Prahalad, 2004). Lately, however, a new wave of BoP (BoP 3.0) approaches with a more engaged orientation and value proposition have emerged, emphasizing co-creating new business models and frugal technology solutions as a development strategy for the near-subsistence markets (Kolk, Rivera-Santos, & Rufin, 2013; London & Hart, 2010). In this way, BoP 3.0 has laid the ground for social enterprises, stepping away from marketing cheap products to the poor and moving toward innovation ecosystems, cross-sector partnership networks, and sustainable development frameworks (Caneque & Hart, 2015).

Similarly to BoP 3.0 approaches, the social enterprise model assumes leveraging the untapped market potential at the base of the economic pyramid to create positive social change (Galvin & Iannotti, 2014). In principle, social enterprise strives toward economic sustainability but orients itself toward a social mission, reinvesting the profits in order to achieve multiple bottom lines. Accordingly, even though social enterprises bring a promise of sustainable poverty alleviation; they require substantial support from non-market actors at the start-up phase in order to be successful in their participatory outreach (Sesan, Raman, Clifford, & Forbes, 2013).

Importantly, participation and empowerment are often quoted in the development literature as legitimizing factors for social enterprise, validating its increased application in the context of the developing world. An analysis by Nicholls (2012) confirms that social enterprises have the potential to challenge the paternalism and dependency traditionally associated with the development industry. At the same time, considering the prevalence of Western-led social enterprises in developing countries, the social enterprise approach might as well evolve into a new kind of dependency culture, perpetuating the unequal status quo (Nicholls, 2006, 2012).

A proposed solution to this pitfall is deep participation on the part of concerned populations. In the project described in this study—the “Lumière Project”—not only are the local community groups (child protection committees) engaged in the implementation of the intervention, but they become micro-social enterprises themselves (project ownership). In the next section we present the setting in which this transition takes place, explaining the specificity of the moral economic order.

3. MARKET-BASED APPROACH MEETS MORAL ECONOMY

The social enterprise model adopted by project Lumière builds upon harnessing the power of the market in order to generate social value. It is based on the assumption that market forces can serve as regulators and facilitators of the community’s well-being. Next to the supply and demand principle, competition and free pricing of goods are often mentioned as means of distinguishing between a free market economy and other, “pre-capitalist” orders (Arnold, 2014, see also: Bohannan, 1959).

Interestingly, the recent data reveal that even though the rural populations of Burundi might not constitute a

“pre-capitalist society”, their interaction with financial markets is very limited. According to the recent estimates, Burundi remains the third poorest country in the world, and one of the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations Human Development Index, 2015; The World Bank Data – Burundi, 2013). An estimated 90% of the population are subsistence farmers whose livelihood depends of the cultivation of land and livestock and whose involvement with monetary markets is very limited. Subsistence-oriented family farming units account for 95% of the food supply (Niragira, D’Haese, D’Haese, Ndimubandi, Desiere, & Buysse, 2015, see also: African Development Bank Group, 2014). Very high population density (over 300 persons per square kilometer) dangerously increases the population pressure on over-cultivated land and leads to large-scale food insecurity (World Statistics Country Profiles, 2013). “Living close to the subsistence margin and subject to the vagaries of weather and the claims of outsiders, the peasant household has little scope for the profit maximization calculus of traditional neoclassical economics”—a phenomenon that has been referred to as moral economy, typical of agrarian communities (Scott, 1977, p. 5).

Importantly, the primacy of agricultural production does not necessarily translate into an agrarian economic order. It is the way in which agrarian relations, such as sharecropping, shape social relations within and among groups that marks an agrarian, or moral, economy (Powelson, 1998). First described by Tönnies in his concept of *Gemeinschaft* and later developed by Thompson in the theory of a “moral peasant”, moral economy applies to populations living so close to the subsistence line that it takes little to destroy their livelihoods (Thompson, 1971; Tönnies, 2002). Also referred to as “folk society” or “sacred society” (Becker, 1950), agrarian populations are organized around small groups, communities, or, in the case of Burundi, *collines*, which, in the Tönnisian terms, are tied by shared value systems (Loomis & McKinney, 2002, in: Tönnies, 2002, p. 15). In moral economies, traditional understandings emerge as to the relative value of goods with reference to local social networks. These traditional understandings acquire the force of customary law and tend to prevail over the free market mechanisms which assume renegotiating each transaction in accordance with the impersonal supply-demand rule (Offer, 1997).

As opposed to free-market, autonomous economies, moral economies are thus culturally embedded, marked by the prevalence of the customary law and kinship relations over market forces (Arnold, 2014, p. 86, see also: Granovetter, 1985; Polanyi, 1944). We believe that Burundian *collines* exhibit a number of features of embedded economies, as agricultural production and exchange serve not only economic, but also social, political and cultural orders. Economic activities are defined and legitimized by moral beliefs, values and norms (Scott, 1977; see also: Fafchamps, 1992; Sayer, 2007). These are reinforced by a fundamental rule of a peasant society: the ethic of subsistence, granting the right to sustenance to each and every member of the community. Culturally sanctioned and historically reinforced, the ethics of subsistence tends to override what traditional economic theory refers to as rational economic behavior. Patronage and clientelism regulate the community life via a dense social network of interdependencies, and the principle of reciprocity warrants the survival of the group under the conditions of scarcity.

Scott and Wolf argue that, by imposing capitalism, the colonial powers “commercialized” the peasant societies of Africa, a process similar to Polanyi’s “great transformation” (Gangster et al., 1997). For the purpose of our analysis, though, we choose to focus not the mechanics of moral

economy in terms of agricultural production, but on the way in which these mechanics imprinted onto the social strata, legitimizing certain economic behaviors over others. In broad view, moral economy challenges the legitimacy of the market, preserving an alternative exchange system of subsistence products from market penetration (Guyer, 2004).

In our analysis, we cautiously apply some of the principal concepts of moral economy like embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985), fair price principle (Thompson, 1971) or risk aversion (Scott, 1977) in order to account for the successes and challenges encountered by the micro-social enterprises in the very first stage of the implementation of program *Lumière*. The theoretical background of moral economy provides a coherent framework, allowing us to explain the observed behaviors of the program participants in response to the new, engaged model of practicing development—the community social enterprise. We draw on the evidence of London, Stuart and Hart, who argue that the success of economic interventions in settings like rural Africa is conditional on recognizing that Western-style patterns of economic behavior may not occur in peasant environments (London & Hart, 2004). We study the community-based social enterprise as an example of strong participation in the context of a moral economic order, trying to identify its prospects to boost the sustainability of the development interventions in Burundi.

4. METHOD

Our explorative study was conducted in November 2013, and was preceded with several months of direct, non-controlled observation of the rural communities in Burundi performed in relation to other projects. For the data collection itself, we have adopted a mix-method approach that unfolded in two stages.

The first stage of the research entailed background reading and a literature review of the agrarian history of the region. Subsequently, we focused on secondary sources, conducting a comprehensive analysis of the archival documents of the field partner implementing the project (the local NGO – Amade) including annual reports, program documents and monthly balance statements of the pilot study “*Lumière*”. This information served as ground preparation for the study proper.

The second stage of the investigation involved field data collection. We conducted semi-structured individual interviews with the senior staff and the field workers (“animators”) of the NGO Amade. In this way, we were able to cross-check the information derived from our secondary sources and also sketch a timeline for their work with the groups: the subsequent stages of participation, the evolving projects and their guiding logics. We then organized site visits to the nine communities selected for the project, and conducted dual-moderator group interviews (with a translator) with all the groups.

Since the communities participating in the project were located in remote, far-off rural areas, accessing them was only possible with the help of the NGO. In order not to disrupt the daily work of the farmers—some of whom travel from afar—we asked for the visits to be arranged around the usual weekly meetings of the group members. After the habitual proceedings were completed, the NGO officers were respectfully asked to leave and we asked the group members to stay along for an informal discussion session.

As a rule, the qualitative investigation paradigm proposes to reduce power relations between the participants (Maxwell,

2013). In order to stress our non-partiality, we also ensured our respondents of the unconditional anonymity and confidentiality of the study. For this reason, we also refrained from collecting any categorical variables, as these could serve as easy identifiers of the speakers (Almlund, 2013).

Despite several measures undertaken to encourage disclosure and authenticity between researchers and participants, certain amount of distrust proved unavoidable. For example, on many occasions, after offering a critical opinion on some aspect of the program, the speakers would hastily add that they are still happy with it, and willing to continue.

In an equally informal manner we also held a few additional individual interviews with three of the nine group leaders. Subsequently, we performed a simple mapping activity, aimed at estimating the geographic range of micro-enterprises’ operations (Chapin, Lamb, & Threlkeld, 2005). Together with the respondents, we speculated how far the Burundian villagers would be willing to travel in order to obtain a better lighting source, and we confronted it with the distances that the respondents marked on paper print-outs of the neighboring *collines*.

Finally, in order to broaden the spectrum of individual experiences with the day-to-day operations of the enterprises and their clients, we attempted two short rounds of a photo-voice project. Tanguy and Torero (2015) found the photo-voice method particularly effective in rural Ethiopia where they were mapping the social interactions and their effects on the households’ decision to participate in a newly installed electrical grid. In our case, sensitive to the power imbalances in photography projects, instead of focusing on the visual material, we used the photographs as prompts in order to stimulate a more detailed account of the daily experience of running the social enterprise (Harley, 2012). Hence, we do not perform an analysis of the visual material per se, but used the photographs in the interviews to stimulate the narrative flow. Applied as such, the photographs helped us elicit important information that was not covered in our interview protocols, like the time management issue.⁴

All the interviews were recorded in Kirundi, transcribed in French and subsequently analyzed with the help of the qualitative analysis software Atlas-Ti (Creswell, 2013). It is important to note the significance of the translation practices. Both early phase (in the field, with the moderator) and late phase (after transcription) translation were applied (Santos *et al.*, 2015). While we observed a number of small discrepancies between the two, we assumed—after Krzywoszynska (2015)—that, in cross-cultural research, translation is less about the decoding of texts, and more about coming to understand facts and practices in context. We thus explored the storyline of the implementation of project *Lumière*, focusing on actors, their perceptions, actions, and behaviors.

Peer review (both in the field and back in the academia) and external audit (presentations at seminars and conferences) were applied as a means to maximize the validity of the analyzed concepts. Low-inference descriptors and direct quotations constitute a large part of the analysis in order to increase the internal reliability of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

The method of organizing the results is as follows: we begin by re-creating a narrative chronological account of the project “*Lumière*” from the point of its launch three months prior (Langley, 1999). Basing on the quantitative data (sales records), we identify the “problem areas” for the micro social enterprises. Building on this output, we then narrow our focus onto the following issues: actors/setting, rules/management, outcomes/objectives, identifying the points of friction between the context of rural Burundi and the social enterprise model.

In the course of the analysis, we triangulate our results with the outcomes of the analysis of sales records, and illustrate them with examples provided by the interviewees.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

I say: from the beginning the way I remember it, we (the families who took in orphan children) started getting together to help each other, and hence we started a co-op, to see if we can save, so that we can help one another through group lending. And then a branch of NGO Amade opened here, to also help orphans and vulnerable people. They taught us to do this: we all chip in together in this group so that our orphans can go to school, and they helped us. And later they told us that there was a project that was going to come here to us, because the children have no way to study in the dark. They told us they were going to come here, and we can get a machine that produces energy so that even our orphans can study, and we welcomed that plan (19, 0128, Gitega, Itaba, Mvaro).

(a) Green and social micro-enterprises—project Lumière

The intervention under study is a pilot project implemented by the UNICEF Burundi Innovation Lab and a local non-governmental organization NGO FVS Amade on a sample of nine communities. Ultimately, assuming the positive results of the pilot, the intervention is to be scaled up to cover three whole provinces of the country.⁵

The NGO started off their operations with the community child protection committees (CPCs) in three rural provinces of Burundi (1992–2002). As the cooperation continued and grew, many of the groups have become influential structures in their respective communities, participating in capacity-building campaigns, awareness—raising training, micro savings cooperatives, and a number of donor-based interventions (2006–present). Table 1 illustrates how, through subsequent projects, the child protection committees (now called Nawa-Nuze) evolved through deepening stages of participation, gradually acquiring decision-making power.

Following the self-sustainability trend that has dominated the development sector following the economic crisis and the growing popularity of microfinance, the NGO has decided to equip the committees with an income-generating opportunity (Calvo & Morales, 2015). A participatory needs assessment was performed by the NGO's field officers

(“animateurs”) and revealed that energy deprivation was one of the most pressing issues for their communities. Accordingly, the NGO's management partnered up with the newly created UNICEF-Burundi Innovation Lab. As a result of this cooperation, each of the groups was equipped with a green-energy generator machine (a NuruEnergy generator), to be paid off on an interest-free micro-loan basis (see Section 5(c) for the detailed description of the business model). By selling the specially designed rechargeable lamps and billing the prospective buyers for recharge, the groups are expected to become self-sustainable, community social enterprises. The profits are to benefit the groups' social mission: supporting the orphan children in the village or other social projects of the group (Figure 1).

According to the project design (by NGO Amade and UNICEF), each group that has purchased the energy generator is to work toward achieving the multiple bottom line. The two subsequent sections give further details on (b) the social objectives that the groups' aim to achieve and (c) the social business model that should allow them to attain economic sustainability.

(b) Double-bottom line: social mission

In Burundi, less than 5% of the population have access to the national electricity grid (the average in Sub-Saharan Africa is 26%), living in energy deprivation and relying on kerosene lanterns and candles for light, and on wood for cooking and heat (The United Nations Statistics Division Energy Statistics Database, 2015). Especially in the rural areas, an important part of household income is being spent on energy that, in most cases, is insufficient, hazardous and unhealthy (Sesan, 2012; Sokona, Mulugetta, & Gujba, 2012). Inhaling kerosene fumes is damaging for the health of women and children and kerosene-related accidents are a frequent cause of burns (Albi & Lieberman, 2013; Bailis, Cowan, Berrueta, & Masera, 2009). Since kerosene and candles cannot be domestically produced, supplying them incurs high transaction costs (expenditure on travel plus time investment). Lack of access to electricity is thus both a cause and an effect of unremitting poverty (OECD/IEA, 2010). For this reason, alleviating energy poverty has been identified as one of the social objectives of project Lumière, and selling energy became the economic income generating strategy for the project participants.

The underlying assumption of project Lumière is to contribute to diminishing energy poverty by empowering

Table 1. Stages of participation—Amade—managed Child Protection Committees, Nawa-Nuze

Community mobilization	Weak participation	Strong participation	Project management	Project ownership	Self-mobilization
Collective action	Local knowledge	Empowerment	Control	Sustainability	Self-reliance
Community members agree to participate, also because they need resources	Communities are consulted, social capital mobilization	Communities take part in a particular stage of the project, for a particular purpose	Joint decision making; power-sharing	Autonomous decisions regarding the project taken by community	Innovation, coming up with own project initiatives
Formation of the Nawa Nuze child protection committees; forming savings cooperatives	Children's protection committees—group members commit to care for the orphans in the village	School supplies program—group members agree to mobilize funds for school fees and uniforms for the orphans	Social Enterprise—Project Lumière—groups become social enterprises: they distribute rechargeable lamps, sell energy and generate income to support their orphans' fund		Bururi—Kaninya—group members' own initiative to offer credit to orphan children willing to work during holidays ^a

^a More details in analysis.

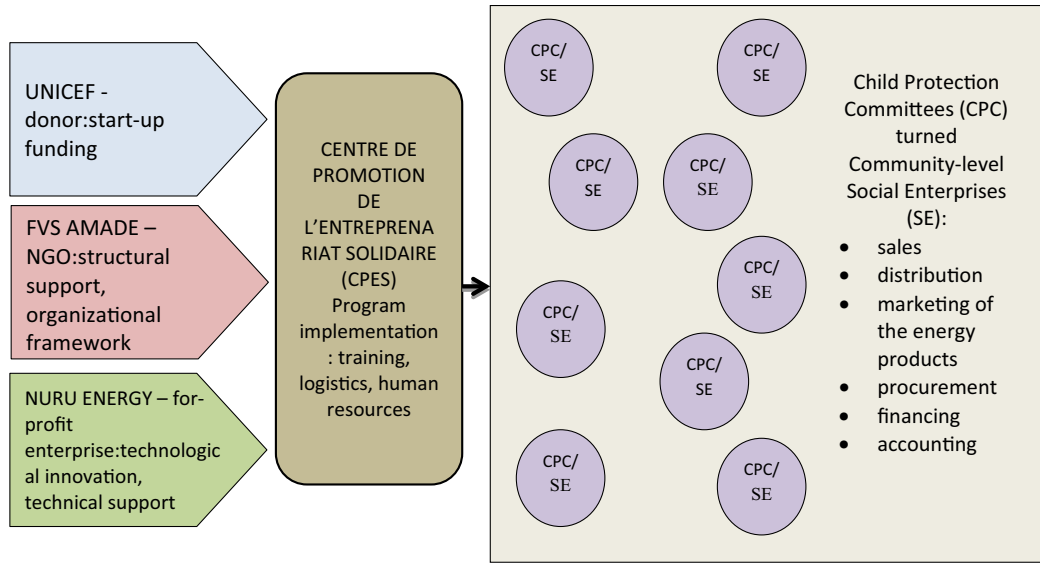


Figure 1. *Project Lumière—social enterprise model.*

communities with a reliable, clean and sustainable energy source. The project aims to leverage the power of the market and create a chain reaction of mutually reinforced social and economic impacts. Table 2 presents an overview of the many social objectives that the community-based micro social enterprises are expected to meet.

(c) *Double-bottom line: social business*

In the social enterprise model, the main objective is not to maximize financial returns but to provide the missing service for the destitute. Nonetheless, while financial success is not a priority, social enterprises are expected to break even at the very least. Donor assistance is foreseen at the early stage of the venture, but in principle, social enterprises are to finance themselves.

Since the intervention under study is intended as a pilot project, three different pricing plans were designed for the nine communities in question (Table 3). The real cost of the generator amounts to 275 USD. All the groups were required to pull together the down-payment of 58 USD. The remaining 217 USD were to be paid in monthly installments over the period

of two years. Together with the generator, each group received the initial tranche of 116 lamps, to be sold by the groups either below (UNICEF subsidization) or at real price (around 6.5 USD, see Table 3 below). Since the machines are man-powered (bicycles), the cost of producing energy is limited to the opportunity cost of the operator. In less than 5 min, five lamps can be fully charged. One lamp is expected to provide bright light for up to 28 h (one full week) on a full recharge.

In order to pay the monthly installment, the groups should distribute at least 300 lamps and have the households recharge them at least once a week. Prior to receiving the machines, the groups had to declare the readiness of at least 300 households in the vicinity to buy and use the new lamp. Participation in the project was voluntary; the NGO extended the offer to the nine most active of its 971 child protection committees. Training sessions were organized, including technical management of the power-generators and the teachings of the sales/pricing models.

In the previous sections, we explained the assumptions of the project under study, outlining both its social objectives and sustainable business credentials. With reference to the social enterprise definition discussed at length in the

Table 2. *Social enterprise “Lumière”—multiple bottom lines drawn for the groups*

Social objectives	Assumed benefits
Furthering the social mission of the group Poverty alleviation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds generated through recharging the lamps are used to support the orphans’ fund: food and clothing, school supplies, uniforms, school fees for the orphans
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Households that purchase the lamps are able to reduce their energy expenditure Households save on opportunity costs (no need to travel to the market to get kerosene/petroleum)
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a clean energy source decreases the occurrence of kerosene-related health issues (respiratory diseases, eye irritation, skin rashes, headaches etc.) Less health hazards resulting from kerosene-related accidents
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children who work in the fields after school can still study after dark, improve their school performance and graduation prospects Green energy (man-powered bicycles): clean, renewable, reliable; helps eliminate harmful fumes

Table 3. Pricing models: variation 1, 2, and 3; all prices in USD

	Price of the generator	Price of the rechargeable lamp	Price of the recharge
Model 1	257	5	0.25
Model 2	275	5.8	0.19
Model 3	275	6.5	0.13

theoretical section, we feel confident to claim that project Lumière exemplifies a model social enterprise: an organization seeking market-based solutions to social problems. Table 4 summarizes the criteria outlined by Haugh (2007), highlighting the relevant features of project “Lumière”.

Importantly, the details outlined above also illustrate how the social enterprise model adopted by the project embodies what Michener (1998) described as strong participation. The nine pilot groups are in fact supposed to become semi-autonomous economic structures, holistically responsible for the execution of the project. The sales, marketing, and distribution of the lamps, managing the energy generator, marketing and accounting of energy sales, balancing credit for the machine, and re-investing the profits in the orphans’ fund are only some of the tasks that the groups are to perform. Partnership and ceding control are the benchmarks of the intervention, ushering into a seemingly new way of practicing development.

In the light of the recent work of Swidler and Watkins (2009), “the doctrine of sustainability adds to these participatory approaches a profoundly moral invocation to the poor: that they should become self-reliant, mobilizing their own energies and resources to solve their own problems” (1184). The authors further argue that projects might achieve sustainability generating their own revenues. In the following section, we take a closer look at the environment in which the social enterprises are supposed to function, highlighting both the challenges and success factors.

(d) Prospects and pitfalls—three months into the project

Actually, we are all here in this association (child protection committee, CPC). So after joining this association called NAWE NUZE (Kirundi: “Come on, you too!”), there came a time when they (the NGO) came to teach us a new thing. They told us they would give us the lamps and this lamp is called MURIKIRANIGE (Kirundi: “Give me light so that I can study”). They told us that this lamp will reduce our problems, that very soon we will no longer have sore eyes and that this light, this lamp, does not break down easily. They also told us that we can attach this lamp on the forehead, so that we don’t have to hold it in hand while at work (P2, 0141, Bururi, Murago). (...) They also told us that the machine was not a gift; we would give a certain amount (P19, 0128, Gitega, Mvaro) (...). We welcomed the proposed light because before the arrival of these lamps, people were concerned about the means of

education for the children. So we welcomed this project and yes, it helps us a lot. (...) It delights us much (P1, 0134, Makamba).⁶

As illustrated by the above fragment, project Lumière was well received by the groups. As the program unrolled, however, people’s perceptions shifted, shaped by both positive and negative experiences with the model.

Three months’ time into the program might seem a very early stage for evaluating the actual financial performance of the microenterprises. At the same time, BoP research proves that while behavioral change takes time, the dissemination of innovation occurs rather rapidly among the BoP consumers, due to word-of-mouth recommendations and market readiness (Pansera & Owen, 2015; Weidner *et al.*, 2010).⁷ We believe that the initial numbers help us single out important patterns and trends, highlighting the themes that undergo further analysis in the proceeding qualitative section of the paper. There are three important observations that we find especially worthy of further investigation.

First, the relative success of the groups in distributing the lamps seems to depend more on the province where the microenterprise is located than on the price of the lamp. As Table 5 illustrates, the groups of Bururi sold the most lamps, regardless of the price, and even managed to start distributing the second tranche. The groups of Gitega, however, sold a little over half of their devices. These findings point out to the importance of both the differences in economic development of the provinces (Gitega being one of the poorest provinces) and the efficiency of self-organizing and entrepreneurial culture. Second, the price of the recharge does play a role, with provinces charging 200 FBU for one recharge having overwhelmingly more individual recharges per lamp buyer. Third, after paying the initial down-payment, none of the groups has paid the installments of the loans taken to purchase the energy generators.

The analysis presented below has been divided into three subsections, corresponding to the main thematic fields of the interviews. The analysis takes the form of a structured exploratory overview; it is aimed at identifying general patterns and explaining the prevalent phenomena. The “actors/setting” section focuses on how the group members see their new role as social entrepreneurs and how they envision their cooperation with partners. The subsequent section, “rules/management” analyzes the adoption of the organizational structure of a social enterprise; its governing principles and business logic. Finally, the section on “outcomes/objectives” scrutinizes

Table 4. Social enterprise criteria with reference to the Lumière project, based on Haugh (2007)

Social Enterprise Criteria	Project Lumière—Child protection committees
Pursue a social purpose.	Social—benefit organizations, with multiple bottom lines
Operate via trading in a market place	The groups sell rechargeable lamps at production cost and then generate income by selling energy to lamp owners (supply–demand model)
Business-led solutions	The pricing model tailored for the local context, in accordance with a business model that assumes full sustainability over the period of two years
Profits re-invested to create community benefit	All profits pulled to benefit the orphan’s fund
Non-financial measures	Impact on household wellbeing as measure of success, sustainability

Table 5. *Performance overview—lamps and recharge sales per group*

Province	Commune	Recharge price	Lamp price	Number of individual recharges in 3 months' time	Total number of lamps sold	Repayment of the loan for the energy generators
GITEGA	MAKEBUKO	0.19	5.8	101	61	0
	NYARUSANGE	0.25	5.0	65	70	0
	ITABA	0.13	6.5	100	67	0
Subtotal					198	0
MAKAMBA	KAYOGORO	0.13	6.5	127	116	0
	MABANDA	0.19	5.8	100	116	0
	NYANZA-LAC	0.25	5.0	120.25	116	0
Subtotal					348	0
BURURI	SONGA	0.19	5.8	248	196	0
					326	0
					129	0
	BURURI	0.25	5.0	163	86	0
BUYENGERO	0.13	6.5	159	86	0	
Subtotal					823	0
TOTAL GENERAL					1,369	0

the groups' attitudes toward the immediate and long-term effects of the intervention.

(i) *Who are the entrepreneurs? Actors/setting*

The model of a social enterprise, as described above, assumes that independent economic agents—buyers and sellers—interact in a free market environment. In rural Burundi, however, economic behavior was found to be deeply submerged in social relations, in accordance with the [Granovetter's \(1985\)](#) concept of embeddedness. Solidarity bonds define the setting for the project, as they tie members of a same family, neighborhood, or village together. Those bonds manifest themselves in a wide variety of ways, including assistance to the vulnerable, the sick and the needy, but also forced reciprocity and free-riding. Productive assets and excess resources are redistributed along the solidarity systems, governed by delayed reciprocity. Group solidarity, as a form of mutual insurance and collective responsibility, warrants survival in the face of scarcity. As one of the respondents, already a lamp owner, put it: “*many of us say that if we could reduce these (high) prices, we would all be equal in the association and this machine could generate much more profit for us (...)* And since some of us have bought these lights and others have not, we'll all end up in a bad place” (P12, 0127, Gitega, Kigara). Strong social relationships create interdependency among members, highlighting the role of powerful group influences, including the sense of obligation toward the weaker and the principle of reciprocity ([Viswanathan, Sridharan, & Ritchie, 2008](#)). (This village group), *it's all of us together, but we have leaders. These are the people who are standing over there and it is they who have the first word* (P1, 0127, Gitega, Kigara)—remarked one of the respondents. A good example of such influences is the way in which some of the groups obliged their own members to buy out the initial tranche of lamps, seeing it as their duty as role models for the rest of the community. Going even further, one group in Bururi, Murago decided to charge higher lamp and recharge prices to their own members, in order to generate higher profits for the micro-enterprise and to compensate for the insufficient monthly income. Socially legitimized hierarchy imprints onto economic behavior, elevating the purchase of the lamp to the status-marker within the community.

Interestingly, the hierarchical mode of economic reasoning also influences the relationship that the group microenterprises develop with partners, both the NGO Amade and UNICEF. By identifying themselves as weaker/poorer than the partners, the groups expect to receive the benefits of patronage—a relationship contrary to market relations of parties of equal standing ([Graeber, 2011, p. 108](#)). *About this project, you see, what we see is that we're really poor. . . Countries are really different, you see, and in here, at our place, we are really poor (. . .). As for me, what I could say about this price (of the lamp), it is that there are people here who cannot have these eight thousand francs. There are widows, people who do not have such means, whether or not they are with money. That's where the difficulty lies. There are all those widows and other vulnerable people* (0135 P5, Makamba Kigamba). Just like the speaker in the above quote, a large part of the group members univocally identified themselves as poor or very poor. With chronic poverty still prevalent in the rural areas of Burundi, the group members strive for basic needs fulfillment, in particular the provisioning of food and clothing. Diverting scarce resources from these priorities is a cognitive decision entailing sacrifices on the part of the entire household—a decision that is both risky, and difficult to take. *They* (NGO Amade and UNICEF) *can help us by giving us credit. . . So that some of us could buy the basic things, buy clothes, and raise goats because without goat manure we cannot cook, and we cannot eat. There are many of us who do not have any goat now, because of poverty, and so I ask them to really help us* (P13, 0127, Gitega, Kigara).

This way of perceiving the partnership is, in ways, at odds with the free-market mechanisms of exchange. In barter economies, the objects being traded are seen as equal, and so are the people involved in the transaction ([Graeber, 2011](#)). In contrast, in societies with strong hierarchical relationships, independent exchange of goods and services and parallel partnerships are almost non-existent. “*Whenever the lines of superiority and inferiority are clearly drawn and accepted by all parties as the framework of a relationship, and relations are sufficiently ongoing that we are no longer simply dealing with arbitrary force, the relations will be seen as being regulated by a web of habit and custom*” ([Graeber, 2011, p. 110](#)). In the case of the groups under study, these hierarchical relationships have been legitimized by the many years in which the NGO/UNICEF assumed the role of the leaders/providers,

and the groups adopted the identity of aid recipients/beneficiaries. It can be deduced that in some ways these naturalized forms of authority, hierarchy and stratification hinder the groups from pursuing independent entrepreneurial efforts (Table 6). The next section analyzes this issue in more detail, explaining the rules and principles that were found to govern the inter- and intra-group relations in our study.

(ii) *How do the enterprises operate? Rules/management*

As presented in the preceding section, our data suggest that in rural Burundi, as a result of the embedded institutions, normative decision making tends to prevail over the agents' individual utility maximization. To the large majority of the respondents, it seemed "unnatural" that anybody should profit by denying others the basic right to relative wellbeing. The "ethics of subsistence" manifested itself in a variety of ways, the most prevalent of which pertains to the attitudes that the groups have taken toward their prospective customers. The predominant view held that every member of the community should have the right to benefit from the new light, and the benefits of the innovation should reach even the poorest households. These mechanisms come clearly into view when discussing the financial aspects of the microenterprise: the prices of the lamps, the recharge, and the loan installments for the energy generators.

Many of the respondents maintained that a traditional "fair price" (i.e., the price that was affordable to all, and historically legitimized) was more important to the community than the price dictated by the market. Even though all of the three proposed recharge pricing plans were ultimately cheaper for the households than the traditional lighting sources, it is the price of 200 FBU per recharge that was univocally deemed "suitable" by the groups. Interestingly, even when asked whether offering lower prices (100 FBU) would be better suited, the groups maintained that the fair asking price is indeed 200 FBU—the price that for many years bought a quarter of a quart of kerosene, affordable and accepted by all.

Another example of the ethics of subsistence is the groups' perception of the price of the energy generators. As mentioned above, not one of the microenterprises has made an attempt to pay the first installment of the outstanding loan for the machine that had been granted at the beginning of the program. The group members tended to find the installments too high, but their reasoning did not question the price per se, but the affordability of the payment to be made at this point of the program. "This project is good but it is expensive. For example, speaking of the machine (energy generator), you see that it's a heavy price for the group, and for anyone who is expected to give such big money. This rental money, there are times when people do not come to recharge their lamps as was intended, and look at those of us who brought this machine! These lamps do not keep the money coming the whole time. To pay for this machine, we have to go

to the family savings and to that money that we use to help orphaned children back here. This is not right" (P13 0133, Makamba, Kayogoro). In view of the group members, the rate of the loan could be high, provided that the generator would "earn for itself", and that what was left would be enough to cover the socially oriented expenses of the groups (the orphans' fund). The "what is left" principle also derives from the ethics of subsistence, where the agents higher in social hierarchy get homage and allegiance from the poor and vulnerable, and they grant them the means of subsistence and security in return. In fact, in some of the groups the total price of the generator was not even acknowledged by the members: they assumed they would be paying the installments forever, an arrangement closely resembling the practice of sharecropping, and they found it acceptable as long as the monthly installments would not exceed their limited means.

In terms of attitudes toward entrepreneurship the populations under study proved to be risk averse and following the "safety first" principle. Just as they would not adopt risky cash crops, persuading them to switch to innovative lighting technology proved to be difficult. In moral economies, agrarian households operate in a world with a substantial random component in the outcome of their efforts. In response to uncertainty, traditional ways are seen as potentially reducing the likelihood of severe shortfalls, although they may not maximize the expected value of output. In our study, the initial investment in the price of the lamps proved to belong to the category of such very risky decisions. One piece of evidence of such behavior is the difficulty in distributing the lamps in the poorer *collines*. (Question): among your neighbors, there are many who would still want to buy these lamps? P6: There are many but they are so, so afraid of this price! (0133, Makamba, Kayogoro). Another good example can be found in the incident at Itaba, the province of Gitega, when the communities returned all of their lamps to the microenterprise, which in turn gave them back to the NGO as a result of a word-of-mouth rumor that the energy generator was not charging the lamps to the full (proved to be untrue).

Having stated the above, it must also be noted that some of the groups have demonstrated unexpected entrepreneurial propensity. A group in Makebukoro, Gitega, has taken a brave decision to hire an external person to maintain the generator, while a group from Murago involved neighbors in distributing lamps outside of the *colline*. Three groups have independently started their own crediting programs in order to boost their lamp sales, while a group in Bururi-Kanyinia proposed an initiative allowing their orphans to work during school vacations (Table 7).

(iii) *Where is it all going? Outcomes/objectives*

Interestingly, in terms of outcomes and objectives, the social enterprise model was found to fit very well within the social

Table 6. Moral economy/enterprise comparison: actors/setting

Enterprise—actors/setting	Burundian <i>collines</i> —actors/setting	Examples
Free market	Community	"Supply and demand" mechanisms are limited to households that are within a geographic proximity (result of participatory mapping); there is also no competition
Independent economic agents	Networked community members	In the majority of cases, the only households that bought the lamps are the group members and their immediate neighbors, guided by the sense of obligation and reciprocity
Equality of all subjects	Socially legitimized hierarchy	Buying a lamp becomes a status marker for better-off households. NGO and Unicef are seen as patrons, not partners (e.g., the groups repeatedly ask for subsidies, they also do not even attempt to pay installments for the machines since they have not turned profit)

Table 7. *Moral economy/enterprise comparison: rules/management.*

Enterprise—rules/management	Burundian <i>collines</i> rules/management	Examples
Supply–demand principle	“Fair price” principle	Independently of the actual lamp and recharge prices, which were different in different groups, all of the groups asked for leveling the pricing model with the standing prices of other lighting sources (in some cases, simply changed the dictated prices without consulting the NGO/Unicef)
Ethics of expansion	Ethics of subsistence	Perspectives on the generator rental model: it does not matter to the groups how much they will have to pay for the machine over the period of five years, many were not aware of the total price. What matters is whether the generator supports itself (sustainability) and the surplus funds are enough to support the group’s social mission.
Entrepreneurship	Risk-aversion	The poorer the group, the more risk-averse: example: returning the lamps and withdrawing from the project once a gossip spread that the charging is not effective But: entrepreneurial efforts present (see quotes)

institutions of a moral economy. In both systems, profits are to be re-invested in the social cause, as opposed to being shared by those in charge of the organization. Accordingly, having started off as child protection committees (CPC), the groups were found to be very determined in their primary objective and “social mission”: *We are, like, a special group to help the orphans. And so we also do other development work, we also work in agriculture, but first, our work helps the orphans* (P1, 0127, Gitega, Kigara)—claims one of respondents, a perspective observed in all of the groups.

The respondents univocally claimed that for them, ensuring the profits for the orphans’ fund was the principal aim of the program, in the name of which other social objectives could be compromised and sacrifices endured. Interestingly, even though the new lighting system was designed to be cheaper for the households than the traditional lighting sources, the possible self-interest of the lamp-buyers was found to be almost completely overlooked. From the moment the groups were launched as child protection committees, the idea of practicing philanthropy entailed sacrifice on the part of participating households. Tending to the orphans is costly, and it was precisely the expense spared that counted toward the social standing of a household in the village hierarchy. When *Lumière* started in the villages, buying and recharging the lamps became “the thing to do” for the better-off. *In fact in order to recharge the lamp, one needs to pay two hundred francs and to even buy the lamp it was ten thousand francs! But in addition to this, we must give two hundred francs a week as members of the group, and we must give two hundred francs a week for our orphans. . . . So, do you realize, we must donate four hundred francs a week!* (P3, 0133 Makeba, Kayogoro, Shaka). The group members were reported to have compromised the well-being of their own households in order not to jeopardize the microenterprise’s social mission, mobilizing private funds for the down payment for the energy generator. In Burundian *collines*, those who can afford to care for the vulnerable in the community are socially obligated to do so, and so they purchased the lamps not to benefit their own households, but to show support for the program and its objectives. It was only after a while that some of the group members admitted that the new energy allowed for considerable savings for their own households’ benefit.

The new lamps were also recognized as beneficial for the children’s health and education prospects, though their environmental effects were not acknowledged: *I found that the objective of this project is very good indeed. For example, our children used to use kerosene lamps to study and this lamp consumes dirty oil. And it is the oil fumes that often cause eye dis-*

eases (P3 Murago 0141, Bururi)—concludes one of the respondents. *They (the children) appreciate their new lights; it does not hurt their eyes* (P13, 0133, Makamba). *This (the fact that the lamps do not produce fumes) prompted us to buy them, these lamps that we used before, the screen-oil lamps and candles, then the smoke went inside the children’s noses during their studies, this is why we have seen that this lamp was good.* (P3, Bururi, 0138, Kanyinya). *When we bought these lamps, we were very happy because before these lamps, the children had sore eyes from their studying, but now, when we ask them, they say they have no eyes that are hurt* (P3, 0137, Makamba, Nyanza Lac).

Sustainability of the program was also found to be well integrated. Within the first several weeks of the existence of microenterprises, seven of the groups firmly obliged all their members to purchase the lamps in order to start generating income from recharge. While again providing proof of the socio-cultural embeddedness of the groups (i.e., the lamps being bought not as a result of a supply–demand mechanism but socially imposed obligation), this also means that the idea that the machines should be “earning for themselves” seemed well understood and generally agreed upon.

As Table 8 illustrates, in terms of aims and objectives, the setting of the moral economy provides a congruent background for the implementation of the community-based social enterprise model. Commitment to their social mission and to the non-distribution constraint, as well as the shared understanding that generating income from lamp recharge is the key element in achieving sustainability create a promising prospect for the social enterprise model. At the same time, as shown above, the specificity of the socio-cultural system and the precarious economic situation of the Burundian households seem to constrain the model from achieving full efficacy. While in agreement in focus on social outcomes and increased sustainability, our study unveiled the divergent and culturally embedded understandings of charity, responsibility, rights and obligations that threaten the prosperity prospects of the model. When applied to the context of the Western world, social enterprise is said to have the potential to bring about “transformative social change” by targeting the underprivileged “social” sectors of economy (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004). Understood as such, social entrepreneurs advance a systemic change by modifying dysfunctional power relations in order to arrive at more engaged and equitable development. Achieving “systemic change”, however, was not identified within the aspirations and capacities of the program participants, setting a firm limit to the prospects of increased participation in development interventions. When interviewed, the

Table 8. *Moral economy/enterprise comparison: outcomes/objectives*

Enterprise—outcomes/objectives	Burundian <i>collines</i> —outcomes/objectives	Examples
Social outcomes	Social outcomes	All community members felt obliged to buy the lamps, which was considered a “charitable” behavior, other social objectives often not realized (esp. the environmental)
Sustainability	Sustainability	Sustainability prospects are high for the few groups that embrace the market logic (especially 3 and 9). The program was found to generate savings for households. For the others: resistance and fear, preference for donor-based programs.
Profit re-distribution reinvestment into the social cause	Profit re-distribution reinvestment into the social cause	The groups seem very much committed serving their social goals. Some of the groups chose to charge their member higher fees to increase the chances of project’s success. Many members compensated for the project’s losses from their own pockets
Social transformation	Maintaining the status quo	The groups do not see the social enterprise model as a long-term solution to any of their problems. They accept it as an interim quick-fix that provides temporary relief to households struggling to make ends meet

groups did not see the social enterprise model as a long-term solution to any of their problems. The group members accepted the program and strived to make the most of it, ready to endure personal sacrifices to safeguard the continuous functioning their social enterprises. At the same time, the personal commitment seems short-lived. The communities accepted it as an interim intervention that might benefit the children (orphan’s fund) but the reality of running an actual enterprise exceeds the liquidity capacities of the households and threatens their pro-social orientation, so typical of the moral economic order. *Us, when we looked at it (the program) at the beginning, it was easy for us. But now when it is all mixed and we must keep donating: the sum of two hundred francs per week as members, two hundred francs to orphans, and the money to buy a lamp (. . .). And now, this recharge for the lamp, three hundred francs! All these expenses could push us, members to abandon these orphaned children, and they will then leave school and return to the streets.* (P9, 0138, Bururi, Kanyinia).

The theory of moral economy allows us to understand the inhibitors faced by rural communities when attempting to reconcile their traditional ways of dealing with social issues with the new development model. Entrepreneurial, system-challenging initiatives do not always flourish in this framework because the objective of community members is to reinterpret their identity within the existing structures rather than to create new opportunities for displacing those structures. Consistent in their philanthropic role, the group members seemed unable to reconcile their charitable orientation and a market-based model (see also: [Marson & Savin, 2015](#) for conflict between financial and charity objectives).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Our study investigated the propensity of the agrarian communities in rural Burundi to accommodate the newly emergent development model of a community-managed micro social enterprise. Introduced as an innovative income-generating strategy for the village groups, the intervention understudy employed the market-based approach to help the groups pursue a number of social objectives. Following [Sud, Vansandt, and Baugous \(2009\)](#), we call into question the ability of the social enterprise, by itself, to provide sustainable solutions on a scope necessary to address multiple or/and large-scale social issues.

(a) *Project Lumière—a recount*

The results of our research show that the groups participating in the pilot study initially appreciated the social enterprise model and were in agreement with its market-based assumptions. At the same time, despite the three hundred pre-declared prospective lamps-buyers per *colline*, the sales results for both the new lamps (two out of three provinces) and power recharge (all the provinces) proved to be dangerously below the expected level. Three months into the program, none of the groups have managed to generate enough earnings to pay for the monthly installment for the generators. These results are especially surprising considering that the new energy is supposed to be substantially cheaper for the rural households in comparison with the traditional lighting sources, like oil and kerosene. This apparent advantage, however, for the large part accounts for the observed difficulties: the obvious profitability of the innovation was to drive the diffusion of the innovation within the *collines*. The households in question were expected to adopt the new technology, replacing the traditional ways of lighting which were doomed inefficient and pricey. In other words, market forces were expected to induce, drive and foster behavioral change.

Such a proposition turned out more complex when implemented in the field reality. As observed by [Sesan et al.](#), innovations in development require more differentiation than can be achieved with profit-driven business models ([Sesan et al., 2013](#)). Considering that the majority of the buyers also continued to use other, traditional lighting sources might mean that they did not see an immediate need nor a want for the new lamps, despite the positive results of the needs assessment survey ([Ramani, SadreGhazi, & Duysters, 2012](#)). These findings point to an important factor influencing the adoption rate of innovations: in addition to technological and economic, the cultural aspects also influence the uptake and usage of the lamps ([Sesan, 2012](#)).

At the level of the social enterprise, we have identified three problem areas for the intervention. A careful analysis of the context (actors/setting) revealed that the financial dealings between the community members in Burundian *collines* are in fact regulated by a network of inter-dependencies and hierarchical orders that may override the economic-efficient behavior (compare: [Schneeg, 2015](#)). We came to understand the community as a relational system that perpetuates specific ideological and cultural contents that both constrain and

enable the functional capacities of its members (Bernard, De Janvry, & Sadoulet, 2010; Kebede & Zizzo, 2011). In the case of Burundi, community became equivalent with a *colline*: a group of people linked by common beliefs, norms and values. Apart from regulating the social life, these links imprint onto the mechanisms of production, consumption and exchange. The rules of kinship, patronage, and reciprocity proved to, at times, hinder the entrepreneurial initiatives of the group members (rules/management). Finally, though socially oriented and deeply committed to their charitable causes, the groups were found to adhere to the traditional donor-based model, seeing development agents as patrons rather than partners, and positioning themselves as patrons to the orphans (outcomes/objectives). While aware of the benefits of increased economic sustainability, the majority of respondents approached the intervention as an interim, one-off bid and did not recognize its power-shifting potential. Accordingly, while the social enterprise can be seen as a way of making the market approach more “social”, we do not find evidence that it could usher into an alternative way of practicing development. Seen from the perspective of BoP and CDD literatures, social enterprise model might seem as a useful way to increase the engagement of the rural populations in development interventions. At the same time, our findings show that socio-cultural variables may have a profound effect on how local factors (alternative market structures, relational systems and networks) need to be taken into account when designing interventions across contexts (see also: Marquis & Battilana, 2009).

(b) *Beyond anthropology—moral economy as a useful framework*

Our study employed the theoretical framing of moral economy in order to account for the observed “points of friction” between the market-based model of a social enterprise and the context of a small rural community. Even though the majority of historians and cultural anthropologists applied the theory moral economy mainly to pre-capitalist societies, recent research proves that it also find it useful in relation to modern societies (see e.g., Langan, 2012; Olsen, 2009).⁸ Andrew Sayer (2000, p. 2) writes that moral economy “embodies norms and sentiments regarding the responsibilities and rights of individuals and institutions with respect to others. These norms and sentiments go beyond matters of justice and equality, to conceptions of the good, for example regarding needs and the ends of economic activity.” Seen as such, moral economy framework does not reflect on instrumental economic rationality, but the embeddedness of all economic systems in a broader sociopolitical environment (Sanghera & Satybaldieva, 2007).

At the same time, in the era of globalization, the increased exposure of rural communities to financial markets is unavoidable. When this happens, however, the supportive local network of neighborly interdependencies may turn into a potentially harmful apparatus of power: (...) “the monetization of individual social networks is likely to cannibalize trust and undermine existing norms, and in the process, reduce the solidarity necessary for collective action” (Levien, 2015, p. 88). In his analysis of the dark side of social capital, the author pointedly illustrates how the clash of traditional structures with the influx of external capital—“the solvent of solidarity”—corrodes the existing social networks, hindering equitable growth. Within the theory of moral economy it is possible to account for such processes in a structured and logical manner, neither glorifying modernization and progress nor romanticizing the peasant way of life.

(c) *Participation and development—concluding remarks*

As the above analysis illustrates, the groups under study have undergone a long transformation, increasing in autonomy and responsibilities. This process tends to be linked with particular claims to group identity and, consequently, agency: participating in decision making processes increases the awareness of rights while project “ownership” induces the sense of entitlement and obligation. In other words, our results suggest that participation does increase the sustainability prospects of projects via its empowering effect on subjects and groups.

The overlooked element of the debate is, however, closely linked to the fundamental question of development: what is empowerment supposed to lead to, or what is the final value to which participation is aspiring. Material wellbeing, social equality, and economic sustainability are often mentioned, but in principal, participation is expected to lead to relative viability of the development interventions to perpetuate themselves within the established social structures (Lyons, Smuts, & Stephens, 2001, see also: Friedmann, 1996). In order to establish the endogenous mechanisms within communities to transform themselves without outside help it is crucial for the development agents to gradually relinquish control, steadily leaving the projects in the hands of the beneficiary populations. Such “systemic change”, however, is only possible if we conceptualize development as the “ability acquired and held by communities over time to initiate and control development, thus enabling communities to participate more effectively in their own destiny” (Lyons et al., 2001, p. 1237).

Overall, increasing participation in the form of a social enterprise was found to be a promising novel form of practicing development but not necessarily a tool for a power-shifting systemic change (Mosse, 2001). In *Participation—The New Tyranny* (2001), Cooke and Kothari warned against some dangers of misconstrued participation, the echoes of which were identified also in project Lumière.

The first threat concerns the permissibility of using the social enterprise model to achieve better project outcomes. While it is argued that participation allows for the projects to be effectively integrated into the realities of the concerned communities, it can also require contributions in the form of workforce, funds, and resources and thus transfer some of the project costs onto the beneficiaries (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; see also: Mosse, 2001; Stirrat, 1997). In the name of cost-effectiveness, the recipient populations become “individualized” and “responsibilized”, replacing the absent or inefficient state agent (Fernando, 2006). Following this line of reasoning, it is perhaps advisable to ask whether the populations involved in project Lumière—impoverished rural communities—can sensibly be expected to tend to the even more vulnerable—the village orphans—without outside help.

The second threat brings attention to participation as a process which enhances the capacity of the impoverished populations to improve their own socio-economic standing. The new paradigm of participation, it is argued, is little more than a surface rhetoric that assumes no more than an instrumental role on the part of the local people. The critics argue that, in such cases, the increased capacity does not go beyond short-term involvement in a particular one-off project, failing to target the power structures that perpetuate the unequal status quo (Gujit & Shah, 1998). Accordingly, while the Lumière groups under study did indeed fully participate in the program implementation, their perspective was not considered in the design of the project: social enterprise model, the pricing plans or the allocation of responsibilities.

In view of these results, we propose that more qualitative, in-depth, context-specific evidence is needed in order to achieve a better comprehension of the processes involved in the adoption, spread and sustainability of the innovative development interventions in the field. It requires the involvement of all the stakeholders, including the academics, but also, practitioners, local governments, and the NGOs working on the ground.

We believe that these findings contribute to the current debate on communities and entrepreneurialization in development and management studies. Our study brought attention to the benefits of participation, while also highlighting the challenges of the agrarian setting that may undermine its potential to bring about a systemic social change. The search for innovative breakthroughs, primarily driven by the concerns about inefficacy of the current development models and declining donor capital, encounters the problem of the transferability of models across contexts. In the case of rural Burundi, due to the unique characteristics of subsistence marketplaces and large-scale economic deprivation, such approaches might require an additional re-evaluation.

With this paper, we attempt to address an important issue of the development sector at present: the adoption of the new engaged development models by the recipient populations in the least developed countries. It responds to the need for both research and practice to understand the impacts that the “paradigm shift” in development has exerted on individuals and communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, Burundi in particular. By focusing on the contextual, social and cultural factors that either foster or inhibit the adoption of the new, participatory, entrepreneurial approach, it aims to help guide the design and the projects’ implementation schemes of future interventions.

While this paper does not question the relationship between the empowering effect of entrepreneurship and the participatory approach to development, it does speculate whether the empowerment extends beyond the poor’s participation in markets (Sinkovics, Sinkovics, & Yamin, 2014). In view of the future research, it invites investigations of the effects that the engaged development models have on civic empowerment, examining their potential to extend beyond the producer/consumer identities and to achieve a true systemic change.

NOTES

1. We apply the term “moral economy” in accordance with the enlisted theories, as an alternative economic order. Our use of the term does not, therefore, entail a normative judgement (e.g. moral vs. immoral). See Götz (2015) for more reference.
2. See e.g., Santos (2012) for the examples of the applications of the social enterprise model in addressing the problems of unemployment among the youth, healthcare and regional poverty.
3. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness further reiterated this claim, pledging donors’ commitment to developing countries’ ownership of the development processes. See: The Paris declaration on aid effectiveness: five principles for smart aid (OECD, 2005).
4. For example, one of the photographs presented a lone man, sitting on the floor next to the machine operator; the narrative of the respondent revealed that even though the process of recharging up to five lamps takes

only 10 min, it is impossible to predict when the potential clients would arrive. Accordingly, the machine operator needs to spend his days in the vicinity of the generator.

5. Due to the recent outbreak of pre-electoral violence, the future of the intervention is uncertain.
6. Fragments not in italics added by the author.
7. See for example a paper by Biermann, Grupp, and Palmer (1999) on the adoption of solar cookers in South Africa, where data were collected after three months after introducing the product to the households.
8. See, for example, the special issue of the Cambridge Journal of Economics 33 (2009), devoted to the modern applications of the theory of moral economy.

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