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MICROFINANCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: WILL NOT ENSURING CAPACITY BUILDING BE A POTENT TOOL FOR PROMOTING STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

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ABSTRACT

Many of current researches done in various countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), as it regards the impact of microfinancing on entrepreneurship, livelihoods and poverty reduction, comes out with similar recommendation(s): the need for microfinance institutions (MFIs) and/or the government to focus on training, education, skill upgrading, or awareness creation for the MFI clients and the institutions themselves. We link these recommendations to the absence of, and therefore the need for, a well-thought-out curriculum for capacity building as key deliverable of microfinancing in fulfilling its desired effect. As microfinance is deemed to serve the 'unbanked' who are often 'unsophisticated' in their livelihood activities, capacity building becomes as "extension" services to improve clients performance. We associate the intended effects of the provision of capacity building to be in sync with the intensions of structural transformation and sustainable development. This is a concept paper.

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INTRODUCTION

Microfinance, which is the provision of a variety of financial services to poor, low-income people and micro and small enterprises that lack access to banking and related services, is proving vital to empowering communities. It offers significant opportunities for African countries to fully unleash the private sector's potential and contribute to addressing emerging and long lasting development challenges such as poverty, income inequality, high levels of underemployment, particularly among its youth, and the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (now Sustainable Development Goals-SDGs) (UN 2030), as well as in fulfilling Africa Union's Agenda 2063 (see The African Union Commission, 2015, Chapter 2 Aspiration 1). The SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063 represent an enlargement of the development idea; the notion of diversifying economic growth by boosting the division of labour, that is, by moving from largely subsistence traditional livelihood activities to a diversified industrial society. Current development thinking as it regards poverty reduction and economic development in Africa, seeks to enhance the complementarity between structural transformation and sustainable development in Africa (see UNCTAD 2002). Structural transformation is necessary to address the development challenges facing Africa. The concept refers to a process by which the relative importance of different sectors and activities of the economy changes over time. In the African context, this implies a relative decline of low-productivity as well as low value-added activities, and a relative increase in manufacturing and higher-productivity services. Structural transformation can generate both static and dynamic gains. The static gain is the rise in economy-wide labour productivity as workers are employed in more productive sectors. Dynamic gains, which follow over time, are due to skill upgrading and positive externalities that result from workers having access to better technologies and accumulating capabilities. Productive structural transformation can be defined as the structural transformation process that simultaneously generates productivity growth within sectors and shifts of labour from lower to higher-productivity sectors, thereby creating more, better-remunerated, more formal, and higher-productivity jobs. Currently, many African countries continue to feature among the least competitive in the world (World Bank, African Competitiveness Report 2013). The UN's Economic Commission for Africa (2015) puts it straight-

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forward, "Africa must put in place development strategies that foster economic diversification, create jobs, reduce inequality and poverty and boost access to basic services. This can only be done through structural transformation". Sub-Saharan Africa's structural deficit lies mainly within the uncompetitive sector, where a bulk of the so-called employed labour force is concentrated. Indigenous and traditional activities are still the dominant forms of employment for many. Primary commodities still account for the dominant share of African countries exports and foreign exchange. Within the employment sector, it is known that the share of informal economic activity in Sub-Saharan Africa remains among the largest in the world. The high incidence of the informal economy in all its aspects represents a major challenge for upward mobility and economic change for the operators. It is associated with vulnerable employment, lack of social protection and indecent/poor working conditions leading to 'exclusionary development' which impacts negatively on sustainable enterprises- albeit sustainable development. This limits the scope of progress for the majority of the continent's workforce. More broadly, however, this is where microfinance efforts seem to be more focused given the fact that it is the operators here who constitute the unbanked and/or underserved; regular banks would not bother to want them as customers. Often, the operators in the informal sector have little or no formal education, having low incomes. In much of SSA, it is observed that the self-employed, who constitute the bulk of informal operators, are a poor group (see Fields 2013).

Statement of Study Problem

Microfinance in Africa still faces challenges, which conceal the strengths and opportunities at its operational levels. These challenges have inhibited its capacity to unleash its potential to better contribute to the fight against poverty- albeit structural transformation and sustainable development. In several studies carried out on microfinancing operations in Sub-Saharan Africa, the researchers have pointed out the need for training and/or education or skill development[1] as key recommendations to improve the impact of microfinancing. In effect, they see the absence of structured capacity building as it regards both microfinance institutions (MFIs) and clients as fueling inefficiency, low productivity and low incomes due to demonstration effect. Nurkse (1953), argues that low incomes result from low productivity which again is the result of low ability to effect value-addition and become a more active participant in the market. The following researchers find the capability gap in SSA microfinancing as a hindrance to realizing potential as it regards clients: Diagne and Zeller (2001); Kessy and Urio (2006); Matovu (2006); Alemu (2007); Turay (2008); Sayang and Huang (2008); Ngehnevu and Nembo (2010); Audu and Achegbulu (2011); Khoda (2011); Kane (2011); Mishi and Kapingura (2012); Olowe, Moradeyo and Babalola (2013); Electrin *et al*. (2013); Ntibashirwa (2013); Okurut *et al*. (2014); Kaseva (2014); Giesenow and Colomeet (2014); Selome and Tshuma (2014); Kasali, Ahmad and Lim (2015); Kazimoto (2016); Kamusaala (2016); Thylen and Selen (2016); Mngadi (2016); Mutua (2017). Other researchers recommend the need for MFIs to have better structures in place and have more capable staff: Chirwa (2002); Nathan, Margaret and Ashie (2004); Banwuesigye (2008); Guruswamy (2012); KPMG, South Africa (2013); Toy (2013); Okafor (2014); Chetama *et al*. (2016); Akanga (2017). They recommend that providing capacity building to both MFIs and clients can become a game-changer for the better.

Linking Sustainable Development with Structural Transformation

Structural transformation as well as sustainable development concepts is neither spontaneous nor inevitable. Both concepts are interrelated and complementary. Sustainable development is a complex and multidimensional issue which combines efficiency, equity and intergenerational equity based on economic, social and environmental aspects. Petkeviciute and Svirskaite (2001) describe sustainable development as the process of economic development and structural change to broaden human possibilities. Conway and Barbier (1990) see sustainability as an economic concept which connotes the ability to maintain productivity. Pearce, Markandya and Barbier (1989) provided a definition of sustainable development that states "the creation of a social and economic system that guarantees support for the following aims: increase in real income, the improvement of the level of education, and the improvement of the population's health and the general quality of life, thereby. Munasinghe (1994) describes sustainable development as "a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual human beings and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a period of time, while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems". Sustainable development implies an agenda for change since few of its attributes are satisfied today in current SSA context. Lessening the burden or costs on future generations requires putting in place the groundwork efforts today. Here, there is an ethical necessity to open up opportunities for the current individuals who are marginalized, socially 'unprotected' and vulnerable, and working their lives out on low productivity and low income activities to do better. From this view, sustainable development is linked to structural transformation.

The Relevance of Capacity Building and Capacity Development in the Context of Structural Transformation

Scholars recommend that microfinance stands better positioned to do more to bring about desired transformation, especially of the so-called *entrepreneurial poor*. But the lack of capacity building for both MFI and clients creates a gap between operations and performance. This underscores what pundits believe to be a 'reductionist approach' in current microfinance service delivery in most parts of SSA. By highlighting the research deficiencies, those recommendations suggest that absence of capacity building impose weaknesses and can dampen potential opportunities for growth and development for both clients and MFIs. 'Capacity deficit reduction' could motivate and energize both clients and MFIs towards further improvement and attainment of more desirable performances and outcomes. There is a wide array of literature that links capacity building to performance, sustainable transformation, and as 'driver of change' (see, UN's CaDRi; Munasinghe (2003); UNCTAD (2016); AU Agenda 2063 document). UNCTAD (2002) points out that the failure of structural adjustment programmes to overcome major structural change needed to initiate and sustain growth was partly because the link between adjustment programmes and performance was weak and emphasized participation and

[1] Subsequently, we use "capacity building" as a catchall term for the provision of training, education, skill development or awareness creation to enhance client or institutional betterment.

ownership of programmes and policies designed to reduce slippages in implementation. We find a high relevance of capacity building within that verdict. Capacity building is sometimes considered as the offspring of the need for capacity development. The concept of capacity development has three fundamental ingredients which, when recognized, offers a meaningful approach to capacity building: first, dissatisfaction with the present situation, second, a creditable change (instructional) process and third, a shared vision about the future.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is described as "focused energy". Capacity includes commitment, compassion and connectedness (Kaplan, 2006). Various definitions of capacity exist. Wikipedia (2018) defines capacity development as the process by which individuals and organizations obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment and other resources needed to do their jobs competently or to a greater capacity (larger scale, larger audience, larger impact, etc). Capacity building and capacity development are often used interchangeably. The United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction Office (UNISDR) defines capacity development as the process by which people, organizations and society systematically stimulate and develop their capability over time to achieve social and economic goals, including through improvement of knowledge, skills, systems, and institutions - within a wider social and cultural enabling environment. The Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) explains capacity development as the process of strengthening the abilities of individuals, organizations and societies to make effective use of the resources, in order to achieve their own goals on a sustainable basis.

Earlier Recognition of the Need for Capacity Development in SSA

Recognizing the serious shortage or needed capacity in SSA, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development laid out capacity building thrust for the same in 1996. Also, the need for capacity development was considered as being indispensable during the 'Washington Consensus' of 1997 which set a target to reach 100 million of the world's poorest with microfinance services. Accra Agenda for Action (2008) highlighted the extra-ordinary need for capacity development, and in the AU Agenda 2063 document (2015), Article 6.5 dedicates capacity development for the Agenda.

Capacity Building as Demonstration of Organizational Attitude

Typically, what applies to an organization can apply to an MFI. MFIs need to build their confidence to act in and on the world in ways that they believe can be effective and have an impact in transforming the lives of their clients and their livelihood activities in measurable ways. A MFI has to exert control and leadership in order to lead and bring about the desired caliber of clients who come to MFIs as trustees. This means embracing the odds as regards the economic, social and physical conditions 'out there' within clients' and MFIs immediate surroundings in order to bring about betterment. This implies a shift from an 'isolationist' posture to a more inclusive acceptance of the responsibilities which go with operating an MFI and the much needed client transformation often professed in their mission and vision statements and why they exist. The organization which does not know where it is going and why, which has a poorly developed sense of responsibility for itself and the socio-economic space it operates within is inadequately organized and would either overlook or ignore current investments in what can viably guarantee a more sustainable pathway in the form of building the capacity of itself and its 'groundforce'-the MFI clients. The relevance of MFIs requires them to be reflective, non-defensive and self-critical as it regards transforming their clients from one level of low-level/poor activity (petty trading) to a next level higher productivity activity which only can bring about the desired transformation.

"Scaling up" and "Skilling-up"

Early pundits believed that among its operational positives, microfinance was better placed to up-scale poverty. This often meant 'revealing the depth of poverty' within their catchment areas. But one needs to ask the question, 'after 'up-scaling' poverty then what?' Here, providing loans solely as a stand-alone activity for clients' repayment cannot suffice. However, there is the concept of "scaling up" microfinance operations. It may mean "adoption"; especially as transplanted from a more 'sophisticated' environment to a less 'sophisticated' environment and becomes considered as a benchmark. But the institutional danger of high inefficiency is observed in instances whereby untrained and 'unprofessional' staff or management may divert resources, provide loans to favored clients or place the sole premium on profit-making at the expense of other support necessities. Besides, having inadequate corporate infrastructure or corporate governance systems, they often engage the would-be beneficiaries of the microfinance operations by cutting corners and/or adopting "short-cut" measures on the pretext of adopting cost-cutting practices. 'Scaling up' then when improperly executed results in organizational inefficiencies, inadequate controls and accountability and, as always, room for manipulation and corruption presents a risk to both clients' and MFIs' sustainability.

Also 'scaling up' is observed as microfinance is replicated on a large scale. It becomes a challenge when due diligence and proper planning are ignored: suddenly the institution need additional staff and skills over and above those used in the small scale activity, quickly and widely. Thus, the whole idea connotes having the necessary 'manpower' and infrastructure at the institutional level as well as having an army or prospective clients equipped and ready to embrace the odds that accompany eking out livelihood activities and succeeding in order to ensure the productivity or capital/loans without default. Often, however, the situation may warrant additional learning and performance in order to stay relevant in an ever competitive and global environment. Having this outlook makes capacity building an imperative support to understand ones environment for survival.

Capacity Building as a Precursor to Income

The ILO (2011) found that the wage share- the share of domestic income that goes to labour- declined in almost three-quarters of the 69 countries for which it collected data. The drop in the wage share was more pronounced in emerging and developing economies than in advanced ones. The decline in wage share was more significant for unskilled workers than for their skilled counterparts. Thus, apart from low incomes, unskilled labor is more vulnerable to shocks. A comprehensive income-generating strategy requires skills upgrade, hence capacity building. That same report posits "wage moderation" and draws a connection between productivity and wages.

To obtain the wage share assigned to the self-employed:

$$\text{Wage share} = \frac{\text{Compensati on of labor}}{\text{Value - added}} * \text{self employment ratio}$$

$$\text{With Selfemploymentratio} = \frac{\text{totalemployment}}{\text{totalemployees}}$$

Hence, we can say that value-addition through capacity building has an effect on income.

The Approach: Action Impact Matrix

According to Munasinghe (2003), Action Impact Matrix (AIM) is a tool to facilitate sustainability of development by analyzing economic, environmental and social interactions of various development policies. We herein adopt the AIM approach to help find a win-win approach for all stakeholders through capacity development. The approach can identify key linkages within the chosen variables of interest. AIMs promote an integrated perspective, meshing traditional microfinance operations with priority capacity building modules.

Multiple-Criteria Analysis

Multiple-criteria analysis (MCA) or multi-objective decision-making is particularly useful in situations when a single criterion approach like dispensing loans or client loan repayment fall short- especially where other value-addition necessities via capacity building cannot be assigned monetary values. MCA provides techniques for comparing and ranking different outcomes, even though a variety of indicators are used.

Indicators

In order for capacity building to happen, people, institutions and the community first need to know where they are in order to determine whether or not they are making progress towards where they want to go. We use indicators to help us understand the world around us and control our responses to it which is necessary for the goal to be derived from capacity building. The indicators or variables to be used must be consistent with a new ethic and in line with both sustainable development and structural transformation. For the sake of this paper, we conceive nine variables as being relevant for instance whereby the capacity concept could be applied: credit, entrepreneurship, business advisory services, marketing and sales, information communications technology (ICT), knowledge, supply and value chains, MFI architecture and corporate governance, government/non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Credit: access to credit is a constraint facing micro-livelihood activities. Because the bulk of such operators constitute the 'unbanked', they are those who become MFI clients. Not only is credit geared towards financial inclusion but without (sufficient) credit, many self-employed persons/activities remain poor, fragile and underdeveloped.

Entrepreneurship: the need for entrepreneurship acumen among the generality of people in SSA cannot be overemphasized, especially among microfinance clients. It combines the ethic as well as the practice of considering a 'broader picture' in a competitive and sustainable manner and work towards achieving aims.

Business advisory services: is about institutional transfer of know-how as it regards improving quality, livelihood location and other forms of information which are intended to strengthen clients' ability to be resilient and more competitive.

Marketing and sales: superior market knowledge or information allows a client to adequately access opportunities and treats (Bhargava, Hemant and Choudhary, 2001). ICT offers a wide range of possibilities for improving livelihood and other forms of competitiveness (Fullantelli and Allegra, 2003).

Knowledge: a World Bank report 1998/1999 stresses that knowledge, not capital, is the key to sustained economic growth and improvements in human wellbeing.

Supply and value chain: imparting knowledge of this concept to clients overcomes a number of important weaknesses of traditional sectoral analysis which tends to be static and suffers from the weakness of bounded parameters. It explores the dynamic linkages beyond productive activities that go beyond a particular sector whether they are of inter-sectoral nature or between formal and informal sector activities. Together they explore the interlinkages for an easy uncovering of the dynamic flow of economic, organizational and other activities between producers within different sectors on an enlarged national or even global scale (Kaplinsky and Morris 2000).

MFI architecture and corporate governance: institutions exist for a purpose; they are the basis of competitiveness. The corporate architecture sometimes refers more to corporate 'professionalism'. It defines the business objectives of supporting functions, design corporate structures, assesses and redefines structures, functions procedures, and policies. In effect, clients and MFIs sustainability depends upon the MFI architecture and its corporate governance system in place.

Government/NGOs/development partners: Of late, the concept of 'government' in public policy literature is adopting a 'new' stance depicting a revolutionary departure from the past whereby 'governance' today emphasis its collaborative nature (Salman 2002, in Chang 2009). Government is seen as a key initiator and promoter of the private sector as well as encouraging more secure forms of livelihood, job creation and employment generation. Meanwhile, the role of other development partners both local and international needs to be harnessed. Not being merely coincidental, the United Nations also underscores the increasing recognition of the value of partnerships to leverage investment initiatives to boost livelihood as well as micro/small and medium enterprises in developing countries. Tapping into these concepts as capacity building indicators and key deliverables of microfinancing would inure to clients uplift; the need of the times.

How they will work: Policy Implementation: These nine complementary inputs are aimed at improving the client's ability to obtain a broader "usage and returns" of loan and seek to improve MFIs impact on both clients and their environment.

Table 1. Recommended Assessment Schedule to Track MFI and Client Progress

	1st Quarter	Progress Report on client sales/challenges	2nd Quarter	Progress Report on client sales/challenges	3rd Quarter	Progress Report on client sales/challenges	4th Quarter	Progress Report on client sales/challenges	Total score per client
Credit	25		25		25		25		100
Entrepreneurship	25		25		25		25		100
Business advisory services	25		25		25		25		100
Marketing and sales	25		25		25		25		100
ICT training	25		25		25		25		100
Knowledge	25		25		25		25		100
Supply value chain	25		25		25		25		100
MFI Architecture and governance	25		25		25		25		100
Government/NGO development partners	25		25		25		25		100

MFIs Principle Component Analysis diagram for each client.

Table 2. Sustainability cum Impact Matrix of Capacity Development (adopted based on Hinterberger et al. 1997).

Level	Economic	Social	Institutional	Environmental
Micro (livelihood activities and clients)	Increasing returns to clients	Improving dignity	More reliable and improves social capital	Promoting more innovative means of livelihood
Meso (the MFIs)	Curbing default, low savings	Promoting good corporate citizenship	Institutional development and strengthening	Creating awareness
Macro (including fiscal, monetary, income and product distribution conditions)	Better/improving incomes and upping national income measurement	Improving jobs and employment as well as a knowledge society which promotes structural transformation	Promoting a wider set of people-focused institutions.	Better remuneration for livelihood activities
Meta (fulfilling social	Enhancing community	Enhancing a knowledge society as	Replicating more	Opening up more options for

As a recommendation, they form part of a microfinance institution's "Principle Component Analysis" to assist with clients' knowhow of how to do better in the market. Once the blueprints come into being, it might be possible to produce increasing output and hence makes setting target/forecast more feasible. Assuming a score of 25 marks of each component is awarded to a client from the day of registration with the MFI, there will be a total of 100 marks for each client. The cycle period consists of one calendar year when an account is given of the nature or modules taught to each client.

Benefits of Capacity Building/Capacity Development
The Sustainability Matrix

Hinterberger *et al*. (1997), propose a sustainability matrix which depicts the benefits of an intervention such as capacity building at the various levels: micro, meso, macro and meta. We adopt this concept to assume the intended benefits of capacity building within the broader reaches of society.

Policy Considerations

Against the backdrop of low capacity of microfinance clients and MFIs, as highlighted by various researches on microfinancing in SSA; its attendant problems being low productivity, low incomes and negative welfare implications, an ILO report (2011) provides econometric evidence of the important role financial policies can have in injecting impetus to both provide opportunities for business activities while reducing 'vulnerabilities'. As Zysman (1983) observes, the financial system (especially MFIs in this case) can serve as policy allies for transformation based on terms negotiated by key stakeholders and finance. "The issue in the system is [thus] not whether government intervenes to affect the allocation of financial resources; the question is who control the process and how," (Zysman 1983:22). This calls for partnership and engagement by all stakeholders. The inclusion of government, NGOs development partners and the MFIs architecture is to engender a partnership and measure the participation of each of those indicators in the capacity building/capacity development process.

Conclusion

The relevance of microfinancing needs to be observed as well as assessed through the effects they have in fulfilling society's aims. Something needs to be put in place to enable MFIs as well as clients do better. We identify it as capacity building. Perhaps, it is the single most important ingredient necessary to make a low productivity, low -income labor force effect value-addition and competitiveness in their livelihood activities. Capacity building would nurture the grounds for value-addition and better incomes today which are the investments of tomorrow; which in turn lays the groundwork for better employment the day-after-tomorrow: hopefully, a reflection of sustainable development and structural transformation.

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