
Small and Medium Enterprises Development in Nigeria: A Sustainable Approach to Employment Generation

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Abstract: *The contribution of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) has been recognized as main sustenance of the economy because of their capacity in enhancing the economic output, wealth creation, employment generation and enhance human welfare. Although, the SMEs lack of access to relative cheap and effective source of finance have been identified as the major factors hindering their contribution to economic growth, other factors include lack of management skill, poor government policy, high taxes and security problem. On this basis, this article assesses SMEs development and their contribution to employment generation and economic growth via investment level. The main objective of the study is to critically evaluate the performance of SMEs and implications for employment generation in Nigeria and also to examine the contribution of SMEs to socio-economic development of Nigeria. The study was conducted in Nasarawa State. The study used questionnaire as an instrument of primary data collection from a stratified random sample of 150 in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study concludes that there is increase in the number of SMEs established in Nigeria and finance is the major hindrance to their development in Nigeria. The study recommends that the government should provide secure, conducive, political environment that enhance greater performance of SMEs that guarantees employment. The government should as a matter of urgency prioritize the SMEs sector by giving it devoted practical and visible attention with a view to making it virile, vibrant, focused and productive.*

Keywords: *Small and Medium Enterprises, Employment Generation, Management.*

1. Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises Development (SMEs) has continued to be a popular phrase in the Business world. This is because the sector serves as a catalyst for employment generation, national growth, poverty reduction and economic development. SMEs the world over can boast of being the major employers of labour if compared to the major industries including the multinationals. According to Peterise (2003), SMEs both in the formal and informal sectors employ over 60% of the labour force in Nigeria. More so, 70% to 80% of daily necessities in the country are not high-tech product, but basic materials produced with little or no automation. Most of these products come from the Small and Medium Enterprises. Odubango (2000), Onwumere (2000), and Nnanna (2001) all support that SMEs help in the achievement of improvement in rural infrastructure, improved living standard of the rural dwellers thereby creating employment utilization of indigenous technology, production of intermediate technology and increase in revenue base of the private individuals and government (Wahab and Ijaiya, 2006).

Small and medium scale enterprises have been considered as the engine of economic growth for promoting equitable development. The major advantage of the sector is its employment potential at low capital cost. The labour intensity of the SME sector is much higher than that of the enterprises. The role of small and medium enterprises in the economic and social development of the country is well established. The sector is a nursery of entrepreneurship, often driven by individual creativity and innovation. There is a general believe that the desired employment generation in this country can be achieved through development of small and medium scale enterprises (Awosika 1997, Schmitz 1995). Gunu (2004) and Aremu (2010) posited that Small Scale Enterprises provide income, savings, and employment generation. They are seen as veritable engines for the development of entrepreneurial capabilities and indigenous technology which will generate employment in the country. Small and medium scale industries constitute the basis for industry and natural economy in many countries. It has been estimated that SME's employ

22% of the adult population in developing countries (Daniel, 1994 & Fisseha, 1991). Small and medium scale enterprises can be regarded as one of the important elements of a country's development and this play a crucial role in the economy of this nation.

Small and medium scale enterprises speed up the rate of socio-economic development of many countries, particularly developing countries. They served as system for attainment of national objective in terms of employment generation at low investment cost and also the development of entrepreneurial capabilities and indigenous technology. It also reduces the flow of people from rural area to urban area, henceforth, it can be easily established by the relatively less skilled labour force of a developing country, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises contribute substantially to the gross domestic product, export earning, and development opportunities of the countries. After the attainment of independence much emphasis has been laid on growth of small and medium scale industries as means of reduce the incidence of poverty and employment in the country (Gunu, 2004).

At the early stages of industrialization, Japan's economy was characterized by traditional industries and a large number of small firms who as of that time drew their strength not from an abundant supply of capital, but from their vast supply of labour. So in Japan “during the interwar years (1919 - 1938) and after, government policies accorded and continued to accord due priority to the country's small and medium scale enterprise (Mosk, 2010).

In Nigeria, the realization of the role of SMEs in development sprang from the backdrop of the problems plaguing the economy in recent decades. These include slow or declining economic growth, unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has put the figure of unemployed Nigerians in the first half of 2012 at 23.9 percent, up from 21.1 percent in 2010 and 19.7 percent in 2009, compare to the rate at 19.7% in 2008 and 16.3% in 2007 respectively. Unemployment rate for 2006-2008 was 55.9 percent, 4 times higher (Salami, 2011).

2. Literature Review

There appears to be no universally accepted definition of SMEs for now. Each country or development agency or institution defines the term as it suits its purpose and, therefore, emphasize different things in its definition giving rise to varying definitional outcomes. In particular, the definition depends, among other things, on the role SMEs are required or encouraged to play in the development process and the level of economic development of a country. For example, a developing country with a large population and unemployment problem may emphasize job creation and labour intensive production practices, which are then reflected in its definition of SMEs. This has influenced the definition of SMEs in Nigeria (Minister of Industry, 2001:127-129).

In Nigeria, the National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the National Council on Industries (NCI) have defined SMEs differently and given different definition at different times (National Association of Small and Medium Enterprises 2001:148-148). The National Council of Industries in Nigeria for example, now defines SMEs in terms of number of employees (rather than the erstwhile consideration of capital invested).

A business enterprise defined as a small firm in an economically developed country may be equivalent to a medium or even large scale enterprise in a less economically developed country. Thus, the characteristics of, and research findings for, SMEs in the developed world may not reflect those of a developing country which suggest why what works for SMEs in one country may not work for those in another. Thus, if financial constraint is a problem for SMEs in developed countries, then it may be more severe for those in developing countries. This strengthens the call for contextual understanding of SMEs.

In the context of Nigeria, the Central Bank of Nigeria (as cited in Inegbenebor, 2006) defines an SME as an enterprise with not less than 10 and not more than 300 employees. This definition considers SMEs as a band of enterprises whose main characteristic is that they employ between 10 and 300 persons. This definition necessarily distinguishes SMEs from micro-enterprises and large scale enterprises. This classification is very widely used in studies as, for example, in the cases of Lai (2007) and Massey et al

(2004). In this study, the directories used for constructing the sample frame made entries in terms of SMEs. In some cases, a finer distinction is made in which small scale enterprises and studies as such as, for example, in the case of Lai (200) and Wiklund (1998).

Lai (2007) identifies other characteristics of SMEs in Nigeria; they have small capital investment; they are small in size; they have low profit margins; and they have little management or few staff. Thus, Lal (2007) concluded that they cannot, on their own, provide the technical and support services they require to operate successfully. Davis et al (as cited in Spillan and Ziemnowixs, 2003) suggested that small firms differ from large scale enterprises (LSEs) in their marketing practices, that is; they have different marketing objectives; they lack marketing experience; and they have limited financial and organizational resources. The most limiting of the three features is said to be the limited availability of financial resources. Levy (2003) also maintained that funds constitute the most binding constraint for SMEs.

Further, Weinrauch (as cited in Spillan and Ziemnowicz, 2003) suggested that financial constraints impact on small firms' marketing activities in the form of; restrictive credit policies; an inability to hire marketing specialists; under-specialization which results in fewer new products (created and marketed); inadequate cash flow, causing ineffective hand-to-mouth policies; and ineffective and inflexible pricing strategies. Two other unique characteristics of SMEs may be added. One is that the enterprise is dominated by one person who is the owner-manager. As such management specialization is very limited in SMEs with the owner-manager becoming what Ogunmokun (as cited in Spillan and Zienmowicz, 2003), adapting an old adage, called the "jack-of-all-trades", and as the saying goes, master of none; that is, specializing in none. The other feature is that SMEs are characterized by informality. Five strategic management implications arise from the above characteristics of SMEs-in terms of strategy practice. These are the firm's strategic management orientation, strategic horizon, preferred market development strategy, devolution of strategic decision-making responsibility, and the informality in the strategic decision-making process.

2.1 Small and Medium Scale Capacity Building in Nigeria

The strategies and initiatives to promote SME development in Nigeria feature prominently in most of the government's economic development plans. Over the last decade, a clear path for accelerating the development of SMEs has been charted through the establishment of agencies such as DFRRI, NDE, NAPEP, SMEDAN etc. although the challenges before this establishment are daunting (Ogwuma, 1995). The state-led models of industrialization followed immediately after Nigerian independence in 1960 and those of 1970s and 1980s was a major factor constraining the growth of SMEs. There are many ways in which industrialization discriminated against SMEs during the time.

Firstly, trade was regulated in a way that followed large firms to obtain import licenses, official exchange rates for imports, and tariff rebates more easily than small firms. The anti-export bias induced by import substitution strategies also discriminated against intensive SMEs. Moreover, small firms were denied access to most investment incentives because of high rent-seeking costs. Secondly, financial sector interventions also discriminated against SMEs. Selective credit controls in conjunction with controlled interest rates prevented banks from compensation for the higher cost of small loans by charging more. As a result, small clients were allocated limited credit, allowing large firms to grow at the expense of small firms. Thirdly, the problems of dealing with government regulations and tax authorities weighted more heavily on smaller firms in the shape of higher compliance costs, i.e. the fixed costs of complying with import/export and tax regulations, labour market regulations, and licensing and price control. Fourthly, Nigeria's underdeveloped physical and social infrastructures create a binding constraint to SMEs growth. SMEs rely heavily on inefficiently provided state infrastructures such as electricity and water and cannot afford the cost of developing any alternatives. Similarly, inadequate investment in human capital hampers SME growth because of the scarcity of skilled workers, managers and entrepreneurs (Tendler and Amorim 1996).

In more challenging environment SMEs are aware of the need to become more resilient and competitive in the face of economic changes. The continuous changes that affect the business environment, due to the globalization process and the technology innovations, force Small and Medium Scale Enterprises and other organizations in Nigeria to constantly look for new competitive advantages in order to maintain and

improve their market position (Aremu 2004). Towards this end, the government efforts should be directed to strengthening SMEs and thus encouraging domestic investment and promoting economic growth.

2.3 Small and Medium Scale (SMEs) Strategy for Sustainability

Sustainable development is recognized as an essential requirement for achieving economic goals without degrading the environment; major problems arise in implementing the concept of sustainability. At the most basic level, researchers dealing with sustainable development have suggested that the achievement of sustainability requires ecologically sustainable political and economic systems, organizations, and individuals (Starik and Rands 1995; Costanza and Daly 1992; Gallup International Institute 1992). Specifically, governments, consumers, and enterprises contribute and play crucial roles in reaching sustainable development. As a result, if goals of sustainability are to be achieved, small and medium-sized enterprises must be reformed to minimize their negative ecological and social impacts (Gladwin, 1992).

Generally, SMEs will have to assist and facilitate growth, multiply and replicate into sufficient mass across industries and sectors. The SME sector is considered to be the backbone of the modern day economy. The importance of this segment is undisputed. However, the yawning gap between the needs, demands and policy response in this unorganized sector has always dampened the sector's prospects. The recent economic turbulence has only added to the sector's problems. Hence, it becomes imperative for us to ensure that SME sector, which is facing one of the toughest times in the industrial history, should be strongly supported by the relevant stakeholders - government, financial institutions, associations, etc. This is to enable the sector to play its sustainability roles in the economy.

SMEs contribution towards sustainable development is small, taken together SMEs have a very large impact on the development quality of a specific geographic area. The more presence of SMEs in the economy of a particular area, the more important is the SMEs role for achieving sustainability (Welford and Gouldson, 1993). In comparison with large companies, SMEs show particular benefits for a geographic area interested in achieving a sustainable development, which can be grouped in the following categories: economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and collaboration contributions. Major economic contributions to sustainability come from the fact that residents and indigenous are more probably to own and run SMEs than larger companies, which frequently are multinational companies.

Specifically, in the SMEs, the management process is characterized by the highly personalized preferences, prejudices, and attitudes of the firms' entrepreneur, owner and/or owner-manager (Jennings and Beaver, 1995). As a result, SMEs allow residents and indigenes to participate in the economic development and, consequently, to obtain the economic benefits generated by the community (Howard and Hine, 1995).

Furthermore, SMEs which are owned and run by residents are expected to reinvest their benefits in the community itself, while large companies usually act internationally. Finally, SMEs draw out capital that would otherwise remain underexploited by the economy, and help develop new markets by improving forward and backward linkages between economically, socially, and geographically diverse sectors of the economy (Howard and Hine, 1995). These SMEs potential economic contributions to sustainability might be balanced against overall economic efficiency of SMEs in comparison with larger companies; meaning that SMEs operating in a particular community must be internationally competitive in order to make significant contributions to sustainability (Diego and Juan, 1998).

2.4 Ways of Developing Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Nigeria to Enhance National Development and Employment Generation

SMEs play a crucial role in national development and to reflect its recognition towards economic development, the federal government must make good small business policy as their number one priority; it has to put up solid steps in place to ensure they are able to grow and prosper. For instance one of the ways of doing this will be to set up a national business office (NSBO) along the line of the small business agency in the United States and Medium Business Services.

The NSBO can be replicated at the state level. The state small and medium office will have responsibility for running national policies and programmes set up by national small business office (NSBO) at the state level and will also be directly answerable to state Assemblies. Another important way of developing is by providing the SMEs with adequate financial capabilities; provision of good infrastructural base; formulation of good policies and programmes to increase SMES performance; market expansion; organizing regular seminars on entrepreneurship development in order to increase SMEs owners' managerial skills and capabilities and provision of adequate security throughout the country.

3. Research Methodology

The study used a survey to evaluate the performance of a small and medium scale enterprise and its implications on employment generation. The design was adopted because of its appropriateness in describing the current situation of phenomenon (Kothari, 1990). The population of the study is the operators of small and medium businesses operating in Nasarawa State. Nwankwo (1999) stated that the population of any research work is the universe of such group; of people or object in which a researcher is interested. In obtaining the sample size of the population, SMEs owners from selected local government in Nasarawa State, North-Central Nigeria were selected through random sampling. 13 local government areas were selected for the study. We had in these local government areas obtained sample elements of 150 respondents through a probabilistic sampling technique. The primary sources of data collection were through the use of questionnaire, personal observation and interview.

3.1 Research Instrument and Technique

The primary instrument used for the collection of data for this study is the questionnaire. The questionnaires were designed in open and closed ended patterns and administered directly on the operators of the SMEs directly. Further, in order to reduce the possibility of questionnaires missing or getting lost in transit, the questionnaires were retrieved the same manner in which they were administered. The data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using non-parametric simple percentages and Regression model statistical technique was used in order to confirm the stated hypothesis through the use of SPSS.

3.2 Reliability of Research Instrument

The validity of an instrument refers to the extent to which it measures what was intended to measure. The validity of the scales utilized in this study was assessed for content and construct validity. After the survey had been completed the reliability of the scales was further examined by computing their coefficient alpha (Cronbach Alpha). All scales were found to exceed a minimum threshold of 0.7 suggested by Nunnally (1978).

4. Results and Discussions of Findings

In the course of this study 170 questionnaires were distributed to SMEs operators in order to critically evaluate the performance of SMEs and their implications on employment generation vis-à-vis the efforts of the government on the development of the sector. The contribution was gathered from the SMEs operators within Nasarawa State, North-Central Nigeria. A total 160 questionnaires were returned out of which 150 were found to be valid and useful for our study. This represents 88% which is good enough, as it is reliable and generalizable.

4.1 Research Hypotheses Testing

The following tables (regression model coefficients) indicate the measures of the study variables used in the study.

$$Y = a + bx$$

Where: y = the dependent variable (or employment generation)

a = constant

b = coefficient

x = the independent variable (or SMEs)

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between perceived political environment and performance of SMEs.

Table 4.1: Regression Model Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.464	.102		14.393	.000
SMEs Performance and Employment Generation	.191	.070	.193	2.739	.007

Source: SPSS Output 2013

a. Dependent Variable: Environmental Factors

Environmental factors = 1.464 + 0.191 SMEs Performance & Employment Generation

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance of SMEs towards employment generation.

Table 4.2: Regression Model Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.650	.767		3.454	.001
SMEs Performance and employment Generation	.248	.525	.034	.472	.638

Source: SPSS Output 2013

a. Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurial visitation

Environmental factors = 2.650 + 0.248 SMEs performance & employment generation

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between Government policy and the performance of SMEs.

Table 4.3: Regression Model Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1. (Constant)	3.264	.287		11.357	.000
SMEs Performance and Employment Generation	.355	.197	-.129	-1.802	.043

Source: SPSS Output 2013

a. Dependent Variable: Government policies and programme

Government programme and policy = 2.650 + 0.248 SMEs performance & employment generation

The hypothesized statements were tested using Regression analysis statistical tools with the use of SPSS as earlier stated. The test conducted at 95% confidence interval and 0.05 significant levels. Following the decision rule of accepting or rejecting null hypothesis i.e. if calculated Sig value is less than the critical value of (0.05), We reject the null hypothesis, if not we accept. We thus hypothesized as follows;

H₀₁:

As shown in Table 4.1, after establishing an Ordinary least square (OLS) model of “Environmental Factors” on “SMEs Performance and Employment Generation” it is observed that the significance probability of independent variable SMEs performance is 0.007 which is remarkably less than 0.05(5%) level of significance which is termed “significant”. We reject the null hypothesis H_0 and conclude that there is a positive significant connection between perceived political environment and performance of SMEs.

H₀₂:

In testing this hypothesis, Table 4.2 was drawn. From the Ordinary least square (OLS) model built for “Entrepreneurial orientation” on “SMEs Performance and Employment Generation” it was discovered that the significance probability of independent variable SMEs performance is 0.638 which is remarkably greater than 0.05(5%) level of significance which is termed “not significant”. We accept the null hypothesis H_0 and conclude that there is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and the performance of SMEs as per the sampled population. This finding was supported by the literature review.

H₀₃:

Table 4.3 has proved our stated hypothesis to be right by revealing that the Ordinary least square (OLS) model built for “Government Policies and Programmes” on “SMEs Performance and Employment Generation” it is observed that the significance probability of independent variable SMEs performance is 0.043 which is remarkably less than 0.05(5%) level of significance which is termed “significant”. We reject the null hypothesis H_0 and conclude that there is significant relationship between Government policy and the performance of SMEs as per the sampled population.

4.2 Summary of Findings

The result of the research work as regards the performance of small and medium scale enterprises and its implications on employment generations revealed that there has been a lot of increase in the number of SMEs in Nigeria over the few years but this growth has been affected by a lot of environmental factors like poor weather condition, poor locations, and insecurity especially the recent and continuous attack of the terror group “Boko-Haram” in the Northern part of the country which make it difficult for the operators of SMEs to perform efficiently and effectively. While the rowdy atmosphere created by the government such as increase in tax, non availability of infrastructure and lack of continuity by the government has a lot of negative implications on employment generations, the study concluded that there is a significant connection between the perceived political environment and the performance of SMEs. The study further shows that the entrepreneurship orientation by most SMEs owners in Nigeria is so low with a sig. value of 0.638 which is higher than the 0.05 level of significance as shown in Table 4.2. This indicates lack of awareness and publicity by various government agencies on SMEs which can affect the rate of employment generation in the country.

The last hypotheses as shown in Table 4.3, there exist a positive significant relationship between various government policies towards the performance of SMEs over the years as most policies were formulated but not executed by various governments, therefore adequate measure should be taken by the government and its agencies in formulating policies that will enhance performance of SMEs towards employment generation in the country. These are in line with the assertion of Onugu (2005) cited in Fatai (2011) that some of the challenges of the SMEs are induced by the operating environment such as government policy, globalization effects and financial institutions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Conclusively, lack of management skills by the operators of SMEs does not only affect the effective performance of SMEs and employment generation but also reduces their ability to compete favorably in the market with their large scale industrialist counterparts which has been a major stumbling block for the development and growth of SMEs in Nigeria. It is becoming increasingly apparent to government and policy makers that the role of small and medium scale enterprises is very important to the development and

growth of any given economy. Small and medium scale enterprises will ensure efficient use of resources, employment creation, mobilization of domestic saving and investment.

5.2 Recommendations

Finance is the most important and cogent key of any enterprises. Small and medium scale enterprises must be financially supported so that they can take off and expand and be able to meet the needs of Nigerians. Shortage of indigenous entrepreneurs has been identified as a major impediment to economic development. It is also recommended that there is need for supporting and strengthening SMEs' productive capacities and market competitiveness of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in the country. This therefore calls for the need for establishment of small-scale enterprises as a way of developing and providing a training ground for indigenous entrepreneurs. The rural-urban drift is due to lack of job opportunities in the rural area. Thus, small-scale enterprises will help to reduce this drift particularly when they are sited in rural areas. Non capital-intensive nature of small-scale industries is another important significance of small-scale enterprises. They are usually started with small savings which made them affordable to go into. The meagre capital requirement of small-scale enterprises makes them to promote an even distribution of income in the economy.

This is because if there is adequate financial support, more unemployed Nigerians will engage in small scale enterprises thereby gain their means of living easily than looking for unavailable white collar jobs. There is need for establishment of Small-scale enterprises since they ensure community stability as small-scale enterprises do less harm to the physical environment than large enterprises. They promote agro-industries, improve rural welfare and generally reduce unemployment and poverty in the country. In advanced economies, the SME sector is acclaimed as the engine of economic growth and development. However, against international best practices Nigeria is rated poorly. Extensive efforts in terms of strategic programmes, policy and practice will be required to elevate Nigeria to a leading position. Though Nigeria lacks adequate census on relevant economic indices, it is estimated that Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria currently account for over 75% of employment in the country (SMEDAN 2006). This relatively high percentage is however a paradox as 60% of Nigerians still live below the poverty level (UNDP, 2005). When 60 percent living below the poverty line are taken into account, the share of those gainfully employed in the SME sector is more likely to be in the region of 10% as recorded by US Industry Small Business Administration (SBA).

Finally, government as a matter of urgency, should prioritize the SME sector giving it devoted practical and visible attention with a view to make it virile, vibrant, focused and productive. The era of 'lip service' attention to the sector should be done away with. The employment creation cannot be developed without a vibrant SME subsector, and so government should do all within its arsenal to reverse the situation.

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