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Research Article

NURTURING SMALL BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURS IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

This study on developing a strategy and action plan for nurturing small businesses and entrepreneurs in the South-East of Nigeria is critical for generating a road map with which to encourage more local residents, especially young people, to consider entrepreneurship as a career option and to understand the importance of these firms for national economic prosperity. This would help to drastically reduce the rate of unemployment and crime in our society. The maximum variation sampling technique ensures that all the LGAs in the South-East as well with dimensions of interest are included in the samples collected was adopted. Data generated through questionnaire were analysed using percentage, chi-square and test of proportion statistical tools. The result of the study indicate that certain factors negatively affect the performance of SMEs significantly. These factors include poor electricity and water supply, lack of good road network, inability to access credit from the formal financial sector, inadequate supply of foreign exchange and raw materials. Other factors are unfavourable business environment which manifests in multiple taxation, bureaucratic bottlenecks, official corruption and high utility charges, all of which add up to constitute what is generally referred to as high cost of doing business in Nigeria. It was also found that the regulatory and policy environment of SMEs are bad. In particular, trade liberalization and globalization presents new challenges for SMEs. They have to contend with substitute products from their relatively more mature overseas counterparts who produce their goods under a friendlier environment. But despite all these challenges, the role of SMEs in developing indigenous entrepreneurship and creating employment opportunities in Nigeria cannot be overlooked. Though the operating environment has not been as expected, the sector has continued to be the engine of the development of the economy in one way or the other. It was recommended that for SMEs to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the economy, the problem of infrastructure must be dealt with decisively, especially in the area of electricity supply and provide conducive business environment by taking care of the infrastructural problem, running a tax regime that is devoid of multiple taxation, solving the problem of insecurity, dealing decisively with the issues of corrupt practices and eliminating all appearances of bureaucratic bottlenecks as well as making credit available at low interest rate.

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INTRODUCTION

The description of Nigeria as a paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty has long been in public discourse. This is because the serious poverty situation contradicts the country's huge endowment in both human and natural resources. Nigeria, in the mid-70's, was quoted among the richest 50 countries in the world. Just few years after, she became one of the 25 poorest countries in the world (Obadan 1996). As the sixth largest exporter of petroleum products in the world, it is hard to

believe that over 60% of the citizens live below US\$2 (about N300) a day with the majority of the people living in the rural areas where access to electricity, clean water and sanitation, good roads, etc, are almost non-existent. In July 2006, foreign exchange inflow and outflow through the Central Bank of Nigeria amounted to US\$3.25 billion and US\$1.6 billion respectively. Cumulative inflows and outflows in the Nigerian economy in the first seven months of 2006 stood at US\$ 34.98 billion and US\$12.50 billion, respectively, compared to US\$26.42 billion and US\$9.98 billion in the corresponding

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period of 2005 (CBN, Monthly Report July 2006). The statistics as shown above suggest that more revenue came into the coffers of the government in 2006 than in 2005 yet poverty rate increased from 61% in 2005 to 67% in 2006 (UNDP 2007).

According to the World Bank, greater part of Nigeria's oil wealth got siphoned off by one percent of the population, condemning more than half of the population to abject poverty. In the process corruption thrived in public service and gained a strong foothold in the society (NEEDS, 2005). Nigeria's growing unemployment is one of a major concern to many analysts as the figures increasingly suggest dwindling potentials. Official data from the Bureau of Statistics put this figure at about 20.9% for 2012. By implication, it means that if Nigeria's population is 170million, then over 35million Nigerians are unemployed, or worse still, at least 71% of Nigerian youth are unemployed. This is particularly disturbing and counterproductive because at least 70% of the population of this country is youth. Consequences of youth unemployment has security implications for virtually every nation, since desperation and idleness often lead young people to fall prey to criminal gangs, political violence, militancy, prostitution, internet scam and other vices. The Arab spring that swept the world in 2010 has the disenchanting and frustrated youth at its fore. According to Raimi and Adeleke (2010) arrest data from the Nigeria Police has shown that of the armed militants in Nigeria - Boko Haram, Niger Delta militants, and Egbesu Boys, 40% of the group composition are in the 16-17year-old age group, 10% are in the 18-19 year-old age group, 20% in the 20-21 year-old age group and a further 20% between the ages of 20-23. Approximately, 60% of them were unemployed.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, the lack of job prospects and the likelihood of a dissolute future for the youth have contributed to socially deviant behaviours such as prostitution, armed robbery, suicide bombings, kidnapping for ransom, political thuggery and so on. Many young persons view youth gangs as substitute families because they tend to satisfy their immediate economic and social needs through violence (Idemobi 2011). There is need to seriously fight unemployment in Nigeria to reduce poverty and crime. In Nigeria today, the lack of job prospects and the likelihood of a dissolute future for the youth have contributed to socially deviant behaviour such as prostitution, armed robbery, suicide bombings, kidnapping for ransom, political thuggery and so on.

This study would help to generate a road map with which to encourage more local residents, especially young people, to consider entrepreneurship as a career option and to understand the importance of these firms for national economic prosperity. It is like building the entrepreneurial pipeline. Building the entrepreneurial pipeline especially in the rural areas will help get more local people talking about entrepreneurship and, hopefully, more of them will take the leap to start their own businesses. This would help to drastically reduce the rate of unemployment and crime in our society.

Objectives of the Study

The central objective of this study is to examine the critical success factors for nurturing small businesses and

entrepreneurs in Nigeria using the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria as case study. However, the specific objectives are;

1. to identify and examine the factors that negatively affect the performance of SMEs in Nigeria;
2. to determine the role of SMEs in entrepreneurial development and employment generation;
3. to ascertain the perception of SME operators towards cluster development to enhance SME operations; and
4. To examine the prospects of SMEs in Nigeria vis-a-vis expectations.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the factors that affect the performance of SMEs negatively in Nigeria?
2. What is the role of SMEs in entrepreneurial development and employment generation in Nigeria?
3. How do SME operators perceive cluster development in enhancing their business operations in Nigeria?
4. What are the prospects of SMEs in Nigeria in the near future?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There are no factors that negatively affect SMEs operations significantly in the South-East of Nigeria.
2. SMEs do not play any significant roles in entrepreneurial development and employment generation in the South-East of Nigeria.
3. SME operators do not perceive cluster development in the South-East of Nigeria as a means of enhancing their business operations.
4. The prospects of SMEs in the South-East of Nigeria are not significant.

Brief Literature Review

Despite all the enormous resources, Nigerian citizens still suffer from wide spread poverty, low economic output both in the public and private sectors due mainly to corruption, inefficiency, erratic power supply, poor infrastructure and unrealistic policies. Several attempts have been made to reverse this trend but to no avail. The austerity measures of the mid 1980s, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced in 1986, the current poverty alleviation in all its forms and even the current economic reforms, have yielded unsatisfactory results leading to the conditions of majority of the citizens becoming worse by each passing day. Evidence abound that the majority of Nigerians never had the opportunity of enjoying from the wealth of the nation (Idemobi, 2008; Nkamnebe, A. and Idemobi E. 2008; Anyadike, N., Emeh, I. and Ukah F. 2012). Past governments in the country, instead of focusing on delivering essential public services to the people assumed control of major sources of national income to the advantage of only a few.

As Oviawe (2010) puts it, it is no longer hearsay that Nigerian public institutions had long been unable to deliver public goods such as law and order, security, economic infrastructure and basic welfare to the citizens. As Idemobi (2010) puts it, the citizens are impoverished, nihilistic violence is multiplying, and political extremism is assuming destructive ethno-religious dimensions. Oviawe (2010) further observed that Nigeria's national priorities are misplaced, and her bureaucracy bloated in a pervasive culture of consumerism. A recent comparison between Nigeria and Indonesia as documented by Lewis (2013) shows that these two countries are both resource rich countries that underwent a similar historical trajectory of poverty, political instability and military authoritarianism. However, while Indonesia utilized its resources to develop itself, Nigeria's petrodollars seem mostly frittered away by generations of leaders in the public service.

The account has it that both Indonesian and Nigerian elites were very corrupt but while the Indonesians invested in their country and created jobs, their Nigerian counterparts frittered public resources and ferried them clandestinely to Geneva, Dubai, London, Pretoria and other world capitals. According to the Idemobi (2010) unemployment and poverty in Nigeria were caused by years of corruption, military rule, and mismanagement that hindered economic growth. As Anyadike *et al* (2012) opined, all efforts towards Nigeria's development are thwarted by corruption which creates room for more costly public investments and low government revenues. The cumulative effect of these is poverty, poor infrastructural development, insecurity, unemployment and fall in ethical standard," he said.

According to the World Bank, foreign investors cite Nigeria's security challenges as a deterrent to investing in Nigeria (World Bank Report 2012). In parts of the country unemployed youth constitute terror gangs extorting money from innocent members of the public. In some places in this country the dropping of a few cement blocks on a piece of land is enough reason for unemployed youth gangs to demand ransom. During the 2011 elections idle youth were willing tools in the mindless orgy of political violence. Oviawe (2010) attributed the spate of terrorism and other violent crimes in the country including kidnapping largely to the problem of youth unemployment, which he opined had been neglected over the years. Insecurity occasioned by armed robbery and kidnapping is today at rooftop across the country (Idemobi and Akam 2010). Supermarkets, fashion outfits, restaurants etc now hire armed private guards. In some parts of Northern Nigeria, civilians suspected of harbouring or lending sympathy to terrorists are said to rank more among unemployed and embittered young Muslims. Everywhere you go across the country, the story is the same. The contentious issue therefore, is how has Nigeria arrived at this level of decay.

Approach and Methodology

Basically, the work would seek to develop strategies and action plan to enable local residents to consider entrepreneurship as a career option. Ideally, efforts to build a stronger pipeline to developing entrepreneurial pursuits should target a wide array of groups within the focal communities. Efforts can begin in local school systems where expanding the availability of youth entrepreneurship training should serve as a primary goal.

Because the introduction of formal new curricula can often pose a challenge, other tools for building business education partnerships would also be considered. Young professionals especially of South-Eastern Nigeria offer potential avenues to build connections between local schools and leading entrepreneurs.

Three key steps would be followed to conduct the study on developing a strategy and action plan for entrepreneurial profiling and mapping study in the five states of the South-East of Nigeria. These steps include:

- Site Selection; i.e. selection of the number and locations of communities using maximum variation sampling strategy;
- Ranking of communities in-terms of their entrepreneurial inclination using local informants and enlightened people for the purpose of sampling;
- An entrepreneurial promotion index would be created and extrapolated to all focal communities in the focal LGAs in each of the five states through questionnaire put to a random sample of communities using standard sampling and survey techniques;

Essentially, the maximum variation sampling technique was used in this study. This approach is informed by the need to ensure that all the LGAs and communities as well with dimensions of interest are included in the samples collected. The dimensions of interest here would ensure that all the LGAs and communities are given the opportunity of being sampled. To this end, all the LGAs in the three Senatorial zones each of the five states would be sampled.

In order to ensure that communities with maximum variations are pooled into the sample and local informants' representatives and other informed participants would be asked to confirm listed communities from their LGAs and rank them into three entrepreneurial groups of highly willing, just willing, not willing and core entrepreneurial passion using self-perceived measures. The participants would later be asked to suggest measures as driving force that can help make entrepreneurial development a core part of the States' initiatives and development strategies.

Research Design

The study was designed as a descriptive survey which made use of primary data principally but not exclusively. According to Uzoagulu (2011), design can be described as an outline, a general agreement or plan from which something may be made. Nworgu (1991) notes that research design is a plan or blueprint which specify how data relating to a given problem should be collected and analyzed; it provides the procedural outline for the conduct of any given investigation. The use of survey research design in this study is justified because it follows an empirical investigation and helps in predicting behaviour (Bordens and Abbott, 2002). It also helps to determine whether or not a relationship exist between the variables of the study (Kerlinger, 1983). Responses were sought from the units of observation SME operators, on a wide range of issues bordering on the challenges of SMEs and how to make SMEs contribute significantly to entrepreneurship development and employment generation in the country. Ikeagwu (1997) observes that studies of this nature use survey method to look

for information on facts, attributes, practices and opinions of the respondents.

Area of the Study

The study was commissioned to cover the five states of the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria namely; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Both Owner-managers and paid-managers of SMEs were properly identified and enumerated.

Population of the Study

The population for the study comprises all small and medium scale enterprises that employed ten (10) persons and above in the five states of the South East of Nigeria mentioned above. From the directory of this categories of business domiciled in the ministries of industry and commerce 28,634 were identified. The breakdown of the population according to states is as follows: Abia State – 10,212; Anambra State – 8,375; Enugu State – 5,850; Imo State – 2,511 and Ebonyi State – 1,686. As could be seen from the breakdown of the population, Abia and Anambra states have the highest concentration of SMEs in the region.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the study was estimated through the application of a formula developed by Borg and Gall in 1973 for estimating sample size from a finite population. The formula is given by:

$$n = (Z_{\alpha})^2 (e) [N]$$

Where:

n = Sample size to be determined

Z_{α} = Confidence level (1.961)

e = Acceptable error margin

(α) = significant at 0.05

N = population of interest.

Substituting in the formula we have:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= (1.960)^2 (0.05) [28,633.9] \\ &= 3.8416 (1431.695) \\ &= 5,500.01872 \end{aligned}$$

N = 5,500 (Nearest whole number).

Thus, 5,500 SME operators in the South East was the sample size for the study.

Concerning the sampling techniques used in selecting the units of observation, systematic sampling was considered most appropriate for the selection because of its ability to evenly spread the sampling units across the population of interest. Systematic sampling technique is one of the probability sampling designs. Unlike others, it makes use of random start and sampling interval, an attribute that sets it aside from other methods.

Table 1 Population and Sample Allocation

S/No	State	Population	Sample Allocation	Percentage of Tables (%)
1	Abia	10,212	1,962	35.7
2	Anambra	8,375	1,609	29.2
3	Enugu	5,850	1,124	20.4
4	Imo	2,511	481	8.8
5	Ebonyi	1,686	324	5.9
	Total	28,634	5,500	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2015

As could be seen from Table 1, samples were allocated according to the strength of SMEs in each state (proportionate allocation). For instance, Abia State with the highest concentration of SMEs in the region with approximately 10,212 outfits was allocated 1,962 followed by Anambra State with 8,375 outfits which were also allocated 1,609 units of the sample.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument (questionnaire) was designed to reflect all aspects of the study and they include the following: factors that negatively affect the development of SMEs, the role of SMEs in entrepreneurial development and employment generation, the perception of SME operators about cluster development and the extent to which firms link up with one another in terms of forward and backward integration among others.

Validation and Reliability of the Questionnaire

The instrument was both face and content validated by the expert in questionnaire drafting within the statistic department of the consultancy. They certified the questionnaire fit for the study. In terms of the reliability, this was also assured through a process known as test re-test. It involved administering 50 copies of the questionnaire on SME operators outside the sample. After the interval of two weeks, the instrument was administered on the same group of people as in the first instance. Their responses were analyzed using the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient. The coefficients returned from the analysis were 0.88, 0.68, 0.80 and 0.60 thus, showing average coefficient of 0.74 which implies that the instrument is 74 percent reliable and therefore it was considered adequate for the study.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Direct administration of the instrument on the selected units of observation (SME operators) was adopted. As the enumerators administer the questions on the respondent at their locations, it affords the respondents the opportunity to ask questions where necessary and the interviewers also utilized the opportunity to make clarifications and explanations based on the training they had received concerning the enumeration. This approach increased the response rate to appreciable level. Out of the 5,500 questionnaire distributed across the five states, 5,109 were completed and returned thus showing a response rate of 92.9 percent. Concerning the analysis, the returned questionnaires were sorted by states before subsequent analysis was carried out on them. Prior to the commencement of data entry, a blank scorecard questionnaire was coded and used to design the datasheet as well as guide the data entry exercise. The data entry was followed by data cleaning, which was carried out to ensure that all the data were correctly captured in the sheet to minimize error. Simple descriptive statistics were used and information generated was carefully represented in simple bar charts for easy communication to the members of the public. Also, Chi-square (χ^2) and Z-test inferential statistics were used to test the various null hypotheses accordingly. All tests were carried out at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 2 Response Rate of Questionnaire Administration

S/NO	State	No of Questionnaire Distributed	Response	Response Rate (%)	Non Response	Non Response Rate (%)
1	Abia	1,962	1,791	91.3	171	8.7
2	Anambra	1,609	1,495	92.9	114	7.1
3	Ebonyi	324	301	92.9	23	8.7
4	Enugu	1,124	1,072	95.4	52	4.6
5	Imo	481	450	93.6	31	6.4
Total		5,500	5,109	92.9	391	7.1

Source: Field Enumeration, 2015

As could be seen from the above table, the respondents from the five states under investigation were just interested in the survey as their rate of response to our questions has shown. Even though some states have more SME Operators than the other states, the response rate across the states shows that SME operators have been yearning for a study like this to communicate their feelings to the policy makers.

Presentation of Data and Analysis

The data generated in this study were presented and analyzed in this section. The analysis was partitioned into the five sections of A, B, C, D, and E as reflected in the instrument (questionnaire) used in collecting the data. There were equally charts which were added in the analysis to further increase its understanding by the stakeholders. The first step in the analysis was the demographic characteristics of the SME operators interviewed.

Demographic Features of the Respondents

Here, efforts were made to reflect the state in which the SME operator is located, the type of manager he or she is whether owner-manager or paid-manager, gender of the respondents and highest educational qualification. Other pertinent background information captured about the respondents were the size of the business in terms of capital base, the nature or sector to which the business belong as well as the age of the business that is, how long the business has been in operation.

As could be seen from the table, 86.7 percent of the sample is male and 90.1 percent are owner-managers. It shows further that SME operators from Abia, Anambra and Enugu states dominates the sample with percentages of 35,29.3 and 20.9 respectively.

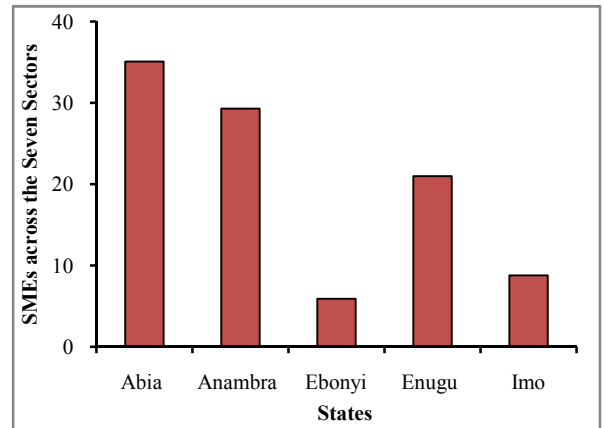


Figure 1 Distribution of SMEs across the five states of the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria

Table 3b is the presentation of SME operators’ nature of business and state of location. As could be seen from the table, manufacturing sector occupies 62.5 percent followed by service industry with 9.9 percent and agriculture services with 9.2 percent.

Table 3a Demographic Features of the Respondents

Gender	State	Ownership Status		Total	% of Total
		Owner-manager	Paid manager		
Male	Abia	1376	158	1534	30.0
	Anambra	1203	103	1306	25.6
	Ebonyi	214	35	249	4.9
	Enugu	879	73	952	18.6
	Imo	331	51	382	7.5
Female	Abia	220	37	257	5.0
	Anambra	169	20	189	3.7
	Ebonyi	49	3	52	1.0
	Enugu	111	9	120	2.3
	Imo	53	15	68	1.3
Total		4605	504	5109	100.0
% of Total		90.1	9.9	100.0	

Source; Field Enumeration, 2015

Table 3a is the presentation of gender, state of location of business and ownership status of business.

Entertainment and hospitality industries occupy 5.4 percent and 6 percent respectively. Also, the table shows that Abia State

occupies 35.1 percent of the sample; Anambra State occupies 29.3 percent and Enugu State 21.0 percent. The graphical presentation are shown in figures 1 and 2.

As could be seen from the figure, age bracket of 26-30 years represented by 4.3 percent and 31 years and above represented by 5.3 percent of the sample.

Table 3b Distribution of Respondents by State of Location and Nature of Business

S/N	Nature of Business	State of Location					Total	% of Total
		Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo		
1	Manufacturing	1201	1071	120	685	135	3194	62.5
2	Service Industry	163	128	51	91	73	506	9.9
3	Entertainment	87	55	32	63	39	276	5.4
4	Hospitality	109	64	29	59	43	304	6.0
5	Importation	73	58	27	40	35	233	4.6
6	Exportation	35	21	17	23	28	124	2.4
7	Agric Services	123	98	43	111	97	472	9.2
	Total	1791	1495	301	1072	450	5109	100.0
	% of Total	35.1	29.3	5.9	21.0	8.8	100.0	

Source: Field Enumeration, 2015

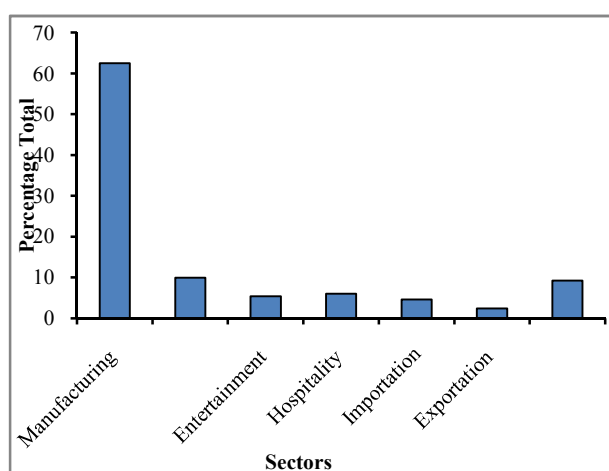


Figure 2 Sectoral Distribution of SMEs in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria

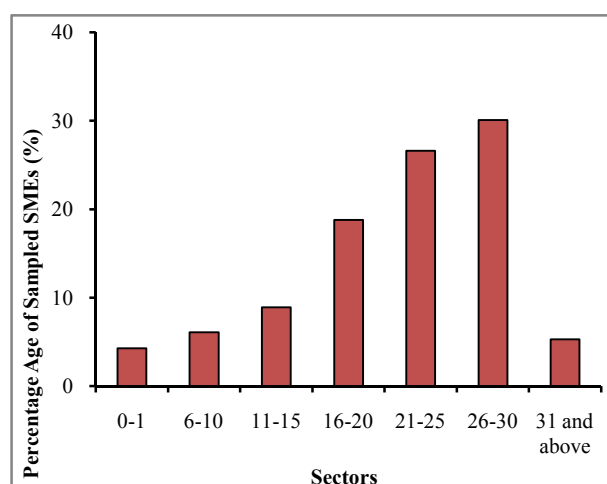


Figure 3 Distribution of respondents by Age of Business

Table 3c Distribution of Respondents by state of Location and Age of Business

S/N	State	Age of Business (in years)							Total	% of Total
		0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31+		
1	Abia	87	102	153	389	497	521	42	1791	35.1
2	Anambra	59	85	137	249	395	491	79	1495	29.3
3	Ebonyi	19	20	38	44	61	80	39	301	5.9
4	Enugu	36	59	67	223	297	321	69	1072	21.0
5	Imo	21	45	59	54	108	123	40	450	8.8
	Total	222	311	454	959	1358	1536	269	5109	100.0
	% of Total	4.3	6.1	8.9	18.8	26.6	30.1	5.3	100.0	

Source: Field Enumeration, 2015

Table 3c is the presentation of age of business by state of SME location. The table shows that businesses that have been sustained for upward of 16 years and above are represented by 80.8 percent of the total businesses in the region. However, out of this, only about 5.3 percent have stayed alive for 31 years and above. Achieving 80.8 percent as those who have remained in business for upward of 16 years and above is no mean feat especially when the environment of operation has been very unfriendly as regards infrastructure and un-encouraging government actions. But it is also disheartening that only about 5 percent of the businesses in this category have stayed up to 31 years and above leaves much to be desired. This is because, in developed economies or even emerging ones, businesses in this category are known for long life because they are major source of employment as well as engine of growth for such economies.

Table 4 Rate of Access to services and other inputs

Services/Inputs	High	Moderate	Low	No Access	Total
Electricity supply	151.8	1791.3	3018.0	147.7	5109
Water supply	93	1821	3090	105	5109
Access Roads	89	1854	3055	111	5109
Credits	125	1698	3156	129	5109
Foreign exchange	210	1787	2978	134	5109
Raw materials	205	1899	2822	183	5109
Total	189	1689	3007	224	5109
% of Total	3.0	35.0	59.1	2.9	100.0

Source: Field Enumeration, 2015

The analysis of rate of access to services and other inputs by SME operators presented in Table 4 shows that only 3 percent of the sample said they have highly access to those essential services, 35 percent said they have moderate access, 59.1 percent said low access while 2.9 percent said no access at all. This actually is what the sector has witnessed over a long

period of time as many literatures have indicated. It is of course the major reason that their contributions to job creation and national development has been very insignificant compared to the role the sector play in developed and some emerging economies across the globe.

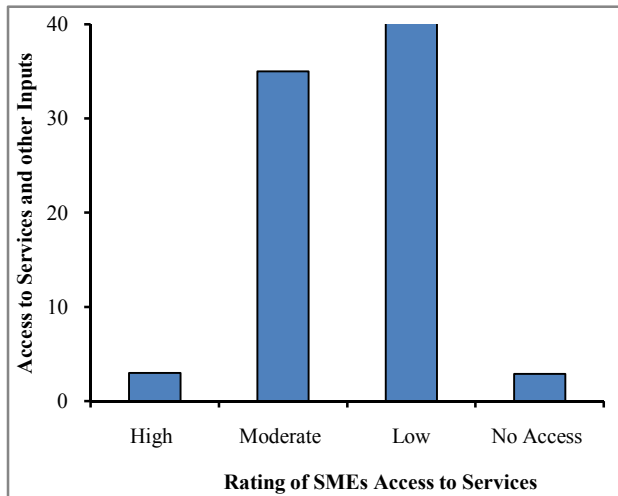


Figure 4 Rating of SMEs Access to Services and other Inputs

The implication of 59.1 percent saying they have low access to services such as electricity and water supply, access roads, etc, is that they make alternative arrangement to ensure that they continue to remain in business. This is the reason that they are producing at very uncompetitive prices for their products. For instance, the cost of alternative source of power is simply unimaginable, especially in an environment where the supply of petroleum products is very unstable and unpredictable.

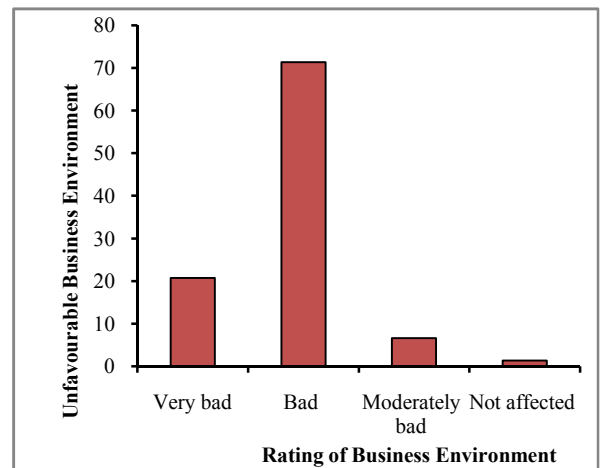


Figure 5 Rate of Bad Business Environment on SMEs.

Percentage analysis presented in Table 6 shows that on the average, 38.5 percent of the SME operators strongly agreed that SMEs play significant role in entrepreneurial development and employment generation in an economy. Forty-nine percent merely agreed with this opinion, 7.3 percent disagreed, 4 percent strongly disagreed while an insignificant proportion of 1.1 percent were undecided. However there are variations across the items. For instance, 37.2 percent and 50.9 Percent of the respondents strongly agreed and merely agreed with item 6 respectively while 38.3 percent and 51.1 percent respectively did so for item 8. The implication is that overwhelming majority of SME operators are aware of the crucial role SMEs are expected to play in the development of the economy.

Table 5 Effects of Unfavourable Business Environment on SMEs

Government Unfavourable Actions	Rate of Negative Effect				Total
	Very bad	Bad	Moderately bad	Not affected	
Multiple taxation	1201	3298	454	156	5109
Bureaucratic Burden	1300	3510	263	36	5109
Official Corruption	1055	3664	308	82	5109
Utility charges	670	4111	320	8	5109
Total	4226	14583	1345	282	20,439
Percentage of Total	20.7	71.4	6.6	1.3	100.0

Source: Field Enumeration, 2015

Table 5 shows the analysis of extent of negative influence of unfavourable business environment on SMEs. As could be seen from the table, about 71.4 percent of the SME operators interviewed said negative effect is bad, 20.7 percent said the negative environment affects them badly while an insignificant proportion of 1.3 percent said they are not really affected by the unfriendly environment. The implication is that many SME operators run their business under harsh business environment as noted earlier and it has been a source of discouragement to some entrepreneurially minded individuals who could have loved to engage on one venture or the other.

Lack of enabling environment hampers the capacity of SMEs to transform the communities by providing jobs for the teeming youth who roam the streets in endless search for jobs in urban areas and major cities in the country. About 92.1 percent of the SME operators interviewed said they are confronted daily by bad government action in the course of doing their businesses.

The opinion of the respondents concerning how they perceive cluster formation and its effect on SMEs performance is presented in Table 7. The analysis in the table indicate that on the average 40 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that well developed industrial cluster has so much to offer SMEs in the day to day management of their enterprises.

Also about 47.8 percent merely agreed with the statements of the items, 7 percent disagreed, 4.1 percent strongly disagreed and 1.1 had no opinion. But beyond the averages, there are variations across the items. For example, 37 percent and 48.8 percent strongly agreed merely agreed with item 5 respectively while in the case of item 6, 47 percent and 41.1 percent did so respectively. It is also interesting to note that on the aggregate, about 87.8 percent of the sample opined that industrial cluster would promote their activities by giving them access to the services that may not be available outside.

Table 6 Role of SMEs in Entrepreneurial Development and Employment Generation

S/N	Item	Alternative Responses					Total
		SA	A	D	SD	UND	
1	Majority of SME operators are entrepreneurs.	1951 (38.2)	2501 (49.0)	398 (7.8)	203 (4.0)	56 (1.1)	5109 (100)
2	SME operators are source of inspiration to would be entrepreneurs.	1897 (37.1)	2525 (49.4)	462 (9.0)	200 (3.9)	25 (0.5)	5109 (100)
3	It is not the duty of government to employ but empower SMEs who have the capacity to do it.	1880 (36.8)	2521 (49.3)	387 (7.6)	234 (4.6)	87 (1.7)	5109 (100)
4	A vibrant SME sector is critical to entrepreneurial activities and sustained poverty reduction.	1995 (39.0)	2463 (48.2)	342 (3.7)	210 (4.1)	99 (1.9)	5109 (100)
5	SMEs constitute major avenues for gainful employment for a vast number of unemployed youth.	2001 (39.2)	2514 (49.2)	359 (7.0)	178 (3.5)	57 (1.1)	5109 (100)
6	SMEs assist in stimulating indigenous entrepreneurship and technology.	1898 (37.2)	2603 (50.9)	366 (7.2)	209 (4.1)	33 (0.6)	5109 (100)
7	SMEs are known to rely more on local raw materials.	2000 (39.1)	2503 (49.0)	331 (6.5)	221 (4.3)	54 (1.0)	5109 (100)
8	As a source of employment and economic activities to a large number of rural and urban people SMEs assists in poverty alleviation.	1955 (38.5)	2611 (51.1)	330 (6.5)	179 (3.5)	34 (0.7)	5109 (100)
9	SMEs should facilitate the dispersal of economic activities to be able to promote even development so as to reduce rural-urban drift.	2010 (39.3)	2413 (47.2)	421 (8.2)	200 (3.9)	65 (1.3)	5109 (100)
10	SMEs constitute the majority of companies in the private sector and accounts for more than 60% of local employment in Nigeria.	2100 (41.1)	2401 (47.0)	325 (6.4)	211 (4.1)	72 (1.4)	5109 (100)
	Total	19687	25,055	3721	2045	582	51090
	Percentage of Total	(38.5)	(49.0)	(7.3)	(4.0)	(1.1)	(100.0)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages

Table 7 Perception of SME operators Towards Cluster Formation and Development

S/N	Item	Alternative Responses					Total
		SA	A	D	SD	UND	
1	Even though clusters require massive start-up capital investment and capital injection, it is the way to go for SMEs.	2000 (39.1)	2503 (49.0)	331 (6.5)	221 (4.3)	54 (1.1)	5109 (100)
2	Cluster development demands high technology and managerial skills but it is the best alternative.	2010 (39.3)	2413 (47.2)	421 (8.2)	200 (3.9)	65 (1.3)	5109 (100)
3	With industrial clusters, it is easy to achieve economies of scale in the purchase of inputs such as raw materials, equipment, finance and consulting services.	2100 (41.1)	2410 (47.0)	325 (6.4)	211 (4.1)	72 (1.4)	5109 (100)
4	Individually, SMEs are sometimes unable to capture market opportunities.	1885 (36.9)	2515 (49.2)	389 (7.6)	224 (4.4)	96 (1.9)	5109 (100)
5	Large production quantities, homogeneous, standard and regular supplies are what clusters can afford.	1888 (37.0)	2491 (48.8)	432 (8.5)	251 (4.9)	47 (0.9)	5109 (100)
6	Through proper development of cluster innovation can be achieved to enhance competitiveness.	2400 (47.0)	2100 (41.1)	338 (6.6)	220 (4.3)	51 (1.0)	5109 (100)
7	Cluster encourages networking and collaborations among firms which reduces operational and transaction costs.	1955 (44.8)	2611 (45.0)	288 (5.6)	190 (3.7)	40 (0.8)	5109 (100)
8	There is no integration among firms that is, forward and backward linkages as a result of lack of proper cluster formation.	1955 (38.3)	2611 (51.1)	330 (6.5)	179 (3.5)	34 (0.7)	5109 (100)
9	All the necessary services are always provided in any well developed industrial cluster.	1898 (37.2)	2603 (50.9)	366 (7.2)	209 (4.1)	33 (0.6)	5109 (100)
10	Ownership, tax, labour and new business/expansion regulations are usually minimized in industrial clusters.	2000 (39.1)	2503 (49.0)	341 (6.5)	211 (4.3)	54 (1.1)	5109 (100)
	Total	20,427	24,440	3,561	2,116	546	51090
	Percentage of Total	(40.0)	(47.8)	(7.0)	(4.1)	(1.1)	(100.0)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages

As could be seen from Table 8, about 74.4 percent of the sample feels that SMEs have great future in Nigeria given the efforts being made by the government to alleviate the problem bedeviling the sector. This opinion presupposes that efforts of the government which are yet to come to full manifestation anyway, are already beyond rhetoric of the past. No doubt, SMEs have prospect in Nigeria because they have no alternative in terms of wealth creation and capacity for employment in the economy, especially now that government is looking for avenues to tackle the problem of unemployment confronting the nation.

Test of Hypothesis

In this section of the analysis, all hypotheses formulated to guide the study were tested through the application of

appropriate statistical tools as mentioned in the methodology of the study. The essence of the test is to further confirm what the respondents have said in their answers to the research questions as presented in Table 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. All tests were carried out at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One

In this hypothesis, the researcher sought to determine whether there are factors that negatively affect SMEs significantly. Accordingly, the null and alternative hypotheses were set up as stated below:

H₀: There are no factors that negatively affect SME operations significantly.

H₁: There are factors that negatively affect SME operations significantly.

The test was carried out at 0.05 level of significance and 36 degrees of freedom.

To test the hypothesis, chi-square (χ^2) inferential statistics was applied to the data presented in Table 4. The data is on SME operator's access to certain essential services such as electricity, water, access roads, credits, etc. The test was carried out at 0.05 level of significance and 15 degrees of freedom.

Decision Rule

At 0.05 level of significance and 36 degrees of freedom, the weight of evidence against the null hypothesis was quite enormous as could be seen from the calculated and critical values of the χ^2 .

Table 8 prospects of SMEs in Nigeria in the Near Future

S/N	Item	Alternative Responses		Total
		SA	A	
1	With the new policy of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria's tertiary institutions, SMEs have great future.	4899	210	5109
		(95.9)	(4.1)	(100)
2	There is hope that within a short time, infrastructural deficit in Nigeria will be a thing of the past.	2910	2199	5109
		(57.0)	(43.0)	(100)
3	Banks and other formal lending houses appear to be ready to give credits at low interest rates to SMEs now.	3850	2521	5109
		(75.4)	(24.6)	(100)
4	There are signs that bureaucratic bottlenecks encountered by SMEs would soon disappear.	4510	599	5109
		(88.3)	(11.7)	(100)
5	Government at all levels appears to be doing something with regard to checking multiple taxation.	3570	1539	5109
		(69.9)	(30.1)	(100)
6	It appears the long documentation process by SMEs has been shortened.	2578	2531	5109
		(50.5)	(49.5)	(100)
7	A well developed SME sector is the answer to the huge problems of youth unemployment facing the country.	4985	124	5109
		(97.6)	(24.3)	(100)
8	Government has come to recognize SMEs as the real engine of economic growth and development.	2987	2122	5109
		(58.5)	(41.5)	(100)
9	SMEs serve as vehicles for propagation and diffusion of innovative ideas.	5001	108	5109
		(97.9)	(2.1)	(100)
10	Government at all levels seems to be ready to implement all policy dialogue that will promote the contributions of SMEs.	2100	2401	5109
		(52.8)	(47.2)	(100)
Total		37,990	13,100	51090
Percentage of Total		(74.4)	(25.6)	(100)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages.

Table 9 Summary of Chi-square (χ^2) Test for Hypothesis I

Hypothesis	Sample size (n)	Degrees of freedom (df)	Chi-square (χ^2) values		Significance level (x)	Decision Rule
I	5,500	15	χ^2_{cal} 218.126	χ^2_{crit} 24.960	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Note: χ^2_{cal} means calculated value of χ^2 and χ^2_{crit} means critical value of χ^2 .

Decision Rule

At 0.05 level of significance and 15 degrees of freedom, the calculated value of χ^2_{cal} (218.126) is greater than the critical value of χ^2_{crit} . (24.6). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative which suggests that there are factors that negatively affect SME operators significantly was accepted.

Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative which suggests that SMEs play significant role in entrepreneurial development and employment generation was accepted.

Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis three examined the opinion of the SME operators regarding the establishment of industrial clusters to promote their operations. Accordingly, the null and alternative hypotheses were outlined as stated below:

Hypothesis Two

The researcher sought to determine whether SMEs play significant role in entrepreneurial development and employment generation in the economy. Accordingly the null and alternative hypotheses were set up as stated below:

H₀: SMEs do not play any significant role in entrepreneurial development and employment generation in the economy.

H₀: SME operators do not believe that cluster formation and development can enhance their businesses significantly.

H₁: SMEs play significant role in entrepreneurial development and employment generation in the economy.

H₁: SME operators believe that cluster formation and development can enhance their businesses significantly.

To test the hypothesis, Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was applied to the data presents in Table 6 on the role of SMEs in entrepreneurial development and employment generation.

To test the hypothesis, Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was applied to the data presented in Table 7. The test was carried out at 0.05 level of significance and 36 degrees of freedom.

Table 10 Summary of Chi-square (χ^2) Test for Hypothesis II

Hypothesis	Sample size (n)	Degrees of freedom (df)	Chi-square (χ^2) values		Significance level (x)	Decision Rule
II	5,500	36	χ^2_{cal} 104.311	χ^2_{crit} 43.773	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Note: χ^2_{cal} means calculated value of χ^2 and χ^2_{crit} means critical value of χ^2 .

Table: 11 Summary of Chi-square (χ^2) Test for Hypothesis III

Hypothesis	Sample size (n)	Degrees of freedom (df)	Chi-square (χ^2) values		Significance level (x)	Decision Rule
III	5,500	36	χ^2_{cal} 129.110	χ^2_{crit} 43.773	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Note: χ^2_{cal} means calculated value of χ^2 and χ^2_{crit} means critical value of χ^2 .

Decision Rule

At 0.05 level of significance and 36 degrees of freedom, the calculated value of χ^2 (129.110) is greater than critical value of χ^2 (43.773). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative which suggests that formation of industrial clusters can enhance the performance of SMEs was accepted.

Hypothesis Four

The researcher sought to determine the chances that SMEs will prosper in Nigeria in the near future. Accordingly, the null and alternative hypotheses were set up as follows:

H₀: The chances that SMEs will prosper in Nigeria in the near future are not significant.

H₁: The chances that SMEs will prosper in Nigeria in the near future are quite significant.

To test the hypothesis, the data in Table 8 was used through the application of test of proportion. The test was carried out at 0.05 level of significance. The researcher actually considered the proportion of the respondents who actually said agreed in Table 8. It was further assumed that if more than 50 percent of the population said agreed, then it could be said that the proportion was significant, hence the population mean was assumed as 50% (0.5).

H₀: $\mu = 0.5$

H_A: $\mu > 0.5$

Then statistical formula for test of population (P₀) is:

$$P_0 = \frac{P - \mu}{\sqrt{\frac{\mu(1 - \mu)}{n}}}$$

Where:

P= the observed proportion

μ = the population mean

Such that:

$$P_0 = \frac{0.744 - 0.5}{\sqrt{\frac{0.5(1 - 0.5)}{5,500}}} = \frac{0.244}{0.00674} = 36.202$$

But P expected (P_e) at 5% level of significance (one tail) =1.645.

Therefore, Since P observed (P₀) is greater than the P expected (P_e); we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative

which suggests that SMEs have greater prospects in the near future.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The preceding section dealt with the presentation and analysis of the data generated in this study. From those analyses, certain findings which are quite pertinent were made. Those findings are discussed below under the following sub-headings: factors that negatively affected SMEs performance in Nigeria, the role of SMEs in entrepreneurial development and employment generation, perception of effect of cluster development by SME operators on performance of SMEs and the prospects of SMEs in Nigeria.

The result of hypothesis one in this study indicate that certain factors negatively affect the performance of SMEs significantly. These factors include poor electricity and water supply, lack of good roads network, inability to access credit from the formal financial sector, inadequate supply of foreign exchange and raw materials. Others are unfavourable business environment which manifests in multiple taxation, bureaucratic bottlenecks, official corruption and high utility charges, all of which add up to constitute what is generally referred to as high cost of doing business in Nigeria. It is a source of discouragement that dampens the spirit of businessmen. Such disincentives also discourages would be investors. The regulatory and policy environment of SMEs are bad. In particular, trade liberalization and globalization presents new challenges for SMEs. They have to contend with substitute products from their relatively more mature overseas counterparts who produce their goods under a friendlier environment.

Another level of challenge is the cumbersome official procedures. Typical examples include procedures for complying with regulations on such issues as company registration and compliance with requirements for benefiting from government incentives. The macroeconomic fundamentals are not encouraging. The concern here has to do with the degree of stability of the macroeconomic environment. In this regard, it is instructive to note that Nigeria has a low rating in terms of ease of doing business.

The second most serious problem of SMEs is the inadequate access to finance. SMEs main source of capital are their retained earnings and informal savings and loan associations. The quantum of funds from these sources is however, limited. Furthermore, the informal sources of finance are unpredictable

and have little scope for risk sharing. SMEs are handicapped in accessing funds from the capital market because the listing requirements are often considered restrictive by the promoters. They also find it difficult to attract funding from banks for a variety of reasons, including higher administrative and transaction costs, inadequacy of records and information relating to their operations. Lenders have to devote a significant amount of time to evaluate the viability of the project. Therefore it is scarcely considered a visible source. The result of hypothesis two shows that SMEs play significant roles in entrepreneurial development and job creation in Nigeria's economy. It is true that all managers are not entrepreneurs but evidence from this study reveals that majority of the managers are owners of their businesses. The implication is that majority of SME operators in the South East of Nigeria are entrepreneurs. Every well known entrepreneur today started at a micro level and with entrepreneurial instinct, they grew to the enviable heights that they occupy today; and so have become industrialist and huge source of employment in the economy. With regard to employment generation, this study reveals that SMEs are source of employment and economic activities to a wide range of people both in the rural and urban population thereby reducing poverty level. Experience from developed and emerging economies indicates that SMEs are the greatest source of employment. Apart from those who gained paid employment in the firm and, their owners themselves has by implication empowered themselves by virtue of running the enterprise regardless of the risks involved. The study found equally that as a dispersal of economic activities, it promotes even development within the economy thereby reducing rural-urban migration which has been the bane of rural communities. As a means of stimulating indigenous entrepreneurship and technological development, it encourages innovation in a variety of ways. Also, as a source of inspiration to prospective entrepreneurs, efforts must be made to sustain the contributions of the sector to the economy.

The result of hypothesis three shows that SME operators would want the government to develop standard industrial clusters for them. This is because industrial clusters would provide access to the services that are not ordinarily available outside the clusters. The desire to have cluster also arises from the fact that it provides enabling business climate through decreasing the cost of doing business by eliminating multiple taxes, harassments, bureaucratic bottlenecks and unnecessary documentation, sincere and trustworthy collaborations with the representatives of the government. Cluster was equally believed to have the capacity to facilitate graphing of linkages (forward and backward) among firms. In situations where output of a firm is the input of another, cost is drastically reduced and firms leverages on their comparative advantages. This finding, substantially supports the position of AIAE Enugu Forum (2006) on "unleashing industrial clusters for growth: the role of government". It notes too that government policies designed to grow SMEs must be implemented effectively.

The result of test of hypothesis four indicates that SMEs have great prospects in Nigeria. By looking at it from different perspectives, on one hand, the population of the country is a great advantage because it provides already market for the products and on the other hand, the populations have large

labour force that is unemployed such that the firms can take advantage of such cheap labour and produce at competitive prices. In another development, the unemployment situation in the country has aroused the interest of government toward entrepreneurship development including the policy of compulsory entrepreneurship education in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The policy of entrepreneurship education can only make desired impacts if it is linked with the established SME operators for the necessary practical.

This will encourage learning by doing and not the textbook theories that hardly work. As a vehicle for propagation and diffusion of innovative ideas, SMEs are in a better position to assist the government in implementing policies that are geared toward employment generation and wealth creation. The idea of establishing industrial cluster is a step in the right direction because with it, deficit in infrastructural facilities will be a thing of the past. The most recent in the arsenal of programmes that has increased the prospects of SMEs is the establishment of the small and medium enterprises equity investment scheme (SMEEIS) by the Central Bank of Nigeria. A move initiated by the Bankers Committee as another means of funding SMEs in Nigeria. The scheme requires all banks to set aside 10% of their after tax profits annually for equity investment in SMEs. The scheme is aimed at promoting indigenous entrepreneurship, develop local technology, generate employment, facilitate the flow of funds from banks for the establishment of new, viable SMEs, ensure output expansion, redistribute income and promote industrial linkages. All this have added to the prospects of SMEs in Nigeria.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs), across the globe have been recognized as sources of employment, wealth creation and engine of economic growth and development. Unfortunately, the contributions of this sector to the economy have not been quite significant in Nigeria despite some steps taken by the government to promote their activities. Certain factors have been indentified to constituting impediments to the performance of the sector and such factors include the epileptic power supply, lack of water and roads network. Others are inability of the SMEs to access credit from the formal sector at low interest rate as well as the unfavorable business environment among other factors.

But despite all these challenges, the role of SMEs in developing indigenous entrepreneurship and creating employment opportunities in Nigeria cannot be overlooked. Though the operating environment has not been as expected, the sector has continued to be the engine of the development of the economy in one way or the other. The expectation of all stakeholders is that SMEs should be encouraged to actively participate in the development of the economy like in the advanced and emerging economies across the globe. Small and medium scale enterprises look up to cluster formation and development as one of the many ways of solving the numerous problems facing the sector. The understanding is that development of industrial clusters would facilitate access to the needed services by the SMEs. Cluster would also enable the firms operating within it to take advantage of forward and

backward integration as well as enjoy reduced costs of transaction and operation when the output of a firm is the input of another.

Finally, the operators of SMEs are confident that there is prospect for the sector given certain moves that the government is making toward making them effective in contributing significantly to the economy. This is in recognition of their importance by government that growth of the economy and job creation are generated by enterprises and not policy-makers. In the same way, government has also realized that SMEs need support rather than acts that constitutes discouragement such as multiple taxation, bureaucratic bottleneck, unnecessary and prolonged documentations, harassment from government agents and the likes. Nigerian business environment may not be quite supportive at the moment but definitely, there are greater days ahead.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made.

The greatest problem facing SME operators in Nigeria is that of huge infrastructural deficit. For SMEs to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of the economy, the problem of infrastructure must be dealt with decisively, especially in the area of electricity supply. Many small businesses that cannot sustain production from alternative source of power supply have shut down due to high cost of procurement and maintenance.

As it was found from this study that SMEs have the capacity to create and nurture indigenous entrepreneurs as well as generate enough employment opportunities for the economy. However, they need massive support from the government to achieve them. The government can provide conducive business environment by taking care of the infrastructural problem, running a tax regime that is devoid of multiple taxation, solving the problem of insecurity, dealing decisively with the issues of corrupt practices and eliminating all appearances of bureaucratic bottlenecks as well as making credit available at low interest rate.

The study revealed that SME operators are optimistic that development of industrial clusters would help in eliminating some of the problems that hinder their effective performance. This is because standard cluster will have all the basic facilities necessary for smooth operation. In addition, cluster promotes firms linkages which cuts down on operational and transaction costs.

Since it was found that SMEs in Nigeria have great prospects but there is the need to break down barriers to doing business and provide incentives to encourage small and medium businesses growth. This well integrated package of measures and incentives should reflect both the supply and demand side, to foster the growth of a vibrant SME sector.

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