

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT AND SMALL BUSINESS SURVIVAL: A STUDY OF SELECTED COOPERATIVE-FINANCED ENTERPRISES IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the face of the prevailing credit crunch in the Nigerian economy, the typical Nigerian budding entrepreneur is guided by such institutional credit markets as the Bank of Industry, Microfinance banks and cooperative societies as avenues for improving the wealth-creating potentials of such entrepreneurs. Against a background of serious unemployment and dwindling fortunes of small and medium scale businesses all over Nigeria, the study has a main objective of evaluating the business support activities of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in her bid to ensure the survival of cooperative-financed small and medium scale enterprises in Ogun State, Nigeria.*

*The study, designed as a survey, utilized a two-pronged approach in sourcing primary data through the use of questionnaires. Out of the 140 questionnaires administered, 135 were returned representing 96.4% response rate. 27 respondents were officials of Ogun State Cooperative Federation Limited (OGSCOFED), while the remaining 108 were cooperative members who are owners of small businesses in the State. With a Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.902, the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed while the data were analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics such as simple percentages, rating indices and the Students *t* distribution.*

*The study revealed that the establishment of Business Support Centres, though important, was not significantly crucial to the survival of some selected businesses (especially cooperative-financed small businesses) in Ogun State, Nigeria, within the study period of 2005 – 2010. Among the study's recommendations are that the Federal Government of Nigeria should put in place necessary infrastructure like regular power, good roads, water and enhanced security across the states in order to enhance the survival of small businesses in Nigeria. Inasmuch as the small and medium enterprise sector is the nerve centre of most nations' industrial sector, implementing the study's recommendations would serve to encourage and engage the army of the nation's fresh university graduates and subsequently reduce unemployment.*

**KEY WORDS :- Business Support, small business, cooperative society**

### **Introduction**

Contributing to the subject matter of Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, Adefulu (2008) posited that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are believed to form a large chunk of entrepreneurial activities and therefore are considered as the engine room for the development of any economy. Furthermore, Hisrich, Peters and Shepherd (2008) assert that the

role of entrepreneurship in economic development involves more than just increasing per capita output and income; it involves initiating and constituting change in the structure of business and society.

After completing their one-year mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme, it is the considered opinion of these researchers that not more than 5% of fresh graduates from Nigerian Universities and other higher institutions are likely to be retained by their employers on permanent jobs. The remaining 95% along with other 500,000 secondary school leavers as well as numerous able-bodied men and women who never went beyond primary school, out of a need to survive and stay away from crime, most likely will either learn a trade/skill or establish a small scale business. Alternatively, these graduates may go for higher degrees or simply stay at home, jobless and gradually rot away. Some of them, weary and disillusioned, may try their hands on a vocation from which they hope to earn a living, but these efforts in most cases are stunted by inadequate infrastructural facilities and unfavourable business climate.

It is no longer news that the American economy is the world's largest which boasts of a wide array of enterprises, ranging from one-person sole proprietorships to some of the world's largest corporations. However, large corporations, contrary to expectations, do not dominate the economy. According to the US Small Business Administration, (SBA) a government body that regulates the activities of all small businesses in the United States, 99 percent of all independent enterprises in the United States of America employ fewer than 500 people. These enterprises account for 52 percent of all US workers; 19.6 million Americans work for companies employing fewer than 20 workers, 18.4 million work for firms employing between 20 and 99 workers, and 14.6 million work for firms with 100 to 499 workers.

The mission of the SBA is to maintain and strengthen the American economy by enabling the establishment and viability of small businesses and by assisting in the economic recovery of communities after disasters. According to Wikipedia, the SBA has directly or indirectly helped nearly 20 million businesses and in 2008, had a loan portfolio of roughly 219,000 loans worth more than \$84billion making it the largest single financial backer of businesses in the United States.

No doubt, small businesses in America enjoy tremendous support from the SBA; little wonder that segment of the economy thrives. Researchers on small business development, judging from the recorded success of this segment of the population in America and other developed nations like Germany, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, etc. posit that small businesses must be supported in the overall interest of business growth and development of any nation. It is in the light of the foregoing that this paper discusses the concept of Business Support and survival of small businesses using as a case study some selected businesses in Nigeria. This concept, as far as this paper is concerned, is defined as a Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) - provided facility within the Nigerian State which offers internet/website facilities as well as market information on small and medium scale enterprises. Such facilities are also expected to provide free business consultancy services in order to reduce the failure rate of MSMEs in each state of the Nigerian Federation.

### **The Nigerian Small Business Sector**

Successive governments in Nigeria have always emphasized the place of the Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) as the engine of growth, without concrete action on ways of actively developing the sector. Despite the prevailing credit crunch in the Nigerian economy, government's renewed interest in the SME sector was corroborated by Ugwu, (2010), in his

article:- ‘Banks begin screening for N200billion SME’s Loans’. According to the report, commercial banks in the country had begun appraisal of the N200billion (\$1.25billion) small and medium enterprises credit scheme. The money had been earmarked solely for small and medium scale enterprises and was 80% guaranteed by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The main objectives of this Credit Guarantee Scheme by the CBN were: to fast-track the development of SME/manufacturing sector of the economy by providing guarantees; set the pace for industrialization of the Nigerian economy, increase access to credit by promoters of SMEs and manufacturers; and generate employment.

Taking cognizance of the prevailing high interest rates and other sharp practices in banks and other traditional sources of finance, the governments of most developing countries have initiated various industrial credit programmes. Such programmes have the objectives of assisting small-scale entrepreneurs to increase their income and to improve their living standards. It is believed that these programmes are veritable tools for redistributing resources that would lead to the wealth creation of the small-scale entrepreneurs. The above considerations have led to the establishment and recognition of many institutional credit markets in Nigeria including the Bank of Industry, Micro-finance banks, Co-operative Societies etc.

Nigeria’s equivalent of the American SBA is the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) which was created by the SMEDAN Act of 2003. The Agency seeks to promote the development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector of the Nigerian Economy.

Under its function of designing and establishment of Business Support Centres and Industrial Parks, the following are some of its stated responsibilities:-

- Business Support Centres (BSCs) will be established in each state, to provide business advisory services; i.e. link MSMEs to sources of funds;
- Provide internet/website facilities;
- Provide market information;
- Provide business consultancy services;
- Collate and make available business plans and prototypes;
- Implement capacity building programmes;
- Advise on regulatory and standardization frameworks and collate all relevant business information that could be useful to SMEs.

Corroborating the above stated functions, Umar (2010) posited that the agency has, inter alia, been able to provide to MSMEs the following:-

Business Development Services (BDS) Provision: The Agency has continued to offer BDS through duly appointed service providers and its Business Support Centres (BSCs) and Business Information Centres (BICs) in the various State Capitals and Local Government Areas in the country. The Business Information Centres are also into partnership between SMEDAN and Local Governments, Enterprise Clusters or City/state chapters of Business Membership Organizations (BMOs). SMEDAN has a total of 15 BSCs and 38 BICs that are fully equipped.

## **Study Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:-

1. To authenticate the presence or otherwise of Business Support Centres operated by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in Ogun State, Nigeria

2. To appraise the operations of such support agencies in the survival of selected businesses in Ogun State, South-western Nigeria.
3. To compare support operations of other bodies in other parts of the world with what obtains in Nigeria.
4. To subsequently offer recommendations on how to improve such support operations for the ultimate benefit of small businesses in Nigeria.

### **Hypothesis**

The study's sole hypothesis is:-

H<sub>0</sub> The establishment of Business Support Centres by SMEDAN is not significantly crucial to the survival/success of small businesses (especially those partly or wholly financed by cooperative societies) in Ogun State, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The study, a survey, was designed in a way that data were obtained from small business owners in Ogun State in South-western Nigeria. The survey instrument, the questionnaire, contained specific questions targeted at eliciting response from the respondents on business support functions of SMEDAN as specified on her website. The cooperative enterprise, as an emerging area of study in Nigeria, comprises the authors' primary area of focus. Officers of the Federating body of cooperatives in the state as well as less literate ordinary members of cooperative societies in Ogun State who are also business owners were interviewed in order to obtain a balanced view of opinions on the concept of business support which was defined by SMEDAN as including internet/website facilities as well as market information on small and medium scale enterprises. Such facilities are expected to provide free business consultancy services in order to reduce the failure rate of MSMEs in each state of the Federation.

It is the considered opinion of the authors that these groups of respondents would be able to adequately assess the performance of the subject matter of the study i.e. business support to small businesses, and by default, business growth in Ogun State, which has been appropriately described as a compelling investment destination in Nigeria. Mention should also be made of the fact that the respondents are equally representatives of individual cooperative societies in the state as well as small business owners.

### **Analysis of Data**

Data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Rating indices were used to evaluate some of the responses to the questions in order to show the weights that the respondents attached to the various responses. Data were analyzed using both inferential and descriptive statistics. The data were obtained from two strata of respondents – the first stratum comprised of 30 (Thirty) officials of Ogun State Cooperatives Federation Ltd. (OGSCOFED). The second stratum comprised 108 ordinary members of cooperatives societies in Ogun State, Nigeria, who are equally owners of small businesses. The main line of distinction between these two strata is their level of education which also affects their ability to complete the study questionnaire; hence the slight difference in the mode of information collection from these two sets of people. Data obtained from the thirty OGSCOFED officials were analyzed using the Students t-test, since this is the most appropriate for small samples. Employing a 95% confidence level, the research variables were tested; the respective mean, standard deviation and standard error mean values were subjected to appropriate interpretation according to existing decision rules. The study's hypothesis was subsequently accepted or rejected depending on the computer-generated values of the variables tested.

# **RESTATEMENT AND TEST OF HYPOTHESIS**

H<sub>0</sub>:- The establishment of Business Support Centres by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) is not significantly crucial to the survival/success of small businesses (especially those fully or partially financed by cooperatives) in Ogun State, Nigeria.

The only variable being tested here is the respondents' opinion on the desirability of the establishment of Business Support Centres to the survival/success of small businesses (especially those fully or partially financed by cooperatives) in Ogun State within a study period between 2005 and 2010.

According to the computer-generated table of paired samples test below, at a confidence level of 95% and the respective degrees of freedom for each of the pairs, the results of the 2-tail test are displayed hereunder in Table 1.1. The t-tabulated values for 26 degrees of freedom and 5% level of significance is 2.056. The acceptance region will therefore fall within a range of - 2.056 and +2.056. The calculated values of the respective pairs range between 0.022 and 0.746, which all fall within the acceptance region.

Decision Rule: Where t-calculated value falls within the acceptance region, H<sub>0</sub> is accepted.

Therefore the study's null hypothesis which states that:-

**The establishment of Business Support Centres by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) is not significantly crucial to the survival/success of small businesses (especially cooperatives) in Ogun State, Nigeria** is accepted for the first stratum of respondents.

**Table 1.1**

**Paired Samples Test – Stratum One**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Upper	Lower			
Pair 1	.11111	.42366	.08153	-.05648	.27871	1.363	26	.185
Pair 2	-.03704	.58714	.11299	-.26930	.19523	-.328	26	.746
Pair 3	.03704	.51750	.09959	-.16768	.24175	.372	26	.713
Pair 4	-.14815	.60152	.11576	-.38610	.08980	-1.280	26	.212
Pair 5	.14815	.71810	.13820	-.13592	.43222	1.072	26	.294
Pair 6	-.14815	.60152	.11576	-.38610	.08980	-1.280	26	.212
Pair 7	-.07407	.61556	.11847	-.31758	.16943	-.625	26	.537
Pair 8	-.25926	.71213	.13705	-.54097	.02245	-1.892	26	.070
Pair 9	.03704	.51750	.09959	-.16768	.24175	.372	26	.713
Pair 10	.07407	.26688	.05136	-.03150	.17965	1.442	26	.161
Pair 11	-.11111	.50637	.09745	-.31142	.08920	-1.140	26	.265
Pair	.18519	.62247	.11979	-.06105	.43142	1.546	26	.134

12								
Pair 13	-.18519	.39585	.07618	-.34178	-.02859	-2.431	26	.022
Pair 14	.11111	.64051	.12327	-.14227	.36449	.901	26	.376
Pair 15	.29630	.66880	.12871	.03173	.56086	2.302	26	.030

**Source: Computer-generated from data input (2011)**

According to the computer-generated table of paired samples test below, at a confidence level of 95% and the respective degrees of freedom for each of the pairs, the results of the 2-tail test are displayed hereunder in Table 1.2. The t-tabulated values for 26 degrees of freedom and 5% level of significance is 2.056. The acceptance region will therefore fall within a range of -2.056 and +2.056. The tabulated values of the respective pairs range between 0.022 and 0.746, which all fall within the acceptance region. **Therefore for the first stratum of respondents, the null hypothesis is accepted.**

For the second stratum of respondents, a restatement of the study's hypothesis may be necessary at this stage:-

The establishment of Business Support Centres by SMEDAN is not significantly crucial to the survival/success of small businesses (especially cooperative-financed ones) in Ogun State, Nigeria during the study period. To test this hypothesis on the second stratum, Table 1.2 was computer-generated:-

**Table 1.2**

**Paired Samples Test**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 3	-.01852	.13545	.01303	-.04436	.00732	-1.421	107	.158
Pair 4	-.21296	.41131	.03958	-.29142	-.13450	-5.381	107	.000
Pair 5	-.07407	.26311	.02532	-.12426	-.02388	-2.926	107	.004
Pair 7	-.01852	.13545	.01303	-.04436	.00732	-1.421	107	.158
Pair 8	-.21296	.41131	.03958	-.29142	-.13450	-5.381	107	.000
Pair 9	-.07407	.26311	.02532	-.12426	-.02388	-2.926	107	.004
Pair 10	-.01852	.13545	.01303	-.04436	.00732	-1.421	107	.158
Pair 11	-.21296	.41131	.03958	-.29142	-.13450	-5.381	107	.000
Pair 12	-.07407	.26311	.02532	-.12426	-.02388	-2.926	107	.004
Pair 13	-.19444	.39762	.03826	-.27029	-.11860	-5.082	107	.000
Pair 14	-.05556	.23013	.02214	-.09945	-.01166	-2.509	107	.014
Pair 15	.13889	.34744	.03343	.07261	.20517	4.154	107	.000

**Source:- Computer-generated from data input (2011)**

From the computer-generated paired samples test on Table 1.2, it was observed that at a 5% level of significance and 107 degrees of freedom for each of the pairs, the results of the 2-tail test as displayed in the table revealed computer-calculated t-values ranging from 0.000 to 0.158, which all fall within the acceptance region.

Decision Rule: - Where t-calculated values fall within the acceptance region of the t-tabulated,  $H_0$  is accepted. Therefore the study's null hypothesis which states that:-

**The establishment of Business Support Centres by SMEDAN is not significantly crucial to the survival/success of small businesses (especially cooperative-financed ones) in Ogun State, Nigeria** during the study period is accepted for the second stratum of respondents.

Therefore, for both strata of respondents, the study's null hypothesis was accepted.

**Discussion of Results and Policy Implications**

One of the major planks with which SMEDAN is supposed to ensure the survival of small businesses in the country is the establishment of Business Support Centers or Business Information Centers in each state of the Federation. Unfortunately, empirical study of Ogun State, Nigeria, revealed that the State is yet to be a beneficiary of this laudable scheme. Such centers are expected to provide internet/website facilities, free business consultancy services for MSMEs including cooperatives. Such businesses are also expected to obtain useful information on available business plans and prototypes useful to cooperative societies as well as other enterprises. Where such do not exist, the result is stunted growth for these businesses with all attendant consequences that border on eventual failure.

The results of this study are unexpected because all over the world, anything that could act as a buffer in realizing the growth potential of small businesses should be welcome. Unfortunately, this is yet to fully manifest in Ogun State, Nigeria. That the respondents opined that the establishment of Business Support Centres was not significantly important for the survival/success of small businesses (especially cooperatives) in Ogun State during the study period was against all forms of rational reasoning; however, the results are not totally unexpected given the fact that such Business Support Centres are supposed to be government-financed and operated. Experiences from Nigeria's recent history do not portray the government as good business managers. Carcasses of poorly-run government establishments dot the Nigerian landscape; right from Aviation, Shipping, Telecommunications, Road and Railways, etc. It is the considered opinion of these researchers that not until the government divests itself of things in which it has no expertise or competence, will researchers stop getting this kind of results.

Expectedly, it is evident from this study that SMEDAN, being a government agency, did not quite measure up to public expectation as far as its mandate to the SME sector is concerned. The approach to duty of a typical Nigerian government agency is usually not encouraging; neither is the general attitude to work business-like. The study, therefore, corroborates an existing public perception of a typical government agency as lackluster and not alive to duties.

**Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

The purpose of the study was to, among other things, use scientific and empirical means to authenticate the presence or otherwise of Business Support Centres operated by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) in Ogun State, Nigeria; and to appraise the operations of such support agencies in the survival of selected businesses in Ogun State, South-western Nigeria within the study period between 2005 and 2010. Such variables that were tested include establishment of Business Support centres in the state to assist small businesses, extent of collaboration of SMEDAN with the Ogun State government in the

establishment of industrial parks that would facilitate easy access among SMEs to land, good infrastructure and security in the state.

The study revealed inter alia that, with a large population of enterprises requiring different forms of assistance to develop their businesses coupled with the challenge of covering a large country like Nigeria, funding, according to the Agency, was a major challenge. Other challenges, though not identified in the report, but are generally identified with government establishments, include lack of qualified personnel to drive its operations, the usual high-level corruption within the system, undue politicization of crucial issues like appointments, lack of political will to let the agency work, etc. Small and Medium Enterprises, including cooperatives, strive under unreliable electricity supply, high cost of bank loans, visible lack of infrastructure support and stringent tax regimes imposed by various government agencies.

From the results of the study, it is obvious that SMEDAN has not been of much support to cooperative-financed businesses in Ogun State, Nigeria by the establishment of Business Support Centres within the 2005-2010 study period. The study is the first attempt at a balanced investigation of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) vis-à-vis her contribution to cooperative development and survival in Ogun State. The study discovered a glaring absence of SMEDAN from major cities within the four study zones of Ogun State.

In the three local government areas closest to the researchers, SMEDAN's only 'proof' of presence is a rusty 6' x 4' signboard bearing the agency's name and advertising her Business Information Centre in Okun Owa in the Odogbolu Local Government Area of the State. A close inquiry, however, revealed that the centre had long moved to an unknown address in Ososa Ijebu, about 10kms away in the same LGA. Upon combing the whole of Ososa Ijebu and inquiring from a Micro-finance bank (which expectedly should know better), it was discovered that SMEDAN existed just on the figment of imagination – but not on ground.

The researchers therefore recommend as follows:-

- (a) In view of the identified limiting factors of the typical SME, it is advisable that SMEDAN, as a support agency of the Federal Government, should be more focused on her stated mission to SMEs, including cooperatives not only in Ogun State, but in the entire country of Nigeria.
- (b) The Federal Government should depoliticize appointments into her agencies as much as possible; this is with a view to getting the best hands to do the job.
- (c) Non-government agencies should also be empowered to complement government efforts in supporting small businesses by way of training, staff recruitment and other forms of support.
- (d) SMEDAN should be given the necessary tools it needs to perform her support role to small and medium enterprises not only in Ogun State, but in the entire Federation.
- (e) Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, as the nerve-centre of most nations' industrial development, need to be encouraged in order to engage the army of the nation's fresh graduates and subsequently reduce unemployment.
- (f) The Federal Government of Nigeria should put in place the necessary infrastructure like regular power supply, good roads, water, and enhanced security across the states in order to encourage setting up of businesses.

Globally, employment generation is one of the most important reasons for promoting the development of SMEs. There is no gainsaying that Ogun State, a neighbouring state to Lagos, stands to ameliorate the nation's unemployment situation if her SMEs including cooperative-



financed small businesses, enjoy the necessary support from SMEDAN. Consequently, the SME sector would be on course in creating the right environment for jobs and the nation will also be on her way to meeting the Millennium Development goals on sustainable development. Ogun State, being only one of Nigeria's 36 states, this study only serves as a starting point for other researchers, educators, government agencies and academics. Finally, since some of the findings of this study are not in variance with previous research findings, the study provides many opportunities for more in-depth studies and knowledge to be acquired in similar areas of study.

The study, therefore, serves as an eye opener to the Federal Government of Nigeria that some of her big-sounding government agencies may exist, only to gulp appropriations running into billions of tax payers' money with nothing to show for such expenditure in the lives of the citizenry, thereby nullifying their mandate in the first instance.

SMEDAN, an equivalent of America's Small Business Administration (SBA), is expected to give lifeline to small businesses which are regarded as the bedrock of most industrialized economies.

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