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## **Lifting micro-enterprise operators performance using stakeholder engagement model in Abia state, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:**

*Abstract The alarming rate of business failure in Nigeria is worrisome. Addressing this challenge require not only government intervention in policy but a multi-stakeholder engagement to share ideas, innovations, and drive success. This study examines factors that militates against performance among microenterprise operators in Abia state, Nigeria. The specific objective is to ascertain the level of profitability of these enterprises and social factors influencing their performance. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed in the selection of respondents and location. Data were collected through interview with the aid of a well-structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as tables, percentages and multi-regression model were employed to analysis data obtained. The study found that the mean profit of operators is small and inadequate to sustain the business. Inflation, government policy, scarcity of raw material militates against operators' performance. The study recommends that since government and private sector drive engine of development, hence both must collaborate in addressing these challenges by sharing ideas through stakeholder engagement. Also, investment in agriculture to drive the local content law as a way of addressing challenge of scarcity of raw material among other recommendations.*

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### **Abstract**

The alarming rate of business failure in Nigeria is worrisome. Addressing this challenge require not only government intervention in policy but a multi-stakeholder engagement to share ideas, innovations, and drive success. This study examines factors that militates against performance among microenterprise operators in Abia state, Nigeria. The specific objective is to ascertain the level of profitability of these enterprises and social factors influencing their performance. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed in the selection of respondents and location. Data were collected through interview with the aid of a well-structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as tables, percentages and multi-regression model were employed to analysis data obtained. The study found that the mean profit of operators is small and inadequate to sustain the business. Inflation, government policy, scarcity of raw material militates against operators' performance. The study recommends that since government and private sector drive engine of development, hence both must collaborate in addressing these challenges by sharing ideas through stakeholder engagement. Also, investment in agriculture to drive the local content law as a way of addressing challenge of scarcity of raw material among other recommendations.

**Keywords:** performance, microenterprises, SME, stakeholder engagement and government policy

### **Introduction**

In recent time, there appeared to be a general skepticism about the future direction of economic growth in most developing countries without appreciable increase in the performance of micro enterprises. This is because most micro-enterprises are drivers of local content policies. According to Oteh and Eleodinmuo (2016), no nation can develop beyond investment in its factor endowment because economic development is dependent on those factors. The discouraging pace of development in Nigeria when compared with other developing countries and Asia, reflects the potency of investing, and harnessing the value of micro-enterprises to drives growth. Examples are often cited of the pace of development in China and India, which

have lifted many out of poverty, mirrors the commitment to sustainable industrialization using the micro-enterprise model of industrialization.

Small, Micro, and Medium enterprises (SMEs) plays a decisive role in economic development of any nations. The role of SMEs in economic development of developed countries, especially their contributions to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment cannot be underestimated (Subrahmanya *et al.*, 2010). According to Etuk *et al.* (2014), in most OECD countries, SMEs and Micro enterprises account for over 95 percent of firms, 60-70 percent of employment, 55 percent of GDP and generate the lion's share of new employment. In comparison with other OECD countries, SMEs productivity in Nigeria cannot be described as impressive given their roles as cog in the wheel of industrialization. According to 2012 enterprise baseline survey in Nigeria, over 17 million registered SMEs contribute only about 25 percent employment and contribute of about 46.54 percent to the nation's GDP in nominal terms; with more than 75 percent of these businesses according to Oyindo (2006) in Mbanasor (2012), being Agribusiness enterprises.

In terms of poverty decimation, SMEs are important vehicles that navigates poor people out of vicious circle of poverty (World Bank, 2004). Particularly, micro-enterprises model contributes to the reduction of poverty and vulnerability of the poor through self-empowerment, and economic self-sufficiency. This implies greater access of the poor to enter mainstream economy, improve income and well-being. At the macro level, these firms contribute to innovations, jobs and economic growth. Given their propensity for local content - local resources and expertise, micro-enterprises serve as a means of developing indigenous entrepreneurship which is indeed necessary for sustained industrialization (Mulat *et al.*, 2006).

Despite the above credit, most of these enterprises die within their first five years of existence, a smaller percentage goes into extinction between six and tenth year, while only about five to ten percent survive, thrive, and grow to maturity (Aremu and Adeyemi, 2011; Gomez, 2008). Although micro-enterprises and other businesses are not immune to challenges due to convergence of social, economic, and political factor, but challenges against these businesses in developing countries appeared to be greater when compared to those of developed countries. The challenges of micro-agribusiness enterprises in Nigeria, nay developing countries have been identified by researchers (see Ojo, 2003; Nto *et al*, 2012; Idachaba, 2000; Marchet *et al.*, 2001; NIPC, 2006). There appears to be a consensus that the financial health of micro enterprises is bad because of lack of adequate funding and working capital to effectively drive growth and survival of these enterprises. For instance, a study on sources of total factor production growth in 83 industrial and developing countries for the period 1960-1990 by Nehru and Dhareshwars (1994) showed that finance formation was three to four times more important than raw materials in explaining output growth of these enterprises. This confirms the view of Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) as cited by Bowen *et al.* (2009) that three out of five businesses fail within the first few months of operation. Inadequate credit, lack of raw materials, sluggish demand, insufficient working space and infrastructural services are among the major bottlenecks (Rosli,2011). The consequences are underperformance and inability of the businesses to make meaningful contribution to national development.

The recent release of unemployment figure in Nigeria by NBS and National Employment Consultative Association (NECA) confirms the opinion of Mulat *et al.* (2006) that micro-enterprises have been performing below capacity and their growth has been inhibited by numerous factors. Addressing the challenges of under-performance among SMEs requires better

understanding of the characteristics of operators of such business and factors that drives their success (Mulu, 2007). One of the fundamental way of achieving this is through stakeholder engagement, as this will provoke sharing of ideas, innovations and energize effective drive for success. Therefore, overcoming the challenge of micro-enterprise as a harbinger of modern economy require participation and engagement of multi-institutions especially in those areas that are relevant for the success of micro-enterprise operations.

In recent time, there appeared to be greater emphasis on cooperation among business organization concerning increasing complexities in our environment. Stakeholder cooperation is considered a way of managing risk, sustainability and improve strategic. According to Petra (2013), many businesses have come to full realization that stakeholder engagement can improve business performance. The negative consequences of poor relationship with stakeholders is seen in damaged reputation and poor project result.

It is also important to mention that stakeholder engagement does not guarantee only economic performance. It incorporates the triple bottom-line being one of the pillar of corporate social responsibility. In other words, when business engages stakeholders as part of its corporate responsibility, it reaps social performance and goodwill that comes from increasing patronage. According to Petra (2013), such cooperation leads to improved market development.

Despite the above benefits, there appear to be little engagement and cooperation among SMEs in developing countries and their performance in the face of rising population of Nigeria underscores the importance of looking at stakeholder engagement initiatives and determinants of micro-enterprises' performance. In addition, the relatively scant information about enterprises found at the state level is a gap which this study seeks to address. Therefore, this study aims at

investigating demographic and firm-related characteristics which determine performance in terms of microenterprise operators in Abia State Nigeria such as profitability, social factors that determine performance and other constraints militating against the business, and addressing performance from stakeholder outlook.

The underlying motivation for this study is the inability of many micro agribusinesses enterprises to discharge their developmental obligations and continue in business. As government continue to seek for ways to enhance performance of SMEs, this study will serve as a framework to design effective management policies and strategies for the development of SMEs in Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Abia State, Nigeria. The state is one of the states in the south East region of Nigeria. The state lies with approximately latitude  $4^{\circ}45'$  North and  $6^{\circ}19'$  and longitude  $7^{\circ}00'$  and  $8^{\circ}10'$  East. Abia State occupies about 5,834 square kilometers and has a population of over 2,883,999 persons with a relatively high density at 580 persons per square kilometer (NPC, 2007).

The state is divided into administrative blocks called Local Government Areas which is grouped into three (3) agricultural Zones namely Ohafia, Umuahia and Aba Zones. In terms of occupation, Abians are majorly farmers and traders. The presence of a good numbers of agricultural institutions such as National Root Crops Research Institute, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Faculty of Agriculture of Abia State University, Extension outfit of Ahmadu Bello University etc in the state guarantees an unquantifiable advantage and adds to their capacity in their agricultural production, while the presence of modern and international markets mostly in Aba, the commercial nerve center of the state drives the business chain. The

state is the home to Nigeria made shoes, bags and other fabrications. Their ingenuity, enterprising and entrepreneurial ability earned the city of Aba, the nickname “Japan of Africa”

The study adopted mixed research approach (multi-stage sampling technique) in the selection of respondents. Two urban locations were purposively selected for the study because of location and number of micro-enterprises - Aba and Umuahia. The next stage involved the random selection of 60 micro enterprises operating from each of the urban locations (Aba and Umuahia). Thus, making it a total of 120 respondents.

Primary data is the major data source and was collected through interview with the aid of a well-structured copies of questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested prior to distribution to ensure consistency and validity. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, and frequencies and regression model based on the choice of attributes.

Following Oteh and Nwachukwu (2014), the multiple regression model is specified as follows:

Where:

Y = Performance measured in terms of profitability (Naira)

$X_1 = \text{Age (years)}$

X<sub>2</sub> = Gender of operator

$X_3$  = level of education of the operator

$X_4$  = Household size

$X_5$  = Marital status

e ≡ terror term

## Results and discussions

### Profitability of microenterprise operators

It is a truism that market performance is the economic result of the relationship between structure and conduct of the market. Performance is approached from different perspective. Financial performance is the most observed performance measure among businesses; others are quality of customer service and strength of brands. Hence, this study adopted the firms profit as a measure of its performance because it is concerned with a firm's specific gain or loss. What a trader receives from a transaction in terms of profit is the economic justifications of continuing in that business. Table 1 represents the distribution of the micro enterprise operators according to profit. The Table posit a mean profit of N67258.25. this implies that the least performed company pocket this amount. This is barely enough to enable the business stay afloat financially in event of shock in the environment. Given the present economic circumstances in Nigeria, the amount cannot take care of large household size of most micro-enterprise operators. Although, the size of their households could implies availability of labour in their operations.

**Table 1: Distribution microenterprise operators according to profitability**

Profit	Frequency n=120	Percentage
<b>10000- 49999</b>	30	25
<b>50000-99999</b>	77	64.2
<b>100000-149999</b>	8	6.66
<b>150000-199999</b>	5	4.16
<b>Mean</b>	67258.25428	
<b>Minimum</b>	17449.00	
<b>Maximum</b>	180000	

Source: Field survey, 2016

### Socio-economic factors that determine performance of microenterprise operators

The result of the multiple regression analysis of socio-economic factors that determine micro-enterprise operator's performance is presented in Table 2. The study tested the four-functional form to identify the model with the best fit. Based on econometric criteria, Cobb Douglas model was adopted as the lead model given its high R-square (0.701). which imply that about 70 percent of variation of the performance of microenterprise operators were accounted in the analysis by the variables. From the Table, the coefficient of age, gender, education and household size were the significant variables that determine performance of micro enterprise operators in the study area. The coefficient of age was positive and significant at 5 percent (i.e.  $\alpha = 0.5$ ). This implies that any increase in age will have a corresponding increase in performance of micro-enterprise. Age confirms practice experience on the operator on better ways to manage his business. This result lends credence to the saying that wine gets better with time. That is the older the operator the better he is in performance. This may be because with age comes a level of experience. This result is in consonance with Onyenobi et al. (2013), who posted a similar result that age increases marketing efficiency of cocoyam traders. Similarly, the coefficient of gender shows a direct relationship and highly significant at 1% (i.e.  $\alpha = 0.01$ ) level of probability. The study observed a predominance of male operators than female operators. This may be because of the propensity of females to white collar jobs than operating their own business. This study implies that male operators were more technically more efficient with managing of micro-enterprise than their female counterparts in the study area. This may be due in part to the fact that females lack the physical strength that microenterprise operation demands (Okoye and Okoye, 2013). The influence of education on performance was lend credence to by this result. The coefficient of education was positive and highly significant at 1% (i.e.  $\alpha = 0.01$ ) level of probability. This implies that operators with higher level of education are more likely to perform better than other without or with low educational qualification. Education is a propelling force to the adoption of

innovation and positive changes (Nto et al., 2010). Dimelu et al., (2009) and Simonyan (2010), had a similar result in their separate studies. Education might be regarded as a factor for increased efficiency among processors, because it increases level of human understanding, and capacity to acquire skills. Education is therefore very necessary in order to increase the performance of microenterprise operators. This is because education helps to break the renowned performance of microenterprise operators (Ebii, 2000).

The positive coefficient of household size and its significance at 5% level of probability (i.e.  $\alpha = 0.05$ ), agreed with the fact that micro enterprise operators with larger household size have probability of better performance because of the extra available division of labour (Fakoya, 2001).

**Table 2: Multiple regression on social determinants of performance**

Variables	Linear	Semi-log	Double-log	Exponential
Constant	11169.747 (0.875)	-48130.788 (-0.951)	8.650*** (11.942)	10.001*** (53.650)
Age(X1)	771.303* (1.909)	23596.522*** (3.552)	0.497** (2.220)	0.014** (2.294)
gender (X2)	6329.438 (0.947)	9937.294*** (3.667)	0.315*** (3.281)	0.076 (0.780)
Education (X3)	3948.880 (1.031)	10660.677 (0.924)	0.333*** (2.017)	0.096* (1.720)
Household size(X4)	0.514.775 (-0.184)	1011.445 (0.785)	0.420** (3.968)	0.024 (0.586)
Marital status(X5)	7634.658 (1.017)	7477.595 (0.785)	0.015 (-0.109)	0.028 (0.253)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.258	0.248	0.701	0.289
F-RATIO	48.430***	43.126***	56.841***	50.603***

Source: Field Survey data, 2016.

\*\*\*, \*\*, \* are statistically significant at 1%, 5%, 10% risk levels respectively.

## Factors militating against the performance of micro enterprise operators

Like every other business, micro-enterprises are not immune to business challenges. The convergence of social, economic, and political factors militates against their business performance. The specific factors in the study are presented in Table 3. Inflation ranked higher than other factors consider. This result is in line with a prior expectation. According to 2016 NBS report, Nigeria inflation rate reached an all-time of 17%. This has consequences on acquisition of capital and other equipment necessary for productive activities through obscuring the signaling of relative price changes, which guide decision making process of micro-enterprises. The impact of inflation on growth is not in doubt and has been a subject of debate over the years (See, Erbaykal and Okuyan, 2008). Government policy came a record second. From a theoretical perspective, government policy as an external environmental factor can make or mar any enterprise. This result is in line with the findings of Oteh et al. (2016) and Ene and Ene (2014), who observed a higher level of inconsistency in policy formulation to aid the growth of SMEs in Nigeria. The result is poor performance of these enterprise to external shocks sine they do not have the necessary instruments to absorb these shocks. Other factors are scarcity of raw materials with a mean of 2.77. This may have been due to ban on the importation of over 41 items by Central Bank of Nigeria and other government agencies without adequate or alternative policy measure on local content. The inability of micro-enterprises to obtain necessary capital from formal market because of interest rate is also a major factor militating against their performance. Oteh et al. (2016) observed a negative sign on interest rate. This implies that, as interest rates increase, agribusiness enterprises will be discouraged from accepting loans especially from the formal sector. This scenario will adversely affect their operations with multiplier effects on their status of financial solvency. According to Olaoye et al. (2012), a high interest rate is the major reason most SMEs prefer to

collect loans from the informal sector. Unfortunately, however, the volume of loans from this sector is not enough to drive the much-needed growth in many agribusiness enterprises. The lower the cost of borrowing credit, the higher the volume of investment in the economy by SMEs (Oladunjoye, 2015).

**Table 3: Constraints militating against the performance of microenterprise operators**

	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Least important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>More important</b>	<b>Most important</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Inflation	1 <sup>st</sup>	6.7	4.2	21.7	67.5	3.5
Government policy	2 <sup>nd</sup>	17.5	18.3	30.8	33.3	2.8
Scarcity of raw materials	3 <sup>rd</sup>	15.0	25.8	26.7	32.5	2.77
High interest rate	4 <sup>th</sup>	14.2	28.3	30.8	26.7	2.7
Misappropriation	5 <sup>th</sup>	72.5	15.8	5.0	6.7	1.46

Source: Computations from Field Survey data, 2016

**Conclusion and implications: Addressing micro enterprise performance challenges through stakeholder engagement**

From available evidences in this study, there is no doubt that micro-enterprises are important in lifting many families out of poverty, unemployment, and other social challenges. However, their performance is discouragingly low with severe consequences on socio-economic welfare of the citizens. The challenges faced by micro-enterprises are direct outcome of factors beyond their capacity given their poor resources. Unfortunately, given their nature, it is difficult to form cooperative societies. Accordingly, addressing their challenges requires more than just government policy instrument. Regrettably, many studies have identified gaps in government policies especially, poor formulation and implementation of such policies. This is perhaps one of the bane to development of micro-enterprises and industrialization in Nigeria. Over the years' elitist hijack, poor formulation and implementation, incessant perturbations in the institutional

frameworks have led to the collapse of many industrial policies in Nigeria (Dauda and Ajayi, 2009; Ogoro, 2002; Sanusi et al. 2006). A well planned industrial and economic policy must therefore not be limited to government apparatus. One important strategy for collaborative effort in addressing challenges of poor performance of industrial policy and progress of micro-enterprise is multi-stakeholder engagement.

In recent time, organizations like United Nations Development programme (UNDP) has continue to advocate for multi-stakeholder engagement process. This is due in part to greater deliverables in terms of participatory equity, accountability, and transparency, and to develop partnerships and networks among different stakeholder (Hemmati, 2002). Therefore, multi-stakeholder increase participation and reduce unnecessary conflicts. It creates room to receive direct unbias information from stakeholders. For instance, the recent launch of SME Clinic by Nigeria government is an attempt to have an interface with SMEs with the aiming of addressing the many challenges that hinders performance of this sector. It also creates room for addressing gaps in ideas, innovations and tap experiences.

This engagement in Nigeria is in line with the mandate of National Industrial Revolution Plan (NIRP) and National Enterprises Development Programme (NEDEP), which is the pillar of Nigeria industrialization. The future of industrial drive upon which lies the future of Nigeria industrialization rest on the engagement of different stakeholder across every productive sector of the economy – finance, policy, environment, agriculture etc; government and private sectors; since both are the two major actors involved in driving the engine of national development. Again, whilst government policies and actions tends to dominate and important for creating enabling environment suitable for service delivery. The role of private sector is simply to take advantage of government infrastructure to create demand and engage consumers in profitable

ways. However, these roles are dependent on the perception and participation of stakeholders in policies that bridge gaps identified as challenges for micro-enterprises in Nigeria.

Poor performance of micro-enterprises has severe implication on social, economic and political stability of Nigeria. Having identified the major constraints militating against the performance of microenterprise operators - inflation, government policy, scarcity of raw materials, high interest rate and misappropriation, this study therefore calls for appropriate policies towards addressing these factors for increased performance of microenterprise operators in the study area. Its major recommendation is that government should create an avenue where microenterprise operators can share their experience such as stakeholder engagement, as this will reduce the gap between business failure and success and energize effective drive for success. Others are provision of effective policies and programmes to support the development of microenterprises. Finally, government should encourage industrialization through investment in agricultural inputs which will cushion the effect of scarcity of raw material and drive local content laws.

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