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Government interventions in supporting SME growth in Lira district, northern Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Promoting economic growth without attendance to register business time, business education investment and non-gender based business growth is outrageous. The study sought to examine the role of Government interventions in supporting the growth of SME's in Uganda a case of Lira District. Data were collected by use of the self-administered questionnaire in Erute counties and Lira Municipality. A sample of 167 respondents was chosen from the respondents and the response rate was 100%. Simple random sampling and stratified sampling was conducted. The study discovered that inadequacy of collateral security and struggle for financial resources come into view to limit the use and access to financial services. The finding indicates the correlations between entrepreneurship intervention and financial accessibility intervention ($r = .628; p < .05$) was relatively strong and statistically significant. The study recommended that Government should promote collateral security-free financial services to encourage entrepreneurs to access credit financing. The government organ charged with registration of business should promote online and decentralized registration. National budgets should prioritize investments in business education to promote business and entrepreneurship training. In addition, government and development partners should promote non-gender-based business growth to allow for participatory inclusiveness.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial intervention, Financial accessibility, SME growth.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the wide spread levels of poverty, income inequality and unemployment in developing economies, the position of government must obviously stretch past the regulation of economic activities and the enforcement of law and order to fostering economic growth and development. Governments intrude in business growth to correct for 'externalities' or spillover effects of private behavior on the rest of the society (Lindert, 2004). When a private activity would benefit the rest of the society as a whole, government should have those outsiders pay for part of the activity through subsidy. However, when a private activity does something bad to the rest of the society, government should tax or reprimand those who engage in that activity. Measuring government intervention in economic development using spending as proxy for intervention is a poor proxy. A number of prospective entrepreneurs have been marginalized in business ownership, skills development, access to financial resources, nonagricultural employment and business rights. There is a marked political gap in access to and control over productive resources (The World Bank, 2014). The use of disguised subsidies in form of tax rebates, and or monopoly privileges to specific industries, regions and firms hardly spur economic growth. Government would rather create generalized externalities in the form of investment in education, skill-import enticements, and tax holidays to promote local and foreign investments (Adelman, 1999). To boost economic growth in South Korea in the 1980s, government policies in this period influenced allocation of resources and shape of the economy. The private sector took advantage of government incentives operating in an environment with favorable signs: the government priority on economic advancement, outward trade orientation, low price distortions, and the significant steps towards liberalization (Rebelo, 1995). A related study in Nigeria indicated a significant relationship between provision of government capacity building programs and development of SMEs. The study recommended government to continue in development and provision of capacity building opportunities to enhance processes improvement in the sector (Atsu & Ojong, 2014). According to (Pillay, 2002), government can support economic reconstruction by developing a shared vision for major sectors within business and labor, with specific commitment on that basis. Skills development programs geared to new sectoral developments and funding sectoral activities or investment, through incentives and or tax reliefs, as well as measures to cut the cost of credit could promote economic growth. The challenge with government intervention however is the politicization of the entire agenda. While the government has to offer economic growth benefits to all

SMEs universally, (Antic, 2003) noted that only firms that are supportive of government receive public funds. Large firms, that have taken off are less taxed while small firms that are grappling for survival are highly taxed due to their lack of ties with government elites. The state is expected to play a facilitative role in economic development, which involves the provision of a 'business-friendly' and 'enabling' environment for the private sector (Pillay, 2002). Government intervention may take the form of providing assistance through provision of credits, training, technology, marketing and management. According to (Scupola, 2003) government initiatives for economic growth could take the form of knowledge diffusion, economic incentives, regulation and legislation and electronic government. In view of our previous studies on entrepreneurial skills on firm performance, and credit financing on financial performance, government intervention in entrepreneurship and financial access is still necessary. Entrepreneurship improves the capacity and competence of indigenous firms in undertaking industrial production processes and in their ability to produce high quality marketable products. Thus, a financial incentive on the part of entrepreneurs to capture the domestic market, which is wholly owned by foreign entrepreneurs (Obwona, Shinyekwa, Kiiza, & Hisali, Unpublished) is necessary. Government intervention in this paper is assumed to mean any course of action, which aims at regulating and improving the conditions of SMEs in terms of supportive, implementation and funding policies, by government (Obaki & Olugu, 2014). Since government takes the lead of establishment, sponsorship and administration, most of the programs, especially in developing countries, a proclamation from government as it relates to entrepreneurship will go a long way to ensuring the sustainability and positive entrepreneurial practice.

1.1 Problem statement

The government of Uganda from 1986, developed the structural adjustment policies to boost the economy and change from a government dominated to the private dominated economy in order to support economic growth. SMEs have been the driving force in the economy with a lot of support from government and development partners. The stakeholders have been consulted on a number of issues related to developing new policies, unfortunately, this has remained in the paper. Initiatives like wealth for all programs, Privatization and Liberalization had been fronted by the Government of Uganda and most of them did not perform to the expectations and when one program fails they introduce another one similar to the one which failed. It's upon this background why the researcher would want to investigate why Government interventions had failed to support the growth SMEs in Lira District Northern Uganda and try to advice all the stake holders on the best practice.

1.2 Objectives of the study

To examine the role of Government interventions in supporting the growth of SME's in Uganda a case of Lira District, Northern Uganda

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Entrepreneurial intervention

Development of entrepreneurship is key in increasing industrial output, generation of employment, dispersal of industrial activities across regions and propagations of SMEs (Jahanshahi, Nawaser, Khaksar, & Kamalian, 2011). Skills development may be necessary in order to provide entrepreneurs with sufficient competent staff to run the business profitably, bearing in mind that a shortage of qualified staff leads to inflated salaries, which make it difficult for start-up operations to be established due to difficulty in operating profitably (Smorfitt, 2008). Economic growth depends directly on economic fundamentals such as skills and capital formation as well as efficiency with which the factors of production are put together, but the nature of government intervention is a crucial factor behind efficient skills development, capital formation and ultimately higher productivity (Velde, 2010). The role of government is usually ventilated through enterprise development initiatives and programs, which act as catalyzers in their effort in stimulating entrepreneurial spirit (Atsu & Ojong, 2014) among the different segments in the society. Support for government intervention consists of developing institutions that provide training for small entrepreneurs in contract design and contract management and fostering institutes for dispute resolution (Priyanath & Premaratne, 2014). To promote economic development, government should stimulate indigenous entrepreneurship (Jibrilla, 2013). Though a number of growing economies have simplified procedures for licensing businesses, entrepreneurs still go through several steps of registration at the local level (Kokko & Tingvall, 2005). To fuel the prosperity of economic activities in the country, government should ensure investment in human capital that possesses higher degree of entrepreneurship (Sahrom, Tan, & Yahya, 2016). In the same view, effective government intervention should emphasize the innovation policy that enables the diffusion of knowledge, permitting the transferring of human and financial capital along the social environment and promoting collaboration between employers and academic institutions. Entrepreneurial government intervention may also seek to create confidence among potential entrepreneurs, lenders, and inward investors in the prospect of an area or to coordinate other agents to overcome market failures, which prevent investment in deprived areas. Potential entrepreneurs may have low educational attachment, less access to training opportunities, and less work experience within a business (Greater London Authority, 2006). More government support needs to be provided for the development of management skills for established firms and professional entrepreneurs; and small-scale projects that have demonstrated large job-creation effects. A large-scale entrepreneurship and business management-training programme targeting secondary school leavers and undergraduates should be established (Eton, Mwosi, Mutesigensi, & Ebong, 2017).

2.2 Financial accessibility

Access to finance refers to the supply of and use financial services without price and non- price barriers. Accessibility to monetary services is one of the significant factors for the continued existence of majority of the newly formed firms as well as an essential element in entrepreneurship practice. The lack of reliable financial capital is still a barrier to SMEs and entrepreneurs who have to mobilize their own capital to establish and expand their businesses (Eton, Mwosi, Mutesigensi, & Ebong, 2017). Government uses direct subsidies, tax incentives, and government procurement to inject large amount of resources to the entrepreneurial process (Obaki & Olugu, 2014). Limited financial access has far-reaching implications for industrial development. In Uganda, finance for business growth can be obtained from commercial banks at very high interest rates and with short maturities, and although Bank of Uganda introduced a number of initiatives to help domestic enterprises especially those with export potential, the impact remains limited (Ministry of Tourism, Trade & Industry, 2008). Access to finance is significant to academic research and policy development in developing economies. The expansion of access to finance may reduce poverty in developing countries, may lead to economic growth and employment generation (Ganbold, 2008). Government intervention in growth of SMEs includes providing the necessary financing for the industry to be economically viable on its own through economies of scale (Mangion, 2013). During financial crises, SMEs are the most hit hence the need for urgent government intervention. Economic recessions manifest market failures and it is the role of government to mitigate the undesirable consequences of the market activity through regulation and appropriate fiscal policy instruments without losing the benefits of competitive economy (Aikins, 2009). Promotion of financial support facilitates greater and easier flow of credit. Burdensome procedures and regulations consume time and financial resources. These transaction costs cut into the resources that can be used for business activities (UNIDO, 2008). The same report noted that many donor activities in support of the private sector lack a clear business orientation thereby providing inappropriate services that have not been tested in the marketplace, and lack financial sustainability because they do not charge cost-covering fees. Government should create competition among service providers, which does not only identify potential service providers but also increase financial discipline and encourages bidders to come up with innovative technology. Government regulations and their bureaucratic procedures can either hinder or promote entrepreneurship activity (Aniola & Entebang, 2015). However, government can design policies that boost and support the growth of novel technologies, products and solutions. On the other hand, hindrance could emanate when government introduces policies that can restrict autonomy as well as the entrepreneurial freedom of some variety. Another justification for government intervention in the financial aspect concerns the difficulty SMEs have to obtain finance compared to larger firms due to collateral security, their proven work record of accomplishment and the proportional greater cost of small transactions (Roper & Hart, 2013). Even in situations where loan and equity finance are plentiful and legal structures are well established, however, it is widely recognized that SMEs often have limited access to institutional finance. Countries with better-developed financial systems experience faster economic growth. Financial systems improve the distribution of income through efficient resource allocation and productivity rather than through the scale of investment or savings mobilization (Demirguc-Kunt, 2008). However, it is not proper for government to become directly involved in the provision of financial services to the public because government does not have the necessary expertise in this field and does not have resources. The role of government is primarily to put in place a policy framework in which the private sector providers of financial services can thrive (MAAIF, MFPED, 2000).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study methodology was descriptive and correlation in nature. The choice of the research design was guided by the purpose of the study, the type of investigation and the extent of the researcher involvement. Data was collected by use of self administered questionnaire in Erute counties and Lira Municipality. A sample of 167 respondents was chosen from the respondents and the response rate was 100%. Simple random sampling and stratified sampling was conducted. The five linkert scale was used to rate the answers from 1-5, which indicated (Strongly disagree, disagree, Neutral, agree and strongly agree) The questionnaire was tested for validity and the results were credible and reliable

4. RESULTS

Background characteristics

The gender distribution indicates that (55.7%) were male while (44.3%) were female, an indication that the male-dominated in this study. in regard to age distribution, (93.4%) were below 40 years of age while only (6.6%) 40 years and above old. The findings on marital status (50.3%) were single, (32.3%) were married while (17.4%) indicated the 'others' option. This option represented the widows, the divorced and the separated participants. According to their level of education, (56.9%) had distinguished certificates, diplomas and degrees, while (43.1%) indicated others. This option captured those who had not reached certificate level and those with advanced degrees. While the participants owned diversified businesses, (37.7%) operated works related businesses, (41.9%) operated services, while only (20.4%) operated production-related businesses. The dominance of service related businesses related to saloons, bars and restaurants, secretarial, transport and early childhood development centers.

Table 1: Correlations

		Entrepreneurship intervention	Financial access	Business growth
Entrepreneurship intervention	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	167		
Financial access	Pearson Correlation	.628(**)	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	167	167	

Business growth	Pearson Correlation	.479(**)	.507(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	167	167	167

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between entrepreneurship intervention and business growth ($r = .479; p < .05$) was moderate and linearly significant. The correlation between financial accessibility intervention and business growth ($r = .507; p < .05$) was also moderate and statistically significant. On the other hand, the association between entrepreneurship intervention and financial accessibility intervention ($r = .628; p < .05$) was relatively strong and statistically significant.

The study attempted to investigate entrepreneurship interventions that had influenced business growth. Among the entrepreneurship interventions investigated (table 2), business experience (73.7%), adequate job skills (68.9%), dispute resolution (68.3%) and business training (66.5%). On the other hand, participants indicated evidence of incompetent staff (31.7%), inability to create their own jobs (53.9%), lack of training opportunities (61.1%) and unprofitable skills (62.9%).

Table 2: Entrepreneurship interventions

Variable indicators	Disagreement	Not sure	Agreement	Rank
Business experience	19.8	6.6	73.7	1
Adequate job skills	25.7	5.4	68.9	2
Dispute resolution	26.9	4.8	68.3	3
Business training	27.5	6.0	66.5	4
Contract management	27.5	9.0	63.5	5
Education attachment	29.9	7.2	62.9	6
Profitability skills	24.0	13.2	62.9	7
Training opportunities	30.5	8.4	61.1	8
Job creation	38.3	7.8	53.9	9
Competent staff	60.5	7.8	31.7	10

The study investigated financial interventions that have influenced business growth in the region. Participants acknowledged the ability to mobilize their own capital to establish and expand business (80.2%). Participants further indicated access to reliable financial capital (70.1%), fewer business regulations (69.5%) and affordable interest rate (65.9%). However, participants indicated the inadequacy of collateral security (48.5%), less freedom in using financial services (53.3%), competition for financial services (57.5%) and less access to financial services (64.1%).

Table 3: Financial accessibility interventions

Variable indicators	Disagreement	Not sure	Agreement	Ranks
Mobilize own capital to establish business	16.2	3.6	80.2	1
Mobilize own capital to expand business	13.2	6.6	80.2	2
Reliable financial capital	22.2	7.8	70.1	3
Less business regulations	24.6	6.0	69.5	4
Affordable interest rates	26.3	7.8	65.9	5
Easy credit flow	24.6	10.2	65.3	6
Access to financial services	23.4	12.6	64.1	7
Competition for financial services	29.3	13.2	57.5	8
Free use of financial services	31.7	15.0	53.3	9
Adequate collateral security	43.7	7.8	48.5	10

The study finally investigated the factors responsible for firm growth in the region. Participants pointed to equity finance (81.4%), capacity building programs (78.4%), equitable allocation of government resources (76.6%), and government participation in enterprise development (76.0%). On the other hand, (46.7%) confirmed that the business environment in Uganda does not enable business; a lot of time is taken to register a business (46.7%), non-increase in the level of government investment in business education (48.5%) and non-gender-based business growth.

Table 4: Entrepreneurship interventions

Variable indicator	Disagreement	Not sure	Agreement	Ranks
Equity finance	16.2	2.4	81.4	1
Capacity building programs	12.6	9.0	78.4	2
Allocation of resources	12.0	11.4	76.6	3
Participation in enterprise development	12.6	11.4	76.0	4
Politicization of private sector funding	21.0	4.2	74.9	5
Bureaucracy in business registration	19.8	6.6	73.7	6
Rights of business ownership	15.0	11.4	73.7	7
Friendly business environment	25.1	3.0	71.9	8
Industrial growth	26.3	2.4	71.3	9
Cost to register business	22.8	6.6	70.7	10
Reduced private spillovers	21.6	7.8	70.7	11
Direct subsidies	24.6	5.4	70.1	12
Legal structures	24.6	7.2	68.3	13
Funding sectoral activities	25.1	8.4	66.5	14
Tax incentives	26.3	7.8	65.9	15
Private activities spillover effects	32.3	5.4	62.3	16
Gender-based business growth	35.3	5.4	59.3	17
Investment in education	39.5	12.0	48.5	18
Time to register business	46.7	6.6	46.7	19
Enabling business environment	40.7	12.6	46.7	20

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The correlation between entrepreneurship intervention and firm growth was moderate and significant. The findings support (Jahanshahi, Nawaser, Khaksar, & Kamalian, 2011) who asserted that developing entrepreneurship increases industrial output, generates employment, disperses industrial activities and propagates SMEs. In a related view, (Smorfitt, 2008) observed that economic growth is directly dependent on economic fundamental such as skills and capital formation. Similarly, a recommendation by (Jibrilla, 2013) on promoting economic development pointed to stimulation of indigenous entrepreneurship. The correlation between financial accessibility and firm growth was moderate and significant. The findings agree with (Eton, Mwosi, Mutesigensi, & Ebong, 2017) who declared that the lack of reliable financial capital is a barrier to SMEs and entrepreneurs to mobilize their own capital and to establish and expand their businesses. The association between entrepreneurial intervention and financial accessibility was relatively strong and significant. The findings support (Obaki & Olugu, 2014) who postulated that government intervention in terms of supportive implementation and funding policies, regulation and improving the conditions of SMEs go a long way in ensuring the sustainability and positive entrepreneurial practice. However, the study disagrees with (Antic, 2003) who noted the politicization of government interventions. Antic noted that when government opts to support economic growth, funding priorities go to firms that are supportive of government even when they aren't in dire need for funding. In view of entrepreneurship interventions, business experience, adequate job skills, business training and dispute resolution ranked high in influencing firm growth. Support for government interventions consists of institutions that provide training for small entrepreneurs in dispute resolution (Priyanath & Premaratne, 2014), and efficient skills development (Velde, 2010). In view of financial accessibility, ability to mobilize own capital, reliable financial capital, less business regulations and affordable interest rates ranked high in influencing firm growth; though inadequacy of collateral security contributed to the competition fir financial resources. The findings are in line with (Aikins, 2009) who posited that regulating appropriate fiscal policy instruments without losing the benefits of competitive economic advantage boosts economic growth. However, the lack of reliable financial capital coupled with inadequate collateral security is a barrier to SMEs growth (Eton, Mwosi, Mutesigensi, & Ebong, 2017). In view of firm growth, equity finance, capacity building programs and equitable distribution of financial resources remain open for government intervention.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The study indicated incompetent staff, inadequate job creation and unprofitable skills as impediments to firm growth. Government should stimulate entrepreneurship development training to curb the shortfalls in staff competence, individual job creation, and profitability skills. Government should promote collateral security-free financial services to encourage entrepreneurs to access credit financing. The fact that registering a business in Uganda takes time, there is need to streamline the channels of registering business.

The government organ charged with registration of business should take promote online and decentralized registration. Registration forms and requirements should be accessible online. National budgets should prioritize investments in business education to promote business and entrepreneurship training. In addition, government and development partners should promote non-gender-based business growth to allow for participatory inclusiveness.

7. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship interventions and financial accessibility are moderately associated to firm growth. The study established that building on previous business experience and adequate job skills coupled with training in business and dispute resolution may not only stimulate firm growth but bolster entrepreneurial activity. It was discovered that individuals with established businesses have used their own business experiences, perhaps as employees in other business. The study was however, hushed on whether adequate job skills, dispute resolution and business training were individual effort or government intervention. Despite the ability to nurture business to some degree, there is still indication of incompetent staff that cannot produce profits. This is to a degree associated to lack of opportunities to train in business and inability to create own jobs. As government considers stimulating economic growth, staff competence building, job creation and profitability skills are core aspects of entrepreneurship development training. Government intervention via financial accessibility is pronounceable in providing reliable financial capital, less business regulation and affordable interest rates. The number of firm owners who can mobilize their own capital is proof enough. Notwithstanding, the inadequacy of collateral security and struggle for financial services come into view to limit the use and access to financial services. Government policies relating to equity finance, entrepreneurial capacity building, allocation of government resources appears to be pronounced. The fact that government participates in enterprise development is evidence to this. However, these policies are lacking in regard to the time taken to register a business, investment in business education and promotion of non-gender-based business growth.

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