Relating External Support, Business Growth & Creating Strategies for Survival: A Comparative Case Study Analyses of Small Manufacturing Firms (SMFs) and Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT. Using a comparative case study approach, this paper presents three of thirty-two findings on Small Plastic Manufacturing Firms' (SPMFs) and Entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The selected firms represent performance differences between firms that have received external support and those that did not. Due to lack of support, some entrepreneurs had to independently sustain themselves through their creative abilities. Findings from the study revealed that Small Plastic Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in Nigeria are constrained by certain external and internal factors. Ironically, these constraints seem to have challenged some entrepreneurs to invent original strategies on their own, to cope, survive and to remain in business. Lack of financial capital, especially foreign exchange needed to import vital operating inputs from abroad has been the most serious constraint. Other serious external constraints identified are inadequate infrastructure facilities, competition from large firms, unfavorable government policies, dearth of machines and spare parts and paucity of raw materials. Internal obstacles like incompetent planning, poor organizational skills and limited knowledge among others were common obstacles faced by the entrepreneurs. In addition, another discovery is that funding assistance to entrepreneurs by relevant institutions concerned is not free from bias on the basis, of favoritism. It is therefore recommended that funding institutions should give due consideration and encouragement to promising talents. Two have especially been identified from the study as typical examples of potential avant-garde entrepreneurs and such should not be neglected or wasted. Guidance for further progress through training is another helpful approach to take and give succor to such admirable talents. Entrepreneurs, who qualify for grants from institutions, should completely be decided on compliance to standard selection procedures, rules and evidence of superior entrepreneurial qualities. In addition, those who qualify for support should be determined only after feasible business plans have been presented.

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1. Executive summary

In this article, some general distinguishing features of three of thirty-two selected entrepreneurs operating small plastic manufacturing firms (SPMFs) in Nigeria are compared, drawn together, and some specific comparisons and contrasts are made between the firms across three case studies. Issues of identity, regional affiliation and types of entrepreneurial strategies are highlighted, as these played an implicit, and occasionally explicit, role in the selection of the SPMFs included under the case study. The thirty-two firms in the original study are divided into two major categories. These are those that have received external means of support especially, financial assistance and those that hardly received any form of external support at all. Some researchers have argued for and against the importance of having external support as a means of influencing effective business growth and performance (Cook, 2001; McMahon, 2001; Warren and Hutchinson, 2000). This study seeks to answer therefore, if there are any significant differences in levels of performance among those who have received external support and those who did not. In addition, the case of firms without access to support is investigated, in terms of how they would cope with the situation and what they would do to sustain their businesses. The paradox of whether lack of external support

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would have any significant effect on those without them is therefore examined.

Two of three entrepreneurs in the study despaired of being able to obtain loans, and so resolved to do without them. There is another interesting parallel between these two firms in the case study. As well as being only minimally able to draw on external finance (except for some family finance), the entrepreneurs of these two firms showed perhaps the highest level of determination to succeed in their chosen line of business. This optimism was mainly motivated by the desire to achieve their financial independence and become masters of their own business empires (Bygrave, 1997; Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2000; Stevenson et al., 1999). This quality was largely missing from most interviews with other Nigerian SPMF owner/managers. None of these two entrepreneurs, however poor the actual performance of their firms might have been at the time of the study, is afraid of failing or appeared to be discouraged. They were optimistic for improvements in their situation for the future (Timmons, 1994; Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2002). They expressed their determination to learn from their predicaments to do better and overcome prevailing constraints (Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2000). The two firms surprisingly undaunted by the external constraints on them, pointed to their creative abilities as solutions to cope with difficult situations. This drive to succeed seems to be informing that courage amidst constraints is yet another outstanding quality of entrepreneurship (ibid., 2000).

The contrast between Messieurs Enuenwosu and Daniel Obanoh's approach compared to that of Alhaji Manu Dauda was of course a case in point. Alhaji Manu Dauda was the more impressive in performance than the other two entrepreneurs in terms of higher sales and profits. Although Alhaji Manu Dauda had more privileged opportunities to get loans and faced lesser challenges of competition to surmount in his business environment, his performance was not very spectacular given the advantages in his favour. Despite performing less impressively in sales and profits, Mr Obanoh and Mr Enuenwosu were still able to sustain their businesses by depending more on their creative qualities. Enuenwosu and Obanoh had better educational backgrounds, more business experience as well as higher entrepreneurial acumen than Alhaji Dauda did. The qualities of the two entrepreneurs (i.e. Enuenwosu and Obanoh) have led to confirm Brautigam's (1994) and Zimmerer and Scarborough's (2000) observations as reviewed in literature, that a background in business that is long-standing is clearly an asset for entrepreneurs. Longenecker et al. (2000), would describe these two entrepreneurs as one that fits that of the "opportunistic entrepreneur", similar to Filley and Adalg's (1978) classification of the "promotion" type. Again, this kind of entrepreneurial description is pertinent to what Stevenson et al. (1999) referred to as the "promoter" entrepreneur. These entrepreneurs are described in these ways since it makes it more likely that they already have the basic skills needed to run any small business, including the ability to do clerical work and keep accurate records. As a result, of their previous experiences and work-related backgrounds, this observation by Brautigam, Stevenson et al., Zimmerer and Scarborough & Longenecker et al. therefore, appears to be more relevant to Mr Enuenwosu and Mr Obanoh as compared to Alhaji Manu Dauda. This indicates therefore, that the success of a small business will not necessarily depend on having access to external support alone.

Again, the case studies on the two firms (Enuenwosu's and Obanoh's) because of their creative abilities provided examples that, is fitting of a Schumpetarian type of entrepreneurship. According to Schumpeter (1934), the term entrepreneurship is synonymous to "innovation" (Berger, 1991; Stevenson et al., 1999) and what he also refers to as, "creative response" for development (Clemence, 2000; Stevenson et al., 1999; Bygrave, 1997). Through the performance of different functions, Schumpeter notes that the entrepreneur does irrational or unusual things (Clemence, 2000). Schumpeter's type of entrepreneur could resemble one motivated by a drive to build a business venture and make a profit through re-investment of profits, by identifying opportunities and skilfully assembling the necessary resources that successfully sustains the business.

In view of the findings from this study, it is recommended that the government and funding institutions that spend enormous amounts of money on small business and entrepreneurial development address the constraints appropriately. It requires that an enabling environment to facilitate their development be created (Cook, 2001). Particular areas of attention that call for immediate amelioration include constructing adequate infrastructure facilities, provision of machines and spare parts and improving standards of technical training and business management (ibid.). In certain instances, it has been observed that external support, are given on basis of favouritism, nepotism or other forms of bias. This serious administrative flaw would have to be corrected. Entrepreneurs who qualify for funding should entirely be based on compliance to set standards. Presenting efficacious business plans and interviews to determine qualification is one way of doing it. Feasible and attractive business plans help to reveal how promising a venture would be before it is too late (Timmons, 1994; Upton et al., 2001; Perry, 2001). Entrepreneurs who show ingenious and promising qualities should qualify. Maintaining this practice would avoid wasting public funds to develop high standard and successful small businesses and entrepreneurship especially in lesser-developed countries.

Introduction

Some business entrepreneurs believe they have a strong internal locus of control. Such entrepreneurs are optimistic and believe that they are capable of sustaining their own destinies and operations by applying independent efforts from within their businesses (Hisrich and Peters, 1998; Kuratko and Hodgetts, 1998; Lussier, 2000; Allen, 1999; Foley, 1999; Stevenson et al., 1999; Longenecker et al., 2000, p. 10; Chell et al., 1990). This confidence is demonstrated through their creative skills and ingenuity in making decisions and solving problems over threatening (external and internal) obstacles that stand in their way. Indeed under such circumstances, entrepreneurs produce a culture (Berger, 1991) for business survival. The whole point of entrepreneurial success notes (Berger, 1991), is to get around problems that others find impassable and these barriers could be institutional or technical. This study explores how some SPMF entrepreneurs were able to overcome impediments against their ventures in the challenging Nigerian business and economic environment, thus creating their own unique culture for survival.

This article presents and interprets a selection of qualitative data obtained during a survey work conducted between January and March 1994, as well as from a Pilot Project in 1992, and analyses that data in a comparative way. The results obtained from 10 entrepreneurs in 1992 had little difference when compared to the results obtained in 1994 from 32 entrepreneurs. The principal observation however, was that constraints appear to have become more difficult for entrepreneurs to overcome overall in 1994 than in 1992. One SPMF business, a plastic shoes manufacturer known as Kamer Ltd., in Lagos had to fold up his operations in 1993 due to inability to cope with prevalent constraints. Those who decided to remain in business are only marginally surviving by all indication. Responses to interviews with 32 small plastic manufacturers have been interpreted in the light of the main concerns expressed in small business and entrepreneurship literature, as reviewed. Reference to the following researchers among a few others have made, giving some significant contributions to the study (Schumpeter, 1934; Berger et al., 1991; Department of Trade and Industry, 1991; Baysinger et al., 1981; Barber et al., 1992; Timmons, 1994); Scarborough and Zimmerer, 1996; Bygrave, 1997; Mambula, 1997; Hisrich and Peters, 1998; Stevenson et al., 1999). Other contributors are, Advisory Council on Science & Technology (1990) (Bangs, Jr. and Pinson, 1999; Lussier, 2000; Foley, 1999; Ryan et al., 1999; Allen, 1999; Megginson et al., 2000; Scarborough and Zimmerer, 2000; Longenecker et al., 2000). Particular attention is paid to factors that are held to influence the growth, performance and development of SMEs and entrepreneurship in general and in Nigeria in particular.

The idea of reviewing these case studies is to obtain a clearer understanding of how internal and external obstacles to and opportunities for growth interact in practice and affect real (small) firms and entrepreneurs in the plastics manufacturing sector. The main question this article intends to answer is to know the kind of external and internal obstacles that limit the growth, performance and development of SPMFs and thus other manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria. In addition, this study further seeks to explain the type of difficulties faced by SPMFs, to survive and grow in Nigeria in view of external support. Cook (2000) and McMahon (2001) are of the opinion that financial credit is the most important form of external support required for SME growth especially in developing countries. This study therefore enquires the impact of the availability or for lack of external support. Does for instance, lack of external support help unleash any latent skills or hidden entrepreneurial talent encouraged by the challenge and necessity for survival? How the entrepreneurs concerned considering their different regional backgrounds and areas of operations cope with the problems confronting their business performance, growth and development (pgd) answers the underlying question. In this article, the perceptions of three selected SPMF entrepreneurs who come from different backgrounds, ethnic regions and work experiences are presented. This gives an overview of the diversity among SPMFs in Nigeria studied in addition to their approach for business and entrepreneurial development.

2. Research methodology

To develop an in depth understanding of small businesses and since individual businesses vary in both organizational structure and in systems of management control, it is pertinent that multiple-methodological approaches are pursued (Mambula, 1997; Denzin, 1994; Romano, 1989; Davidsson et al., 2001). The approach that was used to conduct this research included both mixed-method and multi-site strategies to study 32 small plastic manufacturing firms (SPMFs) identified in the sample. A mixed method strategy is when more than one method of approach is used in data collection, analysis, comparison or integration of results while conducting a research (Romano, 1989). This approach is similar to what Mikkelsen (1995, p. 81) Janesick (1994, pp. 214–215) and Denzin (1994, p. 2) described as Triangulation. Triangulation according to Mikkelsen and Denzin is "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon". The use of the multiple method strategy was adopted in order to enable the researcher obtain in-depth information and to reduce the level of personal bias by not depending on only one method of approach.

The researcher has collected from a variety of sources different kinds of data, and used at least three methods to ensure triangulation as Janesick (1994) Denzin (1994) and Mikkelsen (1995) suggested.

These three methods are the case study method, the survey method and the use of descriptive data. Qualitative, quantitative and historical, personal dimensions on the topic under study can thus be clarified and triangulated or cross-checked.

Adopting this method of approach supports the authenticity of the study as there would be no other way of making genuine tests or corrections in case of any limitations that might be experienced in the course of the research and which could also affect the validity of final results.

In other words, as Bouchard (1976, p. 286) noted, It would be reasonable to conclude that the use of several methods "enhances our beliefs that the results are valid and not a methodological artefact". Similarly, a multi-site strategy, which was also used for this research has been regarded as when more than one sector or institution other than the main sector or institution under research is studied. In another fashion, the multi-site approach closely examines several homogeneous units under research to further investigate their variations in-depth. More than one small plastic manufacturing business firm has therefore been considered for investigation in addition, to obtaining information from other non-SME but related establishments (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1976). Taking this approach is to avoid the possibility of bias response coming from only one firm or sector. As part of the multi-method approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were used in the research. This data was used in a variety of ways, including as earlier mentioned a case study approach and a detailed overview of the survey results in terms of a general profile and model of Nigerian SPMFs. A participant observation approach that involved two separate visits to the research "habitat" of the small firms under study in 1992 and 1994 while examining each company's historical records and data was also conducted. Data and records examined from companies included a review of growth indicators to see if there were any changes in profits, assets, employment, sales, production and expansion in size of space over the years since the firms were established. Adopting this method helped in identifying the factors that were responsible for the changes in growth and performance observed in the firms as at the period of study. In addition, semi-structured interviews based on open-ended, flexible questionnaires and some structured interviews were conducted with several groups of people interested or involved with the small plastics manufacturing sector in Nigeria.

The idea behind this was to obtain some cross-referencing data and some independent confirmation of data, as well as a range of opinions that was further analysed in the main body of the research. The views of the following groups were solicited: (1) Government officials who formulate and implement policies on SME promotion and industrial development in Nigeria (2) Petrochemical officials responsible for raw material supply to plastic manufacturers (3) Managers of large plastic manufacturing firms, since they are operating in the same sector as SPMFs (4) Representatives of development banks who might be requested to give loans to SPMFs (5) Industrial experts and consultants who are well informed about the present state of the industrial sector in Nigeria and (6) Some customers who buy plastic products as retailers to the public or to other SPMFs or larger firms. The information obtained from interviews mainly from those conducted with the SPMFs managers and owners were processed and presented. These were interpreted by creating tables after compiling overall percentage measurements, and frequency distribution measurements.

Since semi-structured open ended interviews provide a lot of information that cannot be tabulated in these ways and may take the form of individual opinions expressed or comments made in response to open ended questions, the use of qualitative methods of expression were employed where appropriate. Secondary sources were first used to gain an understanding of the relevance of existing theories concerning the growth and development factors of small firms generally, and their roles in the industrial and economic development process (Cook, 2001; McMahon, 2001). Secondly, empirical evidence from field based research through participant observation in the firms and institutions visited and through in-depth semi-structured interviews were presented in several different ways. This was able to illustrate some of the general findings drawn out of the literature review. In particular, the concern was to place the particular situation in the Nigerian SPMF sector in a wider context. At the practical level, case study examples were analysed in order to draw some specific conclusions as to the "best practice" and the varieties of "worst practice" existing among individual firms within the SPMF sector.

Categories of small businesses

Table I below from Filley and Adalg, 1978 shows the characteristics of three categories of small firms from craft being the simplest to a more developed promotion or mid-range level and the administration category being the most developed stage. In a similar fashion Longenecker et al.,

TABLE I
Characteristics of small business categories

Characteristic	Craft	Promotion	Administration
Objectives	Comfort-survival	Personal achievement	Market adaptation
Policy	Traditional	Personal	Rational
Leadership	Craftsman	Entrepreneur	Professional
Structure	Power levels	Field of force	Rational hierarchy
Functional development	Single	Successive-emphasis	Full development
Work-group bonds	Fixed roles	Interaction-expectation	Homogeneity
Uncertainty-risk	No perceived risk	Uncertainty	Risk
Basis for success	Benevolent environment	Innovative exploitation	Planned adaptation to environment
Pattern of growth	Non-growth	S curve	Linear

Source: Filley and Adalg, 1978, pp. 579–580.

1997 described the three categories as being marginal, attractive and high potential respectively while Stevenson et al., 1999, classified them along two extremes as promoter and trustee. Most informal sector firms in less developed economies appear to fall within the craft and promotion or marginal and attractive categories due to the level of their national industrial and economic development. The table below will be used to identify and categorize the firms under this study.

Characteristics of the small firms selected for case study

The selected SPMFs portray the range of diversity in size, ownership, background and location of Nigerian SPMFs. Basic facts and figures obtained from the field research survey were used to identify comparable firms (those which shared at least some key characteristics), and to ensure that the sample was as representative as possible. Most of the SPMFs selected are for instance typical in their informal characteristics and are equally faced with the same problems facing all other firms with regards to machinery, infrastructure, raw materials and capital formation. On the other hand, they are untypical in terms of ethnic background. The firms mostly manifest the qualities of determination rather than complacency in order to progress in the SPMF business. Comparisons between the firms included in the three case studies is done on the basis of a number of identified key characteristics as follows:

1. Characteristics of the entrepreneur; outlooks, education, professional and personal background.
2. Characteristics of business setbacks (Internal).
3. Characteristics of business setbacks (External).
4. Characteristics of strategies adopted to overcome Internal/External setbacks; whether the internal and external requirements for future growth and development are met.
5. Characteristics of capital and growth; type of growth.
6. Crucial requirements identified by respondent.

The six essential characteristics identified above were obtained from the main topics reviewed in small business literature, which was the basis on which the field survey results were gathered and analysed. These materials are further used to study the case study profiles of the SPMFs.

Nature of SPMF constraints in Nigeria

Before going into the individual case studies, it would be appropriate to first give a general picture of the nature of what most of the 32 SPMFs studied in Nigeria consider to be the main constraints on their firms' growth and overall performance.

Thirty-two (n = 32) entrepreneurs responded to this question and an entrepreneur could give more than one factor as obstacle to the firm.

Impact of economic policy reform

In 1986, the Nigerian government in collaboration with the World Bank and IMF introduced a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) as an instrument for economic reform, which led to the devaluation of the national currency, the Naira. Changes were made that affected domestic fiscal and monetary policies drastically. There is general consensus by researchers like Cook, 2001; Schatz, 1996; Lall, 1995; Hambagda, 1987, and others as in the case of the SPMF case studies in this article, that the macro-economic changes associated with structural adjustment policies have reduced purchasing power, financial availability and level of investment generally. The level of

TABLE II
The main growth and performance constraints of SPMFs in Nigeria

Respondent nos.	Remark	Percentage
23 respondents (n = 32)	Finance	72
14 respondents (n = 32)	Infrastructure	44
13 respondents (n = 32)	Machines & spare parts	41
11 respondents (n = 32)	Raw materials	34

effective demand and especially for non-subsistence goods has also been curtailed. The scarcity of foreign exchange and the resulting difficulty of importing inputs have squeezed firms. Caught between declining demand, falling prices for final goods, and rising costs of essential inputs, Nigerian SPMFs are characteristic of SMEs in Nigeria generally, in experiencing a tight squeeze on their profit margin's in recent years (Hambagda, 1987). Infrastructure problems have also been exacerbated by cutbacks in government finance for basic amenities and public utilities. In at least two out of the three cases selected for detailed examination in this study, the problem of harassment and mistreatment by government officials was mentioned. The harsh effect of SAP has even extended to make government officials and personnel corrupt. Some Police or other government officials may demand fees as extortion money or bribes without any justification for doing so and there may be little recourse to the authorities, especially if SMEs are not recognised as legal. Such attitudes have mainly been attributed to the austere economic environment under the SAP. Financial constraints therefore, are not only restricted to small manufacturers alone but to all other sectors as well. The operating environment is therefore made difficult for small manufacturers under these conditions.

3. Case studies

Comparative case study of Temple Erako Nigeria Ltd., Daniel Obanoh Nigeria Co., & Mandau Int'l. Plastics

Mr. Enuenwosu the proprietor of Temple Erako Nigeria Ltd. is Ibo and comes from south-eastern Nigeria. The SPMF is located in Jos in Nigeria's central plateau, and was established in 1990. Daniel Obanoh Nigeria Co., whose proprietor is Mr Daniel Obanoh, is a Bendelite from mid-western Nigeria and is located in Lagos. The company was established a year earlier in 1989. The third firm Mandau Plastics whose owner Alhaji Manu Dauda is Kanuri was established in 1985, and is located in Maiduguri his home state capital in the north-east of Nigeria.

Overview of Temple Erako Nigeria Ltd. Jos (north-central)

Mr. Anthony Enuenwosu is the sole proprietor of the Temple Erako SPMF and its manager as well. His firm presents a picture of a small, isolated but also quite innovative SPMF. In 1990, Mr. Enuenwosu established his company employing 9 workers. Before managing to do this, he had lived in one room, and claimed to have lived on beans and rice for a full year, starting his work with only a spanner and sometimes only N120: 00 (£1:00) or ($1:00) cash on him. The only assistance he received was from his sister, who sometimes helped him out. Since he could not afford to buy any machinery in order to manufacture plastic products, Mr. Enuenwosu decided to build his own machines, and did this by recycling scrapped machines and using the parts to construct grinders that could recycle plastic waste as a cheap raw materials for other SPMFs to buy. This was how Temple Erako started business; providing recycled scrap plastic as input for other plastic manufacturers. The firm now has its own machines, again made by Mr. Enuenwosu, which are capable of producing a variety of plastic wares.

Mr Enuenwosu has a Bachelor's degree in Economics. In the words of Longenecker et al., he would be regarded as an opportunistic entrepreneur. An opportunistic entrepreneur is one who has supplemented his or her technical education by studying such non-technical subjects as economics, law, or English (Longenecker et al., 2000). Mr. Enuenwosu's strongly stated preference was to be self-employed and independent.

He wants to be in charge of his destiny rather be dependent on an employer in business, the public sector or in the civil service, portraying himself as a sort of "societal or corporate entrepreneurial refugee" or cast-off (Longenecker et al., 10–11; Zimmerer Scarborough, 2000; Bygrave, 1997). He saw public employment as full of bureaucracy, red tape, lobbying and corruption, and hoped to be able to fully exploit his own creative skills in creating his own firm. This signifies his strong desire for responsibility, to be independent and take the (entrepreneurial) risk of working alone (Kuratko et al., 1998; Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2000). Mr Enuenwosu's interest in plastic manufacturing started when he worked

TABLE III
Some key characteristics of Temple Erako SPMF

Characteristics of the entrepreneur

LOCATION: Jos

1. Form of business set-up: Launched as a new venture.
2. Nature of ownership: Sole proprietorship.
3. Type of organisation: Informal/Promotion/(attractive)/Craft-survival (artisan).
4. Reasons for motivation: A need to be independent and interest in manufacturing.
5. Educational qualifications: Bachelors degree in Economics.
6. Source of influence: Admiration of former employer and boss and support from sister.
7. Family background: Educated, traditional, rich, large, extended, religious (strict christians), as well as business oriented.
8. Religion: Christian.
9. Nationality: Nigerian.
10. Previous job experiences: Accounting officer.

Characteristics of business setbacks (INTERNAL)

1. Responsibilities to society and attitudes of giving gifts, favors and donations takes away some time and money.
2. Finance: Lack of adequate information to sources and access to working capital.
3. Personnel: Workers bad attitude and behavior, unreliability, insufficient skills and know-how.
4. Products/Production: Lack of standard moulds and central research facilities for experiments and tests.
5. Organizational skills: Is poor due to too much work and no one is well qualified or experienced to help take over.
6. Premises: Handicapped by infrastructures like constant water and electricity supplies.
7. Planning: Informal, lack of business or strategic plan or the ability to follow especially by workers.

Characteristics of business setbacks (EXTERNAL)

1. Indigenous large firms: They want SPMFs out of business. They are domineering in competing for funds, raw materials and machine supplies. They are also un-helpful and unwilling to co-operate with SPMFs for advice or offer any type of assistance.
2. Social environment: People are lazy and unserious. They would not take up challenging jobs such as this one.
3. Inputs: Inadequate raw materials and spare parts.
4. Infrastructures: Insufficient electricity and water supplies and bad telecommunication facilities.
5. Availability of information and opportunities awareness: There is absence of such e.g. on export market opportunities.

Strategies adopted

1. Market research.
2. Training and re-training: Done by self on the job to save operating costs.
3. Research and development: Experiment with inventing and building machines, and 'benchmarking' by visits to other companies that have up to date machines, then try to improvise them.
4. Sub-contracting: Other companies order for some of the recycled raw materials, which we produce.
5. Invent niche: By building machines and making unique moulds that can not be copied.
6. Novel production: Occasional changes in color, size or other creative designs.

Characteristics of capital and growth

1. Initial source: Saving from previous occupations and sister's help.
2. Current sources: Mostly Self-generated through reinvestment and a small bank loan.
3. Government assistance: None.
4. Growth level: Stagnant/Fluctuating.
5. Responsible factors: Lack of enough funds and inputs.

Crucial requirements

Funds, adequate infrastructure and personnel with skills and know-how.

Source: Survey material collected January 1994.

briefly for a medium sized plastic company in Kano, whose name he withheld.

Enuenwosu felt that his decision had little to do with family background or childhood influences, but much more to do with (a role model) his admiration for the drive and ability of the SPMF-owner he had worked for in Kano. To him this was a challenging example of what was possible with creativity and determination. According to Mr Eneunwosu, this was the first time he had encountered such an attitude from a Nigerian businessman, and it became an inspiration to him. He had other useful work experience, including working briefly for an electronics company as an accountant. A similar background as Enuenwosu's has been reported on two entrepreneurs who own "Lasa Tech" a very successful high-tech firm in Australia (Warren et al., 2000). The entrepreneurs of Lasa Tech arrived at their level of success among other things from their corporate working experience, in addition to their personalities and high level of expertise as individual managers.

Mr Enuenwosu comes from an educated and quite strict Christian family, where a lot of emphasis is placed on moral discipline, honesty and protecting the family name from shame. The family is extended, and relatives care for each others' needs wherever possible and this will similar to a "collective" type of community setting as Deresky, 2000 had described. Mr Enuenwosu's father for instance had a business background, and taught his son a lot about business during his lifetime. This agrees with the accounts of McClelland (1961) and Longenecker et al. (1991). They noted that early exposure, mastery of skills and parental influence could have a strong influence on deciding the choice of future professional and career development of children. Further, Mr Enuenwosu claimed that the hope, self-discipline and moral training he obtained from practising his Christian faith had been an encouragement to him to launch himself into the plastics business. He had taken to heart, perhaps, the biblical reading that success does not come easy; "thou shalt not eat if thou dost not sow" (*The Holy Bible, 2 Thessalonians, 3:10*). He also believed that helping other needy people would bring goodwill and blessings to his business and so he practices the art of giving in his business transactions.

Fitting the characteristics of the more successful SPMFs included in this sample so far, Mr Enuenwosu said he was not satisfied with his present level of performance. His long-term goal was to manage and own a modern factory that would be innovation-oriented, with up-to-date machinery and higher productivity. This vision is reflective of the entrepreneur's ego, which is involved in future orientation and the desire for success (Kuratko, 1998). Taking a more consciously nationalist approach than other SPMF owners, Mr Enuenwosu said he would seek to substitute for imported plastics in the longer-term. Again, this type of adventurous quality has also been noticed among the innovative qualities of growth performing SME's in Europe (McMahon, 2001). Especially in the UK, such innovators win annual awards given by HRH the Prince of Wales himself to show support for them.

The main constraint on growth of Temple Erako however, which is common to most SMEs in developing countries is the lack of funds (Anderson, 1982; Cook, 2000). Like most other SMEs in Nigeria, this firm cannot meet most of the rigid criteria required for applying for loans from commercial banks. Other problems include the lack of skilled personnel, especially those that can help in building and maintaining machines, and also the difficulty in obtaining good quality moulds of suitable design. These problems are rife to small manufacturing firms in most developing countries (Cook, 2000). Unusually, in the case of this firm, the problem of competition from large indigenous firms was mentioned. Such firms were seen as failing to cooperate with smaller plastic manufacturers in order to extend to them the benefits of their steady raw material supplies and better machinery. Schmitz (1982) found similar conditions with large firms in other developing countries as impeding the growth of small manufacturing sector firms.

All the problems faced by his firm were compounded by the political instability in Nigeria, which according to Mr Enuenwosu had already led to people fleeing the country or returning to their respective home regions within Nigeria. Banks and businesses were closed during this period, mainly as a result of the annulled election of July to December 1993. Dereskey (2000) notes that the political and cultural environments where businesses are situated are important determinants for the success of establishments. The operating environment is affected by cultural factors, which include traditional norms, work ethics, social responsibility, attitudes, and functions of the people. The astute manager will therefore need to analyse the environment and see how he/she could accommodate and manage those forces to the overall advantage of the business. Indeed Mr Enuenwosu saw the cultural environment where he operates as an obstacle to his business especially from the personnel perspective.

This is because he felt that the people where his business is located have some cultural beliefs that encourage reluctance towards work. Local employees are mainly contented with the little wages they make. This seemed to be a case of someone (Mr Enuenwosu) complaining about the local employees lack of an interest in working harder to earn additional money income. There was a tendency to prefer profit from commercial activity, and hard work itself was not regarded as a virtue, unlike with Mr Enuenwosu, who certainly has internalised the values of the “Protestant work ethic”. Making money from trading is seen as easier than making money from production, and few employees remain with the company long-term. Mr Enuenwosu complained that once they had acquired enough money to feed themselves and their families for some time, workers sometimes left to spend the rest of their income in drinking local brew and enjoying other forms of entertainment, which in his view appeared a waste of time and money. They only come back after a while when they were broke again.

One possible problem in Temple Erako’s personnel relations may be that the local who work there do not accept being subordinate, seeing it as culturally humiliating. The general tendency may be to see a venture like an SPMF as a means of survival and earning a living, rather than something that might require sacrifice and long hours. These outlooks may help explain why Mr Enuenwosu is the only Southern Nigerian SPMF manufacturer located in that part of the country.

For the owner of Temple Erako, however, the location was not seen as a constraint; on the contrary, he chose to locate his own company in Jos because he would be the only SPMF there and because it was cheaper and more peaceful to live in Jos than in many parts of the country.

Besides, the central location of Jos in Nigeria helps in transport to other parts of the country. A number of problems were also mentioned, including the usual ones such as the need for improved water, electricity, telephones, better roads and more reliable sources of inputs such as spare parts and raw materials. The problems were not particular to this firm, but were generally noted in most cases in Nigeria, the rest of African and other countries in developing world (Cook, 2001).

Since Temple Erako cannot afford new spare parts, improvised, second hand and recycled spare parts are used. The plastic raw material used is mostly recycled which he recycles himself, and this avoids the cost of purchasing fresh raw material from other manufacturers. Asked whether the SAP policy imposed a harsh set of constraints on his business, the owner of Temple Erako said on balance it did not.

He in fact welcomes most policy measures composing SAP, seeing them as challenging entrepreneurs in Nigeria to bring out their latent creative abilities. He in fact uses a military metaphor of the “survival of the fittest” in which SPMFs and other small enterprises are forced to fight to survive or simply perish.

Mr Enuenwosu has been able to devise various strategies in order to overcome the main constraints he identified as facing his business. He built his own machinery and so saved the substantial cost of buying new equipment. Temple Erako sell most of their products through stallholders in the local markets. Mr Enuenwosu goes to the market place regularly himself in order to assess how his products are doing in relation to those of competitors by benchmarking (Lussier, 2000). He also talks to customers about what they would want or expect in terms of plastic products, and then proceeds to alter the size, design and colour of his products accordingly (Allen, 1999). Informants are also used who keep the manager of Temple Erako constantly informed about changes in consumer taste in the market place, and about competitors’ latest moves (Ibid.). In order to ensure that they are aware of what is expected of them in the firm, the owner/manager insists on training all the employees himself. In addition, visits to larger firms are sometimes arranged in order to obtain ideas about the latest machinery, materials and technical operation.

Because of his technical competence and his ability to improvise, other firms in Jos and nearby cities like Kano, Bauchi and Kaduna, both large and small (in the plastics, textiles, beverage and printing industries) approach Mr Enuenwosu, usually asking him to sell recycled plastic raw materials which he stocks or repair broken machinery. Since he is able to do these sub-contracting tasks quickly, this is quite an easy way for him of earning some additional money. Most of Mr Enuenwosu's starting capital was self-generated from previous jobs, and roughly 60–70 per cent of profits are reinvested back into the business. He gives the rest to charity (like the Church other Christian ministries, like leprosariums, orphanages, or schools for the blind and the deaf). This practice could be taken as some form of ethical social responsibility in another own way, giving a good image to the business (Ferrell et al., 2000; Allen, 1999).

Mr Enuenwosu maintains a very frugal and parsimonious living. Mr Eneunwosu is currently single. Perhaps it is this lack of added responsibility that allows him the chance to give out some of his money, although he had clearly explained that he does so in observation to his religious practices.

According to him his interest is not only to make money from the undertaking, a quality which has been noticed among the common characteristics of avid entrepreneurs (See: Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2000). Bygrave (1997) explains that getting rich is not the primary motivator of entrepreneurs. Money is more of a measure of success. They assume that if they are successful they will be rewarded. In addition, Enuenwosu expresses the desire to fulfil his interest in the manufacturing business and help as many people as he can, as a part of his religious obligations. The utilitarian ethic view, which is intended to meet the general good of most people, would be fitting of this example (Ferrell et al., 2000; Allen, 1999). Mr Enuenwosu has approached a number of banks, which denied him funding, since he could not meet the collateral requirements. This confirms Cook (2000) and McMahon's (2001) findings about the major impediments that hinders small manufacturing firms' growth in developing countries compared to the western industrialised countries who have easier access to funding. Mr. Enuenwosu did obtain a very small loan from one bank, which considered his SPMF a high-risk business. The advantage of this situation, as he sees it, is that he continues to remain relatively independent, and is not in debt.

The manager of Temple Erako is generally very optimistic that the firm will meet growth objectives set at being a large plastic industry in the future. Bygrave (1997) again interprets this quality existing in entrepreneurs as the "Dream". Entrepreneurs have a vision of what the future could be like for them and their business and more important, they have the ability to implement their dreams.

Overall, this SPMF presents the picture of a tightly run, well-managed business that was able to overcome quite severe capital, technical and labour constraints through creativity and innovation. Furthermore, the exploitation of the owner/manager's quite marked determination and his entrepreneurial acumen is an added advantage that continues to sustain the venture (See: Kuratko, 1998).

Overview of Daniel Obanoh Nigeria Co. Ltd. Lagos (south-west)

Similar to the case of Temple Erako is Daniel Obanoh Nigeria Company, based in Lagos. Mr. Obanoh can be described as an equally determined, hardworking and confident plastics manufacturer similar to Mr. Enuenwosu (Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2000; Kuratko, 1998). Mr. Obanoh was introduced to the researcher at the premises of Funmi Otaineke & Sons another SPMF during the period of fieldwork.

Mr. Obanoh is from a Christian background, and his family is small and relatively poor, but quite well educated and oriented towards business. Virtually each member of his family are involved in some type of business activity, and they advise each other from time to time. Apart from his admirable entrepreneurial ability, Obanoh has wide knowledge about the plastics business, which is of a helpful advantage to him (Longenecker et al., 2000). Mr. Obanoh had many potentially sound business ideas about manufacturing in general but as Anderson (1982) earlier mentioned is facing the same problem for most developing country entrepreneurs, in form of lack of capital to implement his ideas.

In 1992, Daniel Obanoh Ltd. owned two plastic moulds; two years later by 1994, it owned around four times as many, a sign of growth.

Mr. Obanoh's strategy was to pay to use his own moulds in machinery owned by others and that was what he was doing in Funmi Otenaike's premises when the researcher met him.

That way the firm was able to keep costs down. Network activities such as this are quite common internationally and have been known to be very helpful in sustaining small firms remain in business (Bygrave, 1997).

This use of machinery was paid hourly, or through a sharing-out of the profit on resulting sales. By 1994 when the main survey was conducted, Daniel had added to his range of products but still could not afford his own machinery. He did report high demand for his products because of their generally high quality. In fact, his main constraint was lack of capital to invest in machinery. This meant that there were times when he could not meet the high demands due to the unfortunate handicap of not having his own machines (Anderson, 1982; Schmitz, 1982; Cook, 2000). Lack of funding according to Cook, McMahon and Anderson, is the most serious of constraints hindering growth of manufacturing firms especially in developing economies.

Like the previous respondent, Mr Obanoh is an entrepreneur of the "self-made" type. He lives frugally, is innovative in his methods of working, works long hours, and seeks to save resources wherever possible (See: Bygrave, 1997; Stevenson et al., 1999; Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2000). The main sources of capital for initial investment in this firm was from personal savings from previous work, and most profits generated are reinvested into the business.

Mr Obanoh requires part payment from his customers in advance of carrying out work for them, and this assists him with cash flow and revenue raising for inputs. He had never bothered to apply for a loan from any bank or government institution, reasoning that since he lacked any connections with any high-placed officials, he would be wasting his time in doing so. Oshagbemi (1983) observed factually that without contacts in the banking or government systems, it would be difficult for entrepreneurs to receive attention or acquire loans in Nigeria. Favouritism and nepotism by officials have taken over the importance of conforming to ideal standards. High interest rates on loans, also discourages entrepreneurs including Obanoh from applying. Mr Obanoh regrets that the government has not paid attention that is more serious to SPMF and to the entire SME sector, and has ignored its potential contribution to the industrial development of Nigeria's economy.

One attempt to borrow money from family members and friends in order to buy a machine did not work out since Mr Obanoh could give no guarantee that he could repay even this "soft" (i.e. interest-free) loan in good time. It is interesting that neither of the SPMFs in this case study so far got into debt. This has been caused more by necessity than by choice. The situation has been turned into a virtue by both of them, however, and has brought them to the same conclusion: that investments in new machinery and equipment would have to come out of existing capital resources generated within the firm rather than from credit from an external source.

Mr Obanoh saw his lack of influential connections with people who might help him as a serious obstacle to further growth however. He would have liked to secure a substantial bank loan or government grant of some kind, to enable him to buy his own machines. Rigidity of collateral conditions as well as corruption both served to exclude small SPMFs like Temple Erako and Daniel Obanoh Ltd just like, Cook (2000) observed to be common in other developing countries.

Yet, both these SPMFs display many of the qualities usually seen as central to successful entrepreneurial activity. A high rate of reinvestment, innovation, and a tendency to live frugally are seen as vital by Weber (1930), Schumpeter (1934), Duesenberry (1949), Kuratko (1989), Bygrave (1997), Zimmerer and Scarborough (2000).

Ironically perhaps, Mr Obanoh doubles as a consultant to other SPMFs, who call him in to deal with the nitty-gritty of their businesses, including matters of marketing and machinery. As in the

TABLE IV
Showing some key characteristics of Daniel Obanoh Co. Ltd

Characteristics of the entrepreneur

LOCATION: Lagos

1. Form of business set-up: Launched a new venture.
2. Nature of ownership: Sole proprietorship/owns his own premises.
3. Type of organization: Balance of informal/craft to promotion (attractive).
4. Reasons for motivation: It is a lucrative business.
5. Educational qualifications: Advanced – levels (post high school diploma).
6. Source of influence: A friend who was doing well in the business encouraged and challenged him to do the same.
7. Family background: Educated, poor, small but business oriented.
8. Religion: Christianity.
9. Nationality: Nigerian.
10. Previous job experiences: Textile company and printing press maintenance technician.

Characteristics of business setbacks (INTERNAL)

1. Responsibilities to family: Helping and supporting other family members needs reduces amount of money to be re-invested.
2. Finance: Lack of information to sources and access to working capital.
3. Marketing: Maintaining/increasing market share due to incapacity.
4. Planning: Informal and spontaneous as required, does not follow any business plans.

Characteristics of business setbacks (EXTERNAL)

1. Economic environment: Devaluation of Naira and SAP policies.
2. Infrastructures: Inadequate electricity and water supplies, bad roads and poor telecommunications facilities.
3. Government officials: Frequent harassment by the Police.

Characteristics of strategies adopted to overcome internal/external setbacks

1. Market research.
2. Research and development: Comparing imported products and inputs as a standard for production.
3. Sub-contracting: Companies and people place orders for products to be manufactured.
4. Exports: Customers arrive from neighboring countries to buy his products.
5. Invent niches: Availability of a special mould for chrome bed and chair tops and caps.

Characteristics of capital and growth

1. Initial sources: Savings from previous occupations.
2. Current sources: Self generated by reinvestment and advanced payment from customers.
3. Government assistances: None.
4. Growth level: Steady.
5. Responsible factors for steady growth: Exports, market research and niche.

Crucial requirements

Machines and adequate infrastructure like electricity, water supply and communication facilities.

Source: Survey material collected January 1994.

case of Mr Enuenwosu, Mr Obanoh felt his choice of career had very little to do with his upbringing. He left his previous job as a maintenance technician in a textile and printing company on seeing how lucrative the SPMF sector could be. Self-employment appeared attractive (Longenecker et al., 1999; Bygrave, 1997; Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2000) to him in part because a close friend had been doing well in the plastics business at that time.

Mr Obanoh also felt that his religious outlook contributed to his business success since he was honest, hardworking and self-disciplined, living a frugal lifestyle and avoiding reckless expenditure (Weber, 1930). His responsibilities towards poorer family members have reduced the amount of time and money he could invest back into the business (See: Bygrave, 1997), but this is not a serious concern for him. His main problem as he sees it has been in trying to secure sufficient funds to be able to buy his own machinery so that he can increase sales and perhaps capture a larger market share.

Inadequate electricity, water supply shortage, bad roads, poor telephones, and other communications are mentioned as problems, as usual. Nonetheless, on the positive side, the firm's premises are well located near a main road, and are very accessible to most customers. The location advantage has often been attributed to the success factor of most businesses (Bangs et al., 1999; Megginson, 2000; Siropolis, 1997). Also nearby are a number of machine owners (SPMF firms like Funmi Otaineke and Mufbat Plastics), to whom Mr Obanoh goes to rent machinery needed to produce plastic goods from moulds.

As earlier mentioned, the economic environment under SAP has reduced purchasing power, and thus undercut demand from customers (Lall, 1995; Hambagda, 1987). Devaluation of the national currency and resulting foreign exchange scarcity has made it even more difficult than before for Mr Obanoh to obtain the machinery he needs. Unfortunately, Mr Obanoh seems vulnerable to abuse in several ways. Because his business so desperately needs its own machinery, he has sometimes been deceived into parting with money on the promise of being provided with a machine in a good state of repair. Unable to trust anyone, he has decided that he will have to raise money himself to buy his own machinery. Harassment from government officials was another problem; because the business was unregistered and informal, he claimed, the police had asked him for bribes in the past, threatening to report him for not being formally registered. This is considered as a wider problem for other SPMFs as well in the sample interviewed, since some of them are also not registered and are paying a fee to inspectors to protect them from being reported to the authorities for legal action.

In the face of such severe external constraints, Mr Obanoh's strategy has been to capture more consumer demand for his products by designing moulds that manufacture standard products of high quality. He also works by himself except when it is absolutely necessary to save costs of having to pay an employee on fixed salary. Like the owner of Temple Erako, Mr Obanoh uses recycled rather than fresh raw materials in order to save on production costs. He uses customers in order to check on mould designs, and on the prices and quality of the products of competing firms, or simply asks his customers directly why they buy his products rather than others. Imported products are widely assumed to be of superior quality to Nigerian-made goods, and Mr. Obanoh refers to such imports by benchmarking (Lussier, 2000), when setting the standard for plastic products produced by his own firm. A reputation for good quality products has attracted customers from neighbouring countries, including Niger, Chad, Benin, Cameroon and Ghana to Daniel Obanoh and to few other SPMFs. This helps Obanoh to get some foreign money especially (in franc), which has a higher value from the francophone countries.

Another of Mr Obanoh's strategies to secure his firm's survival and profitability was to carve a niche by producing unusual moulds that no other small manufacturers have or that would interest other large producers. Niche ventures have proved to hold greater financial promise for new entrants (Stevenson et al., 1999). Sometimes Niche ventures also, require less capital and can achieve financial self sufficiency faster (ibid.). For example, Obanoh is the only manufacturer (In Lagos) who can produce caps for chrome chairs and beds from a mould. Various companies directly subcontract to him for this reason. That he has managed to monopolise the local market in these products has greatly assisted his growth performance. Another positive factor for Mr Obanoh was he did feel that the government's ban on imported plastics had encouraged him to produce some of the banned products, including bottle covers and furniture caps.

This overview of Daniel Obanoh Ltd. suggests that quality of plastic products may be a constraint on the growth and development of number of SPMFs, and especially on their capacity to export their products. Since exports to neighbouring countries, unlike sales in Nigeria, will have to compete with imports, only plastic products of comparable quality to imported products are likely to be able to compete. Nevertheless, subcontracting, niche creation, exporting, networking, benchmarking, location, re-investment of profits were among the different methods Daniel used to sustain his business to the level it has achieved without external support. Obanoh as Schumpeter would describe him, is creatively destructive. He was able to apply a number of innovative qualities in the market, in product development and process to keep his business going amidst the difficult operating conditions within which he finds himself (See: Stevenson, 1999; Clemence, 2000; Bygrave, 1997).

Overview of Mandau Plastics Maiduguri (north-east)

The president of Mandau Plastics Manufacturing is Alhaji Manu Dauda, who is also Chairman of the Borno State chapter of National Association of Small Scale Industries (NASSI).

Mandau Plastics has found a secure market niche in a predominantly Muslim area of Nigeria, as it is the only prayer mat manufacturing company in Borno State. This SPMF is large and well connected, given the influential position of its owner.

In addition, there is virtually no competition from within its area of operation. This security seems to have brought steady growth in the firm's sales and profits. However, there has been a tendency for both to stagnate. This is a seeming contradiction, which this overview will seek to account for.

Mandau Plastics was launched in 1985, with Alhaji Manu Dauda as sole proprietor. He was at that time also a member in the local chapter of the NASSI before gaining his influential position three years later. The owner has a comparatively low level of formal education compared with most owners of SPMFs, having only a primary school certificate. Alhaji Dauda's interest in making things confirming accounts of McClelland (1961) and Longenecker et al. (1999) started from his childhood days, when he made shopping bags from corn leaves and paper and sometimes sold them. His family are poor and involved in trading. They are also committed Muslims. Alhaji Dauda's motivation for entering manufacturing was the desire to become an employer himself (See: Bygrave, 1997). Plastics manufacturing was also one of the most affordable lines of business, as he said. Friends encouraged his interest in the plastics sector in particular by convincing him that mat manufacturing would be simple and there was a high unmet demand for Moslem prayer mats in the region as a whole. This advice proved to be well founded as most researchers noted opportunities that influence business formation and growth (Bygrave, 1997; Ryan et al., 1999; Zimmerer and Scarborough, 1996; Cook, 2000; McMahon, 2001).

Like his Christian counterparts, Mr Dauda believes that his religious background and views have been of great assistance to him in business. In particular, he attributes to his faith his belief in the need to be honest and respectful towards everyone. Although responsibilities to his family do reduce his firm's income (See: Bygrave, 1997), Alhaji Dauda tries to keep such expenditures within limits, and does not see these obligations as a serious problem. The main problems voiced were a shortage of working capital, and the high rate of staff turnover, as people leave for better-paying jobs. Cook (2000) observed how large industries draw technical staff away from small firms by attracting them with better pay and benefits in developing countries. Importing moulds for production had also proved to be a time-consuming problem for Mandau plastics.

Although competition is not fierce for Alhaji Dauda, he uses several strategies to increase his sales, including market research. He collects information by going to the market and asking customers what they appreciate about his products and what changes they would like to see. He also changes the designs and patterns of his products regularly and pays close attention to responses from customers. Entrepreneurs need to understand that maintaining good customer relationships according to Allen (1999) has profitable benefits for businesses. One of the "P's" of marketing (product, place, price and promotion) according to Allen, should be people who are customers. Endorsing Allen's statement, Alhaji Dauda reported that these two methods alone had been very useful in maintaining and increasing sales. That this is so is evident from Table VII in the next section of this paper. Alhaji Dauda was also the only entrepreneur in the sample who was able, or willing, to provide professional in-plant training for his employees. This was provided through the Industrial Training Fund (ITF). The Industrial

TABLE V
Some key characteristics of Mandau Plastics

Characteristics of the entrepreneur

LOCATION: Maiduguri, Borno State

1. Form of business set-up: Launched as a new venture.
2. Nature of ownership: Sole proprietorship/Owns Premises.
3. Type of organisation: Formal/Promotion (attractive)/Administration (high potential).
4. Reasons for going into business: Interest in manufacturing by doing and making things. It is the most affordable line of business known to him and he wants to build a business empire of his own.
5. Educational qualifications: Primary education.
6. Source of influence: Friends advice and information that the business is simple and has high demand. Childhood upbringing and background. Learnt from father who was a businessman.
7. Family background: Poor, strict and religious and business oriented.
8. Religion: Islam.
9. Nationality: Nigerian.
10. Previous job experiences: General trade merchant.

Characteristics of business setbacks (INTERNAL)

1. Responsibility to family members, obligation to other societal activities and giving gifts and favors especially alms, which are a religious practice and this, reduces earnings.
2. Finance: Limited means of getting access to working capital.
3. Personnel: Poor quality and capacity of workers with limited skills and know-how, Bad attitude and behavior towards work and being unreliable. There is scarcity of qualified workforce in the area.
4. Production/Products: Most moulds for good designs are imported and costly. Lack of ability, awareness, or information on what to innovate.
5. Management: Lack of management skills and inability to afford the employment of professionals.
6. Premises: Small for expansion but manageable.
7. Location: The area of location is also distant from major cities like Lagos, the commercial entreport or from areas of skilled workers. One has to travel all the time to acquire needed inputs.
8. Planning: Lack skills but has a written plan that is not applied to the business operations.

Characteristics of business setbacks (EXTERNAL)

1. Economic environment: SAP policy has decreased purchasing power and access to foreign exchange.
2. Political environment: politicians control even bank loans.
3. Inputs: Unstable raw material availability, spare parts and maintenance technicians.
4. Infrastructure: Unstable electricity, water, communications and transport facilities, also costly to obtain or maintain.
5. Large Indigenous firms: They would not co-operate or assist, while they dominate information and sources of inputs and funds.
6. Government Officials: Custom officers demand bribes and create fake regulations.

Characteristics of strategies adopted to overcome internal/external setbacks

1. Market Research.
2. Training and re-training: In plant collaboration with professional consultants (ITF).
3. Invent niches: The only producer in the area.
4. Novel production: Frequent changing of style, color and design patterns to attract more demand.

Characteristics of capital and growth

1. Initial source: From a bank and previous business.
2. Current source: Bank and re-investment.
3. Government assistance: Yes, partially.
4. Growth level: Stagnant/Fluctuating.
5. Responsible factors: Instability of Nigerian economy inhibits planning. Lack of management skills, lack of information to other opportunities and lack of skilled reliable personnel.

Crucial requirements

Adequate finance, Good advice and information on what and how to do them and ability to carry out Research and development.

Source: Survey material collected February 1994.

training fund has been set up to provide training at subsidised costs to formally registered businesses in Nigeria. Most other SPMFs do not use it perhaps because of their informal status and therefore do not qualify, or because they see no need for it to save on time and costs.

Just as many other SPMFs studied, Mandau Plastics recycles plastic products to save costs. Perhaps surprisingly, given the successful increase in sales, Alhaji Dauda did not envisage exporting his products. In part this may be because he is broadly satisfied with his present market position. It may also be because formal export procedures are very cumbersome and informal procedures are illegal. However, this does not mean that he does not export or want to, but perhaps felt this was a sensitive information especially for a responsible NASSI president. Mandau Plastics is well situated for access to local markets. However, the location in Maiduguri has its price; in order to collect imported inputs, for example, a two thousand-kilometre round-trip is needed to Lagos. This can take several days.

Unlike most of the entrepreneurs studied so far, Alhaji Mandau Dauda has well-established connections with well-placed people able to assist him in securing financial resources. He has been able to secure a reasonably sized loan from a bank (he did not specify which one or the date of loan) which enabled him to increase sales/output/workforce. From his experience as state Chairman of NASSI, Alhaji Dauda added that obtaining bank or government support is not easy or always reliable for most SMEs in Nigeria and so he depends on retained earnings and re-investment to boost his company growth. It may be that the very success of Mandau Plastics in carving out a secure niche in terms of the market for its final product tends to stifle entrepreneurial innovation. According to Stevenson et al. (1999), Niche startups sometimes could fail because the cost of serving a specialised niche exceeds the benefits to customers. Entrepreneurs are advised to analyse carefully the incremental costs of serving a niche, taking into consideration their lack of scale and the difficulty in marketing to a small-diffused segment (Allen, 1999). Excess local demand for the main products made by this firm however, creates a seller's market, reducing any incentives there might otherwise have been to diversify, to create new market niches, or adapt new techniques and technologies through innovation as Schumpeter described it (Stevenson et al., 1999; Bygrave, 1997; Timmons, 1994).

It seems if anything that Mandau plastic is more successful than the other two industries in the case studies. Mandau has achieved more consistent "increases" in all categories than the other two firms have, although it has been realising some stagnant positions in its later years.

It does seem that in the case of this firm, one of the enhancing factors for its growth and development may well be the absence of competition, which in this case acts as a disincentive to effort and reinvestment. However, without the opportunities available to Mandau unlike Temple Erako and Obanoh, no one can predict how it would have performed. This is because the examples of entrepreneurial determination and acumen in the first two cases has not been manifested in Mandau, simply because there was no much challenge and a need to fight for survival given the opportunities of assistance and support acquired. This again gives an example of how those with entrepreneurial talents like Mr. Obanoh and Mr. Eneunwosu if assisted like Alhaji Dauda, could have achieved much greater success in their businesses. Denying support and assistance to promising SMEs can therefore be a way of discouraging them from contributing fruitful results, as they should have done to the economy.

4. Case study comparison: Temple Erako, Daniel Obanoh Ltd. and Mandau Plastics compared

Two of the firms surveyed in this research, Daniel Obanoh and Temple Erako closely approximate the ideal type of the Schumpeterian firm, managed by entrepreneurial individuals involved in constant innovation and improvement of production, as well as undertaking high level of reinvestment (See: Bygrave, 1997; Stevenson et al., 1999; Timmons, 1999). Whilst the capital constraint is clearly tight for these SPMFs, processes of accumulation were taking place based on various forms of specialisation and innovation. Both Temple Erako and Daniel Obanoh for instance undertake sub-contracting or repair work for others, and produce, their own working machines from old parts. It could be said that with such strategies, recycling has been made into an art of efficient small enterprise management. The comparison between the three firms in this case study is clear from the Tables VI–VIII below.

Tables VI and VII depict the informal nature of the SPMFs and fall within the "craft"/artisan or "marginal", type of organisation category of Filley and Adalg (1978). Neither is well connected to official or other sources of credit, and neither has

TABLE VI
Growth and performance measurement of Temple Erako Plastic Company

Year	Employment (number of full-time employees)	Sales as a percentage of production	Production (thousand)	Assets (machines)	Profits percentage (thousand/naira)	Space (increased)
1990	3	50	2	2	0	Same
1991	16	150	15	3	90	″
1992	16	150	8	4	Down	″
1993	10	200	14	5	25	″
1994	20	–	–	6	–	″
Comments	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase	Decline	Stagnant

TABLE VII
Growth and performance measurement of Daniel Obanoh Company Nigeria Ltd

Year	Employment (number of full-time employees)	Sales as a percentage of production	Production (thousand)	Assets (moulds)	Profits percentage (thousand/naira)	Space (increased)
1988	2	100	–	1	–	Same
1989	2	100	–	1	5	″
1990	2	100	–	3	10	″
1991	2	100	–	4	15	″
1992	2	100	–	4	18	″
1993	2	100	–	7	20	″
1994	2	100	–	–	18	More space
Comments	Stagnant	Increase	Not available	Increase	Stagnant	Increase

TABLE VIII
Growth and performance measurement of Mandau Plastics Company

Year	Employment (number of full-time employees)	Sales as a percentage of production	Production (thousand)	Assets (machines)	Profits percentage (thousand/naira)	Space (increased)
1985	35	60	60	23	15	Same
1986	20	15	15	26	2–3	″
1987	15	15	15	26	″	″
1988	15	15	15	26	″	″
1989	15	15	15	26	″	″
1990	15	15	15	28	5	″
1991	45	60	60	29	7.5	″
1992	50	65	65	30	10	″
1993	50	65	65	32	11	″
1994	50	65	–	–	–	″
Comments	Increase/Stagnant	Increase/Stagnant	Increase/Stagnant	Increase	Increase	Stagnant

been able to receive much capital from families or friends. Although both firms remain small, especially in terms of employees, they also have characteristics of promotion or attractive organisations, and have the potential to become more growth-oriented in future, due to their ability to accumulate. Of the three, Daniel Obanoh and Temple Erako have had especial difficulties in surviving.

Temple Erako still do not have any up to date machines nor can they afford fresh raw materials and are limited in standard moulds of high quality. Most of Temple Erako's materials are improvised and this takes away time and requires alot of effort to maintain them to be productive. Constant repairs are needed especially for the improvised machines. Although Temple makes some profits, these are not enough to secure any new machines as well as cover operating costs. They are tenaciously coping with the adverse situation confronting them by growing at a very lethargic pace. Whereas in terms of growth Temple Erako conforms to the "marginal" or "survival" category therefore, in terms of entrepreneurial strategies, it more closely resembles "promotion" or "attractive" type organisations.

It may be clear that the determination and fortitude of Mr Enuenwosu to succeed impressed the researcher, and perhaps this has somewhat biased the researcher's conclusions regarding this firm. But the justification for this bias, if it is one, lies in the complex set of strategies adopted, which show a high degree of commitment to long-term survival and expansion on the part of the entrepreneur (See: Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2000; Kuratko, 1998; Bygrave, 1999).

These firms' strategies show signs, which suggest that they have the potential to move beyond survival or marginal in future and become more growth-oriented. Factors beyond the control of the owners may currently oblige these two firms to remain within the category of "craft-survival" or "artisan-marginal", but they do seem to exhibit qualities of strong entrepreneurial motivation and ability. For this reason, there seems a strong case for arguing that were these firms, and other firms of this type, to obtain some genuine external support and assistance, they might well be able to transform themselves quite smoothly into formal, "promotion" or "attractive" – high growth type SMEs, as described by (Filley, 1978 and Longenecker et al., 2000; Timmons, 1999). These two firms are similar in being largely the work of "self made" entrepreneurs, who started with very little capital, and have overcome a lot of obstacles. They also remain highly motivated and are optimistic about realising the "dream" or "destiny" of their firms' future prospects for growth and diversification (See: Bygrave, 1997; Kuratko, 1998).

Given the severe external constraints on each of these firms, the fact that they continue to survive at all without capital backing, and without machinery in the case of Daniel Obanoh Ltd., is evidence of their owners' creative abilities, acumen, drive and resourcefulness. Mandau Plastics on the other hand, a more formal type of SME can perhaps be located somewhere in between a "promotion" or "attractive" and an "administration" or high-growth type of organisation.

It is very close to being of the administration or high-growth type. Mandau Plastics is most secure and successful in usual terms within the "promotion" or "attractive" category.

Unlike the first two entrepreneurs, Alhaji Dauda was not a "self-made" man in the usual sense, and did not fit the Schumpeterian archetype of an entrepreneur. His privileged position as chairman of the state chapter of NASSI makes him a prominent figure in the local community in which his business operates. Both the owners of Temple Erako and Daniel Obanoh Ltd. are isolated, and workers and officials can harass them relatively speaking. Alhaji Dauda's strong business connections and privileged position did not seem to be of any serious advantage to him; in fact in terms of entrepreneurial initiative, Mr Dauda was no match for the other two managers presented here.

Inspite of the advantages Mandau has over the first two entrepreneurs in being free from competition and getting assistance from formal sector banks, the growth of Mandau Plastics was constrained, apparently by too secure a market position. Whilst insecurity can undermine the fortunes of companies, as Temple Erako and Daniel Obanoh's cases have shown, innovation can also be dampened by too much security. This is an interesting finding of this case study.

Whereas Alhaji Dauda had no real need to innovate, stretch his management capability or exercise his resourcefulness in the running of the business, Temple Erako and Daniel Obanoh Ltd. suffered so much from insecurity and rising costs of inputs etc. that it hampered their efforts to invest. Whereas in the other cases, there was the desire for investment and innovation, in the other case neither was desired. Although Daniel Obanoh's firm is very small indeed, he managed to attract orders from the export market. This could have been true, perhaps, of Alhaji Dauda, but he did not suggest any such relationship. Although Daniel Obanoh was seriously constrained by the lack of a proper machine, he was able to secure contract-providing parts for larger companies (chrome furniture manufacturing industries).

The lack of any competition is however common to both Mandau Plastics and Temple Erako as they are the only SPMFs in Maiduguri and Jos and roundabout. Yet only Mandau Plastics has been able to significantly benefit from its monopoly in order to expand sales. The reason for this may be that Mr Enuenwosu is not a local. Although a Christian in a predominantly Christian area in Jos, there could still be the problem of regional difference and he may not appreciate the kinds of goods that might sell more profitably in that area. This is a speculative explanation, of course, but it may well be part of the picture at least.

Perhaps the most important implication of this comparison is to highlight the price of allocating support, grants, loans and other forms of official and private-sector support to SMEs purely on the basis of existing networks. The tendency is to favour familiar names and faces and larger, more conventional firms with secure market positions (such as Mandau Plastics). Smaller, but possibly very promising, firms are not usually considered seriously, especially when involved in the manufacture of some unusual commodities. This problem however, may not be insurmountable as firms could always localise and create niche products that would be accepted to the area (Dereskey, 2000). The need for a more rational and resource-efficient allocation of increasingly scarce credit resources between various SMEs, is highly vital in Nigeria. Whether any changes will result is another matter, and would need to be assessed at some time in the future.

The role of entrepreneurship

It can be seen from the foregoing discussions that indeed entrepreneurship has played a significant role in determining the level of success realised by individual SPMFs presented in the case study profiles. Although external support is essential in enabling a healthy environment that encourages business growth, it cannot function efficiently without effective entrepreneurial input. Table IX below is used to further categorise the trait of the entrepreneurs in this study to understand their identifying qualities. It shows the different definitions and criteria of one approach to the micro view of entrepreneurship. The micro view of entrepreneurship examines the factors that are specific to entrepreneurship and are part of the internal locus of control (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 1998). The potential entrepreneur has the ability to control, to direct or adjust the outcome of each major influence in this view (ibid.). Table X shows how entrepreneurship has also been characterised as the interaction of the following skills: inner control, planning and goal setting, risk taking, innovation, reality perceptions, use of feedback, decision making, human relations and independence (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 1998). In addition, many people believe successful entrepreneurs are individuals who are not afraid to fail (ibid.). In table 11, the overall characteristics of the entrepreneurs studied and the methods of approach they adopt are presented to examine their nature of make-up and identify what qualities are missing. The intention here is to understand the strength and weakness of each entrepreneur and firm and to decide which of these factors and qualities appear to have contributed most to overall performance of selected firms.

From an internal point of view, the approaches adopted by the SPMFs are depicted in relation to external factors. A combination of internal qualities and external factors is used to determine a particular SPMF strategy. Observing the approaches adopted by various SPMF entrepreneurs is useful in revealing the type of practices, which appear to be more or less successful in determining growth and development of such firms.

Mandau Plastics have shown the most impressive result from the case studies presented, as an example of a SPMF within the "administrative" or

TABLE IX
Definitions and criteria of one approach to the micro view

Entrepreneurial model	Definition	Measures	Questions
"Great person"	"Extraordinary achievers"	Personal principles Personal histories Experiences	What principles do you have? What are your achievements?
Psychological characteristics	Founder control over the means of production	Locus of control Tolerance of ambiguity Need for achievement	What are your values?
Classical	People who make innovations bearing risk and uncertainty "creative destruction"	Decision making Abilities to see opportunities creativity	What are your opportunities? What is your vision? How do you respond?
Management	Creating value through the recognition of business opportunity, the management of risk taking . . . through the communicative and management skills to mobilise	Expertise Technical knowledge Technical plans	What are your plans? What are your capabilities? What are your credentials?
Leadership	"Social architect" Promotion and protection of values	Attitudes, style Management of people	How do you manage people
Intrapreneurship	Those who pull together to promote innovation	Decision making	How do you change and adopt

Source: Adopted from J. Barton Cunningham and Joe Lischeron, "Defining Entrepreneurship," *Journal of Small Business Management* (January 1991): 56.

"high-potential", growth range and with a lot of intention to grow further. Although Mandau has less external constraints, it differs in style of approach and in terms of opportunities available to them. The firm is structural in approach in terms of its organisation and does not demonstrate a Schumpeterian method. Whereas Obanoh is more innovative and produces a variety of plastic products within a more competitive environment, Mandau produces only plastic prayer mats and is situated in a less competitive environment. Although Obanoh and Erako did not have the same opportunity Mandau had in terms of being assisted with government funds, yet they used their creative abilities. They developed ways of coping with their constraints by raising their own funds and developing their own raw materials and machinery. Their entrepreneurial qualities stand out above everything else than for instance the supporting factors which has assisted Mandau such as government assistance. Expectations cannot always be predicted with equal accuracy but it appears that with a little bit of assistance as in the case of the first two examples, considering the qualities which they have portrayed, Temple Erako and Daniel Obanoh SPMFs could have easily graduated to a higher category of SPMFs. They could have graduated from the "survival/marginal or the promotion/attractive" category they are currently to a higher category (See Table I). However, lack of external support and assistance could have its own advantages as well. It was under such challenging conditions as Mr Enuenwosu of Temple Erako had said that helped to bring out the best in him. It may not be a general view, but it is possible that the skills and innovative potentials latent in certain entrepreneurs will not have been realised under more

TABLE X
Characteristics often attributed to entrepreneurs

1. Confidence	22. Responsibility
2. Perseverance, determination	23. Foresight
3. Energy, diligence	24. Accuracy, thoroughness
4. Resourcefulness	25. Cooperativeness
5. Ability to take calculated risks	26. Profit orientation
6. Dynamism, leadership	27. Ability to learn from mistakes
7. Optimism	28. Sense of power
8. Need to achieve	29. Pleasant personality
9. Versatility, knowledge of product, market machinery, technology	30. Egotism
10. Creativity	31. Courage
11. Ability to influence others	32. Imagination
12. Ability to get along well with others	33. Perceptiveness
13. Initiative	34. Toleration of ambiguity
14. Flexibility	35. Aggressiveness
15. Intelligence	36. Capacity for enjoyment
16. Orientation to clear goals	37. Efficacy
17. Positive response to challenges	38. Commitment
18. Independence	39. Ability to trust workers
19. Responsiveness to suggestions and criticism	40. Sensitivity to others
20. Time competence and efficiency	41. Honesty, integrity
21. Ability to make decisions quickly	42. Maturity, balance

Source: John A. Hornaday, research about Living Entrepreneurs," in Encyclopaedia of Entrepreneurship, ed. Kent/Sexton/Vesper, © 1982 in Kuratko and Hodgetts, 1998.

TABLE XI
Characteristics and approaches taken by selected SPMFs

Name of SPMF	Entrepreneurial approach	Severity of constraints	Entrepreneurial characteristics	Overall growth performance
Temple Erako	Schumpeterian/ Individual/Classical	High: Machines, and Capital/Infrastructure/ Raw materials	Fortitude/Determination/ Resourcefulness/Initiative/ Positive response to challenges/ Independence/Need to achieve/optimism/versatility/ Intelligence	Moderate
D. Obanoh	Schumpeterian/ Individual/Classical	High: Machines and Capital/Infrastructure	Fortitude/Determination. Resourcefulness/Initiative/ Positive response to challenges/ independence/Need to achieve/optimism/ versatility/foresight	Moderate
Mandau Plastics	Structural/ Management/ Leadership/ Intrapreneurship	Low: Working capital/ Inadequate experience, education & training	Optimistic/Less Innovative/ maturity balance/tolerance for ambiguity/responsibility/ profit orientation/capacity for enjoyment/pleasant personality	Good

relaxed conditions such as those of Alhaji Dauda of Mandau Plastics. Perhaps the particular advantages in favour of Mandau could explain why he had better levels of performance overall than the other SPMFs.

The businesses of Temple Erako and Daniel Obanoh seemed mainly to survive through sheer determination and fortitude. These two entrepreneurs are examples of promising avant-garde Schumpeterian personalities that it could be argued have been neglected by sources of external assistance. Schumpeter's type of entrepreneur according to Stevenson et al. Indulges in all kinds of innovation including process innovation, market innovation, product innovation, factor innovation and even organisational innovation. The entrepreneur in Schumpeter's context is creating and responding to economic discontinuities. Similarly, Messieurs Enuenwosu and Obanoh maintained their own machinery, trained their own employees on the job, and closely supervised, monitored and adapted production processes and products in order to save costs and resources. They were able to accumulate capital for further investment in addition. For example, because they could not obtain loans to afford buying fresh raw materials, they often resolve to recycle waste plastics. In the absence of expensive new imported machinery, the entrepreneurs endeavour to improvise and build their machines and make their own moulds. To meet training needs, the entrepreneurs train their own personnel in-house to save costs of training them in institutes and conduct their own market research in the market place through benchmarking and personal customer contact (Lussier, 2000). In addition, because water and power supply, are erratic and can increase overhead costs, the entrepreneurs dig wells and buy electric generators. Yet, another type of strategy used by these entrepreneurs is to subcontract work to other less busy manufacturers and then split profits afterwards. Sub-contracting deals are usually negotiated with other fellow manufacturers when machines are broken down, during periods of high workloads, or when trying to meet with customer order deadlines. This practice of ingenuity has been observed by Anderson (1982) as a means of economising capital costs adopted by SMEs who have limited access to financial support or assistance. However, the advantage of close supervision by the entrepreneurs, administrative, production, sales and marketing activities could be better integrated.

5. Conclusion

The three comparative case studies presented the range of views from SPMF interviewees and highlighted what was already clear from the survey results obtained. There are no fixed set of obstacles, constraints or a set of positive factors that can be said to influence the growth and development of all small plastic-manufacturing firms in Nigeria. On the contrary, while some constraints are almost universal (poor infrastructure, lack of external credit) (Cook, 2001) even these as Schumpeter explained, can sometimes be turned to advantage through the resourcefulness and determination of particular entrepreneurs. The three comparative case studies gave a good example of this, since the two firms, which suffered from the most severe constraints in terms of credit, were able to accumulate even so. This is not what Schatz (1967) was thinking of when he referred to the illusion of credit shortage in Nigeria, but it may be a new way of interpreting that term. In the case of comparative case study on Temple Erako, for instance, the importance of control appeared to be highlighted, and the difficulties of running a firm without external support seemed to be pointed too. Yet, this was not true of all the SMPFs surveyed in many cases. This study has highlighted the difficult situation of financial capital for small businesses in Nigeria. According to Alhaji Dauda and Mr Enuenwosu larger firms sometimes try to force smaller firms out of business perhaps so that they don't stand in their way for competition in terms of getting attention for funds and raw materials, or in the market through selling products in similar lines of production, since the SMEs could have lower overheads and therefore sell their products cheaper to the poorer segment of society. The larger firms attempt to block smaller firms by dominating financial markets and buying favours from officials involved in handling official policies at the expense of the small firms.

In terms of organisational types, SPMFs appear highly diverse. A few of the larger, quasi-formal sector firms were of the "promotion" or "attractive" type, but most manifested the qualities of the "craft"/"survival" or "margina"/"artisan" type organisation. This confinement to a state of virtual subsistence production can be attributed to a whole range of external and internal factors, which are difficult to disentangle in practice. After each firm was assessed in turn, the comparative case studies and overviews of individual firms presented in this study made it clear just how complex the inter-relations between various factors, internal and external, positive and negative, can be in reality. Overall very few of these SPMFs have obtained any credit from formal-sector institutions (whether public or private). Yet two of the firms, which did not obtain such support, appeared to us to be relatively doing very well, perhaps showing the most promise of future growth based on innovative present survival strategies. Two of the entrepreneurs focused in the study appeared to have indeed created a "survivalist culture" for sustaining their business activities in a constraining business environment.

At times, being in a favourable position to obtain loans and other forms of assistance did not seem to be of a very significant advantage for some entrepreneurs, since they performed no better than firms the less privileged in this respect. Most SPMFs – like many SMEs in Nigeria more generally in manufacturing sector especially – are simply struggling to survive. They would have to depend on their own initiative and determination, as well as the assistance of family and friends a practice commonly found among collectivist cultures (Dereskey, 2000). Discovering ways of encouraging, correcting or ameliorating specific SPMF growth strategies is one of the goals of this research. The implications of this however is that they might have the problem of sustaining that position in the long run as a result of the various type of external constraints against them, which affect even the larger industries as well.

Overall, then, it can be concluded that the most frequently mentioned constraints of SPMFs are external ones. These include: infrastructure, especially inadequate electric supplies; the effect of SAP economic policies, especially devaluation, foreign currency restrictions and the declining purchasing power of consumers. These external constraints make it much more difficult to import updated equipment and other inputs on time since these are not produced in the country (Schatz, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1968, 1970, 1996). The main internal constraints were seen to be: inadequate information about the market and other opportunities, problems of organisational planning and poor management, shortage of financial capital (e.g. loans and grants), and the widespread negative attitudes of personnel towards the work. The views from the SPMF interviewees were useful in providing some confirmation from personnel and managers in some of the major institutions in Nigeria, that capital, raw materials, foreign exchange and infrastructure were indeed regarded as among the most serious impediments to effective growth in the SME sector, and among SPMFs in particular. These groups of non-SPMF respondents also confirmed the problem of the non-implementation of government policies and the lack of any low-interest capital specifically earmarked for manufacturing SMEs like the SPMFs. Inadequate training opportunities were another problem exacerbated by the recency of such industrial and scientific processes in the Nigerian context.

The important, but variable and often intangible role played by family, by peers and by previous professional experience was clear from these comparative case studies.

It is significant for the purposes of this research that these observations on the current situation of Nigerian SPMFs echo the major findings of the review of the existing literature.

The multi-dimensional nature of SMEs must be emphasised, since it means that one single factor cannot always be held responsible for variations in the growth performances of firms such as the SPMFs, as an example (Orru, 1991; Allen, 1999). The same factors can of course operate very differently in differing contexts. It is a simple point, but one that can easily be forgotten in the search for definitive "sets of factors" to explain SME growth, stagnation and decline.

In Nigeria, as in most situations, various opportunities exist both for expanding the size of such firms, and for diversifying their range of activities. The prospects for greater use of subcontracting have been mentioned, for example. Better subcontracting relationships however, like the one enacted by law in Japan in 1969 by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), could be instituted to strengthen links between large and small firms' in Nigeria (Aoyama, 1999). Exporting to regional markets could also be a means of ensuring growth of the SPMF sector and of manufacturing SMEs as a whole, especially in petrochemical and related industries (Mambula, 1997). Further expansion of SPMF activities through import substitution is also possible, particularly as imports become more and more expensive in real terms, given the devaluation of the local currency. This study has shown that many of these potential niches are yet to be fully exploited. In conclusion of this paper, it is important to emphasise that some of these opportunities will have to be embarked on, and a set of proposals will need to be elaborated which it is expected could enhance the growth and overall economic contribution of the SPMF sub-sector to Nigeria's economy.

On a final note therefore and from the case profile examples presented, it is an acceptable fact that in the paucity, inadequacy, scarcity or even absence of resources for production, indeed necessity can be seen to be the creator of invention. In addition, having a high locus of control is a useful antidote for overcoming external impediments. An important lesson that can be learned from this study is that entrepreneurs wherever they are can be creative in alleviating constraining factors themselves. Entrepreneurs should not always depend on external support that could be inadequate or a waste time by "sitting and waiting" for aid that may never surface to aid them.

Although, regional environments can influence business performance in particular areas atimes, the regional and religious backgrounds entrepreneurs come from should not necessarily determine their creative or resourceful capabilities. It is rather, the determination and willingness of the entrepreneurs to act that will count or make a difference as explained by Berger and from a Schumpetarian context. These are important findings of the study for encouraging entrepreneurial resourcefulness, innovation and development.

In as much as there is a more general acceptance for external support for assisting business growth therefore, it should also be regarded as going hand in hand with entrepreneurial effort as a crucial internal requirement. On occasions where external support has been lacking or deficient the entrepreneurial drive has been able to sustain business growth and should therefore be encouraged. Classic examples that support this fact can be seen from the case of Temple Erako and Daniel Obanoh who had high external constraints but were able to sustain their business development through their strong internal entrepreneurial qualities. On the other hand it is clear from given data that Mandau Plastics has a better performance level than the former SPMFs in this study. It is also possible that the limited external constraints against the firm were responsible. However, Mandau did not show any exceptional business performance qualities arising from an entrepreneurial point of view as a sign of internal strength as did Temple Erako or Daniel Obanoh. Rather than just seeing external and internal factors as being independent of one or the other for the growth and development of SMEs at all times, they should also be viewed as interdependent. The critical linkage between internal and external factors for SMEs to perform favourably in terms of overall performance, growth and development is therefore a necessity. Entrepreneuralism on its own is never enough nor is external help ever enough.

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