

Strategy for Sustainable Entrepreneurship Development in Ebonyi State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined strategy as an instrument for sustainable entrepreneurship development in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Observation indicates that entrepreneurship development in Ebonyi State has not yielded the much expected results and the situation has remained unabated in spite of the measures and programmes adopted by various administrations. This study therefore sets to identify the causal factors militating against entrepreneurship development and to unveil the apt strategy that will improve the development of sustainable entrepreneurship in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Qualitative research design was employed in which case there were no independent and dependent variables that would have ordinarily warranted testing of hypotheses. Strengthened by resource-based theory, the study therefore, reviewed substantial and relevant empirical and non-empirical research evidences conducted on the related subject. This method permitted flexible research procedure during which changes were reflected and incorporated in the investigation. Reviewed previous works and relevant empirical proofs indicate that choosing, implementing and monitoring/evaluating strategy that is eclectically proactive and relevant to the prevalent situation is the best approach to achieving sustainable entrepreneurship development in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. This is because there is no best solitary strategy except the one that leads to accomplishment of objective. The study therefore recommends that Ebonyi State government and agencies entrusted or saddled with the responsibility of entrepreneurship development should critically and pragmatically monitor/evaluate the strategy based on contingency, eclectic approach and choose or combine the most promising strategy(ies) prior to venturing in entrepreneurship development in the State.

Keywords: Strategy Sustainable Entrepreneurship Development Ebonyi State Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In the recent decades, strategy has become a global phenomenon for the development and operation of all business activities in order to achieve superior performance, gain competitive advantage, growth and sustain the enterprise. Strategy has been defined as “the patterns of decisions that shape the venture’s internal resource configuration and deployment and guide alignment with environment [1]. This definition has two major implications: strategy formulation, and strategy implementation [2]; therefore, strategy is said to be both proactive (intended) and reactive

(adaptive) [3]. The word strategy is derived from the Greek word “strategos” meaning “the roles of general” [4] [5]. With a clear strategic intent, the core competences of the corporation can be effectively leveraged to create new business [6] [7].

Crafting strategy is an exercise in an entrepreneurship and outside-in strategic thinking [8], and this helps in entrepreneurship development especially when strategy is appropriately crafted, implemented and monitored/evaluated. The obvious fact about strategy is that it is flexible and stable as what worked for

one organisation may not work for the other, and this calls for some elements of flexibility in devising strategy choice popularly referred to as “strategic flexibility”. [9] sees strategic flexibility as the set of capabilities used to respond to various demands and opportunities existing in a dynamic and uncertain competitive environment. It involves coping with uncertainty and its accompanying risks [10]. Flexibility of strategy though stable creates opportunity for generating strategic option in the process of entrepreneurship development.

Entrepreneurship development is the backbone of any developing economy [11]. It is a dynamic process of creating incremental wealth by individuals who assumes the major risks in terms of equality time and career commitment of providing value for some product or service [12]. It focuses on the individual who wishes to start or expand business, and the aim is to enlarge the base of entrepreneurs in order to hasten the pace at which new ventures are created (Entrepreneurship Development, 1999). Developing entrepreneurship at all levels of economic activities has been adjudicated and acclaimed as a means of reducing or eliminating unemployment and a powerful instrument for fighting poverty [13], [14]; [15]; [16]; [17]. This is obvious and observable when one looks at many developed countries of the world such as USA, Britain, Israel, Russia, China etc. These countries achieved the much needed development in every sectors of their economy through apposite entrepreneurship strategies. For instance, [18] averred that America was discovered by entrepreneurs, nourished by entrepreneurs and has become a world economic power through entrepreneurial activity, hence entrepreneurship constitutes the driving force of the American dream, which Ebonyi State and Nigeria in general are striving to emulate. Prior to Nigeria independence in 1960, the business strategy prevalent in the country was dominated by the European multinational companies such as United African Company (UAC), GB Oliviant, Unilever Plc, Leventis, Patterson Zechonis

[19]. This strategy of dominance initiated and implemented by the colonial masters was purely for the benefits of the colonial imperialist and this, wind-swept Nigeria and Ebonyi State in particular the strategy required by the would-be entrepreneurs to develop their latent potentials for sustainable entrepreneurship development. Ebonyi State as one of the States in the South East Nigeria was created on 1st October 1996 with the capital at Abakaliki by Late General Sani Abacha after thirty-nine (39) years of political struggle for freedom [20]. In order to develop the State, the administrative pedigree, Ebonyi State emulated Federal Government strategies (policies) and programmes by establishing entrepreneurship development centres (EDC), youth enterprise with innovation in Nigeria etc.

In spite of the strategies (policies) and programmes put in place, much has not been achieved. [21] generally observed that the approach to entrepreneurship development in Nigeria has remained faulty, which Ebonyi State is a partaker. Concomitantly, [22] had prior to this time asserted that practitioners and researchers have unresolved controversies and considerable debates over which approach managers should adopt in devising their strategy. This situation seems tenable and still lingers in Ebonyi State as continued struggle for sustainable entrepreneurship development of the State appears undefeatable. This is evidenced as many individuals ventured into many businesses but go into extinction within a short period of time. For instance, [23] asserts that reports from the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) suggest that four (4) out of five (5) businesses registered every day in Nigeria fail or die in their five years of existence. [24] [25] in [26] contend that more than half of the enterprises registered in Nigeria have failed within five years of existence, and that the survival rate of new enterprises in Nigeria is around 33% leaving a mortality of 67%. Strategy as entrepreneurship development tool is supposedly expected to have transformed

Ebonyi State to an enviable position in all sectors of the economy as depicted in

fig1.

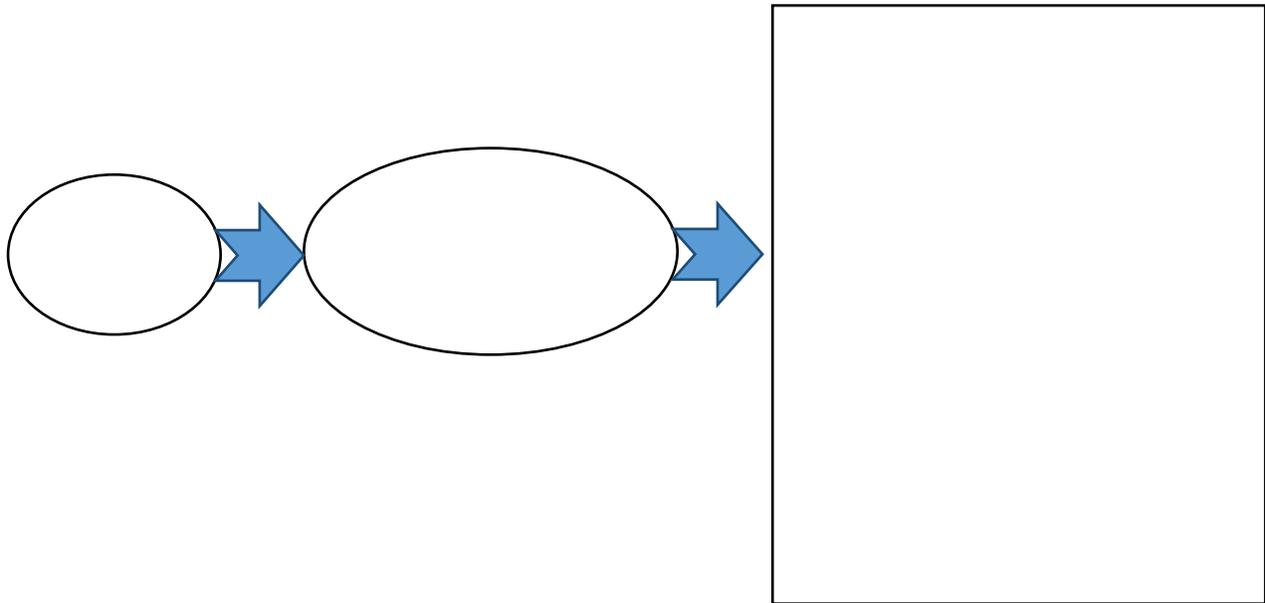


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for linking Strategy and Sustainable Entrepreneurship Development

Figure 1; shows the hypothetical proposition that with apt strategy, poor entrepreneurship development in Ebonyi State would translate to economic stability, political freedom, creating employment, reduction in psychological trauma and social vices prevalent in the society etc. but ironically observation

indicates these have not been achieved. This study therefore set to identify the causal factors militating against entrepreneurship development and unveil the appropriate strategy that would improve sustainable entrepreneurship development in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Strategy

The word strategy was first used by Count Guibert in 1779, though has its origin from the military context meaning generalship in war or battle [27] or plan for deceiving an enemy or gaining advantage over an opponent [28]. Strategy in its usage has become a forest word that reflects both military and the vast sea of non-military affairs [29]. The implication of this premise is that strategy does not only apply to warfare as was originally conceived, but has eclectically permeated every aspects of human endeavours including management, politics, business activities of all types, games, and other operations to outwit an enemy, achieve targeted objective and gain superior performance [30].

The focal point of strategy in this context is on non-military affair that is as it embraces business undertakings and its management activities. Strategy in business management term is comparatively new and crafting strategy that is germane to guarantee solving business problems seems to be indefinable. In order to address the problems of devising strategy in business, [31] postulated five Ps typologies as plan, ploy, pattern, position and perspective while [32] proposed four strategic approaches as prescriptive also called deliberate or planned; emergent or learning; competitive positioning; and resources, competence and capability approach, though these approaches work in different dimensions.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship derived from the 17th century French “entreprendre” refers to individuals who were “*undertakers*” meaning those who “undertook” the risks of new enterprise [33]. It is one of the last four conventional economic factors used in the conversion process of goods and services that consist of land, labor, capital and entrepreneurship. Chronologically, prominence in entrepreneurship started from Richard Cantillon in 1755 who described entrepreneurship as risk taker, Adam Smith in 1776 posit that entrepreneurship is an industrialist while Jean Baptiste Say in 1803 contend that entrepreneurship is one who possess certain arts and skills of creating new economic enterprise. John Stuart Mill in 1848 averred that entrepreneurship is business founder; Carl Menger 1871 see entrepreneurship as “change agent” while Joseph Schumpeter in 1911 described entrepreneurship as “creative destruction” etc. The search for what entrepreneurship is has continued evolving and virtually remained interminable as many writers are still coming up with divergent views of what entrepreneurship is, but most of the explanations emphasizes on new business creation and gaining profit.

Basically, entrepreneurship is considered as a power drive economic growth and development as well as poverty eradication [34], hence it embraces all economic and social activities. Commission of the European Communities (2003) see entrepreneurship as the mindset and process to create and develop economic activity by blending risk-taking, creativity and/or innovation with sound management, within a new or an existing organisation. It is a free enterprise undertaking by an individuals or groups geared towards pursuing identified opportunities, unused and untested venture characterized by risks, innovative, proactive and has profitability and growth as its main target.

Entrepreneurship Development

Development is said to be a state of mind because people have to develop themselves before they can change their physical environment, and is a slow

process that involves change in relations between classes and races [35]. This implies that developing entrepreneurship involves two major actors- individuals and the physical environments. [36] posit that the concept of entrepreneurship development has two aspects or levels. The first level deals with the development of entrepreneurial personality-skills, motivation, values and behavior of an individual that will enable him/her perform the entrepreneurial role or task while the second aspect deals with the pulling together of resources to form a productive and operating enterprise. Global Entrepreneurship [37] classified entrepreneurship development into opportunity-based and necessity-based, depending on whether it is driven by the discovery and exploitation of opportunity or it is prompted by unemployment or need for survival. In this context, our focus is entrepreneurship development from both perspectives that is entrepreneurial personality-skills and formation of productive and operating enterprise through institution-building as they compensate and complement each other.

[38] posit that entrepreneurship development is probably one of the most elusive, complicated and perplexing issues in the promotion and growth of small enterprises and a multi-dimensional task within the environment that may be individual or group oriented while [39] posits that entrepreneurship development is a business ownership and its operation. Entrepreneurship development focuses on the individual who wishes to start or expand a business, and on the hand, it also focuses on developing the enterprise, whether or not it employs or is led by individuals who can be considered entrepreneurial [40]. Entrepreneurship development therefore is concerned with the study of entrepreneurial behaviour, the dynamics of business set-up, development and expansion of the enterprise, and as well the process of enhancing entrepreneurial skills and knowledge [41]. It is the process of enhancing skill and knowledge through structured training and institution-building programmes (Entrepreneurship

Development, 1999). This study aligns itself with this definition as it seems to give a clear view of entrepreneurship development by focusing on personality skill etc. and the enterprise formation because the two does not go in isolation. Basically the whole essence of entrepreneurship development is to increase the number of entrepreneurs within the proximity. When entrepreneurship skills such as creativity, innovative abilities, and risk taking propensity are developed in individuals, will invariably trigger off the formation of new enterprise strengthened by other relevant resources.

Factors Militating against Entrepreneurship Development

That entrepreneurship is not developing in Ebonyi State and Nigeria as whole like other developed nations indicates that something is wrong somewhere; for instance, [42] [43] observed that despite government policies and programmes in Nigeria to assist in promoting entrepreneurship development, not much changes and improvements have been achieved, and attributed this to inadequate infrastructure, insecurity in the nation, lack of training, limited support and finance. [44] averred that the approach to entrepreneurship development in Nigeria has remained faulty which invariably affected Ebonyi State and contend that the major problems lies in the treatment of all small business owners as entrepreneurs and other challenges relating to environmental, political, socio-economic and cultural factors.

[45]; [46]; [47]; [48] enumerated infrastructural inadequacies, environmental hazard, high level of insecurity and incidence widespread of corruption, epileptic supply etc. as the challenges of entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, which Ebonyi State is a partaker. A partaker in the sense that it is akin to a popular saying that when American sneeze, the whole world catches cold. [49] argued that development of personal qualities such as creativity, risk taking propensity, responsibility, technical and business skill are still not adequate in Nigeria and

these constitute the problems. Another striking impediment to entrepreneurship development as canvassed by [50], [51], [52], [53] [54] is that government policies as strategies and programmes focused generally on the development of small and medium scale enterprises and no effort is made, until recently to distinguish entrepreneurial firms from non-entrepreneurial small businesses. [55] posit that the habits of thoughts and conduct are the stubborn obstacles to entrepreneurship development and further stressed that this is made worst by absence of an appropriate industrial and commercial climate, lack of information and access to relevant technology, and some elements of nebulousness in the objective of entrepreneurship development programmes. Besides these enumerated factors constraining entrepreneurship development, other causal factors peculiar to Ebonyi State could be attributed to:

- (i) Discontinuity of government strategies/programmes on entrepreneurship development by the successive administrations no matter how good the strategy may be. This creates suspicions and unhealthy climate for meaningful entrepreneurship development.
- (ii) In Ebonyi State, motives, abilities and pleasant environment that generate and encourage entrepreneurship development are still lacking made worst by individual hurry-hurry mentality of making money syndrome without first laying a solid foundation and enabling environment.
- (iii) Again, is that majority of the institutions/agencies engaged in the entrepreneurship development programmes in Ebonyi State are themselves corrupt and not convinced of what they are doing as the task is delegated based on political affiliation by the government, hence cripple the objectives of the programme;
- (iv) Over-politicization of the entrepreneurship development programmes by the government in

power without recourse to proficiency of those involved in the nurturing exercise of the would-be entrepreneurs creates enormous challenges;

- (v) The Nigeria's legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance prevalent in the country has infected Ebonyi State thereby encouraging and instigating many individual to continue looking for ways of sharing the national cake as an alternative to help bake it;

Sustainable Entrepreneurship Development

The link between sustainable development and entrepreneurship is that companies' sustainability is attested by the main activities performed in their environments, impact evaluation, goal achievement, transparent communication of results, and that they must be oriented to the satisfaction of the people's vital needs by applying the concept of creative destruction [56]. These authors further stressed that it is a precondition and driving force in the transition to a more sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem for better standard of living.

Sustainable entrepreneurship is defined as "the examination of how opportunities will bring into existence future goods and services as discovered, created, and exploited, by whom, and with what economic, psychological, social, and environmental consequences [57]. It has been described as the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services based upon which the economy and society depend (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>>wiki).

Sustained entrepreneurship development could be an end to economic, political, social and psychological problems ravaging the nation and Ebonyi State in particular. This may be achieved where the Ebonyi State Government internalize the entrepreneurship development support system so that it has the momentum and capability to continue and expand through local efforts. Sustainable

entrepreneurship development therefore is the ability of the institution/agencies concerned with the process of entrepreneurial activities to entrench an enduring entrepreneurial spirit and strategies through institution-building that is capable of withstanding the turbulent environment and dynamic business development overtime.

Strategy for Entrepreneurship Development

[58] posit that the failure of many firm's strategies stems from its inability to translate a broad competitive strategy into the specific action steps required to gain competitive advantage. Good strategy results in superior performance and gaining competitive advantage, and this is at the heart of firm's performance, hence strategy must be prudently and strategically implemented and monitored/evaluated to achieve results.

In Ebonyi State, past and present administrations did emulate and adopted various strategies (policies)/programmes instituted by Federal Government aimed at developing sustainable entrepreneurship. These strategies include the establishment of entrepreneurship development centres (EDCs) and youth enterprise with innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN), etc. Taking further initiative, government strategically designed entrepreneurship training programmes under some institutions and agencies all over the country [59]; [60]. For instance, government instituted mandatory entrepreneurship training for graduates during the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programmes and also entrenched the curriculum for entrepreneurship studies in tertiary institutions in the country. With all these strategies (policies)/ programmes adopted ostensibly to improve entrepreneurship development in Nigeria including Ebonyi State, most of these strategies (policies)/programmes with their well-articulated objectives were mostly abandoned by successive administrations for new ones. The desertion instead of consolidation of strategies and programmes initiated by successive administration creates mutual suspicion

among the would-be entrepreneurs. Some of the strategies and programmes aimed at entrepreneurship development in Nigeria are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Strategy and programmes aimed at entrepreneurship development in Nigeria

S/N	Programme	Objective	Problems
1	Industrial Development Centers (IDCs)	Extension services	Lack of equipment
2	Small scale industries credit scheme (SSICS)	Technical and financial support for the SMEs	Inadequate manpower and repayment default
3	Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB)	Provision of medium term Loan	Financial and admin. Constraints
4	Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry (NDCI)	Provide financial services, administer world bank loans scheme	Operational problem and insolvency
5	National Directorate of Employment (NDE)	Vocational skills Development	Lacked commitment by all tiers of govt.
6	National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND)	Fill the gap inadequacies in the long-term financing (SMCIE)	Enmeshed in merger controversy
7	Family Economic Advancement (FEAP)	Provide micro facilities for entrepreneurship	Change in government
8	People's Bank (PB)	Make banking services more accessible to the poor	Change in government
9	Community Bank (CB)	Making bank credit to the active poor in the society	Substituted with Microfinance Bank
10	Better Life Programmes (BLP)	Sensitizing and providing micro credit for women	Discontinued due to change in government
11	Family Support Programme (FSP)	Sensitizing and providing micro credit for women	Discontinued due to change in government
12	Small and Medium Enterprises Dev Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN)	Development of MSME sector of Nigerian economy	No impact at all level of societal strata
13	Small & Medium Enterprises Equity Investment Scheme (SMEEIS)	Provide credit facilities for small & medium entrepreneurs	Lacked national spread in implementation
14	Micro Finance Banks (MFB)	Provision of fin. for active poor in the population	Lacked national spread & high interest rate
15	Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDC)	Provision of institutional support for entrepreneurship development	Disconnect b/w the center & indus. Sector
16	Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN)	Aimed at developing entrepreneurship	Nature of award and political undertone

Source: Sansui (2003) Central Bank of Nigeria

Figure I shows strategies (policies) and programmes by various administrations to assist in entrepreneurship development but many of them failed as a result of mismanagement or lack of equipment etc. [61]. The non-fulfilment of the strategic

objectives of these programmes calls for pragmatic review and address the problems of entrepreneurship development in Nigeria and Ebonyi State in particular. However, general observations indicate that these strategies

are not bad in themselves but lies in incongruous implementation and

monitoring/evaluation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by resource-based theory propounded by Penrose in 1959. Resource-based theory of a firm helps explain corporate venture, integrating resources and capabilities that enhance firms in order to develop corporate ventures, and achieve competitive advantage [62]. This is a theoretical framework that explains how firms achieve a competitive advantage and sustain it over time [63]. Resource-based theory examines strategic capabilities as a pool of internal resources which are strategically important for the creation of competitive advantage [64]. This theory emphasizes on the efficient and pragmatic approach of resources utilization in entrepreneurship development and as well helps to create entrepreneurship strategy. These resources comprise physical, reputation; organizational, financial, intellectual and technological that are strategic and determinant to the development process and growth of entrepreneurial ventures. Strategy of the resource-based framework involves rent seeking suggesting that for firms to develop and achieve sustainable

competitive advantage must possess resources and capabilities that are rare, valuable, hard to copy, and non-substitutable. The capability of Ebonyi State government to develop entrepreneurs depends to a large extent on the availability of resources in terms of human skills, material, core competences and knowledge based strategy.

The resource-based model assumes that each organisation is a collection of unique resources and capabilities [7] [8] posit that the assumptions of the resource-based of the firm are two, namely: (i) resources are distributed heterogeneously across firms, and (ii) these productive resources cannot be transferred from firm to firm without incurring cost. This theory is relevant to this study because, for Ebonyi State government to achieve sustainable entrepreneurship development, the State must be equipped with resources in terms of human, material, financial, core competencies, knowledge based strategy and skills availability.

RESULTS

From the review of relevant literatures, the study establishes that:

- (i) Discontinuity of government strategies/programmes on entrepreneurship development by the successive administrations in Ebonyi State no matter how good the strategy is, creates suspicions and doubt in the minds of would-be entrepreneurs of the authenticity of the new programme.
- (ii) Individual habits of thoughts, motives, abilities and pleasant environment which are the core values and the first steps towards developing entrepreneurship are still lacking in Ebonyi State.
- (iii) The hurry-hurry mentality of would-be entrepreneurs' to making quick money syndrome

without first laying the requisite foundation necessary for motives to thrive has become a perennial culture in the state. This accounts for some of the reasons why most of the entrepreneurship ventures fail within a short period of time after commencement.

- (iv) In Ebonyi State, the bulk of the institutions/agencies engaged in the entrepreneurship development programmes are themselves not convinced of what they are doing as the task is hijacked by the government officials who are overzealous to making money for themselves, thereby annihilating the objectives of the programme.

- (v) Over-politicization of the entrepreneurship development programmes by the those in power as to who and who should not benefit based on party affiliation without recourse to proficiency and abilities of the would-be entrepreneurs involved in the exercise.
- (vi) Nigeria's legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance has infected Ebonyi State thereby encouraging

- many people to seek ways of sharing the national cake as an alternative to help baking it.
- (vii) Another causal factor militating against the development of entrepreneurship in Ebonyi State is the inappropriate implementation and monitoring/evaluation of strategies crafted by the various administrations and not the strategies in themselves.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that various administrations in Ebonyi State failed to achieve entrepreneurship development strides because of habits and thoughts of people, lack of motives, abilities and pleasant environment which Desai (2010) stressed are the stubborn obstacles to entrepreneurship development. The study also concludes that discontinuity in strategies (policies) and programmes of entrepreneurship development by successive administrations, uncertainty in the objectives constitutes challenges to entrepreneurship development. Besides these is that most of the institutions engaged in the entrepreneurship development programmes in Ebonyi State

are stereotyped as instituted by Federal Government, over-politicized of entrepreneurship development programmes by the government in power in the State; hurry-hurry mentality of would-be entrepreneurs' to making money syndrome; and legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance that appeared to be institutionalized in Nigeria has equally infected Ebonyi State. Finally, the study concludes that the various strategies (policies) and programmes adopted by Ebonyi State are appropriate in themselves but the problem lies in implementation and monitoring/evaluation.

RECOMMENDATION

Base on the conclusions, this study recommends that:

- (i) The Ebonyi State government should proactively tackle the problems of general habits and thoughts of would-be entrepreneurs in the State and address the unpleasant environment before embarking on entrepreneurship development initiatives.
- (ii) Government should step up genuine fight against all forms of unethical practices such as fraud, hurry-hurry mentality of making money, over-politicization of the entrepreneurship programmes, convincing all the institutions/agencies engaged in the entrepreneurship development programmes of

- the genuineness of the programmes.
- (iii) The study also recommends that Nigeria's legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance that has infected Ebonyi State should be eliminated in its entirety to discourage people seeking ways of sharing the national cake to rather help in baking it.
- (iv) Finally, the study recommends that appropriate implementation and monitoring/ evaluation of all strategies crafted should be stepped-up to help detect anomalies before they could take root instead of abandoning the programme for new ones.

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