

The Transition Process and Associated Benefits of Industrial Clusters in Ghana, the Case of SME's Entrepreneurs in Western Region

¹Adelaide Spio-Kwofie, ²Hu Xuhua (Associate Professor)
Jiangsu University, School of Finance and Economics, Zhenjiang, China, 212013

¹adelaidespiokwofie@ujs.edu.cn

²xhhu@ujs.edu.cn

Abstract— This article is part of an ongoing research on the transition process and its associated benefits regarding industrial clusters in Ghana, specifically the case of SME entrepreneurs in the Western Region. Although there is an increase in knowledge that SMEs are the centre of every industrial improvement, a systematic plan of action aimed at supporting the SMEs has most often failed. Successful stories about SMEs exist but are rare and this causes concern. Many researchers have established that an industry cluster brings several benefits in countries that are industrialized. Therefore, it is suggested that all inclusive activities which are geared towards successful transitioning and clustering of SMEs in the Western Region are adhered to because they help boost performance and strengthen entrepreneurial activities of a cluster in general. Finally, the paper talks about the benefits the Western Region stands to gain if cluster policies are implemented.

Keywords— Cluster, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Network

1 INTRODUCTION

Many countries in the world are endowed with natural resources such as agriculture, minerals and fossils which are meant to promote the wealth of those nations when efficiently utilised. The exploitation of such natural resources generates revenues, foreign exchange, employment opportunities and provides raw material for the production of goods and services for consumption. However, some literature indicates that economic growth negatively relates to abundance of natural resources across developing countries. In other words, natural resources abundance, though an important source of national development, is not a sufficient condition for economic prosperity and growth (Rodriguez & Rodrik, 2001), this is supported by the relatively underdevelopment of countries such as Nigeria, Angola, Gambia, Argentina etc, despite their relatively endowed resources (Acquah-Sam, 2014). This notwithstanding, America and Great Britain have made greater use of their resources (Altvater, 2007; Hall, 2006).

In general, the liberalization and globalization process of trades have increased customer expectations significantly as well as competition among companies (Ho, Lenny Koh, Karaev, Lenny Koh, & Szamosi, 2007). To be able to adhere to the pressures of global market opportunities and process and benefits from it, SMEs in developing countries are challenged with two main issues (Coe, Hess, Yeung, Dicken, & Henderson, 2004). Firstly, they are to change from an increase in individualistic competition as SMEs and secondly, use the opportunity of the togetherness created by coming into cooperative relations with other SMEs and related partner enterprises (Ho et al., 2007).

In view of this, several countries have encouraged the improvement of industry clusters whereby SMEs can increase in

competences and competitive advantage against some of the world's best competitors through the sharing of resources, innovative capabilities and knowledge (Porter, 1998). Cluster theory directs SME attention on removing hindrances, reducing challenges and inefficiencies to productivity growth (Porter, 2000), as the emphasis is not on market share but rather on ever-changing improvements. Therefore, if a good economic cluster-based development model is applied, it will provide a base for constant economic growth and lead to greater opportunities (Costanza et al., 2007), Martin and Sunley (2003) & (Belussi, 2006) defined cluster as "a generic agglomeration of firms of different sizes operating in the same sector with a specific locality", and (Biénabe & Sautier, 2005); Martin and Sunley (2003) further emphasised the role of local factors for competing in international markets and explained that the pooling of SMEs allows achieving economies of scale through procurement and marketing. Sternberg and Litzberger (2004) defined a cluster as a sector and spatial concentration of firms, Morosini (2004) industrial as "socio-economic entity characterised by a special group of people and economic agents confined in close proximity in a geographic region". Porter (1998) also introduced a different approach for clusters, that is, the industrial cluster is the spatial property being crowded together, that are specialized suppliers, providers of services, similar firms or industries and related institutions (e.g. universities, trade agencies, trade associations) that compete within a particular field but cooperate as well, or a "cluster is a group of reciprocally connected companies and other associated institutions geographically located in a particular area, sharing of common attributes and are interrelated" (Kuah, 2002). In most cases, an industry cluster is made up of geographically confined concentration of related activities such as transactions, communications and shared specialized infrastructure, labour market service and are faced with com-

mon opportunities and threats (Costanza et al., 2007; Kuah, 2002). Clearly it can be seen that geographically connected and similar activities in business relation and cooperation are the common characteristics of cluster. In effect, clusters are taken to mean a group of business enterprises and none business organisations for which the membership within the group is an important element of each members firm's competitiveness. Typically, clusters are made up of "buyers/suppliers relationships, common pool of labours, technologies and distribution channels among others (Humphrey & Schmitz, 2000).

Industrial cluster is a tool used to analyse or recognise those areas of the economy in which other business sector has taken advantage of the situation and develop short and long term strategies to enable the growth of the regional economy (Porter, 1998). The industrial cluster is regarded to have an advantage comparatively if the output of productivity and growth of the cluster are higher in relation to other regions. In addition, the regions asset and collaborative efforts of the members afford cluster industries other advantages that are a result of shared geographic location and common goals (Beaudry & Breschi, 2003). Although complete number of businesses can be an advantage, industries that are regionally located may not show majority of regions' employment. When all these, such as workers, inventors, localities, government, education and others come together to support the cluster industries, it has a ripple advantage on industry cluster groupings (Muro & Katz, 2010).

The reality of developed countries that are into clusters poses a competitive advantage for clusters in developing countries and to link up with them (Humphrey & Schmitz, 2000). Again there is an increase in knowledge that it also boost growth and competitiveness of enterprise (Beck & Demirguc-Kunt, 2006), as well as improve their production, research and development. Generally, cluster promotion is one of the key ingredients of national competitiveness policy because it is practiced in most industrialised countries (Humphrey & Schmitz, 2002). Again it is an important goal of a developing country's SME policies, especially among those aimed at technological improvement (Ceglie & Dini, 1999; Humphrey & Schmitz, 2002).

According to Williamson, Lynch-Wood, and Ramsay (2006) SMEs are perceived as one of the main essential forces of economic development, quickening activities of private ownership and entrepreneurship skills (Muro & Katz, 2010; Wennekers & Thurik, 1999) as well as crucial for sustainable, long term growth, dynamism and employment (Wennekers & Thurik, 1999). Research shows that SMEs have the largest percentage employed workforce and are responsible for income generation opportunities (Audretsch & Thurik, 2001), an organisations in which membership within the group is an important element of each member firm's individual competitiveness (McKague et al., 2011). It is also important to note that clusters involve certain degree of spatial proximity between its

actors and this geographical proximity enables face to face networking, common labour markets and the diffusion of knowledge (Bathelt, Malmberg, & Maskell, 2004; Boschma & Frenken, 2010). Networks are mostly referred to as "collection of firms or companies that come together to embark on a similar project development with the aim of overcoming common problems, achieve collective efficiency and be able to infiltrate markets beyond their individual reach" (Bathelt et al., 2004). Networks are most often termed horizontal when formed by SMEs only, and vertical when large scale enterprises are involved (Mesquita & Lazzarini, 2008). UNIDO is also of the view that with the relationship between the two terms; networks can develop within or out of clusters (Ceglie & Dini, 1999). Clusters more often than not lead to the development of networks within them, which eventually evolve into a cluster of service providers, enterprise associations and the involvement of public institutions (Coe et al., 2004)

The emerging fact is that industry clustering and networking will be of great importance to SMEs operating in environments that are somehow industrially and infra-structurally underdeveloped like Western Region. According to Krueger, Reilly, and Carsrud (2000) as an entrepreneur, network is a key activity that is not only fun, but critical growth and business development. Small business development is all about networking, building relationships and taking action. Building a successful business takes a lot of time and drive, so it's good to have a network of friends and associates to draw energy from and keep you going (Coe et al., 2004). By so doing, you surround yourself with people who share a similar drive and ambition and are more likely to move forward as a group. To Parrilli (2007) there are several benefits associated with networking as simplified in Fig. 1.

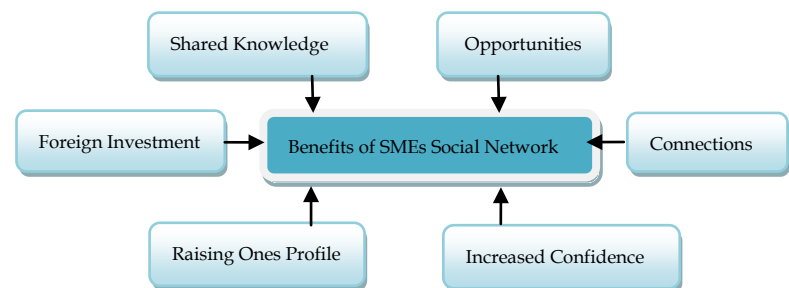


Fig. 1: Benefits Associated with Entrepreneur SMEs Social Network

Ghana has been endowed with major natural resources that have been exploited for many years for economic growth and development (Acquah-Sam, 2014). Ghana's history of oil and gas exploration dates back to the 19th century and it has been one of Africa's fastest growing economies over the past decade and the recent discoveries of oil make this goal seem even more achievable (Sutton & Kpentey, 2012), but if such

growth rates are to be maintained, Ghana will almost certainly need to undergo major advance with regards to industrial capabilities (Acquah-Sam, 2014; Sutton & Kpentey, 2012). Data on SMEs in Ghana is scarce but statistics from the Registrar General's Department suggest that 92% of companies that have registered are those that fall within the category of micro, small and medium enterprises (Ofori & Aryeetey, 2011). The SMEs in Ghana provide about 85% of employment, contribute about 70% to Ghana's Gross Domestic Product (Benzing, Chu, & Kara, 2009), and therefore has a significant impacts on the growth of the economy as well as income and employment. To this, it can be deduced that SMEs players an important role to national development, whether the situation is geared towards an economy that is developed or a developing economy.

Aside being important sources of employment and income in many developing countries (Benzing & Chu, 2009), the flexible nature of SMEs also give it a better adaptability to changes in market conditions thereby making it better suited to withstand any cyclical downturns (Oppong, Owiredu, & Churchill, 2014). Again, the dispersion nature of SMEs across the nation also promote better distribution of income, and generate additional value in both raw materials and product, as well as bring about efficiencies in domestic market (Abor & Quartey, 2010).

Entrepreneurial activities thrive because larger public companies create opportunities through forward and backward linkages (Bresnahan, Gambardella, & Saxenian, 2001), while government provide institutional support, provide enabling market access and environment (Tambunan, 2005). SMEs in Ghana now have greater expansion and variety across the sectors as Ghana's market size changing gradually (Frederick & Dzisi, 2008) and opportunities around neighbouring countries and Africa as a whole are also beginning to look attractive for SMEs in manufacturing, banking, food processing, pharmaceutical, ICT, agro, service sector, telecommunication, among others (Lall, 1996). Globalization and relaxation of trade procedures have increased tremendously and the expectations of customers concerning competition between companies has also gone up. Thus, the benefit of global market opportunities has led to SMEs facing two main challenges; firstly, to increase their individual competitiveness, and secondly because of their limited size, take advantage of the togetherness created, by entering into cooperative relations with other SMEs and related partner institutions (Bresnahan et al., 2001). Due to the benefit attached to the togetherness, many countries have encouraged the development of entrepreneur SMEs industrial cluster where firms can develop competences and competitive advantage against the world's competitors through the sharing of resources, innovative capabilities and knowledge. In order to benefit from these advantages associated with cluster, SMEs in Western Region must come together as a team; this is because the oil discovery

in Ghana has led to the emergence of a substantial number of small scale industries in western region. These small scale industries tend to be smaller and peripheral, compared to other already established leading clusters in the oil and gas-related industry in the world. Western Region is a middle-income economy that has natural resources and industries. The Government has tried a number of strategies in order to diversify the economy and one among these is the promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Most established SMEs in Western Region stand the better chance of economic boom if the transitioning processes, as well as benefits from clustering among entrepreneurs are adhere to.

According to Porter as cited by (Ho et al., 2007), the implementation of cluster increase the productivity of companies within the cluster, promote innovation, stimulate the formation of new businesses, which in effect expands and strengthens the cluster itself. This positive effect leads to learning, innovation and consequently in the upgrading of capabilities leading to the development of sustainable competitive advantages and to the stimulation of regional economic development, as cited in (Bisso, 2003; Khalid & Schmitz, 1994). In light of these benefits that the study aims at helping general reflection on the transition process of industrial cluster among entrepreneur SMEs and how these could be implemented in Western Region, Ghana. Karlsson (2010), in his book, focuses on actions that can be oriented specifically to cluster, when formulating cluster policy, thus the clustering process requires;

- People to people contact
- Consensus on key issues
- Collaboration at multiple levels
- Involvement of businesses and community in the process of building new linkages between communities, business and government

However the government has a role to play in building cluster by providing the business innovative and institutional environment vital for cluster success. These include a universal basic education for the population from early childhood through secondary and tertiary levels; an infrastructure of roads, public transportation, utilities, water, waste disposal and sanitation; health care, adequate housing and a healthy environment. Below are some of the roles government must play as suggested by (Abdin, 2014; Andersson, Schwaag-Serger, Sörvik, & Wise, 2004; Ketels, 2013; Porter, 1998) and shown in table 1.

Table 1
The Government Role

No.	Government Role	Reasons/ Explanation
1	Lay the Foundation of Support	Government should provide basic education, an infrastructure of roads, public transportation, utilities, health care, adequate housing and healthy environment
2	Create Policies which Support and Encourage not	Government is where national policy is formulated and effective

	Prevent and Discourage	clustering requires policies from top which enable and encourage element of an innovation system and align private and public sectors in a systematic and coordinated framework.			tion and entrepreneurship are influenced heavily by a region's educational processes and cultural norms, they can be enhanced by deliberate supporting policies created and driven by government.
3	Collaborate and Cooperate in Networks	The roots of many clusters lie in the numerous project support inter-firm collaboration via networks. For this reason, government should aspire to establish itself as an integral part of networking, providing support for systems where appropriate.	11	Provide National and Seek EU Funding	It is advisable to source for funds because most cluster organisations find it difficult to support themselves. By helping to identify and secure multi funding, state can give cluster organisations the support they need to firmly establish themselves within the cluster.
4	Well Organised Government Services Delivery Structures	Many government services are fragmented, thus training, education, financial, technological and promotional assistance is often the responsibility of different ministries and agencies. It is therefore essential that staff have direct industry experience and an understanding of the problem the cluster companies face as well as their technologies, customers and markets.	12	Create Enabling Financing Vehicles	Government support can be provided by setting up appropriate financing mechanism and by ensuring minimum bureaucratic regulations and impediment to access these funds.
5	Re-organise Government Information Delivery Services	Cluster offer an opportunity to deliver information and services in an alternative manner by ensuring that these are cluster oriented. Employment, business growth rate and market projections would help clusters and agencies plan and design programmes.	13	Allocate Resources and Investment to Maximise Impact and Send Signals	The ways that state agencies allocate resources to cluster should be particularly sensitive to the degree of maturity of the cluster. Resource to clusters should be particularly sensitive to the degree of maturity of the cluster. Embryonic clusters have very different needs from mature clusters.
6	Create Entrepreneurial Support and Learning Networks	The most effective networks are based on existing relationship among entrepreneurs and innovative companies can benefit greatly from networks forming	14	Invest in Cluster Based R&D	Funds are normally based on publications not commercialization but in some cases the process has given birth to cluster in or around the parent universities. Research at these institutions is driven by needs of the local economy and less by global interest of the faculty and most often have immediate payoffs.
7	Build a Specialised Work Force	Certain specialized firms' skills are learned on the job and contribute to knowledge spill over as people change employees. So it is appropriate to develop the human resources.	15	Promote the use of Incubators	More often than not, incubators are used as supporting instruments for new small business enterprises. Limiting tenants to potential cluster members justifies more highly specialized services and assistance, promote inter firms business within the incubator and encourages learning and technology transfer among firms.
8	Cluster as a Learning Context	Educators classify programmes according to the occupation skills in which it is applicable and institutions that teach in a cluster produce workers who are more productive, informed about labour market and are better connected.	16	Create Technology Centres	A focus on local cluster technologies can successfully stimulate innovation and facilitate technology transfer.
9	Promote the Development of Cluster Skill-Centres	Cluster skills centres with other existing institutions can develop new curricula, staying in touch with others, updating skills and standards, benchmarking practices in other areas and generally collecting information about cluster occupations and programmes.	17	Use Clusters as a Promotional Tool	Countries around the world have used cluster to promote themselves as a desirable place to visit and do business. Scotland, New Zealand, Canada, Spain and Ireland have all effectively used cluster to market regions to investors and customers.
10	Stimulate Innovation and Entrepreneurship	Innovation and entrepreneurship are engines of cluster development and growth, although both innova-	18	Support the Development of Export Network	Individual small sized enterprises lack resources and knowledge of

		other countries to effectively exploit global market opportunities. With this style, there is a pool of individual enterprises knowledge and resources to create a mass that can be used to identify and exploit export opportunities.
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- Another benefit attached to SMEs cluster is that, it allows the country to produce in sectors of high rapidity of change in terms of products, processes or markets.
- Clustering of entrepreneur SMEs brings trust as well as capacity building which eventually lead to other benefits associated to networks.
- Clustering enable the development of appropriate standards for responsible business practices.

2 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The driving force of economic development as well as issues relating to cluster formation and technological improvement are not given priority in Western Region, Ghana. The entrepreneur SME cluster development is a process that encompasses several businesses and institutional actors which calls for a general attitude towards improvement and cooperation. Basically, knowing and understanding advantages of cluster are the values to region only if that known knowledge leads to activities that grow economies and raise living standards among the people. If the knowledge base, which is the fundamental principles, is used as benchmark to cluster development, it will assist industry cluster to achieve collaboration efficiently and dynamic improvement will be seen among the SMEs. Again cluster can be used to close the information gap that small enterprises often have, and through this process boost individual firm and above all the performance of SMEs in Western Region. It therefore suggest that a comprehensive activities which is geared towards successful transitioning and clustering is implemented and when this is done, will increase performance and strengthen SMEs position of a cluster as a whole. Strong domestic clusters in Western Region will also help attract foreign investment. Furthermore, if clusters are leading centres for the small medium hospitality industries, they will attract all the key players from both home and abroad. In fact, foreign-owned companies can enhance the leadership of the cluster and contribute to its upgrading. This in effect will lead to further spring up and expansion of other small medium enterprises.

Several indicators proves that the cluster concept could be used by SMEs entrepreneurs that are in less developed economies (Karlsson, 2010) and Western Region which needs the transition to boom economic activities is not exceptional. If the SMEs in Western Region form a cluster, below are the lists of benefit the SMEs entrepreneurs stand to benefit. (Karlsson, 2010; Khalid & Schmitz, 1994; Sahran, Zeinalnezhad, & Mukhtar, 2010; Zeinalnezhad, Mukhtar, & Sahran, 2011).

- Clustering of entrepreneur SMEs serves as entry point for other agencies looking for good business practices.
- One firm cannot achieve in varied market opportunities, hence the need for Cluster of entrepreneur SMEs.
- The pain of cost and risk barriers to trade is reduced when entrepreneur SMEs cluster.
- The activities of entrepreneur SMEs are increased through productivity.
- Strong domestic cluster attracts foreign investment
- The clustering enable firm to grow faster, gain recognition within the market when sited near competitors and related industries.
- Due to the cluster, an open space is created as a recreational areas in which customer may want.
- There is a reduction in sales personnel overhead expenses and increase sales generation when SMEs entrepreneurs cluster.
- Clustering of SMEs encourages sales expertise contacts.
- The activities of SMEs in cluster promotes self employment
- Clustering of SMEs attracts financial institutions and fast growth, thus, entrepreneurs re-investing his /her profit.

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