

Conceptualization of Social Enterprise Critical Success Factors in Nigeria

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Abstract

Social enterprises are hybrid business entities that have been touted as making greater contribution to the development of local community economy than traditional for-profit organisations. Moreover, a large number of social enterprises in Nigeria are under pressure to generate economically sustainable social impact, amid a highly competitive and chaotic business environment. Furthermore, there is decline in funding for the social enterprises, thereby making it difficult for them to achieve success. Despite these challenges, there is paucity of research works that identify the most relevant factors social enterprise managers in Nigeria should consider, for the achievement of their double-bottom-line goals of social impact and financial sustainability. Through literature search and in-depth interviews, this study identified the critical success factors of social enterprises, namely: individual characteristics and competences, enterprise processes and capabilities, and external environmental dynamism. The study developed a conceptual model that begs for empirical interrogation.

Keywords: *Critical success factors, social enterprises, individual characteristics and competences, enterprise processes and capabilities, external environmental dynamism*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A critical success factor (CSF) is a variable, situation or event which may constitute a challenge or, if attended to, lead to higher success or promote greater level of performance of a system (Bullen&Rockart, 1981; Leidecker& Bruno, 1984; AghaeiMeibodi&Monavvarian, 2010). According to Boynton and Zmud (1984), Critical Success Factors (CSFs) signify “the few things that must go well to ensure success for an organization” (p. 89). Rockart (1979) submitted that CSFs are “the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organization. They are the few areas where ‘things must go right’ for the business to flourish” (p. 85).

Thus, CSFs are areas, conditions or organisational endowments (e.g. physical and non-physical assets, skills, capabilities, human and material resources) that can be leveraged to reap higher levels of effectiveness and overall performance (Lasrado, Arif, Rizvi&Urdzik, 2016; Sfakianaki, 2019). They are also viewed as the enduring activities that managers must continuously give attention to or promote in order to actualize the mission of the organization and harvest competitive advantage (Meibodi&Monavvarian, 2010). Any serious manager considers these key factors, as they provide information on what decision to make or strategy to execute, in order to achieve the superordinate goals of the firm and foster prosperity.

Social enterprises (SEs) are known to make greater contribution to the development of local community economy (Graikioti, Sdrali&KlimiKaminari, 2020) than traditional profit making organisations (Kasim& Hudson, 2006). According to Kickul and Lyons (2012), in many cases, social entrepreneurs appear to provide innovative social solutions in a more sustainable and effective manner than governments or for-profits. Furthermore, SEs have the inimitable ability to synergize with other actors to create social change (Rawhouser, Cummings &Newbert, 2019), promote economic growth and sustainability of local communities, assist disadvantaged populations, stimulate economic inclusion, increase employability and standard of living of community dwellers, reduce crime, alleviate poverty, and address environmental problems (Kasim& Hudson, 2006; Yunus, Moingeon& Lehmann-Ortega, 2010; Yunus, 2017).

A critical mass of studies has been conducted on success factors in traditional enterprises (e.g. Dacin, Dacin& Tracey, 2011).Johnson (2013) examined critical success factors for business-to-business e-markets in the United Kingdom. Fuentes-Medina, Hernández-Estárico and Morini-Marrero investigated the critical success factors of emblematic hotels in Spain. Moreover, several other studies on critical success factors were domiciled in SMEs of United States of America, China and the Middle East (e.g. Chawla, Khanna, Chen, 2010; Chong, 2012; Alfoqahaa, 2018; Al-Tit, Omri&Euchi, 2019).

Despite the avalanche of studies on critical success factors in traditional businesses, there appears to be very few studies on success factors of social enterprises. Wronka’s (2013) study on the success factors of social

enterprises in Poland, Satar and John's (2016) conceptual paper on CSFs in India, and GraikiotiSdrali and KlimiKaminari's (2020) empirical study on sustainability factors of social cooperative enterprises in the Greece are among the few conducted in the western countries and Asia. More worrisome is the discovery that the critical success factors of social enterprises in developing countries such as Nigeria are under-researched.

Following the above, this study identifies the critical success factors of various types of social enterprises in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The study seeks to pin-point the individual characteristics and competencies, enterprise processes and capabilities, coupled with the external environmental factors that influence the long-term success of the social enterprises in the Nigeria.

1.2: Statement of the Problem

The role of social entrepreneurship in the growth of nations is receiving enormous attention (Letaifa, 2015). There are over 2 million organisations that can be classified as social enterprises which employ over 11 million individuals. SEs are present in all economic sectors - from agriculture and crafts to banking, insurance, commercial services, health and social services etc. (European Commission, 2014).

Despite the huge presence of social enterprises in Nigeria, they seem not to make appreciable social impact as the country continues to suffer from the pangs of poverty and high rate of unemployment, which has become the major obstacle to national development. Currently, the non-profit sector, which SEs belong to, is facing intensifying demands for improved effectiveness.

Specifically, it has been observed that most of the social enterprises in Nigeria are not financially self-sustainable and are incapable of accomplishing their predefined social goals. Most of the social enterprises are unable to generate enough revenue to stay afloat and are forced to close their doors. Such failure to build a revenue stream negatively affects their ability to execute programs to create social value.

In the midst of these challenges, there is frenetic competition for funding among the social enterprises. The situation gets more gloom as the cost of running the social enterprises skyrockets, while government support and donations from other sources keep diminishing. Thus, the need has arisen for social enterprises in the country to look inwards, scale up and create new avenues for social transformation.

Whereas there are several areas enterprise managers can pay attention to in order to achieve business success, it is not possible to handle every success factor simultaneously. This study advances the theorizing logic that only some few and necessary areas of activity, herein called critical success factors, are tangential to the success of social enterprises and are the areas managers should deploy resources in order to be scalable and yield sustainable social value and competitiveness (Yunus, 2017).

Therefore, it is pertinent for social enterprise managers to identify these factors at all levels, and integrate these factors into the enterprise overall strategy to reap superior benefits (Baker & Cameron, 2008).

Based on the foregoing, it is necessary to identify and classify the critical factors that influence the success of social enterprises. By so doing, managers of social enterprises will be aware of the priority areas to address in order to sustainably generate social impact.

The rest of the paper takes the following trajectory:

- (i) Review of literature on the concept of social enterprises.
- (ii) An explanation of social enterprise success.
- (iii) Exposition on the critical success factors of social enterprises and their sources
- (iv) Methodology
- (v) Conceptual model of the study.
- (vi) Conclusion

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1: The Concept of Social Enterprises

The Department of Trade and Industry (2002, p.13) of the United Kingdom define a social enterprise as "a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners".

A social enterprise is a democratically conscious organization that does business, not strictly for the sake of making profits, but to create social and environmental value through innovation, proactiveness and risk-taking (Santos 2012). Although social enterprises do not have profit making as their primary goal, they seek to generate revenue from trade (Townsend & Hart, 2008) in order to foster financial viability and sustainably cultivate social benefits through empowerment (Peattie & Morley 2008; Shams 2016). A social enterprise is one that engages in social entrepreneurship - an activity of "creating value by combining resources in new ways ... to explore and exploit opportunities to create social value by stimulating social change or meeting social needs" (Mair & Marti, 2006, p. 37). Thus, we define a social enterprise as *a business entity in rational pursuit of social change and transformation through the acquisition and deployment of financial resources. It can also be*

viewed as an innovative, self-sustaining enterprise that carries out business activities to make profits and redirect the profits towards solving societal problems. Social enterprises revolve on the principle of “doing well by doing good” (Henry, 2015, p. 137).

Despite their socio-economic duality of purpose or dual bottom-line posture (Eiselein&Dentchev, 2020), their quest to create social value trumps the pursuit of economic gains (Mair& Marti 2006). Thus, any surplus is deployed to advance the social wellbeing of the target beneficiary constituent or community (local stakeholders), and not for the managers’, decision-makers’ or shareholders’ interest (Baccheiga&Borzaga, 2001; The Department of Trade and Industry, 2002). Some of the objectives of social enterprises are: poverty reduction and wealth creation, equal opportunity, gender inclusion, home for the destitute, reduction of carbon footprint and safe environment, community development, health for all, helping the physically challenged and creation of employment (Borzaga&Defourny 2001; Murphy &Coombes, 2009; Lumpkin et al. 2013).

Social enterprises share some characteristics with traditional for-profit businesses because they engage in commercial activities which include: trading in goods and services, and doing service contracts. Yet, they also get unearned income through grants, donations and endowments. This qualifies SEs as hybrid organisations (Doherty, Haugh& Lyon, 2014).

Global examples of social enterprises are: the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh founded by Muhammad Yunus, which has lifted millions of people out of poverty by providing micro-credits to small business owners without collateral; ME to WE founded by Craig and Marc Kielburger, which enables young people in developing countries to deal on fair-trade products and have travel benefits; Ashoka founded by Drayton, which empowers people around the world to create positive change; and Schwab foundation founded by Klaus Schwab and his spouse, Hilde Schwab, which supports young people to become social entrepreneurs, and promotes social innovation across the globe.

In Nigeria, some of the social enterprises include: Mobility Aid and Alliances Research and Development Centre (MAARDEC) in Nigeria by CosmasOkoli (an Ashoka Fellow), which provides aids and appliances to the physically challenged; Paradigm Initiative Nigeria founded by GbengaSesan, which provides digital education to indigent youths; and Slum2School founded by Orondaam Otto, which provides pragmatic education, skills and psychosocial support to children who live in the ghettos to reach their full potentials. Others are: Making a Difference Positively (otherwise known as MAD+) run by Naomi Ikhureigbe, which inspires people toward a mind-shift, and causes them to take actions for positive change; and Raising Young and Productive Entrepreneurs (RYPE) founded by Grace Ihejimaizu, which offers skills trainings, internship placements, volunteer activities, and peer mentoring to Nigerian youths to become entrepreneurial icons and change masters.

The challenge faced by managers of social enterprises is how to strike a balance between social impact and financial sustainability, while striving to flourish and remain competitive in the turbulent business environment (Boschee, 2006). Therefore, the onus lies on managers of social enterprises to identify the critical success factors, which when attended to, will enable them formulate policies to achieve sustainable success (Peattie& Morley, 2008). Therefore, an examination of critical success factors of social enterprises is necessary as this can give valuable insights to managers and policy makers on how to evaluate the performance of their firms.

2.3: Critical Success Factors of Social Enterprises: where and what?

The identification of critical success factors is skewed to SMEs and other forms of for-profit entities, leaving much to be researched in social enterprises in this aspect. However, due to the hybrid nature of social enterprises, it is the view of this study that the critical success factors – as well as their sources - mentioned in SME literature also, to a considerable extent, apply to social enterprises. Although various organisations and industries have their peculiar sets of critical success factors inventory, some generic prime sources of CSFs have been identified (Rockart&Bullen, 1981; Tan, 1995) as shown in figure 1.

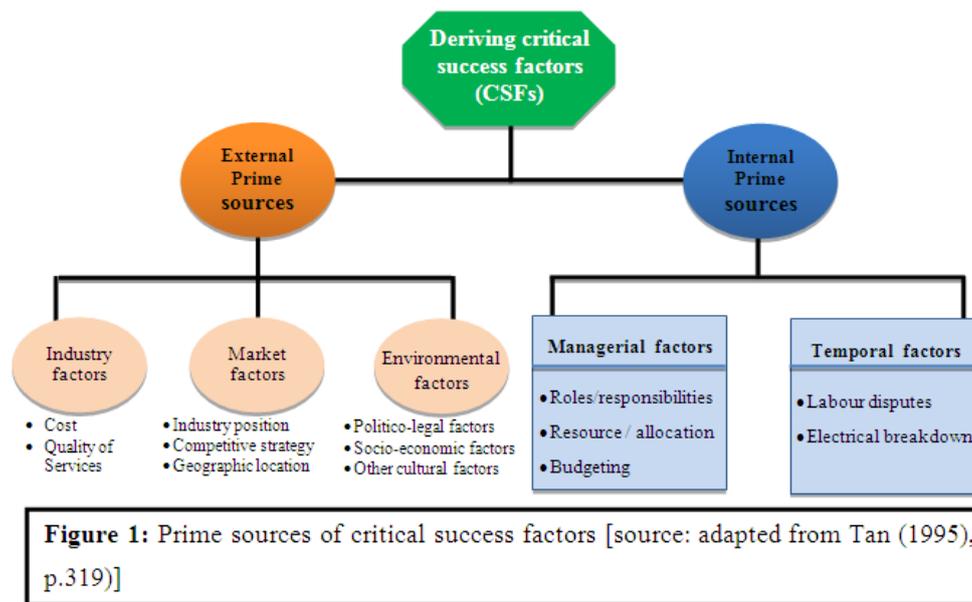


Figure 1 indicates that critical success factors could emanate from industry characteristics (e.g. cost and quality of services), market forces, competitive strategy and position of the firm within the industry, the business environment (e.g. political, economic, social), temporal factors (e.g. intervening activities of labour unions, power outages, community disturbance) and managerial position (e.g. roles, responsibilities, resource allocation, budgeting) (Rockart&Bullen, 1981; Tan, 1995). Also, the operating units of a firm have been identified as sources of critical success factors (Caralli, Stevens, Willke& Wilson, 2004).

In addition, the Growth and Employment Project (Levie&Autio, 2008) identified financial support, government policies, government programmes, education and training, research and development transfer, commercial and professional infrastructure, market openness, access to physical infrastructure and cultural and social norms as nine factors that impact on entrepreneurial outcomes. Based on this, Díaz-Casero, Hernández-Mogollón and Roldán (2012) empirically investigated entrepreneurial icons in Spain and identified (i) entrepreneurial training and education, (ii) research and development transfer, and (ii) cultural and social norms as factors that influence an entrepreneur’s capacity to succeed.

For critical success factors in *Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises*, the following studies are noteworthy, amongst others:

Chawla, Khanna and Chen (2010) did a comparative study on small businesses in China, the United States of America and Mexico, and found that SMEs in these countries have similar CSFs which include: marketing, competitive forces, industry trends, location, capital availability, and owner experience. Chong (2012) investigated SMEs in Malaysia and identified the CSFs as managerial competence, social skill (e.g. charisma and friendliness), government assistance, education and training, availability of funds, prior entrepreneurial experience, support from relations and friends, marketing intelligence, quality products at competitive prices, quality service, hard work, good book-keeping and accounting skills, people management, social/interpersonal skills, political adroitness, reputation and integrity, and location.

Furthermore, Ng and Kee (2012) found that the CSFs of SMEs in Malaysia are: leadership and management, intellectual capital, organizational innovation, organisational competence, entrepreneurial characteristics and competence, human resource, motivation and market orientation, firm characteristics, strategy, reputation for ethical fibre and friendliness, organisational culture.

Lampadarios (2017) studied SMEs of the chemical distribution industry in United Kingdom and identified three strands of critical success factors, namely: Entrepreneurial factors (owner’s age, education level, entrepreneurial orientation, gender, personality, prior work experience and management skills), enterprise factors (firm’s age and size, business networks, customer relations management, financial resources, internationalization, human capital, market and product development, marketing and strategic planning) and business environment factors (political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal and regulatory, ecological and environmental).

In addition, Al-Tit, Omri and Euch (2019) investigated Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Saudi Arabia and identified the following critical success factors: individual factors (owner/manager age, owner/manager education level, owner/manager business skills and experience, use of professional advisors,

personal financial needs. e.g., improve living style), business characteristics (business size, business networks, business innovation, ability to compete), management factors (management commitment and support, organizational infrastructure, human resource management practices, organizational culture, work environment, internal communication, corporate social responsibility, information technology), business support (financial support, government support, family and friends support), capital availability (financial capital, human capital, social capital) and business environment (economic factors, technological factors, legal factors, socio-cultural factors, ecological factors).

For critical success factors in *social enterprises*, the following are the few studies that appeared in literature:

Wronka-Pośpiech (2013) studied social enterprises in Poland and identified 10 success factors as: strong leadership; motivation and commitment of employed people; enabling legal/regulatory environment; attractiveness and clarity of innovative concept; management expertise; key personal qualities for front line service delivery; effective collaboration with public sector; social capital; local community involvement; and keeping and distributing accurate financial records.

Satar and John (2016, 2019) investigated the CSFs of SEs in India and concluded that the CSFs include Individual factor (Business planning skills, entrepreneurial orientation, leadership and networking), organisational factor (innovative financing, triple bottom line planning, social enterprise marketing, community engagement, human capital, organisational culture, social impact evaluation, frugal innovation) and government support.

GraikiotiSdrali and KlimiKaminari (2020) empirically investigated sustainability factors of social cooperative enterprises in Greece. The study identified critical success factors, namely: social economy, market, government policy (e.g. integrated support provided by community, groups and government), members' personality, employees' skills, organisational culture (e.g. cooperation spirit) and financial support. The study found that integrated support contributed the most to the sustainability of the social cooperative enterprises.

III. METHODOLOGY

There are several ways of identifying critical success factors. CSFs can be identified through focus groups, questionnaire administration, in-depth interviews, case studies, field studies, the Delphi method, hypotheses testing, scenario analysis and literature review, or a combination of these (Esteves& Pastor 2004). Moreover, critical success factors can be identified through direct observation, environmental scanning, stakeholder engagement, statistical bulletin, industry reports and review of company documents (Leidecker& Bruno, 1984; Satar& John, 2016).

Furthermore, Ghaffarian and Kiani (2001) suggested that the following steps should be taken to identify critical success factors:

1. Objectively or subjectively generate a list of factors, resources and processes that should be considered for the general functioning of the organisation.
2. Divide these factors into groups: (i) Non-strategic factors – those that do not require complex manipulation for the firm to achieve its goals, (ii) Strategic factors – those that involve greater levels of complexity.
3. Juxtapose the strategic factors with the capabilities of an organization, and identify the critical success factors based on the difference between strategic factors and the available capabilities of the organization.

Following the above, we deployed review of literature on the critical success factors of business enterprises. We also had extensive interviews with 10 operators of social enterprises in Nigeria to identify the factors that are critical to their success. After interviews and extensive literature search on the subject domain, we generated 29 social enterprise success sub-factors represented by 3 clusters, as shown in table 1.

| CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS | SUB – FACTORS |
|---|---|
| Individual characteristics and competences | (1) Owner experience, (2) education and training, (3) social skill, (4) planning skill, (5) owner's ethical orientation and (6) motivation |
| Enterprise processes and capabilities | (1) Enterprise location, (2) capital availability, (3) infrastructure, (4) leadership efficacy, (5) marketing intelligence, (6) innovativeness, (7) proactiveness, (8) risk-taking, (9) service excellence, (10) enterprise resilience, (11) financial management competence, (12) intra- and inter-organisational networking skills, (13) enterprise culture, (14) human resource capability, (15) ethical orientation |
| External Environmental dynamism | (1) Economic, (2) political, (3) socio-cultural, (4) technological, (5) competitor, (6) legal/regulatory, (7) natural/ecological, (8) support from government |

IV. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE STUDY

Table 1 shows the critical success factors of social enterprises in Nigeria, namely: individual characteristics and competences, enterprise processes and capabilities, and external environmental dynamism. Individual characteristics and competences has six sub-factors or indicators, namely: owner experience, (2) education and training, (3) social skill, (4) planning skill, (5) owner’s ethical orientation and (6) motivation. Enterprise processes and capabilities comprises fifteen indicators, namely: (1) Enterprise location, (2) capital availability, (3) infrastructure, (4) leadership efficacy, (5) marketing intelligence, (6)innovativeness, (7) proactiveness, (8) risk-taking, (9) service excellence, (10) enterprise resilience, (11) financial management competence, (12) intra- and inter-organisational networking skills, (13) enterprise culture, (14) human resource capability, (15) ethical orientation, while External Environmental dynamism is reflected by eight indicators, namely: (1) Economic, (2) political, (3)socio-cultural, (4) technological, (5) competitor, (6) legal/regulatory, (7) natural/ecological, (8) support from government.

Based on the table 1, the conceptual model (Figure 2) is shown below:

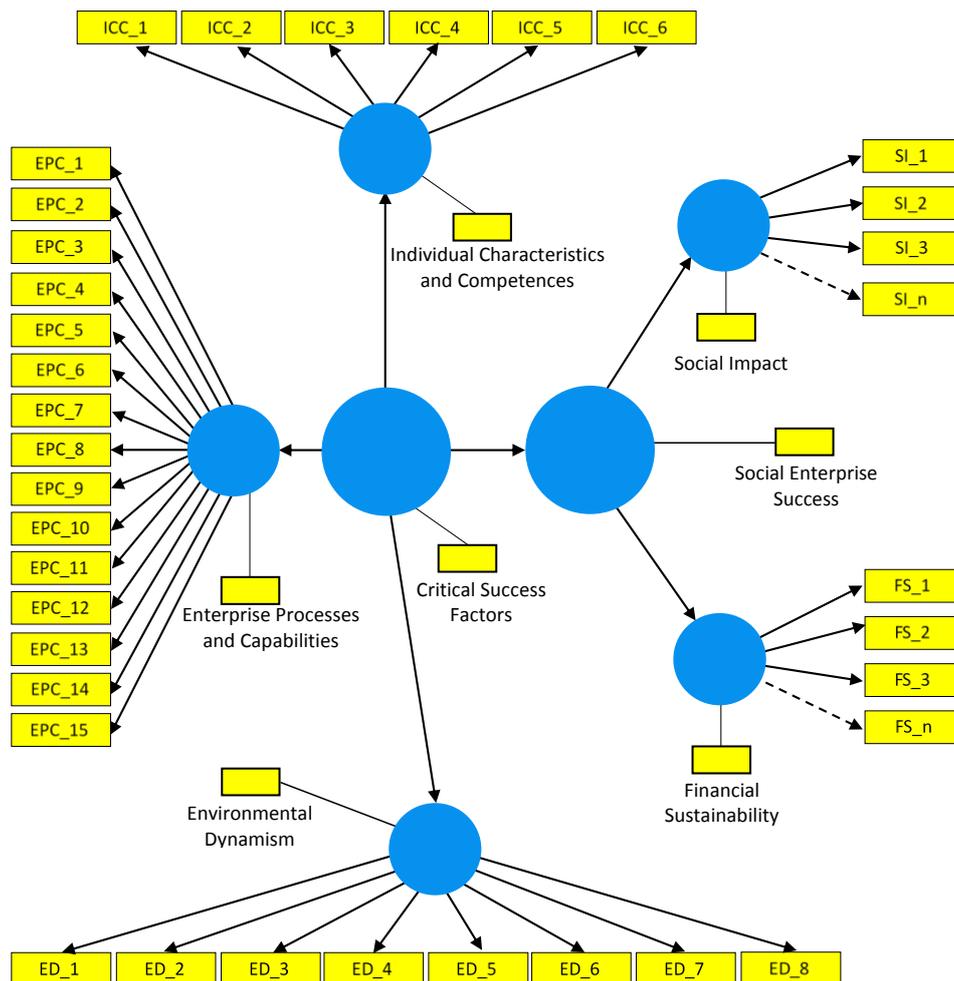


Figure 2: Conceptual model of the study developed by the authors

Figure 2 is the conceptual model of the study. Critical success factors constitute the predictor variable, whereas social enterprise success is the criterion or target variable. The predictor is decomposed into: individual characteristics and competences, enterprise processes and capabilities, and external environmental dynamism while the target variable has social impact and financial sustainability as its measures. The items for individual characteristics and competences, enterprise processes and capabilities, and external environmental dynamism were generated by the authors based on extant literature and interview responses from SE managers. However, items for social impact and financial sustainability are meant to be generated by researchers who may be interested in testing the model. Moreover, the model is based on the theorizing logic that individual characteristics and competences, enterprise processes and capabilities, and environmental dynamism are factors that social enterprise managers need to pay attention to in order to achieve sustainable success.

V. CONCLUSION

It is commonly agreed that social enterprises are prominent contributors to the development of communities and countries. They are known to create social change, alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment rate, vigorously pursue environmental goals, and promote economic growth and sustainability of local communities, better than for-profit organisations. However, social enterprises are currently under pressure to generate social impact in an economically sustainable manner, amid a highly competitive and chaotic business environment. Moreover, achieving success is increasingly becoming a nightmare as social enterprises compete for scarce funding, and are unable to effectively generate revenue.

The study identified three domains of critical success factors (individual characteristics and competences, enterprise processes and capabilities, and external environmental dynamism) that should attract the deployment of most of the organisational resources - for scalability, competitiveness and overall success. Furthermore, based on insight from extant literature, the study proposed a model that links the critical success factors to social enterprise success - which is dimensionalized as social impact and financial sustainability.

Following the above, this study gives insight to managers of social enterprises in Nigeria on the factors that are vital to the success of their enterprises. Thus, the study underscores the need for these managers to pay the most attention to these factors, in order to sustainably generate social impact amid the aforementioned challenges. Moreover, practitioners too ought to be aware of these factors, which when properly considered, will amplify the capacity of the enterprises to deliver financially sustainable social value.

This study makes two-pronged contribution to the social enterprise literature.

Firstly, the study extends the literature on social enterprise to a developing country setting by unveiling the critical success factors of social enterprises in Nigeria. Social entrepreneurship as a legitimate research domain is comparatively recent and suffers from dearth of conceptual examination and empirical scrutiny (Defourny&Nyssens, 2010). Thus, by identifying the CSFs of social enterprises in Nigeria, this study might have reduced this chasm. Secondly, the study proposes a model that calls for empirical interrogation. It is our hope that the theorizing logic on the link between the CSFs and social enterprise success, provided in this study, would stimulate scholarly curiosity and discussion.

This study is not immune from limitations. The critical success factors in the conceptual model were subjectively generated. Ghaffarian and Kiani's (2001) recommended objective technique of identifying critical success factors. Moreover, the study did not rank the critical success factors. Thus, future studies should deploy objective techniques to identify the CSFs and use the Friedman's test to prioritize these factors.

Furthermore, the reliability and validity of the sub-factors in the proposed model were not ascertained. Hence, future studies should generate more items on CSFs and conduct exploratory factors analysis, in order to achieve a scale that has psychometric integrity. Moreover, studies can include validated scales for social enterprise success (with social impact and financial sustainability as measures) as proposed in the model. In addition, curious scholars are at liberty to identify more variables that could have practical linkages with CSFs and social enterprise success and conduct empirical investigation, especially in developing country context. This will go a long way in broadening the research frontiers on social entrepreneurship.

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