

## **Entrepreneurship Ecosystem: Entrepreneurship Culture, Government policy and Development of Entrepreneurs in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study centered on entrepreneurship ecosystem and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State. The study specifically sought to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial culture, government policy and development of entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis. Using a Survey research design, 380 respondents were investigated. Findings revealed that entrepreneurship culture has positive and significant relationship with development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis ( $r = 0.856$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); and government policy has a positive and significant relationship with development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis ( $r = 0.746$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). It was concluded that entrepreneurship ecosystem has a positive and significant relationship with the development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State. It was recommended that at various homes, colleges and universities, the culture of entrepreneurship should be encouraged as this will help to create healthy entrepreneurship culture among individuals and the state government, through various agencies, should encourage the development of business entrepreneurs through periodic arrangement of entrepreneurship training, seminars and workshops as these measures will help to direct their focus towards the development of entrepreneurship.*

**KEYWORDS:** entrepreneurship ecosystem, entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship culture, government policy

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Governments at various levels in Nigeria have developed policies with intentions to create a favourable ecosystem for entrepreneurship as well as encourage the emergence of several entrepreneurs. At the national level, National University Commission (NUC) has mandated

universities to include entrepreneurship as a general study and even the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) offer entrepreneurial training. There is equally the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) and more recently Youth with Innovation (YOUWIN). In Akwa Ibom State, there is the Dakkada Multipurpose Cooperative Societies, Dakkada Multipurpose business forum, and the 'Ibom 3000 Project' (Essien, 2021).

However, rather than attracting and stimulating entrepreneurship in the state, plenty of individuals still remain reluctant in becoming entrepreneurs, while already existing entrepreneurial outfits are increasingly winding up. For instance, in the study carried out by Udemé and Edikan (2015), between 2004 to 2008, there were 1,237 active entrepreneurs and SMEs in the state, between 2008 to 2012, there were 1,148 entrepreneurs/SMEs and between 2012 to 2015, there were only 700 active entrepreneurs and SMEs in the state. These statistics show that there are entrepreneurial ecosystem related factors other than the initiation of entrepreneurship training programs and schemes that seriously affects the development of business entrepreneurs. Thus, this seeks to know how entrepreneurial ecosystem factors such as culture, physical infrastructure, human capital and government policy affects the development of business entrepreneurs in Akwa Ibom state. This is the motivation behind this study.

Although prior work on entrepreneurial ecosystems and business entrepreneurs have made significant progress, yet, there are areas of difference as well as gaps between the present study and prior studies in this direction. For instance, in the empirical studies of Roundy (2017) and Gonzalez and Dentchev (2021), the thrust of those studies was to determine market-related factors that impacts on successful development of business entrepreneurs. More so, in the studies of Elkington and Hartigan (2013), they believe that social problems give rise to business entrepreneurs in the long-run. It is at this point that the present study differs from previous studies in this direction. Rather than projecting market factors as antecedents of business entrepreneurs or adopting theoretical approach to the development of business entrepreneurs, the present study assessed how specific entrepreneurial ecosystem variables affects the development of social entrepreneurs. Hence, the attempt to assess entrepreneurial ecosystem and development of business entrepreneurs in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis. Specifically, the study was to:

1. Examine the relationship between entrepreneurship culture and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis;
2. Examine the relationship between government policy and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between entrepreneurship culture and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis?
2. What is the relationship between government policy and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis?

### **Research Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurship culture and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis;

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between government policy and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

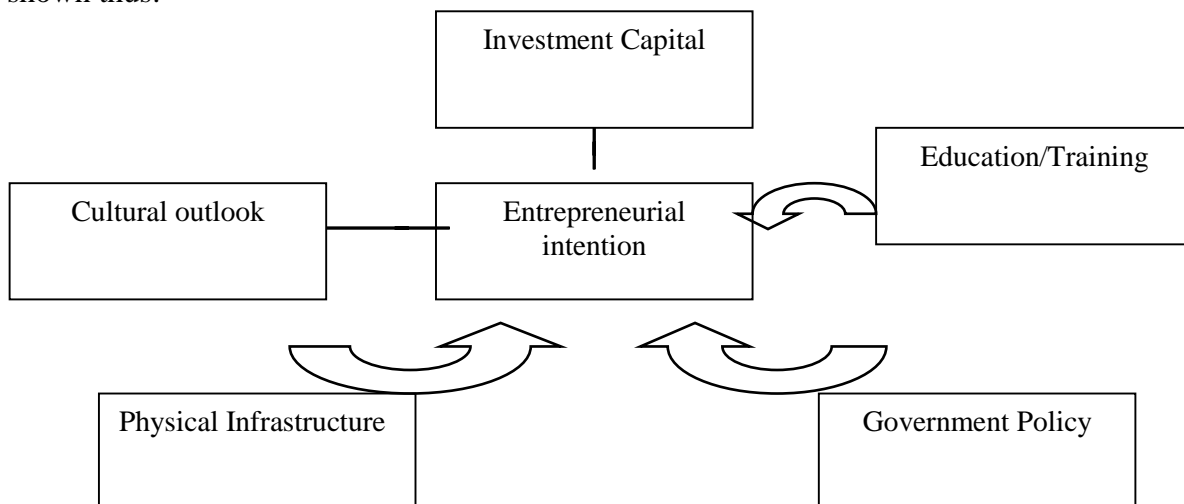
### **The Concept of Entrepreneurship Ecosystem**

Entrepreneurship ecosystem was used by Tansley in 1935 to refer to a basic ecological unit formed by the natural environment, the organisms and their relationships (Malecki, 2017). Later, it was introduced to the management field through Moore's research in 1993. Moore presented the business ecosystem as being similar to the biological one. By transposing the definition from biology to entrepreneurship, companies and stakeholders build several relationships in an environment called the ecosystem. Presently, the concept of entrepreneurship ecosystems has gained popularity in recent years due to mainstream business books such as the Startup Communities and work by Isenberg (2010) that was published in the Harvard Business Review. These works have popularized the idea amongst entrepreneurial leaders and policymakers that a place's community and culture can have a significant impact on the entrepreneurship process. But despite its popularity, there is not yet a widely shared definition of entrepreneurial ecosystems amongst researchers or practitioners. Put differently, the meaning of entrepreneurship ecosystem remains a keenly contested concept.

Moore (1993), who first made use of the concept, defined entrepreneurship ecosystem as a space of interconnection and mutual dependence between economic agents, whose collective health was essential for the success and survival of organizations. Stam and Spigel (2016) defined the entrepreneurship ecosystem as a set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way that they enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular territory. Entrepreneurial ecosystem by Spigel (2017) entails combination of business networks, local cultural outlooks, and capital investment that support the growth of innovative startup. Malecki (2008) opined that entrepreneurial ecosystem could be seen as sectors or technological systems less strictly defined in space, which can create opportunities for a firm(s) to evolve and grow. Mack and Mayer (2016) further sees it as interacting components of entrepreneurial systems, which foster new firm creation in a specific regional context. The entrepreneurial ecosystem approach emphasizes that entrepreneurship takes place in a community of interdependent actors (Freeman and Audia, 2006). The uniqueness of entrepreneurship ecosystem is based on its focus on the external business environment, which

emphasize on the forces beyond the boundaries of an organization but within those of a region that can contribute to a firm's overall competitiveness (Stam and Sipgel, 2016).

The entire idea behind entrepreneurial ecosystem is premised on the fact that businesses don't evolve in a vacuum (Moore 1993). Successful entrepreneurs interact with suppliers, customers, financiers and many more. Consequently, a business environment cannot function without the ecosystems; businesses are interdependent on ecosystem factors for survival. (Mack and Mayer, 2016). Those ecosystem factors also depend on the entrepreneurs as all the actors seek to develop and sustain entrepreneurial ecosystem. For example, entrepreneurs must develop mutual interdependencies for knowledge with the scientific communities to commence a new business function, for financial resources from investors and capitalists, from obtaining human resources from higher training institutes, for parts and distribution from supply chains, product sales from informed consumers, from information obtain from expertise and also for regulatory approval, licensing, laws from various government department (Stam and VandeVen, 2021). Apart from ecosystem variables interacting with one another, an ecosystem has a virtuous cycle of reinventing, thereby making the entire ecosystem self-sustaining and also have no central control (Isenberg, 2016). In shaping regional innovation outcomes, entrepreneurial ecosystem creates value for individual firms and sectors and also create competitive advantage (Cunningham, Menter and Kane, 2018). An entrepreneur cannot act as a sole locus of creating value (Zahra, 2007; Zahra, Wright and Abdelgawad, 2014; Woolley, 2017). This is because entrepreneurial ecosystem approach understands the role of an entrepreneur in making the entire system work. The entrepreneurial ecosystem model/diagram is presented in figure 1 as shown thus:



**Fig. 1:** Model of Entrepreneurship Ecosystem.

**Source:** Adapted from Stan and Spigel (2011).

**Entrepreneurship Culture:** Culture is a way of life of people within a region. Culture consists of tools, implements, utensils, clothing, ornaments, customs, institutions, beliefs, rituals, games, art, and language, among others. Culture is used to refer to the set of values of a nation,

a region or an organization (George and Zahra, 2002). Meanwhile, Pinillos and Reyes (2011) define it as the system of values for a specific group or society, which is the development of certain personality traits, and motivates individuals toward a behavior that may not be evident in other societies. Mueller and Thomas (2001) sees it as an underlying system of particular values to a specific group or society, where the development of certain features both of the personality and behaviors of individuals are displayed and may not be apparent in other societies. House and Javidan (2004) maintained that culture refers to shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meanings of events that result from common experiences of members of a community and are transmitted from generation to generation. Hofstede (1980), a renowned writer in culture studies, define culture as the collective programming of the mind distinguishing members of a group or category of people from other. Thus, entrepreneurship culture relates to perception, norms and beliefs of individual. It has effect on a person's personality and preference. In the words of Brownson (2014<sup>a</sup>), entrepreneurial culture is a society that depicts the exhibition of the attributes, values, beliefs (attitude or mindset) and behaviour associated with entrepreneurs by individuals in such a society which distinguishes them from others. Cultural norms reward entrepreneurial action by providing additional resources and enhancing cooperation between the entrepreneur and the society (Acs, Autio and Szerb, 2014; Estrin, Korosteleva and Mickiewicz, 2013).

Some literature shows that cultural outlook can control the perception of people around a given society (Schultz et al., 2007). The way an individual feel about his/her culture has been found to influence their propensity to become entrepreneurs. A person's personality partly explains their entrepreneurial action. Personal belief is equally attributable to how successful or unsuccessful an individual is able to start a new business (McGee, Peterson, Muller and Sequeira, 2009). Some individuals that perceive cultural outlook as an obstacle as they prefer paid jobs than being entrepreneurs. Hence, business entrepreneurial culture can shape an individual choice of business creation (Mueller and Thomas, 2001). It affects an entrepreneurial action of an entrepreneurial intention that is not align with the belief, trust, perception and norm of a given society. Individual may choose not to start a business in a hostile, unwelcome, unsafe areas where customer do not trust and perceive their business owners. Even though, entrepreneurs take risks in an uncertain world, they are still alert to gaps in the market and their environment (Aidis, Estrin and Mickiewicz, 2008).

**Government Policy:** The popular picture of 'the praying hands' which originated from two brothers, Albrecht and Albert (Desy, 2018), brings to fore the fact that entrepreneurs, no matter how talented and endowed they are, would always need a helping hand. Thus, entrepreneurs need support from internal and external sources, especially external source such as governments. Otherwise, their dreams may never materialize and their lofty ideas may never come to fusion unless certain measures are put in place. The argument is that though entrepreneurs possess some traits and characteristics that make them dynamic and high achievers, government policies affect their activities directly and indirectly. In developing nations also, active role of government have been found to enhanced entrepreneurship (Pietrobelli et al., 2004 cited in Brownson, 2015). For instance, government policies in Netherlands aimed at increasing openings of immigrant entrepreneurs led to numerous business



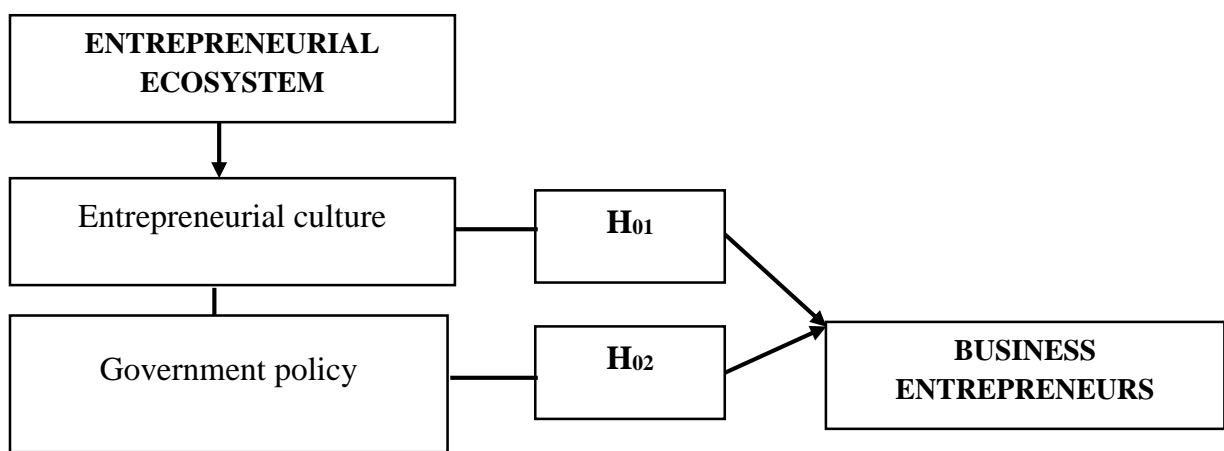
establishments (Kloosterman, 2003 cited in Brownson, 2015). and the US self-employment assistance programme increased the likelihood of entry into self-employment (Benus, 1994 cited in Brownson, 2015). In Nigeria, structures and programmes such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN), N-Power programme, Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) and the You-win programme were designed to promote entrepreneurial activities by facilitating access to funds and other resources needed for SMEs (Oliyide, 2012). All these policies and much more are targeted towards making the course of entrepreneurship to be attractive for an improved entrepreneurial outcome in the economy.

Evidence from prior studies have evidently shown that government policies affect entrepreneurship intention and development (Bygrave and Timmons, 1992; Acs and Szerb, 2007). Brown (1990 cited in Brownson, 2014<sup>b</sup>) found that Britain's graduate enterprise programme positively affected the participants of the programme in that, half of them owed the start of their business to the encouragement of the programme. Government policy relating to taxes and business regulations often affect entrepreneurial activities (Kreft and Sobel, 2005). The taxes, tariffs, and monetary policies have rippling effects on entrepreneurial activities. For instance, when government decides to mop up funds from the economy, they sell treasury bills to the public. This invariably reduces the money in circulation, affect investors' willingness to release funds, and ultimately cripple entrepreneurial activities. On the other hand, when money is pumped into the economy, more funds are made available for investments and entrepreneurial activities. Similarly, tax and duty exemptions on a particular sector trigger investment in it and may generate growth. A high tax rate on imported goods, for example, may encourage local production of the same goods. And on the other hand, a high tax rate for raw materials would hamper domestic production. Furthermore, Trade regulations standardize and affect domestic trade, foreign exchange, and international trade (Aliyu, 2010; Ezedinma, 2008; Bolaky and Freund, 2004), which invariably impact entrepreneurial activities. Also, removing the bottlenecks in business registration process, and providing some start-up capital, does enhance business activities (Bowale and Akinlo, 2012; Agboli and Ukaegbu, 2006).

### **The Concept of Business Entrepreneurs**

The concept of business entrepreneurship means different things to different people and researchers. Some definitions of this concept focus on the profile of the business entrepreneur, others on the sector in which they operate, while some scholars prioritize the definition based on the objectives of a business enterprise or on its business model. Yet, conscious attempts have been made towards giving the concept an operational definition. Business entrepreneurs are organizations seeking business solutions to business problems (Thompson and Doherty, 2006). Elsewhere, the concept is seen as the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define, and exploit opportunities in order to enhance business wealth by creating new ventures or managing existing organizations in an innovative manner (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum and Shulman, 2009). Mair, Robinson and Hockerts (2006) comprehensively defined business entrepreneurs as enterprising individuals devoted to making a difference; business purpose business ventures dedicated to adding for profit motivations to the non-profit sector; new types of philanthropists supporting venture capital-like investment portfolios; and non-profit

organizations that are reinventing themselves by drawing lessons learned from the business world. Business entrepreneurship encompasses a set of opportunities, the most important of which is creating a clear framework to support all segments of society, creating a prosperous and sustainable future and a strong economy capable of growth to reduce poverty and unemployment. Thus, innovation is key to business entrepreneurship. Through innovative solutions, business entrepreneurs are able to solve business problems such as lack of access to education, clean drinking water, healthcare, finance and even basic human rights.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Model for the Study

**Source:** Adapted from Isenberg (2011) and Gonzalez and Dentchev (2021).

Using Hofstede’s (1980) concept of culture, researchers have in general hypothesized that entrepreneurship development is facilitated by cultures that are high in individualism, low in uncertainty avoidance, and low in power distance and high in masculinity. Hence, a good culture influences entrepreneurial intention, which ultimately leads to entrepreneurial development as shown on fig. 2 above. A good and supportive entrepreneurial culture that is expressed in terms of government policies that are stable and supportive for new investors, favourable entrepreneurial climate, and banks’ ability and willingness to give out loans on low interest rates, helps in attracting individuals into becoming business entrepreneurs (Hayton, George and Zahra, 2002).

## METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was applied in the course of this study. 380 respondents were drawn from a population of 7596 entrepreneurs in Akwa Ibom State (National Survey of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, 2021) using Taro Yamane Sample Size determination technique. Thereafter, simple random sampling technique was employed to examined the 374 responses received as shown on Table 1 below.

**Table: Questionnaire Administration**

| Name of Organization   | Copies of Questionnaire No. |            | Percentage Returned |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------|
|                        | Administered                | Returned   |                     |
| Business Entrepreneurs | 380                         | 374        | 98.42               |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>380</b>                  | <b>374</b> | <b>98.42</b>        |

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 1 above shows the result of the questionnaire administered. From the Table, three hundred and eighty (380) copies of the questionnaire was administered, while three hundred and seventy-four (374) of it was returned in a usable form. Thus, data analysis and discussion of major findings are based on the number of questionnaire that were returned in a usable form.

## ANALYSIS

### Test of Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were quantitatively tested in this section of the study. The null hypotheses were all tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis. Data used in testing the two null hypotheses are presented in Tables 2 and 3 below.

### Hypothesis 1

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurship culture and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis.

| Table 2: PPMC RESULT OF HYPOTHESIS ONE |                     |              |         |
|--|---------------------|--------------|---------|
| CORRELATED VARIABLES                   |                     | ENT. CULTURE | DEV. BE |
| ENT. CULTURE                           | Pearson Correlation | 1            | .856**  |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     |              | .000    |
|  | N                   | 374          | 374     |
| DEV. BE                                | Pearson Correlation | .856**       | 1       |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000         |         |
|  | N                   | 374          | 374     |

Source: SPSS Computed Result (2023)

Table 2 above shows a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.856$  and a probability value (P-value) of 0.000. From the Table, the correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.856$  is greater than the probability value of 0.000 ( $r = 0.856, p > 0.000$ ) when tested at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that, entrepreneurship culture variable of entrepreneurship ecosystem has positive and significant relationship with development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis. This value prompts the rejection of the null hypothesis "There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurship culture and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis". The



result brings about the stating of an alternative hypothesis which states that “There is a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurship culture and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis”. This implies that, the more entrepreneurship culture is encourage in the entrepreneurship ecosystem, the individuals will be willing to engage in entrepreneurial activities especially in starting their own businesses.

## Hypothesis 2

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between government policy and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis.

| <b>CORRELATED VARIABLES</b> |                     | <b>Govt. Policy</b> | <b>DEV. BE</b> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| <b>Govt. Policy</b>         | Pearson Correlation | 1                   | .746**         |
|                             | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                     | .000           |
|                             | N                   | 374                 | 374            |
| <b>DEV. BE</b>              | Pearson Correlation | .746**              | 1              |
|                             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                |                |
|                             | N                   | 374                 | 374            |

**Source: SPSS Computed Result (2023)**

Result in Table 3 above shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.746 and a probability value of 0.000. Thus, since the correlation coefficient of 0.746 is greater than the probability value of 0.000 ( $r = 0.746$ ,  $p > 0.000$ ) the null hypothesis that “There is no significant relationship between government policy and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis” is rejected. As such, an alternative hypothesis is stated that “There is a significant positive relationship between government policy and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis”. This implies that, the more government policy is favourable for the entrepreneurship ecosystem, the more development of business entrepreneurs will occur in Uyo metropolis. More people will be willing to startup and be engaged in entrepreneurial activities because government policy is favourable.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study centered on entrepreneurial ecosystem and development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis. The major findings in the study are discussed here:

### Entrepreneurship Culture and Development of Business Entrepreneurs

Hypothesis one result on entrepreneurship culture dimension of entrepreneurship ecosystem showed that the variable has positive and significant relationship with the development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State ( $r = 0.856$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). This

prompted the rejection of the null hypothesis, while an alternative hypothesis was state. The result aligns with the view of Mueller and Thomas (2001). They revealed that business entrepreneurial culture can shape an individual choice of business creation. The result also aligns with the views that cultural outlook can control the perception of people around a given society (Schultz et al., 2007) as such, a culture of entrepreneurship will very much influence the development of entrepreneurs as indicated by the result. They way an individual feel about his/her culture has been found to influence their propensity to become entrepreneurs. Thus, a person's personality partly explains their entrepreneurial action (McGee, Peterson, Muller and Sequeira, 2009). For instance, some individuals who sees cultural factors as an obstacle prefer paid jobs than being entrepreneurs. Thus, culture has a strong influence on business entrepreneurship intentions. These assertions correspond with the finding of this study.

### **Government Policy and Development of Business Entrepreneurs**

Result from the analysis of hypothesis two showed that government policy has a positive and significant relationship with the development of business entrepreneurs ( $R = 0.746$ ). The findings led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, while an alternative hypothesis was stated. This result is in line with the finding of Akinlo (2012) and Aboli and Ukaegbu (2006). They submit that government policies on entrepreneurial ventures help in removing the bottlenecks in business registration process, and providing some start-up capital, which eventually lead to enhanced business operations. Hence, when such happens, more people will be willing to kick start their businesses. Most entrepreneurs cannot kick-start their businesses individually without government intervention. The overriding reason in most situation is that they may lack the required start-up capital. Therefore, they require what Albrecht and Albert described as the praying hands (Desy, 2018). As an important part of the ecosystem, there are various ways through which government supports entrepreneurial activities through the initiation of entrepreneurial programmes and policies. At the national level, there is the existence of such policies such as the N-Power programme. The objective of such entrepreneurial policy is to facilitate entrepreneurship intention and entrepreneurship culture among individuals. In other instance, government policy may tilt to tax reduction, especially for new entrepreneurs (Acs and Szerb, 2007). This measure helps to encourage entrepreneurial activities as well as investment. For instance, a high tax rate of foreign products encourages local manufacturing of goods, while a high tax rate of local raw materials will discourage local or domestic production.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings of the study revealed that Entrepreneurship culture has positive and significant relationship with development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis and government policy has a positive and significant relationship with development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis. Based on these findings, it was concluded that entrepreneurship ecosystem has a positive and significant relationship development of business entrepreneurs in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State.

## Recommendations

Based on the major findings in this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. At various homes, colleges and universities, the culture of entrepreneurship should be encouraged as this will help to create healthy entrepreneurship culture among individuals;
- ii. Already existing and functional state government policies on entrepreneurship should be sustained without the need for a change of policy or abandonment of the existing ones due to new administration.

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