Determinants of Microenterprise Growth in the Republic of Congo

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the factors likely to promote the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo. From the Tobit model on a sample of 233 observations censored on 11105 TPMEA of the RTPMEA data (2017), the results show that, the following variables: Age of the leader, Sex, Marital status (SM), Level of education (NI), Access to electricity (AE), Assistance and Access to credit (AC) are significant and positively influence the growth of Very Small Enterprises in Congo.

Keywords: Growth, Microenterprise, Congo

Introduction

The informal sector is proving to be increasingly growing and persistent in the economies and labor markets of some developing countries (Mbaye et al., 2014), and even some developed countries (Marchesnay, 2015). Indeed, according to Nkakleu and Ali (2016) the economies of most African countries are virtually dominated by the informal sector. The latter is indeed characterized by an overrepresentation of microenterprises that play a considerable role in the socio-economic environment (Mbaye et al., 2014). Generally, these enterprises offer goods and services to all categories of the population, especially those living in poverty. They have also a means of job creation, hence poverty alleviation, and can contribute significantly to the development process of a nation. According to Liedholm and Mead (2013): "micro and small enterprises contribute to the development process by improving household income, increasing well-being, enhancing self-confidence and empowerment, providing social and political stability, and altering income distribution". In the same vein, Julien and Marchesnay (1994) argued that microenterprises are sometimes the sole source of employment and economic renewal.

In Congo, these enterprises dominate the labor market at 78% and largely drive the national economy (Mbalamona, 2011). More than 6 out of 10 illiterate or literate workers are in the microenterprise sector (Kuépie and Nordman, 2011). Moreover, 97% of the enterprises registered with the National Centre for Statistics and Economic Studies (CNSEE) are microenterprises, SMEs represent only 2 .4%, large enterprises are in very small numbers and are mostly linked to multinationals (UNDP-RNDH, 2015-2016). The latest census of economic units carried out on the national territory indicates that out of 11105 units, 4179 are microenterprises. From the above, we can see that these enterprises represent an important part of the Congolese economy and can therefore contribute to its development and diversification. They are a means of creating jobs and fighting poverty. It is clear that in the Congo, young people who have dropped out of school, as well as graduates of educational institutions who cannot find employment, either in the private sector or in the public administration, sometimes give in to the creation of small businesses which constitute to some extent their outlet.

However, the development or growth of these companies causes some concern because they face several difficulties. They are stagnant or disappear without leaving any trace despite their proliferation in the country, thus leaving a bitter taste with consumers. Similarly, the problem of financing adapted to their needs remains a major equation where the parameters escape the various actors. It is therefore essential to identify the factors that can favor or hinder the development of these companies. Hence the interest in this study.

Indeed, the diagnosis of the growth of enterprises in Congo, particularly microenterprises, beyond their economic and social importance, generates some problems that can be understood in the case of this study around the following aspects

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- Problems of raw material supply;
- Problems of management or managerial problems;
- Business environment problems;
- and finally, problems of access to credit.

According to CIDR (1998), many entrepreneurs, especially those in inland cities, face supply difficulties related to the high cost of raw materials despite their availability, or to a shortage of these resources. The number of suppliers is often limited. The same study shows that 83% of all entrepreneurs in Congo are highly dependent on products from abroad. Most of the production structures use imported products, even if only to a small extent. Moreover, 82% of businesses obtain their supplies locally and only 5% import directly from abroad (RTPMEA, 2017). This raises the question of the growth of microenterprises in such conditions.

Furthermore, the management of microenterprises in Congo is also identified as one of the major concerns in this work. According to CIDR (1996), 44% of micro-entrepreneurs use basic means, while the UNDP-RNDH (2015-2016) indicates that only 4% of all entrepreneurs surveyed master management tools. Most of these businesses are dominated by insufficient commercial management skills, a lack of strategic management of the business, and a preponderance of family management. This state of management raises questions about the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo.

According to the World Bank (2004), the contribution of business to society is largely determined by the investment climate. A good business climate provides opportunities for firms to invest profitably, create jobs and increase output, thereby increasing private investment and growth (World Bank, 2010). The business environment may or may not be conducive to rapid business development. Indeed, according to the Doing Business 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 out of 189 countries, the Congo occupied respectively the 183rd, 176th, 177th and 179th place in the ease of doing business, 182nd place with regard to taxes. In the same vein, Samba (2013) states that Congolese companies pay 2.3 times more taxes than other African countries. More than 57.3% versus 42.7% of businesses find the procedures for creating a business in Congo unfavorable. It is therefore not easy to do business in Congo. Such an environment raises some questions about the growth of microenterprises in the nation.

Apart from the problems raised above, the conditions for financing productive activities also explain their size and level of competitiveness. Access to credit is also one of the problems faced by microenterprise promoters. In Congo, 81% of entrepreneurs finance their activities with their own funds, compared to 3% who obtain credit (RTPMEA, 2017). Observation of the banking system through the activities that are favored by banks in Congo (fund transfers, consumer credit, management of current accounts of civil servants and other banked employees, oil activities, construction and public works) reveals that they are not very present in the financing of local national microenterprises and in the financing of microprojects, which nevertheless abound in Congo. The few realities mentioned here raise questions about the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo.

In view of the above-mentioned concerns, it is necessary for this study to highlight the factors that promote or slow down the growth of microenterprises. To this end, the main question of this study is formulated as follows What are the factors that influence the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo?

Generally speaking, this study consists of highlighting the determinants of microenterprise growth in the Republic of Congo.

Specifically, the aim is to identify, on the one hand, the economic determinants that favor the growth of microenterprises; on the other hand, to identify the non-economic determinants that favor the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo.

This work is organized as follows: 1 literature review, 2 methodology, 3 discussion of results.

1 Review of the literature

The question of small firm growth has been the subject of both theoretical and empirical debate. In the following we will briefly present the theoretical and empirical work done on this subject.

From a theoretical point of view, two currents of thought are in confrontation. The first is that growth is the result of strategic choices made by managers. That is to say, there are certain strategies emphasized by managers in order to promote the growth of their companies. Supported here by approaches such as: the entrepreneur and the growth of the firm (Lucas 1978, Kihlstrom and Laffont 1979, Jovanovic 1982), this approach emphasizes the place and role of the entrepreneur in the growth process of his firm. The characteristics related to the latter play on the growth of his activity; in Perren's approach (1999), two main types of factors affect the growth of microenterprises. These are independent factors and intermediate factors that interact with each other, leading to firm growth (assuming the interaction is positive).

Independent factors. He found that independent factors such as personality attributes, transferable experience, stakeholder patronage and other external influences are important for microenterprise growth. This means that these independent factors must be positive in order for the intermediate growth factors to initiate and sustain the growth of a microenterprise. The second stream, on the other hand, sees growth as a natural phenomenon in the evolution of an enterprise. There is no need for factors for any growth, the enterprise follows the normal course of its evolution. This is supported by the theories of stages of development (Churchill and Lewis 1983). For these authors, growth is part of the natural evolution of a company. They identify five stages of growth: Existence, Survival, Success, Flight and Resource Maturity. At each stage of development, a different set of factors is critical to the survival and success of the business.

From an empirical point of view, the work carried out on this subject has made it possible to distinguish, on the one hand, the economic and non-economic determinants likely to favor the growth of the enterprise such as: marital status, the age of the entrepreneur (Tarfasa et al. 2016), the age of the enterprise, the level of education, access to financing (Alom et al 2016), the gender of the manager and public aid (Boukar 2006). On the other hand, the factors that slow down this growth namely, lack of access to bank credit, high taxes (Nuwagaba and Nzewi, 2013); erratic access to electricity, unavailability of infrastructure (Donsaane, 2014), competition, corruption (Musona 2014), inadequate access to electricity and finance, age of the firm (Tarfasa et al.,2016).

2 Methodology

In this work, we will use the Tobit model to identify the factors that influence firm growth. For this purpose, the following equation represents the Tobit model equation:

$$Y_i^* = \beta X_i + \mu_i$$
$$Y_i = \begin{cases} Y_i^* \, si Y_i^* > 0 \\ 0 \qquad si Y_i^* \leq 0 \end{cases}$$

Where Y_i^* is the latent variable, Y_i the observed variable and X_i the set of explanatory variables. μ_i the error term and is normally distributed $[0, \sigma^2]$.

2.1 Model specification

The growth of a company can be assessed either by its turnover, its sales volume or by the size of the company represented by the number of employees. In this work, we use the size of the company to assess its growth. Thus, the size of the company (TE) is used as the dependent variable. The variables, Age of the manager, Sex, Educational level (NI), Nationality (Nat), Marital status (SM), Aid, Subsidy, Access to electricity (AE), and Access to credit (AC) are considered here as independent variables. Hence the followingequation :

$$TE_i^* = \sum \beta Variablesexplicatives + \mu_i$$

$$TE_i^* = \beta_1 Age + \beta_2 Sexe + \beta_3 NI + \beta_4 Nat + \beta_5 SM + \beta_6 Aide + \beta_7 Subvention + \beta_8 AE + \beta_9 AC + \mu_i$$

TE_i^* represents the size of the firm which is not observable. All explanatory variables are captured by the vector X_i hence our equation is transformed as follows:

$$TE_i^* = \beta X_i + \mu_i$$

The observation of TE being defined by $TE_i = \begin{cases} TE_i^* \, si TE_i^* > 0 \\ 0 \qquad si TE_i^* \leq 0 \end{cases}$

With TE_i the observable size, μ_i the error term that follows a normal distribution.

2.2 Presentation of the Model Variables

This study assumes the existence of factors that significantly influence the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo. The variables of this study are the characteristics related to the owner-managers of these enterprises such as: Age, Sex, Nationality (Nat), Level of education (NI) and Marital status (SM); the characteristics related to the business environment such as: Access to credit (AC), Access to electricity (AE), Aid and subsidies. This makes a total of nine (9) variables on which our study focuses, including four (4) economic variables and five (5) other non-economic variables.

Age: The age of the entrepreneur is a variable that we assume to be crucial for the growth of a business. Indeed, this variable was used by Alom et al (2016), Papadaki and Chami (2002); their results show a positive relationship with microenterprise growth.

Sex: Gender is also critical to enterprise growth, as it provides information on the impact of gender on a given activity. Women are also likely to be more family-oriented and less willing to pursue the economic goals of business expansion (Brush, 1992). Nimpa (2016) finds a positive relationship between gender and microenterprise growth.

Nationality: Microenterprises are run by both nationals and foreigners; nationals may have more advantages than foreigners. Nationals may have more advantages than foreigners, so this variable is a determinant of the growth of these enterprises.

Marital status: Being married or not married can affect microenterprise growth. Tarfasa et al (2016) show a positive relationship between marital status and enterprise growth.

Educational level: The educational level of the manager or his or her training can have a significant impact on the growth of the business. The level of education gives or reinforces the managerial skills of the manager. Thus, Cooper et al (1992) underline a favorable link between the level of education of the manager and the growth of the company.

Aids: it is a variable that acts positively on the growth of the enterprise, as testified by Boukar (2006). Indeed, micro-entrepreneurs who get help are likely to expand their activities.

Subsidy: Beyond assets, the subsidies that micro-entrepreneurs may receive would have a positive effect on the growth of their businesses. It is therefore a variable that acts favorably.

Access to electricity: the more science is developed; the more businesses depend on it. Access to electricity is a variable that can affect the growth of a microenterprise. Dontsi (2014) finds a negative relationship between lack of access to electricity and growth. This implies that access to electricity would promote growth.

Access to credit: The source of finance is an indicator of the financial as well as human capital available to the firm, and is expected to have an impact on its growth. Access to credit is a variable that can positively influence business growth.

2.3 The data used

The data for this study come from the census of very small, small and medium-sized enterprises and craftsmen carried out in Congo by the RTPMEA (2017). Indeed, this census is carried out by this body in accordance with service contract No. 037 of 2 October 2014. To do this, two questionnaires were developed; the identification questionnaire and the main questionnaire. A pilot census was organized in order to test the questionnaires and the data entry programmed designed for the occasion; the administrative authorities were sensitized in order to encourage their involvement; a survey of the units made it possible to locate the units to be surveyed. Finally, a census of the units consisted first of reclassifying the units identified and then setting up a programmed of visits by enumerators. A total of 1,105 TPMEAs were surveyed throughout the country.

3 Results and discussion

In this section we present the descriptive statistics of the variables and the results of the model estimation.

3.1 Descriptive statistics of the variables

The descriptive statistics are presented in two parts: the descriptive statistics of the qualitative variables and the descriptive statistics of the quantitative variables.

3.1.1 Descriptive statistics of categorical variables

The descriptive analysis of Table 1 shows that for the variable AE, 8085 enterprises did not have access to electricity and only 302 did. Similarly, of all the entrepreneurs surveyed, 9048 still went to school, 2057 never did. The statistics also show that, of all the people surveyed in Congo, 6,516 are of Congolese nationality, while foreigners' number 4,589. Their marital status shows a negligible difference between the married (5413) and the unmarried (5692). On the other hand, the number of women business owners is 2,270 and the number of men is three times that of women, that is 8,835. Among these entrepreneurs, 132 have obtained assistance while 10,973 have not. In the same vein, 4,922 benefited from a subsidy while 6,183 did not. Regarding access to credit, only 331 people have access to credit while 10,973 do not.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for categorical variables

Variable	Frequency	Cumuli	Libeled
characteristics of the owners/managers			
NI			**NI**:Educationallevel
0	2.057	18.52	0= non-literate
1	9.048	100	1= Literate
Nat			**Nat**:Nationality
0	4589	41.32	0= Foreigners
1	6516	100	1= Congolese
Sex			**Sex**
0	2270	79.56	0= Women
1	8835	100	1= Men
SM			**SM**:Maritalstatus
0	5692	51.26	0= unmarried
1	5413	100	1= Married
Characteristics of the business climate			
AC			**AC**: Access to credit
0	10973	97.02	0= No access
1	331	100	1= Access
AE			**AC**: Access to electricity
0	8085	72.81	0= No access
1	302	100	1= Access
Aids			**Aids**
0	10973	98.81	0= Not havingreceived
1	132	100	1= Havingreceived
Subventions			**Subventions**
0	6183	55.68	0= non-subsidised
1	4922	100	1= Subsidised

Source: Author based on RTPMEA 2017 survey

3.1.1 Descriptive statistics of qualitative variables

From Table 2, we can see that the average size of all the enterprises surveyed is 18.61 and the average age of the entrepreneurs is 49 years.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of quantitative variables

Variables	Average	Min	Max	Standard deviation
TE (Company size)	18.61	1	19998	1897.86
Age	49	9	98	25

Source: Author based on RTPMEA 2017 survey

3.2 Model estimation results

The censoring of the firm size variable is done on 10872 observations and the size of the microenterprises ranges from 1 to 5 workers. 233 observations are thus retained after this censoring. 233 observations are therefore retained after this censoring. Using the Tobit model, we obtained the results presented in the table below.

The results of the above estimation show that eight (8) of the nine (9) variables retained in this study are significant and positively influence the growth of microenterprises. Therefore, two lessons can be drawn. The first is the influence of owner-managers on the growth of their enterprises. The second lesson refers to the influence of the business climate on the growth of the latter.

o ***Characteristics of owner-managers: A determinant of microenterprise growth***

Many researchers recognize the role and place of the entrepreneur in the firm, following Schumpeter's example of the entrepreneur as an innovator, Lucas (1978) defines the firm as the entrepreneur or manager. Eventually, the characteristics of the latter directly influence the growth of the firm.

The influence of managers on growth is analyzed here through four (4) variables, namely: Age, Sex, Marital status (MS) and Level of education (NI).

Indeed, according to the results of the table above, the age of the manager is significant at the 1% level, and has a positive influence on the growth of the company. There is thus a strong probability for older managers to grow their businesses than younger ones. The positive influence of age on growth was also found by Alom et al (2016). Age also reflects the experience of the entrepreneur through the age series effect. That is, the entrepreneur, by facing difficulties, acquires experience and can better engage in business while developing his activity. According to Jovanovic (1982): "Individuals learn to know their capabilities over time, taking into account their behavior in a difficult business climate". However, the negative coefficient of age squared reveals that as the entrepreneur grows older in his or her business, up to a certain threshold of growth, the entrepreneur will no longer be able to respond effectively given his or her age. This will result in a drop in productivity that will even lead to the closure of the business. The company therefore undergoes an inverted U-shaped growth.

In addition to age, the educational level of the manager has a positive impact on the growth of the business. Indeed, managers who have at least a primary school education been likely to increase their activities. The significance here is at the 1% threshold and this variable has a positive effect on the size of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo. The more educated and trained the manager is, the more knowledge and skills he or she acquires that enable him or her to expand the business than the non-educated manager. This result was found by Papadaki and Bassima (2002) and Alom et al (2016).

After the level of education, the marital status of the manager is also a significant variable. There is indeed some difference between microenterprises run by married and unmarried people. The estimation results show that marital status is significant at the 1% level and positively influences the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo. This result was also found by Tarfasa et al (2016). The probability that these enterprises will grow is therefore high for those who are married. In fact, married people are more mature and responsible than unmarried people in managing their businesses.

Finally, gender, like the previous variables, is significant at the 1% threshold and positively influences the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo. Boukar (2006) and Nimpa (2016) also found this result in their respective works. In this case, it is women who are more likely to grow their businesses than men. Indeed, what makes female entrepreneurship unique is the sense of responsibility that women have in managing their families and the way they finance their activities. According to Ayibeka (2008), the development of microenterprises is particularly important for women because it provides them with the additional income, they need to ensure the survival of their families.

The results of this study show that non-economic determinants also influence the growth of microenterprises. The characteristics related to the person of the manager act in favor or against his or her activity, as shown by the results. The hypothesis that non-economic determinants would positively influence the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo is verified. The variables Age, Sex, Marital status and Level of education are significant and positively influence the growth of these enterprises in the Republic of Congo. These results are based on the theoretical view that growth is the result of strategic choices, following the approach of Perren (1999) for example.

o ***Business climate: a key factor in microenterprise growth***

The influence of the business climate on the growth of microenterprises in this study is analyzed through the following variables: Aid, Access to electricity (AE) and Access to credit (AC).

The estimation results presented above reveal that the variable Aid is significant at the 10% level and positively influences the size of microenterprises in Congo. Indeed, a 10% increase in aid would favor an increase in enterprise size. If micro-entrepreneurs receive aid, there is a high probability that they will increase the number of workers and turnover through market penetration of their products. This result was also found by Boukar (2006) in the case of Cameroon.

The results also show the effectiveness of the variable Access to electricity at 5% and its positive influence on growth. This being the case, the probability of increasing the size of microenterprises is higher for those with access to electricity than those without. This is simply because of the increase in labor intensity which is labor intensive. The results presented also show that the variable Access to credit is significant at the 10% level and has a positive influence on the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo. This means that if the managers of these enterprises have access to credit, there will be an increase in the number of workers, and consequently the growth of these enterprises. Harabi (2003) also found this result in the case of Morocco.

From these variables, we conclude that the business climate has either a positive or negative influence on the growth of microenterprises. A good business climate favors growth, while a bad business climate delays the growth of these enterprises. The hypothesis that economic determinants have a positive influence on the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo is verified in this study. These results are also in line with the theoretical view that growth is the result of strategic choices, that there are a number of factors that favor the growth of the enterprise.

Table 3: Estimation results

TE	Coéf	Prob
AE	1970.409	0.029**
NI	118558.9	0.000***
AC	3455.693	0.071*
Nat	14.05086	0.533
Age	453.5978	0.000***
Age²	-2.817947	0.001***
Subvention	1322.761	0.129
Aids	5099.048	0.074*
SM	2122.192	0.017***
Sex	-3601.235	0.003***
Const	-53323.56	0.000

*= significance at 10%; **= significance at 5%; ***= significance at 1%.
Source: Author based on RTPMEA 2017 survey data

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to highlight the determinants of microenterprise growth in the Republic of Congo. Indeed, to achieve this goal, this work used the Tobit model. The results obtained reveal that Level of education (NI), Age of the manager, Marital status (MS), Sex, Aid, Access to electricity (AE), Access to credit (AC) are significant variables and positively influence the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo. Our hypotheses were therefore verified in this study.

In view of these results, it would be necessary to act on these significant variables in order to boost the growth of microenterprises in the Republic of Congo with a view to promote entrepreneurship at the national level and encouraging job creation to reduce the unemployment rate. Thus, these results give rise to the need to set up and/or strengthen support structures for entrepreneurship by creating entrepreneurial training schools, for example, in the image of doctors in the health sector, in order to arouse the vocation and awaken the entrepreneurial spirit, in order to promote entrepreneurship in the nation; provide material or financial support by setting up a guarantee fund for microenterprise promoters in order to boost this sector, which can also contribute to the policy of diversifying the national economy by contributing to the GDP; create or strengthen the capacities of microfinance institutions in order to promote access to credit adapted to the needs of microentrepreneurs, enabling them to establish themselves in an equitable manner with a view to increase their activities.

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