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Evaluation of agricultural incubation model in south-south Nigeria: SWOT analysis approach for agricultural crops development

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Abstract

The research assesses the Agricultural Incubation Model in South-South Nigeria through a SWOT analysis framework aimed at agricultural crop development. The study utilized purposive sampling along with a multistage sampling procedure. A total of 1,360 respondents were selected for the study, and data was gathered using a meticulously designed questionnaire and interviews. The analysis of the data was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The SWOT analysis reveals that agricultural incubation models in South-South Nigeria are viewed as significant drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation. Respondents express strong support for these models' ability to promote collaboration and cultivate essential skills among farmers. Nonetheless, a key finding indicates that these models encounter considerable internal challenges, particularly their limited outreach and empowerment of women and youth, as well as an excessive dependence on technology that may not be readily available to all farmers. On the external front, the rising demand for sustainable agricultural practices and the potential for enhanced support from government and private sectors offer substantial opportunities. In contrast, the inherent instability of agricultural markets, intricate regulatory environments, and the increasing effects of climate change pose serious threats that could jeopardize their long-term sustainability. Consequently, for incubation centers to fully achieve their potential, strategic measures must be taken to improve inclusivity and adaptability while actively addressing external risks. In light of the findings from this SWOT analysis, it is advised that programs and policies be formulated and executed within incubation centers that specifically cater to the distinct needs and challenges faced by women and youth. This should encompass customized training modules, easier access to financing, mentorship initiatives, and adaptable incubation schedules.

Keywords: Agricultural; Crops; Development; Incubation; Model; SWOT

1. Introduction

An incubation model can be generally described as the approach through which an incubation company aids start-ups to enhance the likelihood of survival for portfolio firms and accelerate their growth. It serves as the framework or methodology by which the company delivers incubation services to emerging businesses to create and derive value from them. (Muriithi, Wanjau, and Omondi, 2018). The notion of business incubation has been influenced and shaped by three significant economic and technological advancements, resulting in changes to its governance, value proposition, and configuration. Initially, when business incubators were introduced, they were primarily regarded as instruments for community development and urban revitalization. (Schwartz, 2013; Scaramuzzi, 2002).

The acronym SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis represents a framework utilized to assess a company's competitive standing and to formulate strategic planning. SWOT analysis evaluates both internal and external factors, along with current and future potential.

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A SWOT analysis serves as a method to pinpoint the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and threats that your business, or even a particular project, is facing. While SWOT analyses can be applied to personal goals, they are predominantly employed by organizations, ranging from small startups to large enterprises (Raeburn, 2024).

The aim of a SWOT analysis is to deliver a practical, fact-based, data-driven assessment of an organization's, initiative's, or industry's strengths and weaknesses. To ensure the accuracy of the analysis, the organization must concentrate on real-world situations and avoid preconceived ideas or ambiguous areas. Rather than treating it as a prescription, businesses should regard it as a source of guidance.

1.1. Components of SWOT Analysis

The following four categories are essential to every SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis cannot be considered complete without each of these elements, although the components and insights within these categories may vary from one organization to another

- **Strengths:** The term Strengths refers to what an organization excels at and what sets it apart from its competitors: a strong balance sheet, a loyal customer base, unique technology, a powerful brand, and so on. For example, a hedge fund may have developed a proprietary trading strategy that outperforms the market. Subsequently, it must determine how to leverage these insights to attract more investors.
- **Weaknesses:** An organization's weaknesses hinder its ability to perform optimally. Poor branding, above-average employee turnover, high levels of debt, an inefficient supply chain, or insufficient cash flow are some areas that the organization must address to remain competitive.
- **Opportunities:** Opportunities are favorable external conditions that could give a business a competitive advantage. For instance, if a country reduces tariffs, a car manufacturer could export its vehicles into a new market, thereby increasing sales and market share.
- **Threats:** The term "threats" refers to elements that may jeopardize an organization. For example, a drought could devastate or significantly reduce crop yields, presenting a risk to a company that cultivates crops. Other common challenges include limited labor supply, increasing competition, and escalating material costs.
- **SWOT Factors:** Each of the four elements of the SWOT analysis requires the team members assigned to the analysis to begin cataloging facts and ideas within different categories. Some examples are provided below

1.2. Internal Factors

These are events occurring within an organization that provide valuable insights for the strengths and weaknesses sections of the SWOT analysis. Internal factors may encompass financial and human resources, both tangible and intangible assets (such as brand reputation), and operational efficiencies.

Potential questions to identify internal factors include

1.2.1. Strength

- What are we excelling at?
- What is our most significant asset?

1.2.2. Weakness

- What are our shortcomings?
- Which of our product lines are underperforming?

1.3. External Factors

These are occurrences that take place outside of an organization. They hold equal importance to the organization's success as internal factors do. External factors that can be utilized to compile a list of opportunities and threats include market fluctuations, monetary policies, and the availability of suppliers.

Possible inquiries to identify external factors include

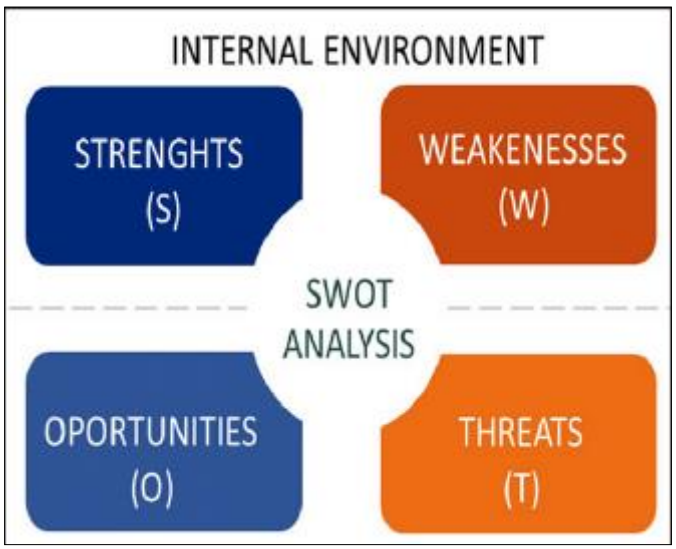
1.3.1. Opportunity

- What trends are observable in the market?
- Which demographics are we currently overlooking?

1.3.2. Threat

- How many competitors are present, and what portion of the market do they occupy?
- Are there emerging regulations that could adversely affect our operations or products?

SWOT Analysis encompasses both the internal and external environments. The internal environment consists of strengths and weaknesses, whereas the external environment includes opportunities and threats (Box 1).



Source: (Raeburn, 2024)

Figure 1 Internal and External Environment of SWOT Analysis

2. Materials and Method

The research study was conducted in South-South Nigeria, a region predominantly inhabited by farmers engaged in livestock rearing (particularly poultry), fishing, petty trading, and the cultivation of arable crops. This area encompasses a land mass of 86,982 square kilometers and is home to approximately 28.8 million individuals from various ethnic backgrounds (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2017). South-South Nigeria comprises six states: Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, and Edo. Geographically, South-South Nigeria is situated between the longitudes of 5.8702° N and 6.6342° N, and latitudes of 8.5988° E and 5.9304° E. The research employed a purposive sampling method for selecting states within the South-South region and the relevant commodities/enterprises, while a multistage sampling technique was utilized for the selection of Local Government Areas, communities, incubatees, and non-incubatees in South-South Nigeria. A total of 640 incubatees and 640 non-incubatees were selected, along with 80 incubators, resulting in a cumulative population of 1,360 respondents from the study area. Primary data was gathered from both incubatees and non-incubatees through a meticulously designed questionnaire and interviews conducted with the support of well-trained enumerators by the researcher. The data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics (means, mode, frequencies, and percentages) as well as inferential statistics (t-test and regression analysis).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

that the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents are detailed in Table 1.0. The age distribution reveals the majority of incubatees are aged between 18 and 30 years, with an average age of 27 years, predominantly consisting of single females. In contrast, the non-incubatees and incubators are older, with mean ages of 44 years and 47 years, respectively, and are primarily married females. The educational attainment of incubatees, non-incubatees, and incubators is at the secondary education level, accompanied by a low household size averaging 4. Most respondents indicated a deficiency in extension services, and the farming experience among incubatees, non-incubatees, and incubators averages 6, 10, and 14 years, respectively, alongside a low staff strength. The lack of extension services has been identified as a hindrance to agricultural progress (Ovharhe et al., 2021). The average income of incubatees is 2,021,950 Naira, which surpasses that of non-incubatees, whose mean income is 1,589,042 Naira. The rise in income

levels and improvements in livelihoods have been noted among incubatees involved in the IFAD project (Ashoro et al., 2024).

Table 1 Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	**Incubatees (n = 640)**	**Mean/Mode**	**Non-Incubatees (n = 640)**	**Mean/ Mode**	**Incubators(n = 80)**	**Mean/ Mode**
Age (Years)						
18 – 30	519	27 years	89		00	
31 – 43	120		154		25	
44 – 56	01		354	44 years	43	47 years
57 – 69	00		43		12	
Gender						
Male	264		242		29	
Female	376	Female	398	Female	51	Female
Marital Status						
Single	425	Single	98		07	
Married	201		487	Married	52	Married
Widow	14		55		21	
Household size (persons)						
1 – 4	432	4 persons	108		9	
5 – 8	186		427	6 persons	31	8 persons
9 – 12	21		98		38	
13 – 16	1		7		2	
Educational Status						
No formal Education	91		143		02	
Primary School	162		220		21	
Secondary School	328	Secondary school	254	Secondary school	44	Secondary school
Tertiary Education	59		23		13	
Farming Experience (years)						
1 – 9	568	6 years	231		22	
10 – 18	67		372	10 years	32	
19 – 27	05		30		18	14 years
28 – 36	00		07		08	
Staff Strength (persons)						
1 – 3	310		496	3 persons	57	3 persons

4 – 6	307	4 persons	138		21	
7 – 9	21		05		02	
10 – 12	02		01		00	
Extension Agent Contact						
Yes	96		82		06	
No	544	No	558	No	74	No
Annual Income (Naira)						
550,000– 1,150,000	65		189		18	
1,151,000 – 1,751,000	178		233	1,589,042	42	1,451,000
1,752,000 – 2,352,000	142	2,021,950	111		11	
2,353,000 – 2,953,000	234		96		5	
2,954,000 – 3,554,000	21		11		4	

3.2. SWOT Analysis of Incubation Model in South-South Nigeria

The second objective was achieved through descriptive statistics. The incubatees concurred that the strengths of the incubation model included encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship in agriculture (70.6%), developing the skills and capacities of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs (61.7%), providing access to funding, markets, and technology (55.5%), fostering collaboration and networking among stakeholders (65.8%), and creating employment opportunities in agriculture and related sectors (55.6%). The incubatees also identified weaknesses, such as limited scalability: the challenge of scaling up and replicating successful models (63.6%), the high risks associated with agricultural incubation, including market and climate risks (62.2%), the potential inadequacy in addressing the needs and empowerment of women and youth in agriculture (79.7%), an over-reliance on technology, which can pose barriers for some farmers (73.2%), and a heavy dependence on external funding and support (36.3%) that were not recognized as weaknesses. Furthermore, in terms of opportunities, there was an increasing demand for sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices (81.4%), potential government support and policies favoring agricultural incubation (76.1%), opportunities for private sector investment in agricultural incubation (60.9%), the potential for digital agriculture and precision farming to enhance incubation models (55.0%), and opportunities for partnerships and collaborations with regional and global organizations (62.3%). Finally, the threats identified were related to climate change: climate change and extreme weather events can adversely affect agricultural productivity and incubation models (54.8%), fluctuations in market demand and prices can influence the viability of incubators (63.7%), and complex regulatory environments along with bureaucratic processes can obstruct incubation models (55.0%). Additionally, competition from established agricultural businesses and industries (41.7%) and cyber security risks impacting digital agriculture and data management (37.0%) were not considered threats to the incubation center in the area of study. Similar research was conducted on the SWOT Incubation model (Al-mubaraki and Busler, 2010). It was found that incubatees had greater options in terms of strengths and opportunities to thrive in their enterprises; they were better able to manage their weaknesses and threats compared to non-incubatees.

Table 2 SWOT Analysis of Incubation Model in South-South Nigeria

S/N	SWOT analysis of the Incubation Center (n = 640)	Yes	No
	Strengths		
1	Encourages innovation and entrepreneurship in agriculture.	452(70.6)	188(29.4)
2	Fosters collaboration and networking among stakeholders.	421(65.8)	219(34.4)
3	Develops skills of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs.	395(61.7)	245(38.3)
4	Provides access to funding, markets, and technology.	356(55.6)	284(44.4)
5	Creates employment opportunities in agriculture and related sectors.	356(55.6)	282(44.4)
	Weaknesses		
6	May not adequately address the needs and empowerment of women and youth in agriculture.	510(79.7)	130(20.3)
7	May rely too heavily on technology, which can be a barrier for some farmers.	468(73.2)	172(26.9)
8	Can be challenging to scale up and replicate successful models.	407(63.6)	233(36.4)
9	Agricultural incubation involves high risks, including market and climate risks.	398(62.2)	242(37.8)
10	Relies heavily on external funding and support.	232(36.3)	408(63.8)
	Opportunities		
11	Increasing demand for sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices.	521(81.4)	119(18.6)
12	Potential for government support and policies favoring agricultural incubation.	487(76.1)	153(23.9)
13	Opportunities for partnerships and collaborations with regional and global organizations.	399(62.3)	241(37.7)
14	Opportunities for private sector investment in agricultural incubation.	390(60.9)	250(39.1)
15	Potential for digital agriculture and precision farming to enhance incubation models.	352(55.0)	288(45.0)
	Threats		
16	Fluctuations in market demand and prices can affect incubator viability.	408(63.7)	232(36.3)
17	Complex regulatory environments and bureaucratic processes can hinder incubation models.	352(55.0)	288(45.0)
18	Climate change and extreme weather events can impact agricultural productivity and incubation models.	351(54.8)	289(45.2)
19	Competition from established agricultural businesses and industries.	267(41.7)	373(58.3)
20	Cyber security risks affecting digital agriculture and data management	237(37.0)	403(62.9)

The SWOT analysis of agricultural incubation centers in South-South Nigeria, as detailed in Table 2.0 (n=640), provides a thorough overview of the existing environment, emphasizing key internal characteristics (strengths and weaknesses) and external elements (opportunities and threats) that affect their efficiency. The results align closely with the challenges and opportunities identified in agribusiness development and innovation ecosystems within developing nations, especially throughout sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2020; World Bank, 2023).

3.2.1. Strengths

The survey findings strongly support the fundamental value proposition of agricultural incubation. A considerable majority of participants (70.6%) recognize that these centers promote innovation and entrepreneurship in agriculture, consistent with the global acknowledgment of incubators as drivers of economic diversification and youth involvement in the industry (UNCTAD, 2021). The ability to enhance collaboration and networking among stakeholders (65.8%) is another notable advantage, reinforcing the notion that integrated ecosystems are essential for agricultural

transformation, facilitating knowledge sharing and resource collaboration (OECD, 2022). Additionally, their role in skill development for farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs (61.7%) highlights their contribution to human capital enhancement, a crucial requirement in a sector frequently marked by traditional methods and skill deficiencies (AfDB, 2024). Although slightly reduced, the capacity to facilitate access to funding, markets, and technology (55.6%) as well as to generate employment opportunities (55.6%) still signifies a considerable positive effect, highlighting the direct economic advantages of effective incubation. These results collectively indicate that incubation models are fundamentally regarded as valuable tools for agricultural advancement in the region.

3.2.2. Weaknesses

In spite of the strengths, the analysis uncovers several significant weaknesses that hinder optimal performance. The most prominent issue (79.7% agreement) is the perceived inadequacy in addressing the needs and empowerment of women and youth in agriculture. This finding is particularly important, considering that women and youth make up a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce in Nigeria and frequently encounter systemic obstacles to accessing resources and opportunities (NBS, 2023; World Bank, 2024). If incubation models lack inclusivity, they risk reinforcing existing inequalities and overlooking a vast reservoir of potential innovation. The dependence on technology, which can pose a challenge for some farmers (73.2%), highlights a digital divide and underscores the necessity for more adaptable, low-tech, or hybrid strategies that accommodate varying levels of digital literacy and infrastructure availability in rural regions. The difficulty in scaling and replicating successful models (63.6%) indicates challenges related to standardization, resource mobilization for growth, or the absence of strong frameworks for knowledge transfer across various locations. Additionally, the recognition of significant risks, including market and climate risks (62.2%), emphasizes the inherent instability of the agricultural sector, which incubators must navigate. Notably, although the perception of a heavy dependence on external funding and support (36.3% 'Yes') is lower in comparison to other weaknesses, it still represents a potential vulnerability should such funding become unreliable, a frequent issue for development initiatives in emerging economies (IMF, 2023).

3.2.3. Opportunities

The external environment offers considerable opportunities for agricultural incubation in South-South Nigeria. The most significant opportunity (81.4% agreement) is the rising demand for sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices. This aligns with both national and global priorities aimed at addressing the impacts of climate change on agriculture and promoting environmentally sustainable food systems (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2024; UNFCCC, 2025). This trend provides a fertile environment for incubators to cultivate green agricultural innovations. The potential for government support and policies that favor agricultural incubation (76.1%) highlights the necessity of a supportive regulatory and political framework. This is essential as government endorsement can unlock funding, create conducive environments, and encourage public-private partnerships (CBN, 2023). Moreover, there are considerable opportunities for forming partnerships and collaborations with both regional and global organizations (62.3%) as well as for attracting private sector investments (60.9%). These external connections are crucial for obtaining capital, expertise, and broader market networks (IFC, 2024). Additionally, the potential of digital agriculture and precision farming to improve incubation models (55.0%) presents a transformative opportunity, indicating that the integration of technology can greatly enhance efficiency, productivity, and market access for incubatees, assuming that the previously mentioned technological barriers are overcome.

3.2.4. Threats

In spite of the opportunities, various external threats threaten the sustainability of incubation models. Variations in market demand and pricing (63.7%) pose a significant risk, as price fluctuations can jeopardize the profitability of agricultural enterprises and discourage investment. This is especially pertinent in Nigeria's agricultural commodity markets. Complicated regulatory frameworks and bureaucratic hurdles (55.0%) create a major obstacle, frequently hindering business formalization, access to necessary permits, and overall operational efficiency, a challenge widely acknowledged for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria (World Bank Ease of Doing Business, 2024). The ongoing threat of climate change and extreme weather conditions (54.8%) has a direct effect on agricultural productivity, introducing unpredictable risks that can severely disrupt farm operations and, as a result, the success of incubated businesses. Although respondents perceive competition from established agricultural businesses (41.7% 'Yes') as relatively less significant, it continues to pose a challenge for new, often smaller, incubated enterprises striving to capture market share. Likewise, cybersecurity threats impacting digital agriculture and data management (37.0% 'Yes') are acknowledged as an emerging, albeit currently less critical, concern, highlighting an evolving challenge as digital solutions become increasingly integrated into agricultural practices.

In summary, the SWOT analysis reveals that agricultural incubation in South-South Nigeria functions within a dynamic context. While it possesses inherent strengths in promoting innovation, collaboration, and skill enhancement, these models face considerable obstacles due to inclusivity gaps, technological limitations, and challenges in scaling. The external environment presents significant opportunities through rising demand for sustainable practices, government backing, and collaborative efforts, yet these prospects are moderated by market fluctuations, regulatory challenges, and the overarching effects of climate change. Effectively addressing these weaknesses and capitalizing on opportunities while managing threats will be crucial for the sustainable development and broader influence of agricultural incubation in the region.

4. Conclusion

The SWOT analysis distinctly illustrates that agricultural incubation models in South-South Nigeria are regarded as significant drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation. Participants express strong support for their ability to promote collaboration and cultivate vital skills among farmers. Nevertheless, a crucial finding is that these models encounter considerable internal shortcomings, particularly their insufficient outreach and empowerment of women and youth, along with an excessive dependence on technology that may not be universally available in their agricultural practices. On the external front, the rising demand for sustainable agricultural methods and the potential for enhanced government and private sector backing offer substantial opportunities. In contrast, the inherent instability of agricultural markets, intricate regulatory environments, and the increasing effects of climate change pose serious threats that could jeopardize their long-term sustainability. Consequently, for incubation centers to fully achieve their potential, strategic measures must be adopted to improve inclusivity and adaptability, while actively addressing external risks.

Recommendations

- In light of the results from this SWOT analysis, the following recommendations are put forth to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of agricultural incubation models in South-South Nigeria
- It is essential to create and execute targeted programs and policies within incubation centers that specifically cater to the distinct needs and challenges encountered by women and youth. This initiative should encompass customized training modules, streamlined access to financing, mentorship opportunities, and adaptable incubation schedules.
- While adopting digital agriculture, incubation models ought to implement a multi-tiered strategy for technology integration. This approach should provide low-tech, accessible solutions in conjunction with advanced digital tools, along with comprehensive, context-specific training to ensure that all farmers, irrespective of their digital literacy, can reap the benefits.
- Incubation centers must actively seek a more diversified funding strategy, reducing their dependence on external support. This strategy should include investigating internal revenue generation models (such as service fees and equity stakes in successful enterprises), forging strong connections with local financial institutions, and crafting persuasive proposals for private sector investment (IFC, 2024).
- There should be an investment in creating standardized yet flexible frameworks, curricula, and operational guidelines for effective incubation models. This effort should involve thorough documentation of best practices, well-defined performance metrics, and mechanisms for knowledge transfer to facilitate easier scaling and replication across various geographical regions.
- Incorporate comprehensive market intelligence services and climate-resilient agricultural methodologies into incubation programs and support services. This encompasses training in market analysis, value chain enhancement, access to climate-smart technologies, and strategies for crop diversification.
- Incubation centers, both individually and collectively through their associations, ought to proactively collaborate with government entities to promote more efficient regulatory frameworks, transparent land tenure policies, and favorable incentives for agricultural startups.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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