

**Research Article**

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# **Assessing The Challenges and Opportunities For Somaliland's Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) In Accessing International Markets.**

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## **Abstract**

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises play a pivotal role in driving the global and international economy by significantly contributing to employment rates, as well as fostering economic and social development. The internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises has been the subject of extensive research and analysis by scholars and governmental bodies across the globe. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the correlation between international activities and the internationalization performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). However, there is a dearth of research focusing on the determinants of this relationship, including drivers of export and their barriers. This gap in the literature is especially noticeable in transition economies like Somaliland, where SMEs play a critical role in supporting economic progress. The research was covered a sample size of 40 SME owners or key decision-makers. Although the number of participants is restricted to 40, this sample size is sufficient for conducting thorough qualitative data collection and analysis. Obtaining a bigger sample size in Somaliland can be difficult because of logistical and resource limitations. Conducting a concentrated examination of handicrafts will provide a more thorough investigation into the distinctive encounters within this particular sub-sector. An interview guide with a semi-structured format was created, incorporating information from pertinent research on the international expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), obstacles faced in Somaliland, and unique characteristics of the export industry.

## **Keywords**

SMEs,  
Internalizations of  
small and medium  
enterprises,  
export,  
Somaliland.

## Introduction

SMEs internationalization is crucial for both export-firm growth and as a macroeconomics. This is because international expansion allows a company to grow its global market share, which can lead to increased sales and, eventually, increased production volume. Expansion of production capacity to satisfy market demand creates job opportunities in local communities. However, the majority of extant SME internationalization research, such as that by Onkelinx and Sleuwaegen (2018), Rutashobya and Jaensson (2014), Alam and Pachera (2003), Zahra and George (2002), and Czinkota (2002), focuses on SME export activities, such as antecedents and export performance. To be sure, little is known about the chances and constraints for developing-country SMEs (DC-SMEs) to expand outside national borders. Similarly, the internationalization motivations and strategies of under developed countries SMEs have gone unexplored. Nonetheless, SMEs are expected to account for 35% to 40% of Somaliland's GDP). Recognizing the significance and potential of SMEs, the country has made efforts since the 2000s to encourage their development and enable them to trade smoothly both domestically and globally, while addressing obstacles in marketing, management, infrastructure, technology, and legislation. Among the initiatives are the availability of financing and market research for their products. Despite these efforts, the potential of many SMEs remains untapped, and their products have yet to access international markets. For example, Somaliland has a very low share of manufactured exports (0.2%), making it one of East Africa's least export-oriented economies. Despite such faults in internationalization, the sector's unique opportunities and challenges in going global remain unknown, and the exporting objectives and strategies adopted have received little attention in SME studies. Obviously, the owners of SMEs want to know about potential opportunities that may persuade them to extend their activities abroad. Similarly, local institutions

and policymakers are expected to comprehend the sector's challenges in order to design coherent SME internationalization policies, which are still absent in the majority of developing nations. As a result, research like this one are crucial for enlightening all stakeholders in the SME sector. This research arrives at this key moment by examining not just the prospects and obstacles for internationalizing SMEs in developing countries such as Somaliland, but also their internationalization motivations and methods. To achieve these objectives, the literature review comes first, followed by the methodology, research findings, and finally the discussion and recommendation.

In the context of Somaliland and for the purpose of the SME policy, micro, Small, and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) encompass enterprises that have a workforce of fewer than 100 individuals and have sales turnover or own total assets amounting to less than USD 500,000. "Micro Enterprise" refers to an enterprise that employs a maximum of four individuals and has an annual sales turnover or total assets that do not exceed USD 5,000. A "small enterprise" can be characterized as a business entity that maintains a workforce ranging from 5 to 20 individuals while exhibiting yearly sales or total assets within the range of USD 5,000 to USD 50,000. A "medium-scale enterprise" is characterized by employing a workforce ranging from 21 to 100 individuals, and it typically exhibits yearly sales or total assets falling between the range of USD 50,000 and USD 500,000. Large enterprises are defined as businesses that have annual sales exceeding USD 500,000 and employ more than 100 individuals. The definitions of MSMEs are provided in Table 1.0

**Table 1.0: Somaliland MSML definitions**

<b>Enterprise</b>	<b>Number of employees</b>	<b>Annual sales/ turnover or total sales</b>
Microenterprise	1-4	Up to \$ 5 000
Small enterprise	5-20	Between \$ 5000 - \$ 50 000
Medium enterprise	21-100	Between \$ 50 000 - \$ 500 000
Large enterprise	Over 100	Over \$ 500 000

**Source: Somaliland ministry of trade, 2012.**

Several studies have been undertaken to study the elements that promote SMEs to access global markets (Leonidou, 1998; Pett, Francis, & Wolff, 2004; Pangarkar, 2008). International development can have an impact on the operations of businesses that are expanding internationally. The OECD identifies four motivators: growth, knowledge, network/social linkages, supply chain links, and local and regional markets. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) confront major challenges when it comes to internationalization. Information, functionality, marketing, procedures, government laws, tasks, and environmental problems are all internal and external impediments to internationalization (Wiedersheim-Paul, Olson, & Welch, 2018; Ter Wengel & Rodriguez, 2006; Ramah & Ramos, 2010; Hashim, 2012; OECD, 2013). Recognizing that the internationalization efforts of SMEs improve economic growth, governments have established initiatives to assist SMEs in overcoming impediments to global expansion. Government aid is affected by a country's economic state and its SMEs (Seringhaus & Rosson, 1990; Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2007). To get access to global markets SMEs require government and network assistance. Consumers, consultants, suppliers, and financial institutions in SME networks can supply useful information on other markets, making internationalization easier (Sharma & Johanson, 2002). According to the World Bank (2017), exports of goods and services by Vietnamese firms amounted to 80% of GDP in 2012 and more than 90% in 2016. The economic impact of SMEs remains minimal. SMEs account for 97% of all businesses but only 20% of total exports (World Bank, 2017). According to 2021 data, SMEs made a considerable contribution to a variety of economic metrics. In 2022, SME

employment, GDP, and exports exceeded 77%, 50%, and 30%, respectively (In statistics). SMEs contributed more in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti than in Somaliland. Somaliland has been preparing to join a number of international treaties in order to increase its worldwide business potential. This research will also look into the complex links that exist between the drivers of the export and their barriers.

**Theoretical models.**

**(i) Uppsala design**

According to the Uppsala model, enterprises gradually internationalize (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975; Welch and Luostarinen, 1988; Welch and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1980). According to Johanson and Vahlne (1977), enterprises prioritize the consideration of "psychic distance" when beginning their internationalisation efforts, causing them to purposefully choose foreign markets that correspond with this criterion. The term "psychic distance" refers to the spatial isolation caused by differences in elements such as language, culture, and political systems. These differences may inhibit information transfer between the organization and the market (Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975). While the Uppsala model was designed to assess larger enterprises' internationalization processes, it can also be used to examine the difficulties and opportunities.

**Methodology**

The research design refers to the overall plan and structure that guides the process of conducting a research study. The research study utilised a

cross-sectional research design and data was collected through the administration of a questionnaire. The focus of the coverage was on the SMEs in Somaliland. The entities under investigation in this study were entrepreneurs, umbrella organisations such as Small Industries, Chamber of Commerce, proprietors, and financial firms.

To test the above claims, a survey of small business key decision makers was conducted over a five-week period between January 2023 and July 2023. The sample consisted of businesses listed with the Ministry of Trade and Tourism. A random sample of 40 firms from the list were successfully contacted by phone and asked to participate in the study. Because of Somaliland's unstable communication and postal systems, a drop-off and pick-up approach was adopted. Researchers in poor countries such as Somaliland have adopted this strategy. This strategy ensured consistent dissemination and collection

procedures that were systematic and under the researchers' control. The survey instrument employed in this study was mostly based on earlier measurements used in the exporting literature. The respondent was asked in the questionnaire to identify how much he/she thought different internationalization hurdles hampered the start-up or extension of his/her firm's export activities. The study collected qualitative and quantitative data and examined variables such as age, size, export experience, types of products shipped, and current export market difficulties and opportunities. These variables were categorized based on relevant literature and identified needs for help, such as financial assistance and training.

### Results and Discussion

This part will summarize the results and the findings of the study.

**Table 1.1: demographic characteristics**

	Characteristics	Percentage
Gender	Male	85%
	Female	15%
Type of the business	Livestock	47%
	Hides	4%
	Minerals/rocks	15%
	Powder soap	5%
	Vegetables	5%
	Foods/incense	10%
	Fish/lobster	14%
Duration of SMEs in International business	Less than one year	9%
	Between 1-3 years	26%
	Between 4-6 years	25%
	More than 6 years	40%

The predominant gender category among managers and owners is male, comprising 85% of the total. Based on the results, it was found that 47% of the participants reported engaging in livestock export as their primary business activity. Additionally, 4% of the respondents indicated that their main line of business involved exporting hides, while 15% reported engaging in the export

of powder soap. Furthermore, 5% of the participants stated that their primary business activity was the export of vegetables, whereas 10% reported engaging in the export of food products. Lastly, 14% of the respondents indicated that their main line of business involved the export of fish and lobster.

Based on the results, it was found that 9% of the participants reported having less than one year of experience in the field of international business. Additionally, 20% of the participants reported having between one and three years of

experience, while 26% reported having between three and five years of experience. The majority, comprising 45% of the participants, reported having more than five years of experience in international business.

**Table 1.2:Major Reasons for Expanding Internationally.**

Major Reasons for Going International	Agree	Disagree
The manager's awareness of international opportunities.	97%	3%
The objectives of maximizing profitability and achieving sustainable growth.	78%	22%
The proficiency in technology/ unique of the product.	83%	17%
The positive perception of one's own country in target markets.	79%	21%
Size, age, and commercial experience of firms	85%	15%
Close proximity to the country's boundaries	65%	35%
The domestic market is tiny and oversaturated	95%	5%
Psychological distance and proximity to overseas clients	89%	11%
Opportunities for foreign markets or market information	82%	18%

The table above presents the primary motivations for managers' inclination to engage in international operations, as determined through a poll.

Manager's knowledge of global opportunities: 97% percent of managers concur that this is a significant motive for pursuing international expansion. Most managers appear to be cognizant of the potential advantages of venturing into untapped areas. Profitability and growth: A significant majority of managers, 78%, concur that this is a primary motive for engaging in foreign expansion. Many managers hold the belief that international expansion is conducive to profit maximization and the attainment of sustainable growth. Product expertise and distinctiveness: 83% of managers concur that this is a significant motive for expanding into overseas markets. Many managers have the belief that their products or services are highly compatible with international markets. Approximately 79% of managers concur that having a favorable view of their own country is a significant motivating factor for engaging in overseas endeavours. Many managers have the belief that their native nation is highly esteemed in the markets they are targeting.

The majority of managers, over 85%, concur that firm size, age, and experience are significant factors that drive worldwide expansion. These findings indicate that larger, more established, and more experienced companies have a higher probability of engaging in international expansion. Approximately 65% of managers acknowledge that proximity to borders is a significant factor in the decision to expand internationally. These findings indicate that companies situated in proximity to international borders have a higher probability of venturing into new markets. According to 95% of managers, one of the main reasons to expand internationally is the saturation of the domestic market. Many managers have the belief that their domestic markets are either insufficiently large or excessively competitive. Psychological distance and client proximity: A significant majority of 89% of managers concur that this factor is a primary motivation for expanding internationally. This implies that numerous managers acknowledge the significance of maintaining proximity to their clients, both in terms of physical presence and psychological connection. Expanding into other markets offers significant prospects and access to valuable information. A

substantial 82% of managers acknowledge this as a primary motivation for international expansion. This indicates that numerous managers hold the belief that there exist substantial prospects for expansion in international markets.

According to Thai and Chong (2008), one of the key factors fueling the export activity of Somaliland firms is the desire to become entrepreneurs. The managers of the majority of Somaliland's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are also the proprietors of the individual firms. As a result, it is critical for small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) embarking on export activities to have a thorough understanding of

export potential, emphasizing the importance of managerial awareness in this regard. Managers' exposure to foreign surroundings also inspires their participation in international endeavors, thereby increasing the proclivity of their small and medium-sized firms to export.

In summary, the table indicates that there are several variables that drive managers to develop their organisations on a global scale. Key determinants encompass the manager's cognizance of global prospects, the capacity for profitability and expansion, the competence and distinctiveness of the product, and the favourable perception of the domestic nation.

**Table 1.3: the internalization barriers facing SMEs**

<b>The Internationalization Barriers Facing SMEs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
Difficulty in meeting the quality/standards/	4.21	0.42
a scarcity of finances to finance the necessary investment for internationalization	4.87	0.35
It is difficult to uncover business prospects in export Markets	3.44	0.29
Insufficient data to analyze potential markets	4.91	0.41
Difficulty in creating and utilizing export distribution channels	3.93	0.28
excessive expenditures for transportation and insurance	3.53	0.25
insufficient time for management to engage with internationalization initiatives	3.69	0.27
Finding reputable foreign representation is difficult	4.31	0.44
Tough and stiff competition in international markets	4.91	0.39
absence of domestic government incentives or assistance	4.11	0.49
inadequate e-commerce infrastructure	4.73	0.34
The presence of high tariffs abroad	4.71	0.41

Source: own survey, 2023

The above table shows the findings of a survey carried out by the authors regarding the obstacles encountered by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the process of internalization. The poll requested participants to assess the significance of several characteristics on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 denoted "insignificant" and 5 indicated "highly significant."

According to the chart, the primary obstacle to internationalisation for small and medium-sized

enterprises (SMEs) is the lack of sufficient e-commerce infrastructure, which is indicated by a mean score of 4.73. Next, there is a lack of funds to support the required investment for international expansion, with an average score of 4.87. Additional significant obstacles encompass "the imposition of substantial tariffs in foreign countries," "challenges in adhering to the organization's quality standards and expectations," and "intense and formidable competition in global markets."

The table additionally displays the standard deviation associated with each element. The standard deviation quantifies the extent of dispersion or variability present in the data. A low standard deviation indicates that the data is tightly grouped around the mean, whereas a large standard deviation suggests that the data is more widely dispersed. The table exhibits a relatively low standard deviation for most criteria, indicating a general consensus among the respondents regarding the significance of the impediments. In general, the table indicates that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) encounter several noteworthy obstacles in the process of expanding their operations internationally. The primary obstacles pertain to matters of financing, infrastructure, and competition.

Somaliland has 60% SMEs but exports 15%. However, SMEs are less internationalised than in other countries. Thus, helping SMEs internationalise is crucial. The report examines Somaliland's SMEs' export support networks and programs. Finally, this study examines how export impulses, export barriers, government support programs, and networks affect SMEs' internationalisation engagement. This study examined prospects and obstacles for internationalising emerging country SMEs, with a focus on Somaliland. Researchers studied their internationalisation motives and techniques. SME internationalisation was facilitated by internationalisation opportunities. Researchers found export rehabilitation incentives, plans, and institutional supports using primary and secondary data. Responsible ministries, financial and nonfinancial institutions, governmental and nongovernmental organisations, development partners, and business associations provided institutional support. However, respondent attributes showed that export promotion programs influence internationalisation decisions. However, insufficient foreign business skills, unawareness of export promotion programs, limited access to funding, and inaccurate market intelligence are the key hurdles. Indirect exporting is the principal internationalisation strategy, driven by profit and

growth goals, home market saturation, and foreign market potential.

Responsible stakeholders should supply foreign market knowledge and, if possible, build information centres to connect SMEs to target markets. To encourage more SMEs to use their services, organisations that help SMEs enter overseas markets should be enhanced. National economic progress depends on management capacity. Business managers influence the fate of companies, so training them is crucial. So training centres should provide more foreign business courses. SME internationalisation issues sometimes involve government and related contexts. However, emerging countries SME managers must be more proactive and, most importantly, have an entrepreneurial mindset. Foreign market-specific marketing programs are crucial. The Internet now brings everything to our desktops. Use resources to get what you want. Finally, SMEs in developing countries should study global markets and identify gaps between their goods and services and the needs of potential international markets. They should also advise relevant bodies on filling gaps. Somaliland has 60% SMEs, yet only 15% of its exports come from them. However, compared to neighbouring countries, SMEs' internationalisation efforts are minimal. Thus, supporting SMEs in their internationalisation initiatives is crucial. This report also evaluates Somaliland's networks and government-supported initiatives to help SMEs export. This study examines how export stimulants and barriers of the export. This essay discusses the potential and challenges of internationalising SMEs in underdeveloped nations, with a focus on Somaliland. Researchers' internationalisation motives and methods were examined. Identifying internationalisation opportunities helps SMEs expand into international markets. The above considerations included encouraging exporting as a way to grow and enter new markets, removing barriers to exportation, and providing exporters with incentives, finance, and other support. Without exporting, firms may have missed these chances. Researchers uncovered export rehabilitation incentives, programs, and institutional supports

using primary and secondary data. National economic success depends on managerial skills. Managers determine the destiny of companies, so training them is crucial. Thus, training centres must encourage worldwide business training. SMEs found many internationalisation issues, largely related to the government and its surroundings. SME managers in developing nations, on the other hand, must be proactive and have an internal locus of control, just like entrepreneurs. Marketing programs that are adapted to overseas markets are essential. Many materials and services are now available to people at their computers thanks to the Internet. Goals can be achieved with the help of readily available resources. For developing-country SMEs, researching global markets is critical. This should be supplemented by in-depth research of the products and services offered by these SMEs, as well as the demands of potential overseas customers. Individuals should provide advice to relevant entities on how to resolve the difficulties.

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