

**BUSINESS INFORMATION NEEDS, SEEKING PATTERNS AND
INFORMATION SERVICES IN THE SMALL, MEDIUM AND
MICRO ENTERPRISES SECTOR (SMME) IN NAMIBIA**

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a study conducted to investigate the business information needs, seeking patterns and information services for small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs) in Namibia. The survey methodology was used and questionnaires were distributed to 308 SMMEs and 60 business service providers in the Windhoek and Oshana districts of Namibia. An in-depth qualitative assessment of the business information services was also conducted in 15 business support organisations in the two districts. The data collected through questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) while qualitative data was analysed using content analysis.

The study revealed that SMMEs have a range of business information needs and top among them are information on: finance, marketing, training and business information. The study also revealed that the information seeking patterns of SMMEs are largely informal with limited use of formal business information services provided by a range of business support services. There are several business support organisations in Namibia providing a range of services, including the provision of business information services. However, the study established that there is need for a coordinated approach towards the provision of business information services in the SMME sector in Namibia.

The study showed that the utilisation of ICTs among SMMEs is very limited to basic computer operations like word processing, book-keeping packages, and spreadsheets. The use of Internet as a business tool and source of business information among SMMEs is also very limited. However, the study shows that the utilisation of ICTs among business support organisations is advanced and that this could be used as a platform to improve information delivery services to the SMMEs.

The study proposes a strategic model that could be used in the deployment of business information services in the SMME sector. This strategy is based on a definition of

business information services, components of business information services and the steps that must be followed in the development of the services. The proposed strategy also outlines the steps that should be taken in the impact assessment of business information services.

The study concludes by making several recommendations concerning the improvement of business information delivery services to the SMME sector. Business support organisations and, in particular government and Chambers of Commerce and Industry need to consider various approaches in the design of sustainable business information services.

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- All the SMME operators and service providers who participated in this study.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife Maureen, my son Rufaro and my late grandparents Elisha and Marian Chiware.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|---|
| AIM | Access to Information and Marketing Centre |
| BIS | Business Information Services |
| BISnet | Business Information Solutions Network |
| BSO | Business Support Organisation |
| BDS | Business Development Services |
| DFID | Department for International Development |
| EDI | Electronic Data Interchange |
| EIS | Enterprise Internet Solutions |
| EU | European Union |
| FAO | Food and Agricultural Organisation |
| FDI | Foreign Direct Investment |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| ICTs | Information and Communication Technologies |
| IT | Information Technology |
| ITC | International Trade Centre |
| JCC | Joint Consultative Council |
| LBSC | Local Business Service Centres |
| LIS | Library and Information Science |
| MIS | Management Information Systems |
| MIS | Marketing Information Systems |
| MTI | Ministry of Trade and Industry |
| NCCI | Namibia Chamber of Commerce and Industry |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NEPRU | Namibia Economic Policy Research Unit |
| NDB | Namibia Development Bank |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisations |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| OSS | One-Stop-Shop |
| PC | Personal computer |

| | |
|--------|--|
| RBRC | Rural Business Resource Centres |
| SACU | Southern African Customs Union |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| SBCGT | Small Business Credit Guarantee Trust |
| SBIC | Small Business Information Centre |
| SME | Small and Medium Enterprises |
| SMME | Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for Social Sciences |
| TPO | Trade Promotion Organisation |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Centre for Trade and Development |
| UNIDO | United Nations Industrial and Development Organisation |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| WSIS | World Summit for Information Society |
| WITFOR | World Information Technology Forum |