

ABSTRACT

South Africa, like most developing countries, has one of the highest levels of unemployment. Within South Africa's borders the highest levels of unemployment are found in areas of the Eastern Cape Province, which is one of the poorest provinces. In these areas, Small Medium Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) have grown out of the necessity for employment. For these SMMEs to succeed, good support programmes from development agencies is vital. It is also important that the recipients of the support perceive this support to be meeting their needs. This research surveyed the perceptions of Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) supported SMMEs regarding the support services they received in the OR Tambo District municipality. The findings confirmed that the SMME entrepreneurs surveyed perceive the ECDC's financial and non-financial support as particularly instrumental in helping them start up their businesses. The biggest perceived challenge is that ECDC does not have enough programmes to help SMMEs to grow beyond start-up stage. Furthermore, the SMME entrepreneurs are dissatisfied with the quality of service they receive from ECDC employees. The lessons of this study are that the SMME entrepreneurs realise the important role that ECDC plays in contributing to their business success. They also believe that ECDC has to evolve constantly with the times by having programmes targeted at start-up businesses, strengthening existing businesses, and growing established businesses to higher levels. The study results suggest that ECDC needs to improve on the quality of their programmes to meet the needs of all types of SMMEs, create more awareness about its programmes, but most importantly, ECDC needs to equip its employees with the skills to support SMMEs of various backgrounds.

