

# **A Study on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Myanmar**

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## **Abstract**

Small and Medium Enterprises are essential for the developing country. Myanmar is one of the developing countries in the world. Indeed SMEs accelerate the economic growth and social progress of the country. SMEs policies are essential to develop the economic sectors. This paper aims to explore the current status of SMEs and identify the role of SMEs in industrialization and to reveal prospects and challenges of SMEs in the development of industrializations in Myanmar. Obviously, SMEs play a significant role in the process of economic development, social and political role in employment creation, resource allocation and income generation, and promotion of employment. The descriptive method was used on secondary data. It is found out the encouraging situations for an effective representation of SME interest. According to the findings from this study, the SMEs in the industrial sector the SMEs play a very important role in economic development. It suggests that SMEs should had need to increase access to finance, to enhance the policy and regulatory environment, and promote entrepreneurship and human capital developments to get better technology, productivity and innovation.

*Key Words: overview of SMEs development in Myanmar, SMEs Development Law, Definition of SMEs, Current Situation of SMEs in Myanmar. Growth of SMEs in Myanmar, Prospects and Challenges of SMEs in Myanmar*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

SMEs are playing a key role in developed and developing countries. SMEs are generally to respond quickly and efficiently to international market signals to take the advantage of trade and investment opportunities and reap the benefit of the international trading system. This suggests that SMEs competitiveness could obviously contribute to improve economic and social development and poverty reduction. The government is recognized that SMEs are main drivers for the country's future national economic development while the government of Myanmar is also focusing on improving the political, social and economic situation in accordance with global development and fostering sustainable economic development, it supports that contribute in developing and developed countries' economic growth. Myanmar has a plan to expand small and medium-sized enterprises enhancing income and lead to social-economic growth. SME growth is often constrained by various factors, such as limited to get information and technological know-how, lack of economies

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of scale, deficiencies in corporate governance, limitations in funds, poor infrastructure, inadequate get to finance, limited marketable, out of date technology, lack of skills and productivity levels, and a lack of business development services.

Government interventions have been required to create enabling environments for SME growth. Such interventions include transparent licensing and permit procedures, financial provisions, information gathering and sharing infrastructure and efficient customs procedures. SMEs encounter several major physical and non-physical challenges relating to get at market and finance. One of challenges concerning market access is a distinct lack of awareness about the advantages and disadvantages of free trade agreements among SMEs. However, because of many pros and cons of foreign investments in the host country, Myanmar need to pursue the suitable measures and to attack SMEs sector development.

Today, SMEs can contribute to these three components; boosting exports, ability to purchase in boosting the middle class and poverty alleviation. The outcome may be an increased domestic household spending and thus if may lift the middle classes purchasing powers as good as alleviate poverty and lift people out of the dire poverty. Therefore, SMEs are very important for economic welfare, this research aim to find out prospect and challenges of small and medium enterprises in Myanmar.

### **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- (a) To explore the current status of SMEs and identify the function of SMEs in industrialization.
- (b) To reveal the prospects and challenges of SMEs in development of Industrializations in Myanmar.

### **1.2 Method of Study**

This paper is based on descriptive method by using secondary data. The necessary data is collected mainly from SMEs Development Center under Ministry of Industry, Small-Scale Industry under Co-operative Department and Internet Website.

### **1.3 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

This study mainly focuses on the situation of SMEs in Myanmar at 2020.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definition of Small and Medium Enterprises

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are non-subsiary, independent firms which employ less than a given number of employees. This number divides across countries. The most frequent upper limited designation of SME is 250 employees as in the European Union. In the European Union is a definition came into force on 1 January 2005 applying to all community acts and funding programs as well as in the field of State and where SMEs can be granted higher intensity of national and regional aid than large companies. The definition provides for an increasing in the financial ceilings: the turnover of medium-sized enterprises (50-249 employees) should not exceed EUR 50 million: that of small enterprises (10-49 employees) should not exceed EUR 10 million while that of micro firms (less than 10 employees) should not exceed EUR 2 million.

With the formulation of the ASEAN Community by the end of 2015, ASEAN has seen great interest and confidence in the prospects and opportunities for businesses, both big and small, in the region. ASEAN recognizes the need to link SMEs, vertically and horizontally, with enterprises, traders, suppliers, manufacturers and consumers within ASEAN member states (AMS) and trade partners. Therefore, by improving their marketable and paving the way for their international, SMEs are able to take advantage of the trade and investment opportunities and benefits from regional economic integration. To ensure that ASEAN shall be globally competitive and innovative by the year 2025, the Post-2015 Strategic Action Plan is being crafted with the aims to (i) promote productivity, technology and innovation; (ii) increase to get finance; (iii) boost market access and internationalization; (iv) enhance policy and regulatory environment; and (v) expand entrepreneurship and human capital development. The definition of SMEs in ASEAN in 2016 is shown in the table (1).

**Table (1) Definition of SMEs in ASEAN in 2016**

Country	Definition	Measure
Indonesia	Less than 100 employee	Employment
Malaysia	Less than RM 2.5 million and Less than 75 employees Different for enterprises	Shareholders' funds and Employment
Philippines	Micro: P 150,000 and below and 1-4 employees Cottage: Above P150,000 to 1.5 million and 5-9 employees Small: Above P1.5 million to 15 million and 10-99	Investment and Employment

	employees Medium: Above P15 million to P 60 million and 100-199 employees	
Singapore	Manufacturing: less than \$12 million fixed assets	Fixed assets and Employment
Thailand	Less than 200 employees or labor intensive industries Less than 100 million baht for capital intensive industries	Employment and Capital
Vietnam	Less than 5 billion Vietnam Dong of capital investment	Capital
Myanmar	Small - 50 employees (300 for labor intensive) -500 million kyats investment  Medium - 300 employees (600 for labor intensive) -500 to 1000 million kyats investment	Employment and Capital Investment

**Source; Eco Echo Journal,**

## **2.2 Definition of SMEs in Myanmar**

Since 1990, there was an official classification of SMEs in Myanmar depend on the four criteria: the number of employees, capital investment, annual production, and power used. The Private Industrial Enterprise Law of 1990 and the 2011 revision, focuses on small and medium sized industries.

The definition of SMEs in Myanmar dates back to the SLORC era, and reflects the emphasis on industrial production that characterized the time into four different metrics that are used to assess firm size, including an industry focused indicator of power used (measure in horse power). Myanmar's previous and current definitions of SMEs come from the Private Industrial Enterprise Law of 1990 and the updated Private Industrial Enterprise Law of 2011.

**Table (2) Classification for small, medium and large enterprises (1990 Private Industrial Enterprises Law)**

<b>Sr. No</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Small</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Large</b>
a	Power used	3 H.P - 25 H.P	25 H.P - 50 H.P	>50HP
b	Employee	10 - 50	50 – 100	>100
c	Capital investment (Million Kyat)	Up to 1	1 – 5	>5
d	Annual Production (Million Kyat)	Up to 2.5	2.5 – 10	>10

**Source: Private Industrial Enterprise Law Myanmar (1990)**

**Table (3) Classification for Small Medium and Large Enterprise (2011 Private industrial Enterprise Law)**

Sr No	Description	Small	Medium	Large
a	Power used	Less than 25 H.P	25 H.P - 50 H.P	>50H.P
b	Employee	10 - 49	50 - 100	>100
c	Capital investment (Million Kyat)	Up to 1	1 - 5	>5
d	Annual production (Million Kyat)	Up to 2.5	2.5 - 10	>10

**Source: SME Development Center**

In relation to Table 2 and Table 3, four measures or criteria for classification, namely electrical usage, number of employees, capital investment and annual production, are applied to disguise different sizes of Myanmar private firms. A small enterprise is defined if business that employs more than 10 and less than 50 workers; power used more than three and less than 25 horsepower of energy, capital investment up to 1 million kyats and a production turnover until 2.5 million kyats of SMEs come from the Private Industrial Enterprise Law of 1990 and the updated Private Industrial Enterprise Law of 2016.

### **2.3 Reviews on Previous Studies**

Literature review on previous studies regarding focus on found various points of view such as SMEs need a conducive business climate and regulation, skill development, obstacles such as lack of get at finance and lack of skill labor. This paper guided how to approach illustration of thesis topic and classification with clear points and highlighted.

Mya Thet Ni (2008) pointed out a study of SMEs in Myanmar. SMEs need a conducive business environment and regulation, adequate basic infrastructure services, entrance to finance. This studied the current status of SMEs and identified the part of SMEs in industrialization and revealed the prospects of SMEs in development of industrialization in Myanmar. It was a descriptive method and based in secondary data and facts collected from different sources literature.

Nu Nu Lwin (2017) analysed the contribution of SMEs in the economy and identified the opportunities and obstacles of Myanmar SMEs. This research mainly focused on seven areas namely, institutional framework, access to supporting services, access to finance access to technology, entrepreneurial education and representation of SMEs interest. This studied point out “Development of SMEs in Myanmar”. This research found out the political willingness, enthusiastic implementation of national development planning, weak institution,

limited sources of finance and technology, weak managerial skills for development of SMEs in Myanmar.

Zun Pwint Phyu (2020) analyzed the development of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Myanmar and exposed the opportunities and challenges of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Kayah State. This thesis found that MSMEs in Kayah State were facing challenges such as financial access, human resource development, technology and innovation, law and regulation, taxation problems and energy crisis. It was descriptive method based on both primary and secondary data.

#### **2.4 Overview of SMEs in Myanmar**

As major driving force for the improvement of economy, SMEs provide opportunities for entrepreneurs, workforce and utilization of natural resources. Agricultural product, forestry product, garment, food & beverages product are major output. Private sectors significantly contribute the industrial production. Establishment of SMEs in mining, manufacturing, construction, trade and services was estimated 99 percent. Critical factors are limiting the growth financing. Human resource is capacity building, technology, market access, energy, infrastructure etc.

Main committee of small & Medium Development was formed on (9.1.2013) with order no.11/2013 of the President's office. As a mean to support SMEs for skill, management effective policy and law, high investment, high technology and market, the following implementation groups were set up by the working committee of SMEs Development.

1. Business Initiative
2. Policy Implementer for the Case of Access to Finance
3. Policy Implementer for Market Penetration
4. Access to Information & Research
5. Human Resources Development
6. Regulatory of SME and Related Laws
7. Cluster Development
8. Monitoring and Evolution and
9. Standardization and Implementation

### **III. Study on the Situation of SMEs in Myanmar**

#### **3.1 Current Situation of SMEs in Myanmar**

At the Ministry of Industry, there were 51685 registered enterprises in Myanmar of which small enterprises were accounted for 30365, medium enterprise 9611 and larger enterprises for 9017 in 2020.

When SMEs are classified by category, data in 2020 shown the food and beverage industry with 55.46% followed by construction materials with 9.38% and clothing and wearing apparel industries with 6.33% of total. As Myanmar is presently trying to develop all sectors of the federal economy, it is obvious that assistances should be given to the SMEs in order to grow in size and quality serving as a base for larger private business to develop. The role of SMEs in the country's economy is very important for Myanmar. The small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in boosting and sustaining the industrial dynamism of the ASEAN member countries. In order to promote the development objectives, including poverty alleviation, the SMEs are assumed as increasing importance in export promotion, production for upgrades goods and services, and a venue for flexible specification. Given current global economic trends, the SMEs have appeared as important instruments in creating the competitive strength of an economy. However, SMEs development in the region have been adversely impacted by a variety of factors such as lack of innovation and managerial skills, technology, marketing, sub-contracting facilities and limited to get financial resources.

### 3.2 Increasing of SMEs in Myanmar

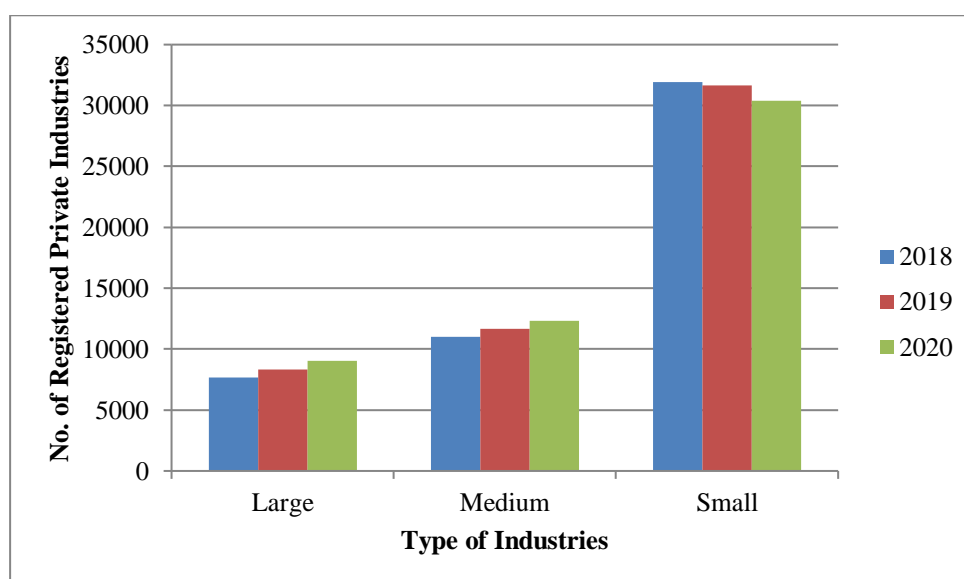
Currently, most SMEs are operated by private companies and only few as state-owned industries. The private own 92 % and the number of private industries are also increasing. The growth of SMEs is synonymous with the development of the private sector. The entrepreneurship spirit is highly associated with the development of SMEs, as there are formed and run by entrepreneurs. Be cause of their private ownership nature, entrepreneur's spirit, ability to adapt to the ever changing environment, they distribute the sustainable growth and employment in a significant manner.

**Table (4) Number of Registered Private Industries**

<b>Industries</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Large	7666 (15%)	8324 (16%)	9017 (17%)
Medium	11035 (22%)	11673 (23%)	12303 (24%)
Small	31927 (63%)	31664 (61%)	30365 (59%)
Total	50628 (100%)	51661 (100%)	51685 (100%)

**Source: Ministry of Industry (2020)**

**Figure (1) Number of Registered Private Industries**



**Source; Table 4**

Table (4) and figure (1) shows the structure of the SMEs. According to table, from 2018 to 2020, the structure of SMEs changed. In 2018 the large enterprise contributed only 15% but it shared increasing up to 17% in 2020. At the same period, the inclusion of Medium enterprise increased from 22% to 23% but the contribution of small enterprise is decreased from 63% to 61% in 2020. Although the numbers of small enterprises were increasing over time, its share were decreasing by comparing with the share of large enterprises. This case was due to the expansion of new technology, human resources, managerial skill and infrastructure, and the inflow of FDI.

### 3.3 The Conditions of SMEs in States and Regions in Myanmar

At present, department of SMEs Development is reorganized and extended on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2014 and (50) branches of SMEs Development Department Branches are newly organized 14 State/ Region and Nay Pyi Taw in related Districts throughout the nation. The following table (4) and Figure (1) shows the number of registered enterprises in each state and region of Myanmar in accordance with the SMEs definition based on 2011 private industry law.

**Table (5) Number of Registered Enterprises in states and Regions, 2020**

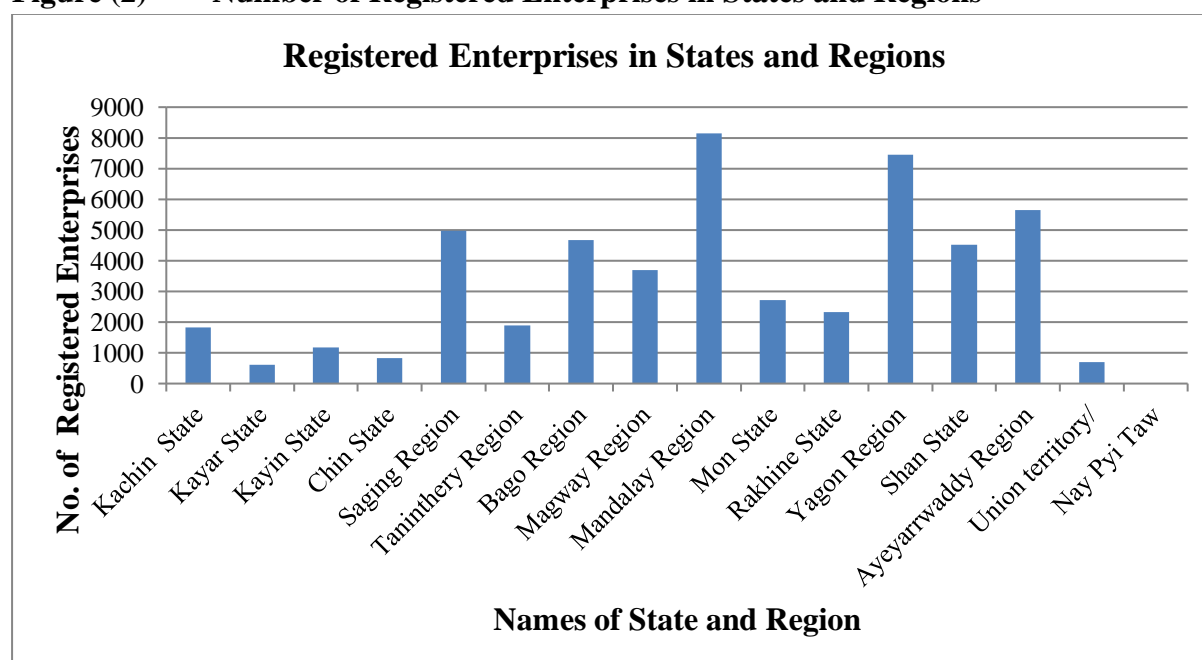
Sr. No	States/Region	Large	Medium	Small	Total	Percentage
1	Kachin State	91	216	1513	1820	3.56
2	Kayar State	50	392	163	605	1.18
3	Kayin State	130	221	834	1185	2.32



4	Chin State	9	70	739	818	1.60
5	Saging Region	471	1237	3272	4980	9.74
6	Taninthery Region	240	201	1443	1884	3.68
7	Bago Region	705	1157	2805	4667	9.13
8	Magway Region	199	698	2787	3684	7.20
9	Mandalay Region	1597	2916	3630	8143	15.92
10	Mon State	254	390	2080	2724	5.44
11	Rakhine State	80	154	2100	2334	4.56
12	Yagon Region	3513	2395	1540	7448	14.57
13	Shan State	382	1030	3103	4515	8.83
14	Ayeyarrwaddy Region	867	630	4143	5640	11.03
15	Union territory/ Nay Pyi Taw	181	215	292	688	1.35
	Total	8769	11922	30444	51135	100
	% of Total	73.55	39.16	59.54	100	100

Source: Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection, 2020

Figure (2) Number of Registered Enterprises in States and Regions



Source: Table (4)

According to the Table (5) there were 51135 registered small and medium enterprises under the Directorate of Industrial Supervision and Inspection, Ministry of Industry in June, 2020. Small enterprises account for 30444, medium enterprises account for 11922 and large

enterprises account for 8769. According to the registration data, Mandalay is the leading region with 8143 registered SMEs, the second leading regions is Yangon with 7448 registered SMEs and Ayeyarwaddy is the third leading region with 5640 registered SMEs respectively. After the top three regions mentioned above, Sagaing, Bago and Magway region follow with the total numbers of 4980, 4667 and 3684 registered SMEs. Kayar state in which is the least populated state in the country with 605 registered SMEs. The least developing state in the country is Chin state that has 818 registered SMEs.

### 3.4 The situation of SMEs Sector under the Ministry of Industry

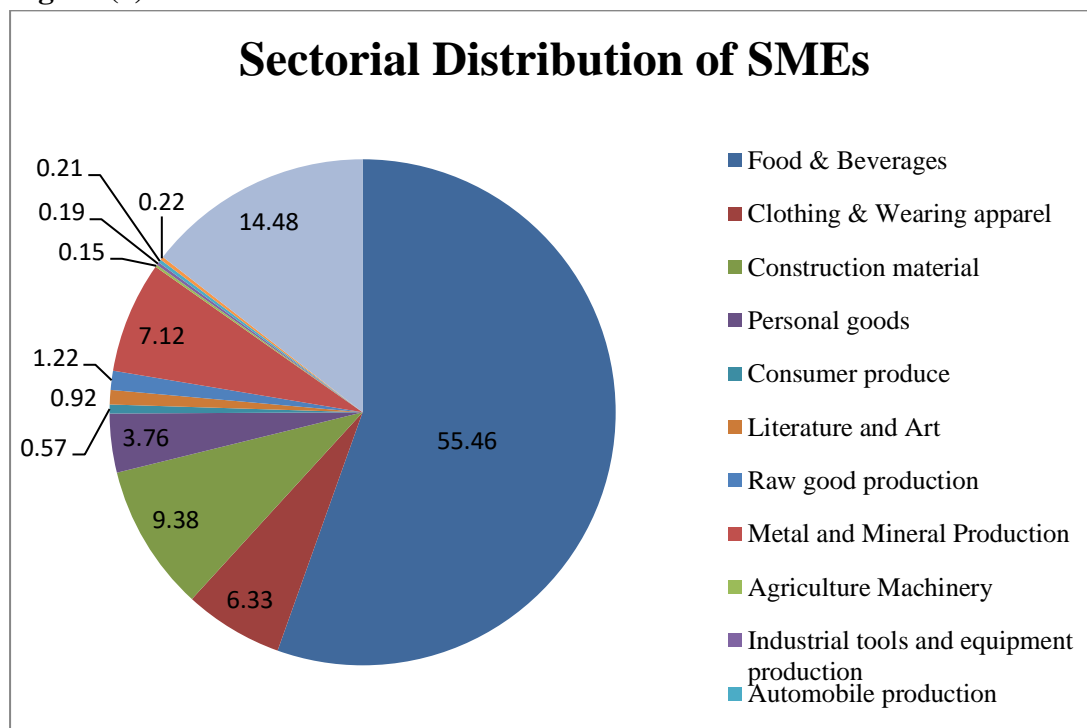
As Myanmar is still an agricultural country, the contribution of GDP by agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forestry accounted to 41.2% while the process and manufacture sector are accounted for about 21.7% at 2011-2012. For the industry sector, principal manufacturing activities are linked to the processing of agricultural resources with food and beverage production generating more than half of gross manufacturing output followed by construction material industries contribution 9.38% and Garment industries contribution 14.14% of the total. Actually, Myanmar's economic structure is early stages of industrialization. The development of sectorial distribution of SMEs for 2020 is shown in the Table (6) and Figure (3).

**Table (6) Sectorial Distribution of SMEs in Myanmar, 2020**

Sr. No	Sub- sector	Quantity of SMEs				%
		Large	Medium	Small	Total	
1	Food & Beverages	4329	6142	17890	28361	55.46
2	Clothing & Wearing apparel	1015	930	1295	3240	6.33
3	Construction material	1285	1632	1877	4794	9.38
4	Personal goods	746	690	484	1920	3.76
5	Consumer produce	145	77	68	290	0.57
6	Literature and Art	110	219	141	470	0.92
7	Raw good production	251	197	175	623	1.22
8	Metal and Mineral Production	443	739	2459	3641	7.12
9	Agriculture Machinery	14	27	36	77	0.15
10	Industrial tools and equipment production	30	29	38	97	0.19
11	Automobile production	71	24	13	108	0.21
12	Electrical equipment	75	20	16	111	0.22
13	General industrial	255	1196	5952	7403	14.48
	Total	8769	11922	30444	51135	100%
	Content % of total	17.15	23.31	59.54	100.00	

**Source: SMEs Development Center, 2020**

**Figure (3) Sectorial Distribution of SMEs**



**Source: Table (6)**

The distribution of SMEs by products groups shows that food and beverage manufacture contributed 55.46%, clothing & wearing apparel 6.33% and construction material 9.38%. And industrial raw good production, Industrial tools and equipment production and automobile production which are all essential for industrial development are not significant in term of establishment and production value.

### 3.5 SME Development Law

The new SME development law was enacted on April 9, 2015 with the objective of supporting in the country. The law classifies business enterprises as (1) manufacturing industry, (2) labor-intensive manufacturing industry, (3) wholesale business (4) retail business (5) service-rendering business and (6) others. The law defines SMEs in terms of the number of workers and capital or turnover.

**Table (7) Definition of SMEs**

Sr. No	SMEs	No. of Worker		Capital(C)/Income (I) (MMK million)	
		Small	Medium	Small	Medium
1	Manufacturing industry	50	300	500	500-1000(c)
2	Labor-intensive industry	300	600	500	500-1000(c)
3	Service-rendering business	30	60	100	100-200(I)
4	Wholesale business	30	60	100	100-300(I)
5	Retail business & other	30	60	50	50-100

**Source: SMEs Development Center**

According to Table (7) SMEs are defined by the number of employees, the capital investment and capital turnover rate in various sector. For small enterprise, it authorizes 30 employees and 50 million kyats turnover in retain business and other, small enterprises 30 employees and 100 million kyats turnover in wholesale, 30 employees and 100 million kyats turnover in service-rendering business, 300 employees and 500 million kyats turnover in labor-intensive, 50 employees and 500 million kyats turnover in manufacturing. For medium enterprise, it authorizes 60 employees and 50 to 100 million kyats turnover in retain business and other, small enterprises 60 employees and 100 to 300 million kyats turnover in wholesale, 60 employees and 100 to 200 million kyats turnover in service-rendering business, 600 employees and 500 to 1000 kyats turnover in labor-intensive, 300 employees and 500 to 100 million kyats turnover in manufacturing.

The new government ratified the SMEs development law in 2017. The objectives of these laws are as follow;

- (a) To develop the natural environment and the social environment for the interest of the union and its citizens;
- (b) To cover the investors and their investment businesses in accordance with the law;
- (c) To create job opportunities for the people;
- (d) To develop human resources;
- (e) To develop high functioning production, service and trading sectors;
- (f) To develop technology, agriculture, livestock, and industrial sectors;
- (g) To develop various professional fields including infrastructure around the Union;
- (h) To enable the citizens to be allowed to work alongside with the international community;
- (i) To develop businesses and investment businesses that meet international standards.

### **3.6 Prospects and Challenges of SMEs in Myanmar**

SMEs are playing in different rates for industrial development. According to their role, it could be categorized as follows: (a) Import substitution in industrialization, (b) Export-oriented SMEs, (c) Rural located SMEs, (d) Local and Traditional SMEs and (e) International Subcontracting SMEs.

When manufacturing domestically, these high industrial products can be easily competitive with imports in quite advantages of this industry. Promoting the import-

substituting high business is most effective in reducing and farming might be encouraged. Myanmar must push the diversification of export product. Most export-oriented industrial can also pushed forward by SMEs. In addition to meet various demands from market, small and medium scale enterprise can be quite advantages.

In the circumstances that farmers comprise 60% of all workers and farming population accounts for 70% of the entire population, thus there is no doubt that the key of Myanmar's economic development lies in agricultural development and farming villages. Therefore, it is necessary not only to expand agricultural products but also to promote various industries in farming villages. In fact, it recognized the establishment of rural located SMEs as an important measure.

Traditional industries in Myanmar have created characteristic products in each region. Most of the products have been limited to share markets so far because they need to improve quality design and other aspects according to large market like national and overseas market in the future. Finally, it should aim for industrialization and development of industries in which Myanmar has comparative advantage of other nation as the ASEAN economic regions have are comparative advantages such as workforce, price level, and technology stages. These above are the different prospects in Myanmar. So special attention needs to be paid.

The most dominant constrained to growth is a shortage of capital or credit. The second challenge is the lack of technical know-how. The third challenge is the shortage of raw materials most serious to growth. The main obstacles for firms to grow: access to finance, access to land, access to electricity and access to skill worker.

Myanmar SMEs are facing with enough limitations and difficulties in conducting the business. Some of the problems are inadequate infrastructure, lack of structured, source of finance, lack of training and advancement of technology, obsolete machinery and equipment, poor knowledge of goods and market growth, lack of intercompany linkages and heavy dependency on important goods. Important challenges include the large volume of imports, weak international relations, lack of experience and knowledge in international trade, a sizeable black market and emigration of skill labor.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

SMEs play an important role in the economic well-being of developed and developing countries. In Myanmar, SMEs are taken under the Ministry of Industry. SMEs make up 126237 or approximately 99.4% of all businesses in Myanmar. At present, SMEs are dominant in all sectors of the economy such as trade and services but the SMEs in the industrial sector play in a very essential role in economic development as they provide

employment to extend the skill of workers, contribute towards import substitution and export promotion, utilization of natural resources, increase the standard of technology and assist in the growth of the most SMEs in all economic sectors.

Actually, Myanmar has sound opportunities such as richness of resources, strategic location sizeable domestic market, cheap labor cost, and various agreements for favorable trade. However, insufficient energy especially electric poor, difficulty to be formal financing and economic sanction are major constraints to grow SMEs in Myanmar. These research findings founded on the encouraging situations for SMEs. In fact these organizations mainly represent naturally, they are try to promote their interests. It can be recognized as encouraging point of SMEs development in Myanmar.

Therefore, SMEs plays a major role in Myanmar economic growth and it's recommended by government and all associations of SMEs agency should encourage providing on development of specific sectors, policy matters, business regulations and structure adjustment. Government and private sector should build up a confident and effective working relationship.

To be better, SMEs are need the basic necessary basic infrastructure, conductive regulations and business environment, equal and adequate access to capital and market demand. Myanmar still needs more efforts to replace outdated technologies and to investment in research and development. To get better technology, productive and innovation, Myanmar SMEs need to get up finance, to enhance the rule and regulatory environment and to enhance entrepreneurship and human capital developments.

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