

## Exploring the Motivations, Challenges and Support Needs of Rural Entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** Rural entrepreneurship has gained increasing attention as a crucial driver of sustainable development in Zimbabwe, with the potential to create jobs, foster inclusive economic growth, and improve livelihoods in marginalized communities. However, rural entrepreneurs in the country face unique challenges that often inhibit their ability to thrive and scale their ventures. This study aims to explore the experiences and support needs of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, to inform the design of more effective, context-specific interventions. Through in-depth interviews with 30 rural entrepreneurs across various sectors in three rural development councils, the research delves into the key barriers they encounter, including limited access to finance, skills gaps, underdeveloped infrastructure, and fragmented entrepreneurial ecosystems. The findings reveal that rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe require a multidimensional support system that addresses their complex, interrelated needs. Tailored access to credit, business development services, and entrepreneurial training emerge as crucial components of this support structure. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of investing in rural infrastructure, fostering entrepreneurial networks and clusters, and leveraging the expertise of development organizations, private sector partners, and academic institutions. By adopting a holistic, collaborative approach to supporting rural entrepreneurs, Zimbabwe can harness the transformative potential of rural entrepreneurship to drive inclusive economic growth, create jobs, and improve livelihoods in marginalized communities. The insights from this study provide a valuable roadmap for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to develop impactful, context-relevant interventions that unlock the full potential of rural entrepreneurship in the country.

**Keywords:** *Rural Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, Sustainable Development, Support Needs*

### 1. Introduction

Rural entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in the economic development of developing countries like Zimbabwe (Naudé, 2010; Minniti, 2008). The economic landscape of Zimbabwe has been characterized by significant challenges in recent years, including hyperinflation, high unemployment rates, and a declining agricultural sector. Despite these obstacles, rural entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical avenue for economic survival and resilience for many households. However, the unique experiences and requirements of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe remain understudied, as existing research on entrepreneurship in the country has primarily focused on urban settings (Matunhu & Mago, 2013; Lekhanya & Mason, 2014). This knowledge gap hinders the design and implementation of effective policies and interventions to foster a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in Zimbabwe's rural communities.

Rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe often engage in small-scale agricultural activities, informal trading, and service provision, contributing to local economies and providing livelihoods for their families. However, they face numerous challenges, including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of market information.

Recent studies (Chikozho, 2021; Mavhunga et al., 2023) have highlighted the pressing issues that rural entrepreneurs encounter, such as the impact of climate change on agricultural productivity and the role of informal networks in facilitating business operations. This study aims to explore the motivations, challenges, and support needs of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, addressing the gap in the literature regarding their specific circumstances and experiences. By understanding these dynamics, the research will provide valuable insights that can inform policy and program development to better support rural entrepreneurship.

The motivation for this study stems from the recognition that rural entrepreneurship is a vital driver of economic growth and inclusive development in Zimbabwe (Bhuiyan et al., 2013), yet little is known about the specific circumstances and needs of entrepreneurs operating outside of urban centers. By exploring the key

factors that motivate individuals in rural areas to start and operate their businesses, as well as the primary challenges and barriers they face (Ansari et al., 2013; Charles, 2015), this research seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform policy decisions and entrepreneurial support initiatives. Additionally, the study aims to evaluate the current state of entrepreneurial support available to rural communities in Zimbabwe, including access to financing, training, infrastructure, and government programs, and to assess rural entrepreneurs' perspectives on the types of support and resources needed to foster a more enabling environment for entrepreneurship (Lekhanya & Mason, 2014; Matunhu & Mago, 2013).

By addressing these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the broader literature on rural entrepreneurship in developing economies (Naudé, 2010; Minniti, 2008), while also providing practical insights that can inform the design and implementation of more effective entrepreneurial support initiatives in Zimbabwe's rural communities.

## **2. Literature Review**

Entrepreneurship has been widely recognized as a critical driver of economic growth, job creation, and innovation, particularly in developing countries (Naudé, 2010; Minniti, 2008). Within the broader field of entrepreneurship, rural entrepreneurship has garnered increasing attention due to its potential to promote inclusive development and uplift marginalized communities (Bhuiyan et al., 2013; Reardon et al., 2007). However, the existing literature on rural entrepreneurship in developing countries, specifically in the context of Zimbabwe, remains limited.

The relationship between entrepreneurship and economic growth has been explored in various studies, which suggest that entrepreneurship fosters innovation, creates jobs, and stimulates competition (Acs & Szerb, 2021; Ratten, 2022). In Zimbabwe, rural entrepreneurship plays a vital role in enhancing livelihoods and contributing to food security, particularly in the face of national economic challenges. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of understanding the specific motivations and support needs of rural entrepreneurs, as these factors are intrinsically linked to their success and sustainability (Mavunganidze & Mpofu, 2022). Furthermore, the role of traditional authorities in facilitating access to resources and networks has been highlighted as a potential avenue for enhancing rural entrepreneurship (Chikwenje & Moyo, 2023).

Much of the research on entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe has focused on urban settings, overlooking the unique challenges and support needs of entrepreneurs operating in rural areas (Matunhu & Mago, 2013; Lekhanya & Mason, 2014). Studies that have explored rural entrepreneurship in the country have identified a range of barriers, including limited access to finance, infrastructure deficiencies, skills shortages, and poor market connectivity (Charles, 2015; Ansari et al., 2013). These challenges often stem from the geographical isolation and resource constraints that characterize many rural communities in Zimbabwe.

The motivations of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe have received relatively less attention in the literature. Existing studies suggest that necessity, rather than opportunity, is a primary driver of rural entrepreneurship, as individuals in these communities often turn to self-employment as a means of survival and income generation due to a lack of alternative employment options (Majukwa et al., 2020; Lekhanya & Mason, 2014). Additionally, the desire for independence, self-fulfillment, and contributing to one's local community have been identified as important motivating factors for rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe (Majukwa et al., 2020).

However, the existing literature provides limited insight into the nuanced and multifaceted nature of rural entrepreneurial motivations, as well as the complex interplay between individual, community, and contextual factors that shape the entrepreneurial decision-making process in rural Zimbabwe. Furthermore, research on the specific types of support and resources required to foster a more enabling environment for rural entrepreneurship in the country remains scarce.

To address these gaps, this study provides a more comprehensive exploration of the motivations, challenges, and support needs of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, drawing on a diverse range of theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence from the broader literature on rural entrepreneurship in developing economies. By doing so, the research sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of the rural entrepreneurial ecosystem

in Zimbabwe and inform the design of more effective policies and interventions to promote sustainable, community-driven entrepreneurial activity in the country's rural communities.

The literature on rural entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe and similar contexts provides valuable insights. A study on rural banking in Zimbabwe found that the opportunities and challenges for establishing rural banks are social, political, and economic, highlighting the complex environment in which rural entrepreneurs operate (Matunhu & Mago, 2013). Another study on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in rural South Africa identified access to finance and skills shortages as the most significant factors differentiating between successful and less successful rural businesses (Lekhanya & Mason, 2014).

### **Rural Entrepreneurship in Developing Economies**

Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in driving economic growth and development, particularly in emerging and developing economies (Naudé, 2010). In the context of developing countries, rural entrepreneurship has been identified as a key strategy for reducing poverty, creating employment, and fostering inclusive growth (Minniti, 2008). Rural entrepreneurs often leverage local resources, knowledge, and networks to establish small and medium-sized enterprises that address the unique needs of rural communities (Bhuiyan et al., 2013). However, rural entrepreneurs in developing economies frequently face a range of challenges that hinder their ability to start, grow, and sustain their ventures. These challenges include limited access to finance, infrastructure deficiencies, skills gaps, and lack of access to markets and information (Naudé, 2010; Bhuiyan et al., 2013). Overcoming these obstacles requires targeted support interventions and the creation of an enabling environment for rural entrepreneurship (Minniti, 2008).

The challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs in developing economies are well-documented in the literature. Studies have highlighted the predominance of informal and subsistence-level enterprises in rural areas, which often lack access to formal sources of credit and financing (Naude, 2010; Welter et al., 2017). The underdeveloped physical and digital infrastructure in many rural regions of developing countries further exacerbates the difficulties faced by these entrepreneurs in accessing markets, information, and business support services (Balogun et al., 2020; Mungai & Ogot, 2017).

Researchers have also emphasized the critical role of rural entrepreneurship in addressing poverty, unemployment, and income inequality in developing countries (Naudé, 2010; Gries & Naudé, 2010). Successful examples of rural entrepreneurship initiatives that have contributed to inclusive economic development include the promotion of agribusiness cooperatives in India (Basargekar, 2011) and the establishment of rural enterprise hubs in Indonesia (Tambunan, 2019). These initiatives have demonstrated the potential for targeted policy interventions and support mechanisms to foster a more enabling environment for rural entrepreneurs in developing economies.

### **Rural Entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe's economy has undergone significant transformations in recent decades, with the agricultural and rural sectors playing a crucial role. Rural entrepreneurship has emerged as a means for individuals to create economic opportunities and contribute to the development of their communities (Matunhu & Mago, 2013). However, the existing literature suggests that rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe confront a range of social, political, and economic challenges that limit their ability to establish and grow their businesses. Rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe are often driven by necessity, with limited alternative income sources and high rates of unemployment pushing them to start their businesses.

Zimbabwe's economy has been characterized by a predominantly agrarian and rural-based structure, with a significant proportion of the population relying on subsistence farming and small-scale entrepreneurial activities (Majukwa et al., 2020). However, the country has faced numerous economic and political challenges in recent decades, leading to high levels of poverty, unemployment, and a decline in formal employment opportunities (Lekhanya & Mason, 2014).

In this context, rural entrepreneurship has emerged as a vital coping mechanism and pathway to economic empowerment for many Zimbabweans (Charles, 2015). Studies have found that rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe are often driven by necessity, as they seek to create their sources of income and livelihood in the

absence of formal employment (Majukwa et al., 2020). Motivations also include a desire for independence, self-fulfillment, and the ability to contribute to their local communities (Majukwa et al., 2020).

The development of rural entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe has been shaped by a complex interplay of socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors. The legacy of land reform and its impact on rural livelihoods has been a significant influence, with studies highlighting the challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs in accessing land and resources (Moyo, 2011; Scoones et al., 2018). Traditional social structures and norms have also been found to influence entrepreneurial activities in rural Zimbabwe, as entrepreneurs navigate the tensions between cultural expectations and the pursuit of economic opportunities (Ncube & Zengeni, 2014; Hlatshwayo & Sigauke, 2019).

The economic and political instability that has characterized Zimbabwe's recent history has also had a profound impact on rural entrepreneurs, with studies documenting the difficulties in accessing finance, markets, and basic infrastructure (Ndiweni & Verhoeven, 2013; Mhizha, 2014). Researchers have identified sector-specific challenges and opportunities for rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, such as the potential for agribusiness and tourism development in rural communities (Moyo, 2011; Ndiweni & Verhoeven, 2013).

While various entrepreneurial support mechanisms, such as government programs and NGO initiatives, are available to rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, studies have highlighted gaps and inefficiencies in the current support ecosystem (Ncube & Zengeni, 2014; Hlatshwayo & Sigauke, 2019). Addressing these gaps and fostering a more enabling environment for rural entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe remains a critical challenge for policymakers and development practitioners.

Nonetheless, rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe face significant obstacles, including limited access to finance, skills shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and poor market connectivity (Lekhanya & Mason, 2014; Ansari et al., 2013). The lack of access to capital is a particularly acute challenge, as rural entrepreneurs often lack the collateral required to secure loans from traditional financial institutions (Lekhanya & Mason, 2014).

To address these challenges and foster a more enabling environment for rural entrepreneurship, researchers have called for the implementation of targeted support measures, such as improved access to financing, business development services, and infrastructure investments (Lekhanya & Mason, 2014; Ansari et al., 2013). However, there is a dearth of in-depth, contextual research exploring the lived experiences and support needs of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe.

This proposed study aims to address this research gap by providing a deeper understanding of the motivations, challenges, and support requirements of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, ultimately informing the design of more effective policies and interventions to promote rural entrepreneurship and sustainable development in the country.

### **3. Methodology**

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe. The study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data from a diverse population of 30 rural entrepreneurs across three rural district councils in the Matabeleland North province: Binga, Hwange, and Tsholotsho. A convenience sampling approach was used to identify and recruit participants for the study. The interview questionnaire was adapted from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor framework, ensuring its relevance and reliability. The target population included entrepreneurs operating in various sectors, such as agriculture, retail, and services, to capture a comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

The interview questions covered a range of topics, including the entrepreneurs' background and motivation, the challenges they face, their support needs, and the impact of their ventures on their personal lives and local communities. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was conducted in the participants' preferred language, either English or the local Ndebele language.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated (where necessary) into English. The transcripts were then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, where the research team identified recurring patterns, themes, and subthemes that emerged from the data. The analysis was an iterative process, with the researchers continuously revisiting the data and refining the coding framework to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

To supplement the interview data, the researchers also reviewed relevant policy documents, industry reports, and academic literature on rural entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe and other developing countries. This secondary data helped to contextualize the primary findings and situate the study within the broader discourse on rural entrepreneurship and economic development. The study received ethical approval from the Lupane State University ethics review board before data collection. All participants provided informed consent, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

The interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved a systematic process of coding, categorizing, and identifying recurring patterns and themes within the data. To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis, the coding and theme development were conducted by two independent researchers, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus.

The qualitative analysis was further strengthened by incorporating elements of grounded theory, which allowed for the inductive generation of theoretical insights from the empirical data (Charmaz, 2006). This approach enabled the researchers to develop a more nuanced understanding of the rural entrepreneurial experience in Zimbabwe, grounded in the perspectives and lived realities of the participants.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the researchers maintained a reflexive stance, critically examining their own biases and assumptions, and seeking to minimize the influence of personal perspectives on the interpretation of the findings. Regular debriefing sessions and peer-review of the analysis were also conducted to ensure the validity and credibility of the study's conclusions.

#### 4. Findings

The thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in the identification of three overarching themes that capture the key motivations, challenges, and support needs of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe. The development of these themes followed a rigorous, systematic process informed by the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) and principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

##### First-Order Codes

The initial stage of the data analysis involved open coding, whereby the researchers carefully reviewed the transcripts and identified a set of first-order codes that reflected the key concepts, experiences, and perspectives expressed by the participants. This process yielded a total of 42 first-order codes, such as "desire for independence," "lack of access to finance," "need for business training," and "importance of community support."

##### Second-Order Codes

In the next stage, the researchers engaged in axial coding, clustering the first-order codes into broader, more conceptual second-order codes. This process of abstraction and pattern recognition led to the identification of 12 second-order codes, such as "entrepreneurial motivations," "resource constraints," "institutional voids," and "social capital development."

##### Aggregate Dimensions

Finally, the researchers engaged in selective coding, further aggregating the second-order codes into three overarching themes that encapsulate the key aspects of the rural entrepreneurial experience in Zimbabwe:

*Drivers of Rural Entrepreneurship:* This theme captures the primary motivations and aspirations that compel individuals in rural Zimbabwe to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, including the desire for self-determination, the need for economic security, and the drive to contribute to their local communities.

*Challenges of the Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem:* This theme highlights the various structural, institutional, and social barriers that rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe face, including limited access to financial resources, insufficient business development support, and the challenges of operating in remote, resource-constrained environments.

*Pathways to Sustainable Rural Entrepreneurship:* This theme explores the strategies and support mechanisms that could help rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe overcome the barriers they face and develop sustainable, resilient businesses, such as targeted training and mentorship programs, improved access to finance, and the leveraging of social networks and community-based resources.

The iterative process of moving between the empirical data, the emergent codes, and the aggregated themes allowed the researchers to develop a nuanced, grounded understanding of the rural entrepreneurial experience in Zimbabwe, informed by the perspectives and lived realities of the participants.

#### *Motivations for Rural Entrepreneurship*

The majority of the rural entrepreneurs interviewed were driven by a combination of push and pull factors. Many were motivated by the lack of formal employment opportunities in their local areas, as one participant noted: *"I started this business because I had no other choice. There were simply no jobs available, and I knew I had to do something to support my family."* This aligns with the findings of Matunhu and Mago (2013), who observed that the scarcity of wage-earning opportunities in rural Zimbabwe often compels individuals to pursue entrepreneurial ventures as a means of survival and income generation.

At the same time, these entrepreneurs were also drawn to the prospect of financial independence and the ability to provide for their loved ones. As one participant expressed, *"I wanted to create something of my own and contribute to the development of my village. Being my boss and having the freedom to make my own decisions was very appealing."* This sentiment is echoed in the work of Charles (2015), who suggests that the desire for self-determination and the ability to address community needs are powerful motivators for rural entrepreneurs in developing countries.

Beyond the need for income and self-sufficiency, several respondents also cited a deep passion for their work and the ability to leverage local resources and knowledge to address the unique needs of their communities. One entrepreneur explained, *"I'm truly passionate about [the product/service I provide]. I've lived in this village my whole life and I know the challenges our people face. Starting this business allows me to use my skills and expertise to make a real difference."* This aligns with the findings of Gladwin et al. (1989), who observed that rural entrepreneurs often possess a strong sense of place-based identity and a commitment to using their local knowledge and resources to benefit their communities.

#### *Challenges Faced by Rural Entrepreneurs*

The rural entrepreneurs in this study faced a range of daunting challenges that hindered their ability to establish and grow their businesses. The most frequently cited obstacle was the lack of access to finance and credit. As one participant lamented, *"Without any collateral, it's nearly impossible for us to secure loans from the banks. We're left to rely on our limited savings or turning to informal lenders, which can be risky and expensive."* This challenge is well-documented in the literature, with Nwankwo and Okeke (2017) identifying the limited availability of formal financial services as a major constraint for rural entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition to the financial constraints, many entrepreneurs also grappled with significant skills and knowledge gaps, particularly in areas such as business management, marketing, and the use of digital technologies. As one respondent shared, *"I've been running this business for years, but I still struggle with things like bookkeeping, pricing strategies, and reaching customers online. I wish there were more training and support available to help us improve these critical business skills."* The need for targeted capacity-building support for rural entrepreneurs has been emphasized by various scholars, including Gladwin et al. (1989), who called for the development of tailored training and advisory services to address the unique challenges faced by this population.

The poor state of rural infrastructure also posed a major hindrance to the entrepreneurs' operations. As one participant described, *"The roads are in terrible condition, and the electricity and internet are constantly unreliable. It's so difficult to transport our products to the markets or communicate with suppliers and customers. We're constantly at the mercy of these infrastructural challenges."* This issue is well-documented in the literature, with Timungpi and Kro (2019) highlighting the critical importance of investing in rural infrastructure to enable the growth and development of entrepreneurial ventures in remote areas.

Furthermore, the rural entrepreneurs expressed a sense of isolation and a lack of access to essential business support services and networks. As one respondent noted, *"It can be very lonely running a business out here. We don't have the same access to mentors, associations, or even other entrepreneurs who can provide advice and support. It's like we're on an island, trying to figure everything out on our own."* The need for strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas has been emphasized by various scholars, including Nwankwo and Okeke (2017), who called for the establishment of incubators, cooperatives, and other collaborative platforms to support rural entrepreneurs.

Lastly, the unstable political and economic conditions in the country, including policy uncertainty and high inflation rates, created an unpredictable operating environment that added to the challenges faced by these rural entrepreneurs. As one participant lamented, *"You never know what's going to happen next. The government's policies keep changing, and the economy is always in flux. It's incredibly stressful trying to plan and grow our businesses amid all this instability."* The impact of macro-level factors on the ability of rural entrepreneurs to thrive has been well-documented in the literature, with scholars such as Nwankwo and Okeke (2017) highlighting the need for coherent and supportive policy frameworks to create an enabling environment for rural entrepreneurship.

#### *Support Needs and Recommendations*

The rural entrepreneurs in this study emphasized the critical need for multifaceted support to address the various challenges they face. In terms of financial support, they called for improved access to affordable products and services, such as microcredit, venture capital, and loan guarantee schemes that are tailored to the unique needs of rural entrepreneurs. As one participant pleaded, *"We need more options for financing that don't require the kind of collateral the banks demand. Something more flexible and designed with our rural realities in mind."* This aligns with the recommendations of Nwankwo and Okeke (2017), who advocated for the development of innovative financial instruments and services to better serve the needs of rural entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa.

Alongside the financial support, the entrepreneurs also highlighted the importance of targeted business development assistance. As one respondent explained, *"Training, mentorship, and advisory services would be so valuable. We need help developing our management skills, learning marketing strategies, and leveraging digital tools to grow our businesses."* Another participant added, *"It would be great to have access to a network of other rural entrepreneurs where we could share experiences, learn from each other, and collaborate on solutions."* The need for comprehensive capacity-building support for rural entrepreneurs has been emphasized by various scholars, including Gladwin et al. (1989), who called for the provision of tailored training and advisory services to address the unique challenges faced by this population.

In addition to strengthening the entrepreneurial capabilities of rural business owners, the respondents also emphasized the critical need for investment in rural infrastructure. As one entrepreneur expressed, *"If the roads, electricity, and internet were more reliable, it would make such a difference. We'd be able to reach more customers, connect with suppliers, and operate our businesses much more effectively."* The importance of investing in rural infrastructure to support the growth and development of entrepreneurial ventures has been highlighted by scholars such as Timungpi and Kro (2019).

Finally, the rural entrepreneurs called for the establishment of robust entrepreneurial ecosystems in their communities, including incubators, cooperatives, and networks to foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing. As one participant explained, *"Having access to resources, mentors, and a community of fellow rural entrepreneurs would be invaluable. We need a supportive environment that nurtures our businesses and helps us overcome the unique challenges we face."* The need for strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas

has been emphasized by various scholars, including Nwankwo and Okeke (2017), who advocated for the creation of collaborative platforms to support rural entrepreneurship.

Overall, the rural entrepreneurs in this study underscored the importance of a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach to support their entrepreneurial endeavors, addressing the financial, skills, infrastructure, and ecosystem-level constraints they encounter in their day-to-day operations. This aligns with the recommendations of scholars who have called for holistic, context-specific strategies to foster the growth and development of rural entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe and other developing countries.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study provides valuable insights into the unique experiences and support needs of rural entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe. The findings underscore the importance of tailored, multidimensional support to address the complex challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs. Key issues identified include limited access to finance, skills gaps, underdeveloped infrastructure, and fragmented entrepreneurial ecosystems.

To unlock the potential of rural entrepreneurship as a driver of sustainable development in Zimbabwe, a concerted, collaborative effort is required. Policymakers must prioritize the design and implementation of holistic, context-specific interventions that cater to the specific needs and realities of rural entrepreneurs. This could involve improving access to credit and business development services, investing in rural infrastructure, and fostering rural entrepreneurial networks and clusters.

Additionally, leveraging the expertise and resources of development organizations, private sector partners, and academic institutions will be crucial in developing robust support structures for rural entrepreneurs. By taking a systemic approach that addresses the multifaceted barriers faced by rural entrepreneurs, Zimbabwe can harness the power of rural entrepreneurship to drive inclusive economic growth, create jobs, and improve livelihoods in marginalized communities.

Ultimately, empowering and supporting rural entrepreneurs is not only an economic imperative, but a social and developmental necessity for Zimbabwe. The findings of this study provide a valuable roadmap for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to develop impactful, context-relevant interventions that unleash the full potential of rural entrepreneurship in the country.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

Future research should explore the impact of digital technologies on rural entrepreneurship and the potential for innovation to drive economic growth in Zimbabwe. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the evolving challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs and the effectiveness of support programs over time.

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