



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Economic inclusion in crisis: Challenges and opportunities for policy reform in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe's economic crisis, characterised by hyperinflation, currency instability, and high unemployment, has deepened due to COVID-19, disrupting livelihoods and heightening poverty. The government's reform agenda aims to stabilise the economy, attract investments, and improve social protection, yet faces challenges including political resistance and institutional deficits. This paper investigates policy reform challenges and opportunities, emphasising economic inclusion as a catalyst for equitable access to economic opportunities, fostering social cohesion, and boosting competitiveness. Utilising qualitative methods, it assesses the role of policies in enhancing access to assets, markets, and social safety nets. The paper advocates for stabilisation measures to curb inflation and currency volatility, increased financial access for small businesses, trade policy reforms for market integration, strengthened social protections, and educational investments to match economic demands. It synthesises best practices from global economic inclusion strategies across sectors like agriculture and industry. Concluding with recommendations, the study underscores inclusive policies as pivotal for Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy, advocating for synergy between inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Key words: Economic inclusion, policy reform, social protection, competitiveness, sustainable growth

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of a protracted economic crisis, Zimbabwe stands at a crossroads, with the potential to redefine its future through strategic policy reforms. According to Maimbo and Luo (2021), the nation's economy, once buoyant, now grapples with the repercussions of hyperinflation, currency instability, and soaring unemployment rates. These challenges, compounded by the global COVID-19 pandemic, have not only disrupted livelihoods but also heightened poverty, pushing the socio-economic fabric to its limits. This paper seeks to dissect the intricate web of policy reform challenges and opportunities within Zimbabwe, with a particular focus on economic inclusion as a cornerstone for recovery and growth. Economic inclusion, in this context, is more than a mere buzzword; it is the lifeline that could ensure equitable access to economic opportunities, foster social cohesion, and enhance national competitiveness. Through a qualitative lens, the study delves into the role of policies in augmenting access to assets, markets, and social safety nets, while advocating for robust stabilisation measures to mitigate inflation and currency volatility. It underscores the imperative for increased financial access for small businesses, trade policy reforms for market integration, and fortified social protections, alongside educational investments tailored to meet the evolving economic demands. Drawing from a rich tapestry of global economic inclusion strategies, the paper synthesises best practices across pivotal sectors such as agriculture and industry. It culminates in a set of recommendations that not only align with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy but also champion the synergy between inclusive growth and sustainable development. As Zimbabwe navigates through these turbulent times, this

research illuminates the path towards a more inclusive and resilient economy, where every citizen has a stake in the nation's prosperity.

BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe's economy has been in a state of flux, marked by a series of economic challenges that have eroded the foundations of financial stability and growth (Maviza, Maphosa, Tshuma, Dube, and Dube, 2019). The onset of hyperinflation has led to a precipitous decline in the purchasing power of the Zimbabwean dollar (Kavila, 2015), creating a cascade of economic hardships for the populace. The unemployment rate has soared, leaving a significant portion of the population without a steady income or the means to support their families. As of 2023, the unemployment rate stands at approximately 46.7%, affecting more than 2.8 million people of working age (Chikandiwa, 2023). Adding to this is the COVID-19 pandemic which exacerbated these issues, disrupting the already fragile economic activities and amplifying the vulnerabilities of the population (World Bank, 2020). The health crisis has not only strained the country's medical infrastructure but also imposed additional burdens on the economy, as lockdown measures and global uncertainty have stifled economic transactions and investments.

In response, the government of Zimbabwe has initiated a series of economic reforms aimed at stabilising the currency, curbing inflation, and fostering economic inclusion. To further enhance currency stability, the extension of the United States dollar as legal tender until 2030 has been implemented (Reuters, 2023). This move mitigates policy uncertainty and provides a stable backdrop for economic transactions, both domestic and international.

Efficiency and governance within the public sector have also been areas of focus. The government has initiated reforms to streamline public services and improve the governance of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), aiming to ensure transparency and accountability in their operations (Ncube, 2023; Mlambo, 2016).

Agriculture, as a vital sector of the economy, has seen transformative policies aimed at increasing productivity and modernising practices (Schneidman, 2016). These reforms are expected to boost the sector's contribution to the economy and enhance food security. The private sector's growth and competitiveness have not been overlooked, with initiatives designed to stimulate economic diversification and job creation (Mlambo, 2016). Similarly, financial sector reforms have been introduced to bolster the stability and functionality of this critical sector (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, 2023). According to Makaye (2019), Land Policy has also undergone significant changes, with the introduction of a 99-year land lease program to improve land use and agricultural productivity. This policy is a cornerstone of the government's strategy to modernise agriculture and ensure its role in economic development.

Tax reforms, including the introduction of new taxes on tobacco turnover and mobile network transactions, have been enacted to widen the tax base and increase government revenue (Saungweme, 2021). These fiscal measures provide the necessary resources for public investment and social services, contributing to the overall reform agenda. Collectively, these reforms represent the Zimbabwean government's resolve to address the economic challenges head-on.

However, these efforts have been met with political resistance and are further complicated by institutional weaknesses that undermine the efficacy of policy implementation (Masiyakurima-January and Muzvidziwa-Chilunjika, 2020). The lack of consensus among political actors and the absence of robust institutions capable of navigating the crisis have impeded the path to economic recovery and inclusion (Maguchu, 2019). The relentless surge of hyperinflation has decimated the value of the Zimbabwean dollar, plunging the economy into a maelstrom of financial instability. This economic turbulence has not only eroded the purchasing power of citizens but has also cast a long shadow over the prospects of economic recovery and development. The unemployment crisis looms large, with a burgeoning segment of the populace relegated to the margins, bereft of steady income or the means to sustain their livelihoods.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has further compounded these tribulations, acting as a catalyst for economic disruption and amplifying the vulnerabilities of an already beleaguered population. The pandemic's ramifications have transcended health concerns, exerting a stranglehold on economic activities and investment flows, as stringent lockdown measures and pervasive global uncertainty have throttled the nation's economic pulse (Bui, 2024). In the face of this daunting scenario, the government's reformative thrust seeks to anchor the economy, entice foreign investment, and weave a stronger social safety net. Yet, these laudable initiatives are ensnared in a web of political discord and institutional frailties, which stymie effective policy enactment and execution. The absence of a unified political will and robust institutional frameworks has thwarted efforts to navigate through the economic tempest and chart a course towards inclusive prosperity.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the multifaceted challenges and opportunities for policy reform in Zimbabwe's context of economic crisis. The qualitative approach was chosen for its strength in providing in-depth insights into complex social phenomena, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of individuals and the socioeconomic dynamics at play.

Hannig and Jansen (2010) acknowledged that economic inclusion involves intricate interactions between various economic, social, and political factors that are best captured through qualitative analysis. Cypress (2015) coined that qualitative methods enabled a deep exploration of the specific context of Zimbabwe, which is crucial for understanding the unique challenges and identifying tailored opportunities for reform. More so, the focus on individual and collective experiences aligns with the capabilities approach, emphasising the importance of human agency and the subjective aspects of economic participation. Qualitative data provided rich insights into the effectiveness of existing policies and the potential impact of proposed reforms, directly informing policymaking processes. The study utilised a variety of qualitative methods to analyse secondary data, ensuring a thorough comprehension of the subject matter. This included a detailed review of policy documents, documentaries, economic reports, and scholarly articles to gather a range of viewpoints on the economic crisis and possible policy changes. The aim was to situate the insights within the wider conversation on economic inclusion and policy reform. Data collected was subjected to thematic analysis, where patterns, themes, and narratives were identified and interpreted

in relation to the theoretical framework (Bengtsson and Andersen, 2020) of inclusive growth and the capabilities approach. This analysis highlights the key challenges and opportunities for policy reform in Zimbabwe.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards and special attention was given to the sensitive nature of discussing economic hardships and policy critiques in the Zimbabwean context. In this study, a desktop review was conducted, which negates the need for informed consent and ethical clearance typically associated with primary research involving human subjects as argued by Cilliers and Viljoen (2021). The study's ethical framework was adapted to the nature of a desktop review, focusing on the responsible use of existing literature and data. The review process involved a thorough and respectful engagement with the works of other scholars, ensuring proper attribution and acknowledgement of their contributions. The absence of primary data collection from human participants meant that the procedures for obtaining consent were not applicable.

Moreover, since the study did not involve human subjects, there was no requirement for ethical clearance from a review board. However, the study still adhered to ethical standards by conducting a rigorous and unbiased synthesis of available information, maintaining academic integrity throughout the research process. According to Romm (2018), this approach to ethical practice in a desktop review underscores the commitment to responsible scholarship. It ensures that the study contributes to the field in a manner that is informative, respectful of intellectual property, and reflective of the highest standards of academic rigour.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in the theory of inclusive growth and the capabilities approach. Inclusive growth, as defined by Ianchovichina and Lundström (2009), and further elaborated by Felipe (2012), advocates for economic growth that is broad-based across sectors and inclusive of all segments of society. This concept is particularly relevant to Zimbabwe, which is facing a severe economic crisis with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. According to the World Bank (n.d), the poverty rate in Zimbabwe was 38.3% in 2019. Additionally, the unemployment rate was reported at 20.5% in the first quarter of 2024 (Zimstat, 2024). The theory of inclusive growth serves as a transformative vision that aims to ensure the equitable sharing of the benefits of economic progress, offering a pathway towards sustainable development and shared prosperity.

The capabilities approach, pioneered by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and highlighted by Alkire (2005), complements inclusive growth by focusing on expanding individuals' freedoms and capabilities, thus empowering them to lead lives they value. This approach emphasises the importance of enhancing people's capabilities through education, healthcare, and social protection, enabling them to seize economic opportunities and realise their full potential. Applying these theories to Zimbabwe's context allows for an analysis of sectors where growth has been non-inclusive, contributing to poverty and exclusion. It also sheds light on the social barriers that prevent certain groups from participating in the economy, highlighting the urgent need for policy reform to foster economic inclusion and empower marginalised populations.

A critical examination of Zimbabwe's current economic policies, as discussed by Kanyenze (2011), reveals gaps that impede inclusive growth and perpetuate economic exclusion. By identifying these shortcomings and assessing their impact, policymakers can develop tailored strategies to promote economic inclusion and social equity. The inclusive growth theory also guides the dissection of Zimbabwe's economic sectors that have failed to contribute to collective prosperity. It allows for a critical examination of policies that may have inadvertently perpetuated poverty and exclusion, such as those affecting the agricultural sector and the integration of marginalised demographics like women and youth into the economic fabric. Furthermore, the theory addresses income disparity and advocates for reforms aimed at achieving a more balanced economic landscape. It also emphasises the importance of social cohesion, especially considering Zimbabwe's social unrest, advocating for policies that promote unity and stability through shared economic success.

FINDINGS

To dissect the economic trajectory and policy landscape of Zimbabwe, a thorough review of key policy documents has been undertaken. These documents, each a repository of insights and assessments, provided a panoramic view of the nation's economic reforms and their outcomes. The Zimbabwe Country Economic Memorandum stands out as a pivotal document, offering a retrospective analysis of Zimbabwe's economic journey since independence. It delves into the critical policy issues that have shaped the nation's economic narrative, emphasising the urgency of reforms aimed at macroeconomic stabilisation and investment attraction to foster growth and development (World Bank, 2023).

Complementing this is the 2023 Mid-Term Budget and Economic Review, authored by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development. This document serves as a barometer for the nation's economic and budgetary health, charting the progress made in the first half of the year. It underscores the government's commitment to economic transformation, advocating for strategies that enhance value addition, diversify the economy, and refine the business climate (Ncube, 2019). According to Mshomba (2009), the World Trade Organisation's Trade Policy Review provided another layer of analysis, focusing on the intricacies of Zimbabwe's trade policies. It helped to evaluate the recent developments and challenges faced by the country in the realm of trade, economics, and investment. The review highlights the integral role of trade policy in the broader spectrum of economic reform, stressing the need for Zimbabwe to weave itself more integrally into the global trading system (World Trade Organisation, 2023).

The Annual Economic Review (Mlambo and R.B.Z. 2016) offered an exhaustive evaluation of the economic policies and their ramifications. This document scrutinises fiscal policies, public expenditures, and revenue collection mechanisms, painting a comprehensive picture of the economic landscape and the efficacy of the reforms implemented (Mlambo and R.B.Z. 2016). Together, these documents mentioned above formed a mosaic of perspectives, each contributing to a nuanced understanding of Zimbabwe's economic challenges and the policy responses crafted to address them. The findings gleaned from these documents underscored a concerted effort by the government to tackle macroeconomic instability, streamline trade policy, and manage fiscal affairs with the goal of propelling the nation towards sustainable growth and economic resilience.

The Main Challenges that Zimbabwe Faces in Achieving Economic Inclusion

According to Kadyamatimba, (2013), Zimbabwe's economy is heavily dependent on primary agriculture and minerals, which creates vulnerability to external disruptions such as weather-related events or sudden price shocks for minerals. This lack of diversification undermines prospects for longer-term economic growth and hampers economic inclusion. On the other end, obstacles in the financial sphere, such as complex credit application procedures, lack of collateral, high lending costs, inadequate venture capital, and non-bank sources of funding, prevent firms from accessing finance (Mole and Namusonge, 2016). This lack of financial capability hinders economic inclusion during times of crisis.

According to Muzurura (2017), corruption in Zimbabwe is a pervasive and entrenched challenge that is significantly hindering economic inclusion, and perpetuating poverty and inequality at large. Corruption has established an environment which is uneven for the citizens, where only those with strong networks and wealth have access to economic opportunities such as government tenders. At the same time, corruption has destroyed every level of the community, from high-level government officials misappropriating public money to low-level bureaucrats demanding bribes for basic services. Resultantly the lack of trust in institutions is growing and hindering economic growth. The resources which are supposed to be used for essential public services are exploited for personal gains. Additionally, Muzurura (2019) argued that corruption has increased in cronyism, with politically connected businesses and individuals getting favourable contracts and treatment, while entrepreneurs and small businesses are not supported. The impact of corruption has far-reaching effects, with the poor and marginalised being affected.

According to Fernandes, Ferro and Wilson (2019), difficulties in gaining information on product standards in destination markets can result in low entry and survival rates for exporting firms. This information failure affects firm entry and survival in foreign markets and hampers economic inclusion. More so, insufficient infrastructure facilities, such as uninterrupted electricity supply, can hinder economic inclusion by preventing firms from entering, investing, and diversifying economic activity. Protection from government interference is necessary to induce a critical mass of private firms to enter, invest, and diversify economic activity. However, excessive government interference can hinder economic inclusion during times of crisis.

The incentive framework in Zimbabwe needs to be addressed to promote economic inclusion. If the incentive framework remains highly distorted and biased against exports or if sectors face significant entry barriers in the form of tariff or non-tariff barriers, active policies are likely to exacerbate the misallocation of resources. Varying institutional capabilities across countries poses a challenge in achieving economic inclusion. Policymakers must be mindful of policies that match their existing capabilities to effectively address the challenges faced during times of crisis (Aiyar et al., 2023; Lewis, 2001).

Zimbabwean Government Economic Reforms

The Zimbabwean government has implemented various economic reforms to address the issues of access to productive assets, markets, and social protection in the country. These reforms have had a significant impact on the country's economy. One of the key changes has been the improvement in

access to credit and productive assets for small and medium-sized enterprises. This has led to increased entrepreneurship and job creation within the country. The World Bank's Zimbabwe Country Economic Memorandum suggests that to achieve upper-middle income status by 2030, Zimbabwe needs to improve productivity growth and create quality jobs. This implies a focus on enhancing access to productive assets for the informal sector, which accounts for a significant 70% (UNDP, 2023) portion of the country's output and employment.

Additionally, the government's efforts to promote market access and social protection have resulted in improved living standards for many Zimbabweans. The implementation of these reforms has also attracted foreign investment, leading to economic growth and diversification. Economic reforms have aimed at boosting trade to scale up productivity in the formal sector. However, despite improvements in export performance, exports remain dominated by a few primary products. Lowering tariffs on intermediate and capital goods and addressing trade facilitation issues are suggested measures to help Zimbabwe integrate more successfully into global value chains (World Bank, 2022).

The reforms have also targeted social development, with a focus on fiscal discipline and investment promotion. Efforts to enhance revenue collection through tax reforms and to provide access to credit for farmers indicate a move towards strengthening social protection mechanisms and promoting modern farming techniques, which are crucial for food security and agricultural productivity (Matarise, 2023).

Despite these positive outcomes, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. One major issue is the need for continued monitoring and evaluation of the reforms to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. There is also a need to focus on inclusive growth to ensure that all segments of the population benefit from the reforms. Looking ahead, it will be important for the government to maintain its commitment to economic reforms and address any emerging challenges. Additionally, there is a need for continued collaboration with international partners to support the ongoing reform efforts and ensure their success.

The Zimbabwean government's economic reforms have had a positive impact on the country's economy, leading to increased access to productive assets, job creation, and improved living standards. However, ongoing monitoring and evaluation, as well as a focus on inclusive growth, will be essential for sustaining these positive outcomes in the future. According to Zvavahera and Chigora (2015) these reforms are part of a broader strategy to revitalise Zimbabwe's economy, aiming to stabilise the currency, curb hyperinflation, and attract foreign direct investment. The emphasis on agricultural revival, investment in infrastructure, and the creation of special economic zones are additional steps taken to address these critical issues (Matarise, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

To further enhance currency stability, the extension of the US dollar as legal tender until 2030 has been implemented (Nyamunda, 2021). This move mitigates policy uncertainty and provides a stable backdrop for economic transactions, both domestic and international. Efficiency and governance within the public sector have also been areas of focus. The government has initiated reforms to streamline public services and improve the

governance of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), aiming to ensure transparency and accountability in their operations (Ncube, 2023; Mlambo, 2016).

Agriculture, as a vital sector of the economy, has seen transformative policies aimed at increasing productivity and modernising practices (Schneidman, 2016). These reforms are expected to boost the sector's contribution to the economy and enhance food security. The private sector's growth and competitiveness have not been overlooked, with initiatives designed to stimulate economic diversification and job creation (Mlambo, 2016). Similarly, financial sector reforms have been introduced to bolster the stability and functionality of this critical sector (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, 2023). Land policy has also undergone significant changes, with the introduction of a 99-year land lease program to improve land use and agricultural productivity (Ministry of Lands, 2023). This policy is a cornerstone of the government's strategy to modernise agriculture and ensure its role in economic development.

Tax reforms, including the introduction of new taxes on tobacco turnover and mobile network transactions, have been enacted to widen the tax base and increase government revenue (Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, 2023). These fiscal measures provide the necessary resources for public investment and social services, contributing to the overall reform agenda. Collectively, these reforms represent the Zimbabwean government's resolve to address the economic challenges head-on. By fostering an environment where growth is inclusive and sustainable, these policies are crucial steps towards achieving Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy. The success of these reforms will be pivotal in charting a path towards recovery and shared prosperity for all Zimbabweans.

Addressing Access to Productive Assets in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean government has implemented economic reforms to address the issue of access to productive assets in the country. These reforms have included measures to improve access to credit and financing for small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as initiatives to promote land reform and redistribution to increase access to land, which is a crucial productive asset in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, the government has also focused on providing training and capacity-building programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of Zimbabweans in various sectors, thereby improving their ability to utilise productive assets effectively (Zvavahera and Chigora, 2015). Additionally, the government has taken steps to improve access to markets by implementing trade facilitation measures and promoting regional integration (Skalnes, 2016). Social protection has also been a key focus of the Zimbabwean government's economic reforms (Dashwood, 2000). The government has implemented various social protection programs to assist vulnerable groups, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income families. These programs aim to improve access to essential services and resources, contributing to the overall wellbeing of the population. Furthermore, the Zimbabwean government has also prioritised infrastructure development as part of its economic reforms. Investments in transportation, communication, and energy infrastructure have been crucial in improving access to markets and increasing economic opportunities across different regions of the country.

The focus on improving access to productive assets, market access, social protection, and infrastructure development

indicates a holistic approach to addressing the underlying challenges in the Zimbabwean economy. The government's emphasis on capacity-building and skill enhancement programs underscores its commitment to fostering sustainable economic development and empowering its citizens. Moving forward, it will be imperative for the government to continue monitoring and evaluating the impact of these reforms, especially in the context of inclusive growth and long-term sustainability. Collaborating with international partners and leveraging external support can further strengthen the implementation of these reforms and ensure their continued success. Skalnes (2016) argued that the Zimbabwean government's economic reforms have demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing the economy and a proactive approach to addressing them. By focusing on access to productive assets, market facilitation, social protection, and infrastructure development, the government has laid a solid foundation for sustainable economic progress. The continued commitment to these reforms and the engagement of stakeholders will be pivotal in shaping Zimbabwe's economic future.

Policy recommendations to enhance economic inclusion and support Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy

In pursuit of economic inclusion and in support of Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy, a multifaceted approach is essential. Fiscal consolidation is paramount, necessitating the implementation of a fiscal policy framework that promotes budget savings and ensures a stable macroeconomic environment. This foundation is critical for attracting both local and international investment, which is further facilitated by the ease of doing business

reforms. These reforms aim to improve the business climate, reduce operational costs, and create a more conducive environment for economic activities.

Empowerment programs play a crucial role in eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods. By focusing on empowering women, youth, and people with disabilities, these programs address the root causes of economic exclusion and foster a more inclusive society. Concurrently, infrastructure development is vital, with investments in electricity and water sources being essential for both economic activities and the overall quality of life.

The enhancement of health and education services is another cornerstone of economic inclusion. By improving the quality and accessibility of these services, Zimbabwe can increase its average life expectancy and develop a skilled workforce capable of driving economic growth. In the agricultural sector, policies that boost agricultural productivity are needed to ensure food security and enhance the sector's export potential, particularly in the face of climate change.

Financial inclusion is a critical driver of entrepreneurship and economic participation, especially for marginalised communities. Expanding access to financial services enables individuals to engage in economic activities and contribute to the nation's prosperity. The engagement of the private sector and diaspora is equally important, as their involvement through incentives and partnerships can significantly bolster economic development efforts.

The Government of Zimbabwe can significantly enhance inclusive economic growth by embracing a technology-driven strategy. This would involve bolstering digital infrastructure to improve connectivity,

thereby granting wider access to information and services. It would also mean harnessing e-learning platforms to democratise education and deploying digital financial services to deepen financial inclusion, particularly in remote areas. By leveraging technology, businesses can boost productivity and competitiveness, while the tech sector itself becomes a fertile ground for job creation across various skill levels. Small businesses can benefit from technological tools that level the playing field against larger firms. In healthcare, digital technologies can revolutionise access to services, improving health outcomes for the population. Furthermore, technology can streamline the implementation and monitoring of social policies, ensuring they are effective and reach those most in need. Collectively, these measures can propel Zimbabwe towards a more equitable and prosperous future, in line with its Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy.

Effective natural resource management is imperative for leveraging Zimbabwe's rich natural resources. Policies must be crafted to ensure sustainable exploitation and equitable benefit-sharing, thus contributing to the nation's economic stability and growth. Lastly, a deepened commitment to good governance—encompassing corporate governance, transparency, and anti-corruption measures—is essential to create a fair and just economic environment that supports long-term development and inclusion. These recommendations align with the overarching goals of Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy, aiming to transform Zimbabwe into a prosperous and empowered upper-middle-income society (Bvirindi, 2021; Golla, & D'Alessandro, 2024; Chitiyo et al., 2019).

DISCUSSION

The study's findings reveal a complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors that have contributed to the current state of economic exclusion in Zimbabwe. The reliance on primary agriculture and minerals has exposed the economy to external shocks, while systemic corruption and institutional weaknesses have further exacerbated the situation. These challenges highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to policy reform that addresses not only the symptoms but also the root causes of economic exclusion.

The government's economic reforms, while commendable in their intent to stabilise the economy and improve access to productive assets, face significant hurdles. Political resistance and fiscal constraints underscore the importance of building consensus and ensuring the sustainability of reform efforts. The study underscores the critical role of inclusive growth and the capabilities approach as theoretical frameworks guiding these reforms. By focusing on expanding individuals' freedoms and capabilities, policies can be more effectively tailored to promote economic inclusion and empowerment. The positive outcomes of the government's reforms, such as increased access to credit and improved market access, are promising signs of progress. However, the continued dominance of a few primary products in exports and the need for further trade facilitation measures indicate areas where additional focus is required. The study suggests that lowering tariffs on intermediate and capital goods and addressing trade facilitation issues could enhance Zimbabwe's integration into global value chains.

The engagement with international partners and the leveraging of external support are identified as crucial elements in strengthening the implementation of these reforms. Looking forward, the study advocates for a policy approach that encompasses fiscal consolidation, empowerment infrastructure development, programs, and the enhancement of health and education services. Financial inclusion, technology-driven strategies, effective natural resource management, and a commitment to good governance are also emphasised as key components of a strategy to support Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy. The research posits that by embracing a holistic and inclusive approach to economic reform, Zimbabwe has the potential to overcome its current challenges and pave the way for a more resilient and equitable economy.

CONCLUSION

Zimbabwe faces significant economic challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to elevated levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. The government has initiated economic reforms to stabilise the economy, attract foreign investment, and enhance social protection. However, these reforms face various challenges, such as political resistance, fiscal constraints, and institutional weaknesses. This study has explored the concept of economic inclusion as a key driver of sustainable development and shared prosperity in Zimbabwe. Economic inclusion is essential for ensuring that all segments of society have equal access to opportunities, rights, and services that enable them to participate in and benefit from economic growth. By addressing access to productive assets, markets, and social protection, Zimbabwe can foster social cohesion, reduce inequality, and enhance competitiveness.

The government's economic reforms have shown positive outcomes in improving access to credit, market access, social protection, and infrastructure development. Moving forward, it will be crucial for the government to continue monitoring and evaluating these reforms, focusing on inclusive growth and long-term sustainability. Collaborating with international partners and leveraging external support can further strengthen the implementation of these reforms and ensure their success.

By embracing a multifaceted approach includes fiscal consolidation, empowerment programs, infrastructure development, health and education services, financial inclusion, technology-driven strategies, natural resource management, and good governance, Zimbabwe can unlock economic opportunities, enhance social policies, and build a more equitable future. These policy recommendations align with the goals of Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy, aiming to transform Zimbabwe into a prosperous and empowered upper-middle-income society. By prioritising economic inclusion and sustainable development, Zimbabwe can overcome its economic challenges and pave the way for a more inclusive and resilient economy.

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