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**QUALITATIVE STUDY**

**Navigating the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem**

*A Qualitative Exploration of Structural and Governance Challenges in Ugandan Enterprises (2000–2026)*

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**ABSTRACT**

The entrepreneurial ecosystem in many developing economies is characterised by complex structural and governance challenges that impede enterprise growth and sustainability. Understanding the lived experiences of entrepreneurs navigating this environment is critical for developing effective support mechanisms. This study aims to explore the perceived structural and governance barriers faced by enterprise leaders, and to analyse how these challenges influence strategic decision-making and long-term business viability. A qualitative, interpretivist study was conducted using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 28 founders and senior executives of small and medium-sized enterprises. Data were analysed through a thematic analysis framework to identify recurring patterns and insights. A dominant theme was the pervasive constraint of inconsistent regulatory enforcement, cited by over 70% of participants as a primary obstacle to scaling operations. This unpredictability was found to foster a risk-averse strategic culture, diverting resources from innovation towards compliance management and relationship-building with officials. Structural and governance issues are deeply embedded within the business environment, creating a significant drag on entrepreneurial ambition and organisational development. These challenges necessitate targeted institutional reforms. Policymakers should prioritise the creation of a transparent and stable regulatory environment. Support programmes must move beyond financial aid to include governance mentorship and advocacy training for entrepreneurs to navigate institutional complexities. This paper provides novel empirical evidence on the micro-level behavioural adaptations of entrepreneurs to macro-level institutional weaknesses, offering an integrated behavioural finance and institutional theory perspective on enterprise strategy.

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial ecosystems, Sub-Saharan Africa, Corporate governance, Qualitative case study, Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Institutional theory, Business sustainability*

**Article Highlights**

- Inconsistent regulatory enforcement cited by 70% of participants as a primary scaling obstacle.
- Macro-level institutional weaknesses trigger micro-level behavioural adaptations in entrepreneurs.
- Structural challenges create a significant drag on entrepreneurial ambition and organisational development.

**Methodological Note**

Qualitative interpretivist study based on 28 in-depth interviews with Ugandan SME founders and senior executives (2000–2026).

*Integrates behavioural finance and institutional theory to examine enterprise strategy.*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support programmes must evolve beyond financial aid to include governance mentorship.</li></ul>	
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## ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

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