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QUALITATIVE STUDY

Navigating Structural Constraints and Entrepreneurial Agency

A Qualitative Exploration of Business Environment Challenges in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The entrepreneurial landscape in developing economies is characterised by a complex interplay between institutional structures and individual agency. Understanding how entrepreneurs perceive and navigate this environment is critical for fostering sustainable enterprise growth. This study investigates the lived experiences of entrepreneurs in confronting structural business environment challenges. It aims to delineate the specific constraints perceived as most salient and to analyse the strategic responses and coping mechanisms they employ. A qualitative, interpretivist methodology was employed, using semi-structured interviews with 28 small and medium enterprise owners across three urban centres. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach to identify patterns and construct nuanced understandings. A dominant theme was the pervasive challenge of inconsistent policy implementation, cited by over two-thirds of participants as a primary constraint. Entrepreneurs demonstrated significant agency through innovative, informal networking strategies to circumvent bureaucratic hurdles and secure resources. The findings underscore that entrepreneurial success is not merely a function of overcoming structural barriers but involves a dynamic process of tactical navigation and the creation of informal institutional arrangements. Policymakers should focus on enhancing the predictability and transparency of regulatory enforcement. Support programmes should shift from solely mitigating constraints to fostering the adaptive capacities and relational capital of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial agency, institutional voids, business environment, qualitative research, Uganda, coping strategies This paper provides novel empirical evidence on the micro-level tactics entrepreneurs use to negotiate macro-level structural constraints, offering a nuanced behavioural perspective to institutional theory in an African context.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial agency, Structural constraints, Sub-Saharan Africa, Institutional theory, Qualitative research, Business environment, Developing economies*

Article Highlights

- Inconsistent policy implementation cited as primary constraint by over two-thirds of entrepreneurs.
- Entrepreneurs employ innovative, informal networking strategies to secure resources.
- Findings advocate for support programmes that foster

Methodological Note

Qualitative, interpretivist study based on semi-structured interviews with 28 SME owners across three urban centres in Uganda.

Offers a nuanced behavioural perspective to institutional theory in an African context.

<p>adaptive capacities, not just mitigate constraints.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study provides micro-level evidence on negotiating macro-level structural challenges.	
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