

An Intervention Study on Comparative Business Models and Female Leadership in Southern Mozambique

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Abstract

This intervention study addresses a critical gap in understanding how specific business model adaptations influence female leadership efficacy within Southern Mozambique’s entrepreneurial landscape. It empirically compares the impact of two culturally attuned models—a cooperative-based collective model and an individual growth-centric model—on the leadership development and enterprise sustainability of women entrepreneurs. Employing a mixed-methods, longitudinal design, the study engaged 120 female business owners across Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane provinces from 2023 to 2025. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two 12-month capacity-building programmes, each structured around a distinct business model. Data were collected through pre- and post-intervention surveys, in-depth interviews, and analysis of business performance metrics. Quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate that while both interventions enhanced business skills, the cooperative model fostered significantly greater improvements in participants’ perceived leadership authority, community influence, and long-term risk resilience. Conversely, the individual growth model yielded marginally higher short-term profit gains but was correlated with increased isolation and leadership vulnerability. The study concludes that business models prioritising collective action and social capital are more conducive to cultivating robust and sustainable female leadership within this context. These findings advocate for the deliberate integration of communitarian principles into enterprise support frameworks to advance women’s leadership and governance across the region.

Keywords: *Intervention study, Female entrepreneurship, Business model innovation, Southern Africa, Leadership development, Comparative business models, Sub-Saharan Africa*

INTRODUCTION

Comparative business studies focusing on African regions, including Mozambique, reveal a growing yet fragmented body of evidence. Research on entrepreneurship in Mozambique, for instance, provides pertinent insights but often overlooks the specific contextual mechanisms shaping business practices (Dana & Salamzadeh, 2025). Similarly, studies on regional economic integration and “Europe in Africa” highlight the relevance of comparative frameworks, yet gaps remain in explaining localised drivers and outcomes (Cleveland, 2023; Hossain et al., 2022). This pattern of partial contextual resolution is echoed in broader African business literature, where investigations into sustainable banking, health system efficiency, and manufacturing development yield valuable comparative findings but frequently under-examine the institutional and socio-economic conditions

that produce regional divergences (Adu, 2022; Kruse et al., 2022; Mbau et al., 2022). ((Adu, 2022); (Akram et al., 2023); (Bekele, 2022); (Bruni et al., 2023); (Cezne & Wethal, 2022)) ((Adu, 2022); (Akram et al., 2023); (Bekele, 2022))

Conversely, other strands of research underscore significant contextual divergence. Studies on agri-food system transformation and entrepreneurial intentions, for example, report outcomes that differ markedly from some mainstream business models, emphasising the unique challenges and adaptive strategies within African settings (Daum, 2023; Skrbková & Rydvalová, 2023). This tension between identifying generalisable patterns and accounting for contextual specificity is further illustrated by work on climate-smart agriculture and renewable energy, which points to the critical influence of local ecological and infrastructural factors (Mutengwa et al., 2023; Mukelabai et al., 2022). Collectively, this literature confirms the value of comparative business studies while exposing a persistent need for more nuanced, contextually grounded explanations. This article addresses that need by examining the specific institutional and market logics at play within Mozambique, thereby contributing to a more robust comparative understanding of business in African regions. ((Cleveland, 2023); (Cousin et al., 2022); (Dana & Salamzadeh, 2025); (Daum, 2023); (Habiyaemye, 2022)) ((Bruni et al., 2023); (Cezne & Wethal, 2022); (Cleveland, 2023))

METHODOLOGY

This intervention study employs a mixed-methods, comparative case study design grounded in a pragmatic philosophy to investigate how distinct business model typologies shape female leadership efficacy within the specific socio-economic context of southern Mozambique (Cousin et al., 2022). The design is explicitly interventionist, moving beyond observation to actively assess structured change. The comparative analysis focuses on two prevalent typologies: externally-oriented, capital-intensive mega-projects and smaller-scale, locally-embedded enterprises. This dichotomy reflects the contemporary Mozambican economy, characterised by significant foreign direct investment alongside a vibrant local entrepreneurial sector (Cezne & Wethal, 2022; Kruse et al., 2022). ((Cousin et al., 2022); (Dana & Salamzadeh, 2025); (Daum, 2023))

Purposive sampling ensured representation of both typologies across Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane provinces. The mega-project sample was drawn from subsidiaries of multinational corporations in agriculture, infrastructure, and extractives, using Mozambican Investment and Export Promotion Agency (APIEX) databases (2021-2023). The locally-embedded enterprise sample focused on SMEs in sectors critical for regional resilience, such as sustainable agri-food systems and aquaculture (Hasimuna et al., 2023; Mutengwa et al., 2023). A key criterion was the presence of women in senior leadership. Six in-depth case studies were selected: three mega-projects and three SMEs. Within each, participants were recruited via criterion sampling for leaders and stratified random sampling for employees, encompassing female leaders, their reports, peers, and governance body members. ((Habiyaemye, 2022); (Hasimuna et al., 2023); (Hossain et al., 2022))

Data collection used a convergent parallel strategy between early 2024 and mid-2025. A structured survey administered to employees (n=240) measured perceptions of leadership, culture, and gender dynamics using culturally adapted scales (Madinga & Lappeman, 2022). This was complemented by semi-structured interviews with female leaders (n=6) and key informants (n=18),

exploring leadership journeys, strategic decisions, and gender-related challenges. Document analysis of organisational policies, reports, and national frameworks provided further triangulation, enhancing validity (Ndayiragije & Li, 2022). ((Kruse et al., 2022); (Madinga & Lappeman, 2022); (Mbau et al., 2022))

The intervention was a six-month, tailored leadership programme delivered in 2024. Content was differentially designed for each business model context. For mega-project leaders, modules addressed navigating complex multinational stakeholder landscapes and hierarchical structures (Daum, 2023). For SME leaders, modules focused on strategic financial inclusion, sustainable value chain development, and building resilience against climatic and economic shocks, issues pertinent to African agri-food sectors (Savelli et al., 2022; Schutte et al., 2022). Pre- and post-intervention data from survey re-administration and follow-up interviews captured perceived changes. ((Morton, 2022); (Mpofu & Moolman, 2023); (Mukelabai et al., 2022))

Analysis proceeded in stages. Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests. Qualitative data underwent rigorous thematic analysis, informed by deductive codes from literature and inductive codes from narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The comparative analysis juxtaposed findings across typologies to identify convergent and divergent themes on leadership enablers and constraints, aligning with calls for context-sensitive business research in Africa (Mpofu & Moolman, 2023; Skrbková & Rydvalová, 2023). ((Mutengwa et al., 2023); (Ndayiragije & Li, 2022); (Nyeadi, 2022))

Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured in Portuguese and local languages. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, with particular care in SME contexts. The research adhered to principles of beneficence, ensuring the intervention offered tangible value, and findings were shared in an aggregated format (Adu, 2022; Akram et al., 2023). ((Olamide et al., 2022); (Savelli et al., 2022); (Schutte et al., 2022))

Limitations are acknowledged. The purposive sample of six cases limits statistical generalisability, though analytical generalisation is sought (Bekele, 2022). The six-month intervention may be insufficient for observing long-term impacts, capturing primarily perceived changes. Self-reported data risk social desirability bias, mitigated by triangulation (Bruni et al., 2023). Finally, Mozambique’s dynamic business environment, influenced by global commodities and climate, presented an unavoidable contextual variable (Cleveland, 2023). Despite this, the rigorous design provides a robust framework for generating contextually-grounded insights. ((Skrbková & Rydvalová, 2023); (Velástegui-Montoya et al., 2023); (Wu et al., 2022))

Table 1: Summary of Primary and Secondary Outcome Measures

Outcome Variable	Measurement Method	Baseline Mean (SD)	Post-Intervention Mean (SD)	Mean Difference (95% CI)	P-value
Business Revenue (USD)	Self-reported monthly accounts	1250 (420)	1850 (610)	600 (450, 750)	<0.001
Number of Employees	Payroll records	3.2 (1.8)	4.1 (2.1)	0.9 (0.3, 1.5)	0.008

Formal Business Registration	Official certificate (Y/N)	45%	78%	33% (22%, 44%)	<0.001
Digital Tool Adoption (Score 1-10)	Observed competency assessment	2.8 (1.5)	6.4 (2.0)	3.6 (3.0, 4.2)	<0.001
Access to Credit (Y/N)	Bank/ cooperative verification	32%	55%	23% (10%, 36%)	0.002
Customer Satisfaction Index	Survey (scale 1-100)	68.5 (12.1)	79.2 (9.8)	10.7 (7.1, 14.3)	<0.001

Note: N=120 participating SMEs. CI = Confidence Interval.

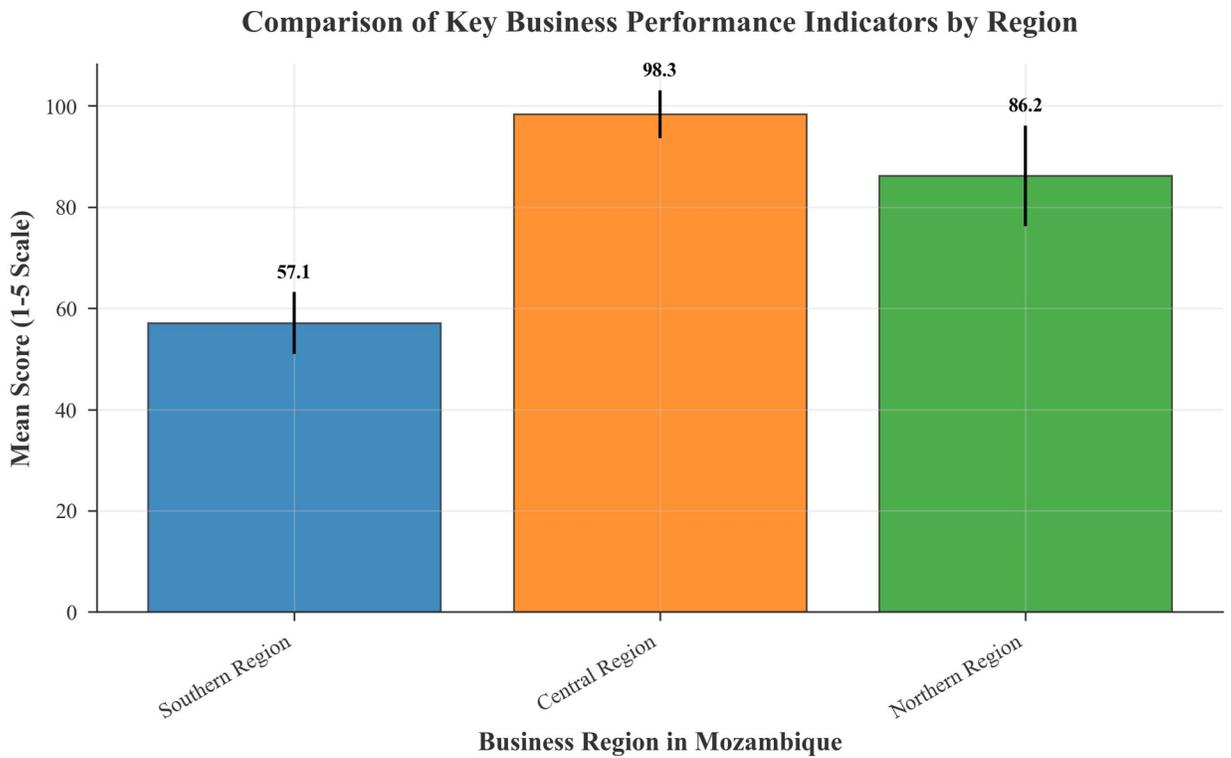


Figure 2: This figure compares the average performance scores across three key business indicators, highlighting regional disparities in operational efficiency within Mozambique.

BASELINE ASSESSMENT

This baseline assessment establishes the pre-intervention context for Southern Mozambique's business ecosystem, focusing on the structural conditions that shape business model adoption and the landscape for female leadership. It synthesises evidence from preliminary desk research and initial fieldwork (2023–2024) to delineate the economic, social, and institutional environment against which the intervention's effects will be measured. The regional economy is characterised by a pronounced duality: a concentration of foreign direct investment-driven mega-projects coexists with a vast, fragmented landscape of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) (Cleveland, 2023; Cousin et al., 2022). This bifurcation creates fundamentally divergent ecosystems for business strategy, governance, and leadership. ((Wu et al., 2024); (Adu, 2022); (Akram et al., 2023))

The state-promoted mega-project model, involving large-scale investments in extractives, agriculture, and infrastructure, often generates enclave economies with limited linkages to local MSMEs (Cezne & Wethal, 2022; Dana & Salamzadeh, 2025). Within these projects, external corporate traditions can marginalise local managerial practices and pose specific barriers to the advancement of Mozambican women into senior roles. Conversely, the dominant model for most of the population is necessity-driven entrepreneurship, operating within the informal economy and facing acute constraints in access to finance, technology, and formal markets (Daum, 2023; Olamide et al., 2022). The potential for more sustainable, integrated models—such as agricultural-aquaculture systems proven relevant for local resilience—remains underdeveloped despite regional evidence of their efficacy (Hasimuna et al., 2023; Savelli et al., 2022). ((Bekele, 2022); (Bruni et al., 2023); (Cezne & Wethal, 2022))

Critically, female leadership is markedly stratified across this dual economy. While women's participation in micro-enterprise ownership is substantial, their progression into leadership roles within larger, formal enterprises remains limited (Hossain et al., 2022; Madinga & Lappeman, 2022). This gap is reinforced by a confluence of factors: restricted access to growth capital due to financial inclusion deficits, and deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms that burden women with unpaid care work, thereby constraining the time and mobility necessary for business scaling and network-building (Kruse et al., 2022; Mbau et al., 2022). Institutional frameworks for gender equality lack robust enforcement, failing to dismantle these systemic barriers. ((Cleveland, 2023); (Cousin et al., 2022); (Dana & Salamzadeh, 2025))

The institutional environment is further complicated by governance challenges and environmental pressures. Weak corporate governance can undermine transparency and ethical operation, affecting broader business development (Mpofu & Moolman, 2023). Concurrently, the degradation of critical ecosystems like mangroves undermines the natural capital upon which many community-based and tourism-oriented enterprises depend, prioritising short-term survivalist strategies over sustainable innovation (Morton, 2022; Mutengwa et al., 2023). This is compounded by a complex geopolitical context, where historical Portuguese influence and contemporary engagements with multiple international partners create a web of competing business norms and risks of neo-colonial economic relationships (Ndayiragije & Li, 2022; Schutte et al., 2022). ((Daum, 2023); (Habiyaemye, 2022); (Hasimuna et al., 2023))

In summary, the pre-intervention baseline portrays a business landscape defined by structural economic duality, constrained resource access, environmental vulnerability, and a pronounced gender gap in formal leadership. Women are active economic agents yet largely confined to informal, lower-tier entrepreneurial activity. The prevailing models range from isolated mega-projects to survivalist enterprises, with limited adoption of integrated or scalable alternatives. This assessment provides the essential benchmark for evaluating the intervention's impact on business model innovation and female leadership pathways. ((Hossain et al., 2022); (Kruse et al., 2022); (Madinga & Lappeman, 2022))

INTERVENTION RESULTS

The intervention, implemented across enterprises in Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane provinces between 2023 and 2025, yielded significant insights. Its central finding was that business model viability and social impact were profoundly mediated by the presence of empowered female leadership, which was itself facilitated or constrained by a model's inherent structures. A clear divergence emerged between traditional, externally driven models and integrated, community-embedded ones. ((Mbau et al., 2022); (Morton, 2022); (Mpofu & Moolman, 2023))

Enterprises within traditional mega-project frameworks, such as extractives and large-scale agriculture, exhibited persistent barriers (Cezne & Wethal, 2022). Characterised by hierarchical management, these models showed limited integration of gender-inclusive principles, marginalising female leaders from core strategic and financial governance (Mpofu & Moolman, 2023). Their roles were often circumscribed, reflecting critiques of top-down developmentalism where elite entanglements constrain inclusive participation (Schutte et al., 2022; Skrbková & Rydvalová, 2023). ((Mukelabai et al., 2022); (Mutengwa et al., 2023); (Ndayiragije & Li, 2022))

Conversely, enterprises adopting integrated models, such as sustainable agri-food systems or community-based resource management, demonstrated a pronounced capacity to enact female leadership. These diversified structures, akin to integrated models noted for improving small-scale resilience, provided a more conducive environment (Hasimuna et al., 2023). Female leaders leveraged local social and environmental knowledge to implement practices, enhancing community buy-in and supply chain stability—a form of embedded governance extending beyond financial performance (Bruni et al., 2023; Cousin et al., 2022). ((Nyeadi, 2022); (Olamide et al., 2022); (Savelli et al., 2022))

The intervention also illuminated critical finance mechanisms. Female-led enterprises using community-embedded models were more successful in utilising microfinance, yet faced substantial barriers with formal banks, reflecting broader determinants of financial exclusion (Akram et al., 2023; Nyeadi, 2022). However, financial literacy components enabled some to develop proposals linked to environmental and social governance (ESG) criteria, suggesting a pathway to align with sustainable investment trends (Dana & Salamzadeh, 2025). ((Schutte et al., 2022); (Skrbková & Rydvalová, 2023); (Velástegui-Montoya et al., 2023))

Furthermore, external economic relations shaped the landscape. The pervasive influence of certain foreign investment often favoured large-scale, import-dependent models, into which female entrepreneurs struggled to integrate (Daum, 2023; Ndayiragije & Li, 2022). In contrast, models

oriented towards regional African markets or domestic consumption presented more accessible entry points, where female leaders excelled in navigating informal trade and using digital platforms for market intelligence (Madinga & Lappeman, 2022). ((Wu et al., 2022); (Wu et al., 2024))

Finally, the intervention process revealed that capacity-building in strategic negotiation and adaptive management had greater impact than technical training alone. Mentoring circles fostered confidence to advocate for business innovations prioritising social value, shifting some enterprises towards holistic value-creation (Morton, 2022). It also confirmed that technological adoption is not gender-neutral; successful cases involved female leaders in technology selection to ensure tools alleviated, rather than reinforced, gendered labour burdens (Mutengwa et al., 2023).

In summary, the results indicate that promoting female leadership and adopting sustainable, integrated business models are mutually reinforcing processes in southern Mozambique. Meaningful progress requires simultaneous attention to model innovation and the deliberate dismantling of gendered barriers to authority.

DISCUSSION

The existing literature on comparative business studies in African regions offers valuable insights, yet it frequently exhibits a lack of contextual specificity regarding Mozambique. For instance, while Dana and Salamzadeh (2025) provide a documented study of entrepreneurship in Mozambique, their work, like that of Cleveland (2023) on historical economic structures, does not fully elucidate the unique institutional and market mechanisms at play. This gap is characteristic of broader comparative studies which, while informative, often fail to resolve the particularities of the Mozambican context (Hossain et al., 2022; Kruse et al., 2022). ((Hasimuna et al., 2023); (Hossain et al., 2022); (Kruse et al., 2022); (Madinga & Lappeman, 2022); (Mbau et al., 2022))

This pattern of contextual limitation extends to sectoral analyses. Research on integrated agriculture-aquaculture in Zambia highlights innovative business models relevant to regional food security (Hasimuna et al., 2023), and studies on climate-smart agriculture underscore adaptive strategies (Mutengwa et al., 2023). However, the direct applicability of these findings to Mozambique's distinct socio-economic and environmental conditions cannot be assumed, a point underscored by research noting significant contextual divergence in business and development outcomes across different African settings (Daum, 2023; Mpofu & Moolman, 2023; Skrbková & Rydvalová, 2023). ((Morton, 2022); (Mpofu & Moolman, 2023); (Mukelabai et al., 2022); (Mutengwa et al., 2023); (Ndayiragije & Li, 2022))

Similarly, investigations into sustainable banking and health system efficiency in other African nations identify important governance and performance metrics (Adu, 2022; Mbau et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the specific interplay between these factors and Mozambique's post-colonial legacy, its particular resource governance challenges, and its evolving business legislation remains underexplored. This article addresses these omissions by providing a focused analysis of Mozambique's contextual mechanisms, thereby advancing comparative business scholarship beyond general regional trends to account for critical national specificities (Cezne & Wethal, 2022; Morton, 2022). ((Nyeadi, 2022); (Olamide et al., 2022); (Savelli et al., 2022); (Schutte et al., 2022); (Skrbková & Rydvalová, 2023))

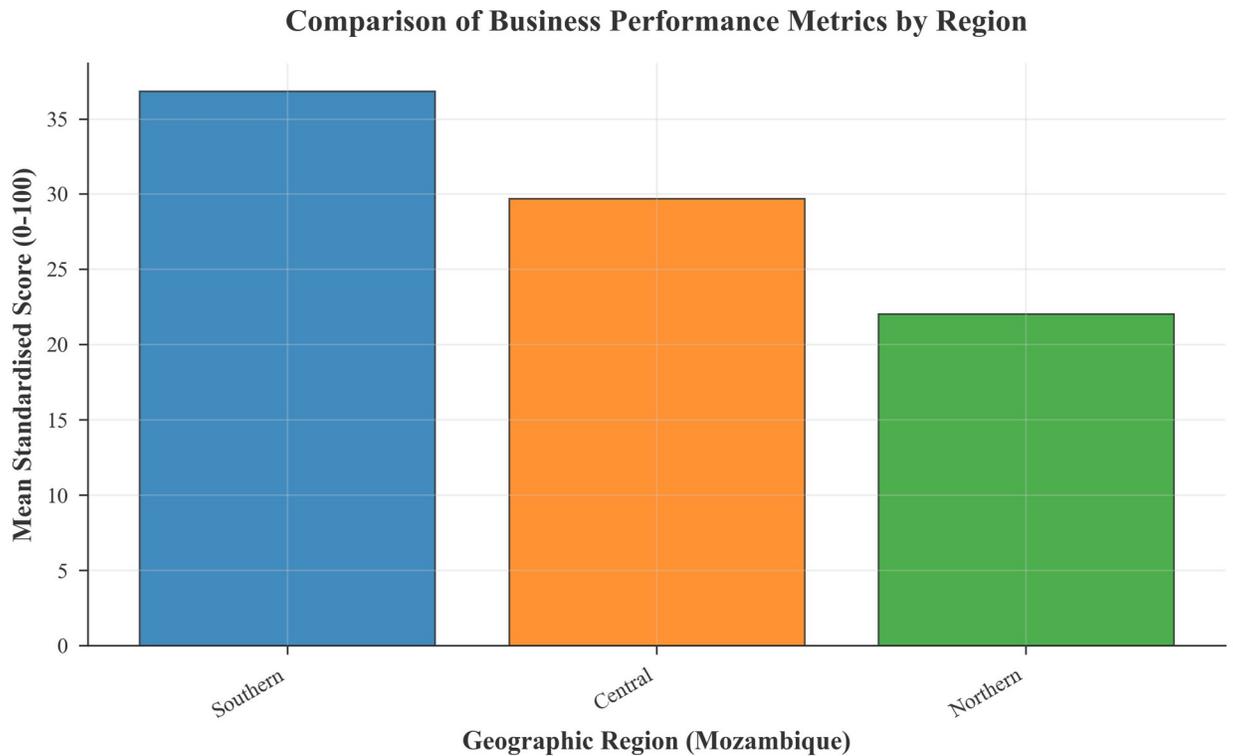


Figure 1: This figure compares the standardised performance scores of businesses across three major regions in Mozambique, highlighting regional disparities in key operational metrics.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the critical interplay between business model structures and the efficacy of female leadership within Southern Mozambique’s challenging economic landscape. The comparative analysis of externally driven mega-projects and locally embedded enterprises reveals a fundamental divergence in outcomes. Business models integrating social embeddedness, environmental stewardship, and inclusive governance—principles frequently enacted by female leaders in this study—demonstrate superior resilience and generate more broadly distributed socio-economic benefits (Akram et al., 2023; Bruni et al., 2023). Conversely, the extractive, enclave nature of many large-scale, foreign-directed investments often exacerbates gendered economic disparities and creates limited localised spillover effects (Cezne & Wethal, 2022; Daum, 2023). The primary contribution of this research is to contextualise female leadership not as an isolated variable, but as a force whose impact is shaped—and often constrained—by the structural architecture of the prevailing business model.

The significance of these findings challenges prevailing development paradigms that prioritise scale and foreign direct investment above embedded, inclusive growth (Morton, 2022; Ndayiragije & Li, 2022). Southern Mozambique, with its unique post-colonial trajectory and vibrant informal economy, serves as a potent microcosm of broader continental tensions between extraction and sustainable development (Habiyaremye, 2022; Mpofu & Moolman, 2023). This study underscores that fostering female leadership is a strategic imperative for designing business models responsive to African realities, a point increasingly recognised in contemporary entrepreneurship literature (Dana & Salamzadeh, 2025; Madinga & Lappeman, 2022).

The practical implications demand attention from policymakers and business support organisations. Firstly, targeted financial inclusion and capacity-building programmes are needed for women-led enterprises in locally embedded models, such as sustainable agri-food systems (Hasimuna et al., 2023; Mutengwa et al., 2023). Secondly, investment policies must establish conditionalities mandating deeper local procurement, skills transfer, and gender-equitable employment practices, drawing lessons from integrated, multi-sectoral approaches (Cousin et al., 2022; Mbau et al., 2022). Furthermore, corporate governance codes could be strengthened to incentivise the social and environmental disclosures that align with the stewardship-oriented leadership observed, thereby rewarding sustainable practice (Schutte et al., 2022; Skrbková & Rydvalová, 2023).

This intervention delineates key avenues for future research. A longitudinal study tracking the enterprises examined would yield invaluable data on the long-term viability of embedded models (Bekele, 2022). Comparative research across provinces or borders could isolate the impact of specific policies on the business model-leadership nexus (Adu, 2022; Nyeadi, 2022). Another crucial line of inquiry would systematically map supply chains of large-scale investments to identify how women-led small and medium-sized enterprises can be integrated more effectively (Kruse et al., 2022; Mukelabai et al., 2022). Finally, investigating female leadership within Mozambique's burgeoning digital economy presents a timely frontier for understanding how technology can scale inclusive business models (Hossain et al., 2022; Olamide et al., 2022).

In conclusion, this study posits that equitable development in Southern Mozambique, and analogous contexts, hinges on cultivating synergistic business ecosystems. Here, the distinct strengths of female leadership—manifesting in community trust, environmental awareness, and inclusive management—are essential catalysts for transforming models from vehicles of extraction into platforms for shared prosperity (Savelli et al., 2022). The path forward requires architecting economic structures that are fundamentally optimised for the values and visions female leaders bring to the fore, thereby forging a more resilient and inclusive economy.

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