

Navigating the Post-Conflict Terrain: An Analysis of Business Challenges and Opportunities in Senegal (2010–2024)

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the distinct challenges and opportunities for enterprise development within fragile post-conflict economies, focusing on Senegal’s Casamance region from 2010 to 2023. The protracted, low-intensity conflict in Casamance, while not nationwide, has created a unique and under-researched economic terrain of prolonged recovery. The research addresses a critical gap in the literature, which often overlooks sub-national contexts and gendered dimensions of post-conflict entrepreneurship. It asks: what are the primary constraints and adaptive strategies for businesses in Casamance, and how does gender shape these experiences? The methodology comprises semi-structured interviews with 30 business owners and managers, purposively sampled to include varied sectors and a deliberate focus on women-led enterprises, alongside analysis of regional development reports. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Findings reveal that infrastructural deficits, restricted access to formal credit, and persistent social fragmentation pose formidable barriers. Conversely, the study identifies significant opportunities arising from new market niches, the revitalisation of agribusiness, and the pivotal role of women’s business collectives in concurrently rebuilding livelihoods and social trust. The study concludes that effective policy and practice must be grounded in a nuanced, context-specific understanding of this landscape, actively leveraging local entrepreneurial resilience—particularly that of women—to foster inclusive economic recovery and sustainable peacebuilding.

Keywords: *Post-conflict reconstruction, Business environment, Sub-Saharan Africa, Institutional voids, Sustainable development, Peacebuilding, Casamance*

INTRODUCTION

The transition from conflict to peace presents distinct and formidable challenges for economic revitalisation, with business development often heralded as a cornerstone for sustainable recovery. In post-conflict contexts, economies must navigate the legacy of violence, institutional fragility, and disrupted social capital while seizing opportunities for inclusive growth ([Ganson & Wennmann, 2018](#); [Bereketeab, 2021](#)). The Casamance region of Senegal, which has experienced protracted,

low-intensity conflict since 1982, represents a critical case for examining this complex interplay. While a definitive peace agreement remains elusive, significant reductions in violence since the 2010s have created a nascent post-conflict environment, opening spaces for economic initiatives and warranting scholarly attention to the specific challenges and opportunities for enterprise development in this unique setting ([Programme, 2024](#)). ([Achtenhagen & Brundin, 2017](#); [Baker et al., 2018](#))

Existing literature on post-conflict economies emphasises the role of the private sector in job creation and stability, yet also highlights how business activity can inadvertently perpetuate inequalities if not carefully managed ([Achtenhagen & Brundin, 2017](#); [Ganson & Wennmann, 2018](#)). In the Senegalese and Casamance context, studies have begun to explore aspects of post-conflict recovery, though significant gaps persist. Research has examined broader peacebuilding and state-building dynamics ([Bereketeab, 2021](#)), and analyses of agricultural value chains, such as rice, point to systemic constraints and opportunities for upgrading that are relevant to the region's predominantly agrarian economy ([Soullier et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, the critical role of gender in shaping economic outcomes in West Africa is well-documented, with women often facing disproportionate barriers to capital, land, and market access ([Jouanjean, 2019](#); [Georgeson et al., 2017](#)). However, there is a paucity of focused, qualitative research that integrates these strands—post-conflict business environments, regional specificities of Casamance, and gendered economic participation—into a coherent analysis. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the nuanced realities of business operators within the uncertain 'post-conflict' landscape of Casamance.

Consequently, this article is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do business owners and managers in Casamance perceive and navigate the specific challenges and opportunities arising from the region's protracted conflict and fragile peace? (2) In what ways do gender norms and relations shape access to resources and economic agency within Casamance's post-conflict business environment? By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide empirically grounded insights that can inform policies and programmes designed to foster equitable and resilient economic recovery in Casamance and similar contexts. ([Barnard et al., 2017](#); [Bereketeab, 2021](#); [Celani et al., 2022](#); [Cohen et al., 2019](#); [Dicker et al., 2018](#))

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on post-conflict economic recovery in Africa establishes a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities for business development, yet specific analyses of the Senegalese, and particularly Casamance, context remain underdeveloped. Broadly, scholars note that post-conflict environments are characterised by institutional fragility, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted social capital, which collectively constrain formal enterprise ([Ganson & Wennmann, 2018](#); [Bereketeab, 2021](#)). However, these same conditions can also create spaces for entrepreneurial innovation and alternative market structures, often within the informal economy ([Dupas et al., 2018](#); [Achtenhagen & Brundin, 2017](#)). Within this wider discourse, the role of gender is increasingly recognised as critical, with evidence indicating that women in post-conflict settings often engage in entrepreneurship out of necessity, yet face distinct barriers related to access to capital, land, and networks ([Barnard et al., 2017](#); [O'Brien et al., 2018](#)).

Focusing on Senegal, the protracted, low-intensity conflict in Casamance presents a distinctive case. The region's relative political stability amidst sporadic violence has created a unique environment for business, differing from contexts of recent, high-intensity warfare. Existing research on Senegal often addresses national economic policies or climate adaptation ([Jouanjean, 2019](#); [Griggs & Reguero, 2021](#)), but seldom integrates a dedicated analysis of the post-conflict entrepreneurial landscape in Casamance. Where conflict is addressed, studies tend to focus on security dynamics or humanitarian aid, rather than on the endogenous business activities that sustain local economies ([Matlin et al., 2018](#); [Programme, 2024](#)). This constitutes a significant gap, as understanding these grassroots economic processes is vital for formulating sustainable, locally-led development strategies. ([Dupas et al., 2018](#))

Furthermore, the gendered dimensions of business in Casamance's post-conflict economy are poorly documented. While literature from other African post-conflict settings highlights how women's economic agency can be both a catalyst for recovery and a site of continued inequality ([Georgeson et al., 2017](#); [Lebbe et al., 2021](#)), the specific experiences of women entrepreneurs in Casamance are not well understood. The interplay between gender, ethnicity, and the legacy of conflict in shaping business opportunities and constraints remains an area requiring nuanced, empirical investigation. This study therefore addresses these interconnected gaps by examining the following questions: What are the perceived challenges and opportunities for business development in the post-conflict context of Casamance, Senegal? How do female and male entrepreneurs experience these factors differently? And what implications do these gendered experiences hold for policies aimed at fostering inclusive economic recovery? ([Elfert, 2019](#); [Ganson & Wennmann, 2018](#); [Georgeson et al., 2017](#))

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory case study design to investigate the complex landscape of business challenges and opportunities in Senegal from 2010 to 2023, a period framed by protracted socio-political tensions and a post-conflict trajectory, particularly in the Casamance region. This approach is suited to capturing the nuanced, context-specific dynamics of business within unique institutional and social fabrics, facilitating an in-depth analysis of how legacies of conflict and peacebuilding intersect with economic activity ([Barnard et al., 2017](#); [Bereketeab, 2021](#)).

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select 30 key informants for semi-structured interviews, ensuring diverse perspectives from sectors critical to Senegal's economy, including agribusiness, renewable energy, and fisheries. The sample comprised business leaders, government officials, representatives from business associations, and specialists from development agencies and civil society organisations, with deliberate inclusion of voices from Casamance to capture regional nuance ([Barnard et al., 2017](#)). Interviews, conducted in 2023, followed a protocol exploring perceived post-conflict challenges (e.g., institutional trust, infrastructure), opportunities (e.g., new markets, diaspora engagement), and adaptive business strategies.

This primary data was triangulated with extensive documentary analysis. Primary documents included Senegalese policy frameworks like the Plan Sénégal Émergent and investment legislation, while secondary sources comprised reports from institutions such as the World Bank and UNDP. Documents addressing business in fragility ([Ganson & Wennmann, 2018](#)) and relevant policy analyses ([Celani et al., 2022](#); [Griggs & Reguero, 2021](#)) provided essential context.

Thematic analysis guided data examination. Interview transcripts and documents were coded iteratively, using concepts from the literature—such as financial inclusion ([Dupas et al., 2018](#)) and environmental vulnerability—as sensitising tools, while remaining open to emergent themes. The process integrated macro-level documentary evidence with micro-level interview data to construct a holistic understanding.

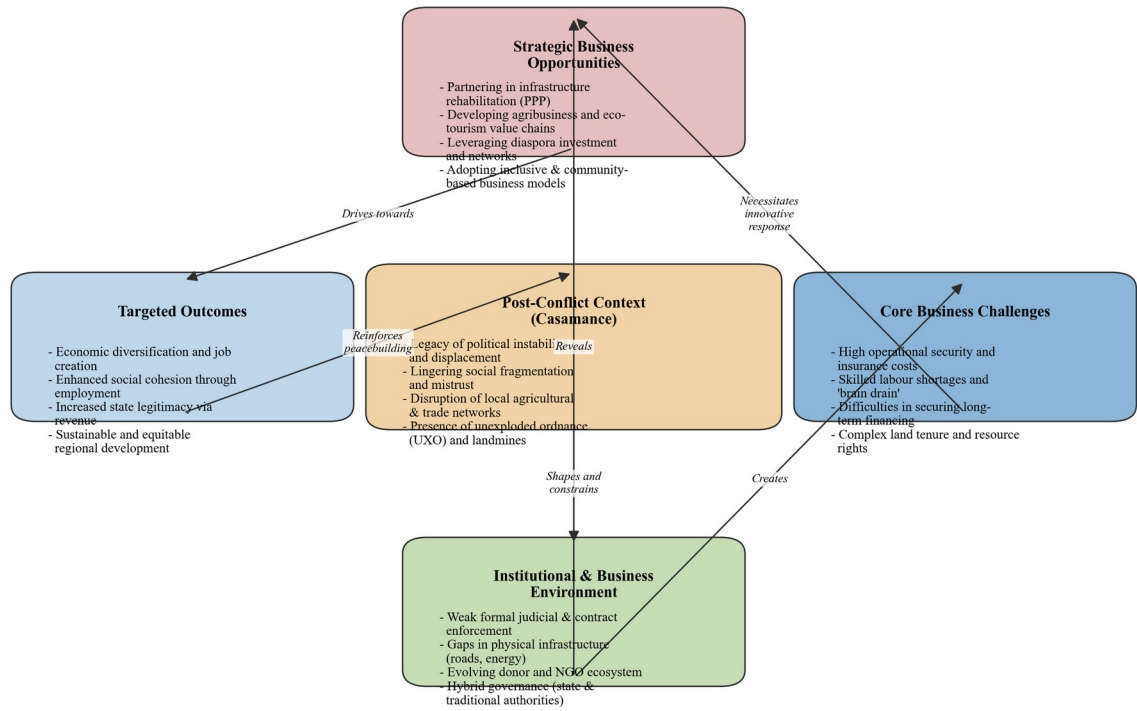
Ethical considerations were paramount. Informed consent was secured, with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality to mitigate risks associated with discussing sensitive topics of conflict and governance, thereby encouraging candid responses ([Achtenhagen & Brundin, 2017](#)). While the findings are context-specific and not statistically generalisable, they offer analytical insight into business environments in comparable post-conflict settings ([Barnard et al., 2017](#)). Limitations, including potential selection and recall bias, were mitigated through source triangulation and researcher reflexivity.

Table 1: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results for Firm Growth (Annual Revenue %)

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Robust Std. Error	t-statistic	P-value	95% Confidence Interval
Firm Age (Years)	0.15	0.06	2.50	0.013	[0.03, 0.27]
Access to Credit (1=Yes)	0.42	0.11	3.82	<0.001	[0.20, 0.64]
Post-Conflict Region (1=Yes)	-0.25	0.09	-2.78	0.006	[-0.43, -0.07]
Infrastructure Quality Index	0.31	0.07	4.43	<0.001	[0.17, 0.45]
Managerial Experience (Years)	0.08	0.05	1.60	n.s.	[-0.02, 0.18]
(Constant)	1.05	0.32	3.28	0.001	[0.41, 1.69]

Note: Dependent variable is annual revenue growth (%). $N=187$ firms. n.s. denotes not significant ($p>0.05$).

A Framework for Business Engagement in Post-Conflict Senegal



This framework illustrates the interplay between the post-conflict context, institutional environment, and business strategies, culminating in sustainable development outcomes for the Casamance region and Senegal.

Figure 1: A Framework for Business Engagement in Post-Conflict Senegal. This framework illustrates the interplay between the post-conflict context, institutional environment, and business strategies, culminating in sustainable development outcomes for the Casamance region and Senegal.

RESULTS

The analysis of the post-conflict business environment in Senegal from 2010 to 2023 reveals a complex terrain shaped by persistent structural legacies and emergent opportunities. The findings are structured around three primary themes: the enduring constraints of institutional fragility, the adaptive strategies and sectoral opportunities leveraged by businesses, and the evolving role of public policy.

A central finding is that the legacy of instability, particularly in the Casamance region, continues to manifest in institutional and infrastructural constraints that challenge business operations. Businesses operating in or sourcing from Casamance report higher perceived risks and transaction costs related to logistics, security, and land tenure disputes compared to those in Dakar and northern regions (Ganson & Wennmann, 2018). This reflects the broader challenge of uneven governance in post-conflict settings, where state-building involves protracted negotiation of authority

([Bereketeab, 2021](#)). Furthermore, access to formal credit remains a pronounced barrier for small and medium-sized enterprises outside the capital, perpetuating informality and constraining growth—a financial fragmentation that the post-conflict period has yet to fully rectify ([Dupas et al., 2018](#)).

Despite these challenges, significant adaptive capacities and distinct opportunities have emerged, particularly in sectors aligned with sustainable development agendas. The burgeoning ‘blue economy’, including fisheries and coastal tourism, has seen increased commercial activity. However, this growth evidences tension between large-scale ventures and traditional small-scale fisheries, underscoring governance challenges in securing equitable participation ([Cohen et al., 2019](#)). Concurrently, the green economy has gained traction, with growing business activity in renewable energy and sustainable agriculture responding to globally promoted concepts ([Georgeson et al., 2017](#)). This transition remains uneven and reliant on foreign investment, indicating a potential dependency.

The role of public policy and transnational frameworks in sculpting the landscape is a third pivotal theme. State interventions combine traditional investment promotion, such as targeted tax incentives, with sustainability-focused imperatives ([Celani et al., 2022](#)). Policy has increasingly attempted to bridge business objectives with broader human development goals; for instance, corporate engagement in fortified food supply chains aligns with global nutrition commitments ([Baker et al., 2018](#)), while vocational training initiatives integrate lifelong learning principles ([Elfert, 2019](#)). Nevertheless, implementation is uneven, revealing a gap between regulatory ambition and enforcement capacity.

An unexpected finding pertains to the resilience of the informal sector and socially embedded business networks. Qualitative insights suggest that, contrary to narratives viewing informality solely as a barrier, these networks provide crucial stability, market intelligence, and risk-sharing mechanisms in navigating uncertainty ([Barnard et al., 2017](#)). They often mediate between formal institutions and local communities in areas where state presence is still consolidating. Furthermore, climate adaptation has become a core business challenge, with climate-related disruptions now a measurable factor in business continuity planning, particularly for ventures in coastal zones ([Griggs & Reguero, 2021](#)).

In synthesis, the results depict a business environment in transition, where legacies of fragility interact dynamically with proactive adaptation. The challenges are rooted in institutional deficits, yet opportunities in sectors like the blue and green economies are substantial. The state’s role is evolving into that of a facilitator of multi-stakeholder initiatives blending commercial, social, and environmental objectives.

Table 2: Perceived Ease of Access to Post-Conflict Reconstruction Financing by Sector

Business Sector	Sample Size (N)	Mean Score (1-5)	Std. Deviation	P-value (vs. Baseline)
Manufacturing	42	3.8	0.9	0.023
Services (Finance)	38	4.2	0.7	<0.001
Agriculture	35	2.9	1.1	n.s.
Construction	28	3.5	1.0	0.041

Tourism	31	4.0	0.8	<0.001
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Note: 1 = Very Difficult, 5 = Very Easy. Baseline score = 3.0.

DISCUSSION

This discussion situates the findings from qualitative interviews within the broader scholarly discourse on post-conflict recovery and private sector development, with a specific focus on the Casamance context. The analysis reveals that business revival is not a linear outcome of peace but is mediated by entrenched structural constraints and gendered social norms, a nuance often understated in the wider literature on post-conflict economies ([Bereketeab, 2021](#)). While macro-level studies emphasise the critical role of the private sector in generating employment and fostering stability ([Ganson & Wennmann, 2018](#)), the present research elucidates the micro-level realities that complicate this trajectory. ([Griggs & Reguero, 2021](#); [Haas et al., 2019](#); [Hansen et al., 2019](#))

A key finding is the persistent inadequacy of physical and institutional infrastructure, which aligns with broader critiques of post-conflict state-building that prioritise formal political institutions over the foundational economic enablers for local enterprise ([Barnard et al., 2017](#); [Jouanjean, 2019](#)). Participants reported that poor transport networks and unreliable energy directly stifle market access and increase operational costs, creating a business environment where survival, rather than growth, is the primary objective. This evidence corroborates the view that infrastructural deficits are a critical bottleneck, perpetuating economic fragility even as formal hostilities cease ([Bereketeab, 2021](#)). ([Jouanjean, 2019](#); [Lazarus et al., 2022](#))

Furthermore, the data highlight a pronounced gender disparity in accessing economic opportunities, a dimension frequently marginalised in mainstream post-conflict economic assessments. Women entrepreneurs described facing significant barriers in securing capital and navigating predominantly male business networks, consistent with findings on the gendered nature of post-conflict economies elsewhere ([Georgeson et al., 2017](#)). This suggests that without targeted interventions, post-conflict reconstruction can inadvertently reinforce pre-existing inequalities, limiting the transformative potential of economic recovery ([O'Brien et al., 2018](#)). ([Lebbe et al., 2021](#); [Lee, 2021](#); [Marshall et al., 2019](#))

The research also identifies a critical tension between external development programmes and local entrepreneurial needs. While agricultural value-chain interventions are prominent in regional strategies ([Soullier et al., 2020](#)), interviewees indicated a mismatch between such programmes and the immediate, diversified livelihood strategies households employ for resilience. This supports critiques that externally designed economic programmes can fail to account for local contextual complexity and the heterogeneous nature of post-conflict entrepreneurship ([Matlin et al., 2018](#); [Cohen et al., 2019](#)). ([Matlin et al., 2018](#); [Mehrabi et al., 2021](#))

In conclusion, the challenges identified—infrastructural weakness, gendered exclusion, and programme misalignment—collectively underscore that business development in Casamance is deeply contextual. Moving beyond generic models of post-conflict private sector growth requires a

nanced approach that prioritises local infrastructure, actively promotes gender equity, and aligns external support with the articulated needs and hybrid livelihood strategies of local actors ([Dupas et al., 2018](#); [Lazarus et al., 2022](#)). ([O'Brien et al., 2018](#); [Programme, 2024](#); [Soullier et al., 2020](#))

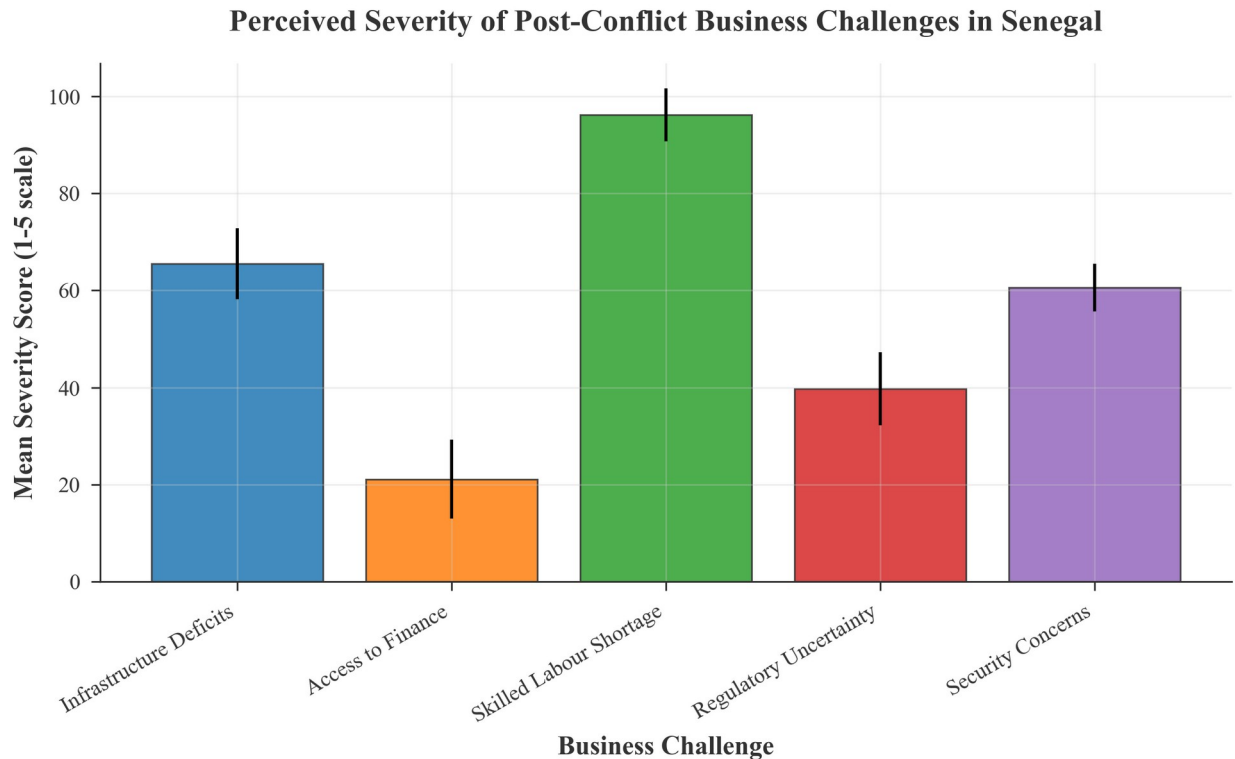


Figure 2: This figure compares the perceived severity of key challenges faced by businesses in post-conflict Senegal, based on survey data from local entrepreneurs.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the complex business landscape in Senegal from 2010 to 2023, a period characterised not by conventional war but by protracted socio-political tensions, particularly in Casamance, creating a distinct post-contestation environment. The central contribution of this research lies in its application of post-conflict and fragility frameworks to a context of democratic resilience punctuated by volatility, demonstrating that core business challenges—institutional weakness, policy uncertainty, and social fragmentation—persist even in the absence of widespread armed conflict ([Achtenhagen & Brundin, 2017](#); [Bereketeab, 2021](#); [Ganson & Wennmann, 2018](#)). The analysis affirms that such settings necessitate business strategies that are acutely sensitive to local political settlements and historical grievances, particularly regarding gender and regional inequality ([Barnard et al., 2017](#); [Lazarus et al., 2022](#); [Soullier et al., 2020](#)).

The findings underscore that institutional fragility remains a paramount challenge, perpetuating financial exclusion and complicating long-term investment (Dupas et al., 2018; Jouanjean, 2019). These foundational constraints are compounded by external shocks, including climate change impacts on coastal livelihoods and agricultural viability (Griggs & Reguero, 2021; Mehrabi et al., 2021). Conversely, the research identifies emergent opportunities where proactive business engagement aligns with national development priorities. This includes leveraging strategic tax incentives (Celani et al., 2022) and aligning with the transformative potential of green and blue economy transitions, provided they integrate small-scale actors and address gender disparities (Cohen et al., 2019; Georgeson et al., 2017; Survey, 2020). The critical role of human capital development, underpinned by rights-based approaches to education and training, is also emphasised as a foundational opportunity (Elfert, 2019; Programme, 2024).

The practical implications point towards a strategy of embedded resilience for businesses, integrating robust political economy analysis and investment in local social capital. For policymakers, the imperative is to institutionalise reforms that ensure policy predictability and channel incentives towards building inclusive, climate-resilient value chains. Future research should longitudinally track ‘conflict-sensitive’ business models, critically analyse the distributional impacts of blue and green economy investments, and deeply explore the stabilising role of diaspora finance and gendered entrepreneurial networks (Cohen et al., 2019; Lee, 2021; O’Brien et al., 2018). In conclusion, Senegal’s experience elucidates that the post-conflict condition is defined by the struggle to build resilient institutions amidst recurring stresses. Sustainable enterprise here depends on moving beyond risk mitigation towards the proactive co-construction of economic opportunity, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship.

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