

Transformational Leadership through Indigenous Systems: Unlocking the *Harurwa* Value Chain for Economic Growth and Innovation in *Bikita* District

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Abstract

This study explores how transformational leadership, when rooted in indigenous systems, can unlock the economic and innovative potential of the harurwa (edible stinkbug) value chain in Bikita District under Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. The harurwa, a culturally significant delicacy with nutritional and economic value, has traditionally been harvested and consumed within local communities but remains underutilized in broader market value chains. Drawing on the principles of transformational leadership vision, inclusivity, capacity-building, and innovation the paper examines how community leaders, traditional institutions, and local entrepreneurs can work together to enhance production, processing, and commercialization of harurwa. The research employed a qualitative case study design to explore how transformational leadership within indigenous knowledge system s(IKS) can unlock the harurwa value chain for economic growth and innovation in Bikita District. Anchored in a constructivist paradigm, it recognized the co-creation of knowledge through interaction between the researcher and participants who value indigenous knowledge systems. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders, local entrepreneurs, and government officials, focus group discussions with harvesters and traders, and participant observation during the harvesting season, supplemented by secondary data analysis. The targeted population included individuals knowledgeable about harurwa harvesting, leadership structures, and value chain dynamics, comprising traditional leaders, harvesters, traders, youth, and relevant officials. A total of forty (40) participants were selected using purposive sampling and refined through snowball sampling to ensure diverse representation and access to knowledgeable informants. The integration of indigenous knowledge with modern value chain management provides opportunities for employment creation, food

security, and rural industrialization. The findings suggest that embracing indigenous governance structures, promoting collective ownership, and fostering innovation-driven practices can position *harurwa* not only as a local resource but also as a strategic contributor to national economic growth. The paper argues that a hybrid leadership model that respects cultural heritage while driving market-oriented innovation can transform the livelihoods of Bikita residents and serve as a blueprint for other indigenous resource-based economies in Africa.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Indigenous systems, *Harurwa* value chain, Economic growth, Innovation

Introduction

The pursuit of sustainable economic growth and innovation in rural Africa has increasingly highlighted the significant potential inherent in indigenous knowledge systems and locally available resources. In *Zimbabwe*, where rural livelihoods often depend on natural resources, traditional practices and indigenous food systems provide both survival strategies and opportunities for entrepreneurial development. One such resource is *harurwa*, the edible stinkbug (*Encosternum delegorguei*), which has long formed part of local diets in *Bikita* District. Its use extends beyond *Bikita* to other parts of the southeastern *Zimbabwe*, with oral traditions among the *VaRemba* and other *Karanga*-speaking communities indicating that the practice dates back to the precolonial era (Maviya, 2015). Ethno-entomological studies indicate that insects like *harurwa* were part of indigenous food systems in Southern Africa long before European settlement (van Huis, 2013). Missionaries and early colonial settlers in the late 19th century also documented insect consumption as an integral part of local diets, though they often misunderstood its cultural significance (van Huis et al., 2013).

In *Zimbabwe*, the harvesting of *harurwa* in the *Norumedzo* Sacred Valley of *Bikita* is regarded as a cultural practice closely linked to spirituality, totemic beliefs, and environmental stewardship, and it has been transmitted across generations. Oral histories from elders in *Bikita* point to *harurwa* being valued both as a nutritious seasonal delicacy and a ritual food, with traditions possibly dating back to the late Iron Age (1600s–1800s) (Nyamadzawo, 2014). However, formal written records of *harurwa* consumption only appear in the early 20th century ethnographies on *Zimbabwean* indigenous diets (van Huis, 2013).

Customarily, harvested during specific seasons, *harurwa* is not only a delicacy however also a source of income generation, nutrition, and cultural identity. Despite its significance, the *harurwa*

value chain remains largely informal, underdeveloped, and disconnected from broader markets, limiting its economic contribution.

To address this developmental gap, this paper argues for the application of transformational leadership through indigenous systems as a mechanism to unlock the full potential of the *harurwa* value chain. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013), is essential for mobilizing communities for them to foster innovation. By incorporating indigenous knowledge systems that guide harvesting, processing, and distribution, leaders can drive the modernization of the *harurwa* sector while still safeguarding cultural values. This blended leadership approach recognises the strength and resilience of indigenous knowledge while also aligning it with modern strategies for economic development and growth.

Harurwa in Bikita District: Cultural and Economic Significance

Bikita District is located in *Masvingo* Province and is widely known as the cultural homeland of *harurwa*. Oral traditions indicate that the edible insect has been a dietary staple in the community's diets for centuries. Its seasonal arrival is often celebrated as a blessing from ancestral spirits. *Harurwa* is typically harvested by shaking host trees early in the morning, then collected in large sacks for household consumption or sale at local markets. Beyond its role as a food source, *harurwa* carries strong cultural significance, symbolizing deep-rooted traditions and often being linked to ecological balance and spiritual harmony.

Economically, *harurwa* has long served as an important income-generating resource, particularly for women and youth who dominate both the harvesting and vending. The trade in *harurwa* is highly seasonal, with prices fluctuating depending on their availability. During the harvesting season, a cup of *harurwa* typically sells for about US\$1, making it relatively affordable for local consumers. However, when the insects are out of season, their scarcity drives up demand, and prices often double to around US\$2 per cup. This seasonal variation often creates the dynamic markets that not only sustain livelihoods in *Bikita* but attract traders as well as buyers from neighboring districts and towns surrounding *Bikita*. However, the lack of structured post-harvest practices such as drying technologies, hygienic packaging, and branding has limited the growth of the *harurwa* value chain. This situation reflects a wider pattern across Africa, where indigenous

foods like mopane worms in Botswana and baobab products in Malawi have been successfully transformed into export commodities through well-organized value chain systems.

Problem Statement

Despite its cultural and nutritional significance, the harurwa value chain in Bikita District remains largely underdeveloped. Existing practices are disjointed, heavily dependent on seasonal availability, and highly exposed to ecological and market fluctuations. Local communities lack access to modern processing facilities, food safety certification, and consistent markets. Furthermore, leadership in the sector is often informal who rely heavily on family or community elders without broader strategic stakeholder engagement. As a result, the potential of *harurwa* to contribute meaningfully to rural industrialization, food security, and innovation is undermined. This paper proposes that the transformational leadership anchored in indigenous governance systems can provide a solution to these challenges. Transformational leaders are capable of inspiring communities with a shared vision by mobilizing resources which excite and foster innovation (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). When applied to the *harurwa* value chain, such leadership can promote collective organization, encourage sustainable harvesting practices, and stimulate local entrepreneurship. Moreover, investing in these strategies within the indigenous cultural roots potentially ensure our own knowledge legitimacy, community ownership, and long-term sustainability.

Research Justification

The justification for this study lies in the urgent need to diversify *Zimbabwe's* rural economies in the wake of climate change, unemployment, and economic volatility. Edible insects have been recognized globally by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2013) as a sustainable source of protein and a potential contributor to food security. In the *Zimbabwean context*, policy frameworks have mostly unnoticed the sector by treating it as peripheral than a strategic venture capital initiative. By focusing on the *harurwa* case, this study contributes to filling this policy and scholarly gap by providing insights into how indigenous resources can capacity build and transform the village business enterprises.

Objectives

The main research objective of this article is to explore how transformational leadership, informed by indigenous knowledge systems, can unlock the *harurwa* value chain for economic growth and innovation in *Bikita* District.

Sub Objectives for this the study seeks to:

- To scrutinize the cultural significance of *harurwa* in *Bikita* District.
- To measure the economic significance of *harurwa* in *Bikita* District.
- To assess how transformational leadership influences indigenous value chain development.
- To identify opportunities for innovation within the *harurwa* sector.
- To examine how indigenous systems can be integrated into rural industrialization strategies.

Research Questions

- How can transformational leadership contribute to enhancing indigenous management of the *harurwa* value chain?
- What are the main challenges constraining *harurwa* innovation and commercialization?
- What potential for value addition or innovation is there in the *harurwa* industry?
- How can indigenous systems be leveraged to generate inclusive economic growth in *Bikita* District?

Literature Review

Cultural Significance of *Harurwa* in *Bikita* District

The *harurwa* cultural value chain in *Bikita* District is deeply rooted in the local people's traditional practices and lifestyles. Traditional leaders play an important role in safeguarding cultural heritage, including practices related to the harvesting and sharing of natural resources such as *harurwa*. The edible stinkbug is often linked to communal celebrations and rituals that reflect values of sharing, unity, and collective identity within the community.

Harurwa also serves as an important source of identity for the people of Bikita. Indigenous knowledge systems support the continuity of culture by embedding traditional practices into everyday life. The taboos and celebrations surrounding the harvesting of *harurwa* strengthen social cohesion and community solidarity, while also helping to keep younger generations connected to their cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the importance of *harurwa* goes beyond its role as a food source. Indigenous resources such as *harurwa* are often closely tied to religious beliefs and cultural practices, with many communities attributing protective and healing properties to them. This spiritual connection enhances its cultural significance, elevating *harurwa* beyond mere consumption. The cultural narratives that surround *harurwa* are a key aspect of making it such an important resource. Oral tradition and storytelling play a vital role in sharing knowledge about the uses and importance of edible insects. These narratives not only guide communities on how to harvest *harurwa* sustainably, but also foster a sense of pride in local heritage and cultural identity.

Lastly, awareness of the cultural significance of *harurwa* informs its utilization in community-based development initiatives. Northouse (2016) identifies that transformational leadership is capable of harnessing cultural resources in a bid to mobilize community engagement and collective action. By identifying and amplifying the cultural significance of *harurwa*, leaders are in a position to mobilize support for viable activities that benefit the community and the environment.

Economic Significance of *Harurwa* in Bikita District

The economic significance of *harurwa* in Bikita District is diversified and includes subsistence, trade, and the potential for market development. Natural resources can be drivers of economic growth, and *harurwa* is not excluded. It provides an important source of income for the majority of families, especially during the peak harvest time when families work together to harvest and prepare the insects.

Transformational leadership is capable of increasing economic opportunities associated with *harurwa*. As argued by Bass and Riggio (2006), motivating leaders can readily mobilize development resources. By stimulating the commercial value of *harurwa*, community leaders are able to impact on an investment in the processing facilities and marketing thus increase the insect worth.

The informal nature of the *harurwa* trade is both a challenge and an opportunity. Humphrey and Navas-Alemán (2010) observed that rural value chains are primarily disarticulated which prevents economic benefits from penetration. The integration of *harurwa* into formal value chains, can trigger efficiency in harvesting and visibility to the global markets. Such transformation requires the engagement of transformational leaders who are capable of confronting the challenges of market integration.

Additionally, *harurwa* has economic significance due to its contribution to food security. Traditional foods more broadly are known to enhance nutritional diversity and strengthen resilience. By promoting the use and trade of *harurwa*, communities can improve household food security while also generating income, making it an important asset within the local economy.

Finally, the economic value of *harurwa* can be harnessed to inform rural development policies. Berkes (2012) also called for the significance of community-based resource management, which can be utilized to facilitate sustainable economic growth. Economic policies can be streamlined and more responsive by making them compliant with the cultural practices surrounding *harurwa*.

Transformational Leadership and Indigenous Value Chain Development

Transformational leadership plays a central role in leading indigenous value chain development, particularly under the *harurwa* context. Transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend self-interest for common goals. For *Bikita*, traditional leaders can rally people through village opinion leaders into action to enhance the value chain pertaining to *harurwa*, linking individual aspiration and communal benefits.

Developing an enthralling vision for the *harurwa* sector is one of the critical roles for transformational leaders. According to Avolio and Yammarino (2013), such leaders can mobilize stakeholders as well as resources through their clear vision. The vision in *Bikita* could be formulated around ways of sustainable *harurwa* harvesting and expanding formal *harurwa* markets, which would enhance the economic benefits to the inhabitants.

Besides, transformational leaders are able to encourage innovation within the value chain. Intellectual stimulation is highlighted by Bass and Riggio (2006) as a key factor in transformational leadership. By encouraging a culture of innovation, leaders have the ability to

challenge members in the community to pursue new ways of processing, packaging, and marketing that could advance the positioning of *harurwa* into the domestic and global markets.

By collaborating indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) with transformational leadership the value chain envisaged can be enhanced. It is contested that application of local knowledge in decision-making will warrant development projects are relevant and culturally acceptable. With this approach, more sustainable practices in the *harurwa* value chain will be realized, which will positively impact the environment and economy.

Lastly, considering the dynamics between transformational leadership and reservoirs of indigenous knowledge value chain systems, the importance of community participation cannot be over looked. Northouse (2016) asserts that effective leadership involves building cooperation and inclusiveness. With the participation of the community individuals in the *harurwa* value chain evolution, transformational leaders will build trust through mutualizing gains.

Opportunities for Innovation within the *Harurwa* Sector

Innovation opportunities within the *harurwa* industry need to be tapped in order to facilitate its growth and sustainability. The global food market is increasingly valuing unique and native products, and this becomes a low hanging opportunity for *harurwa* to gain global recognition. Van Huis et al. (2013) stated that entomophagy and indigenous foods are increasingly at the forefront of sustainable food value chains, and this allows room for the growth of the markets.

Transformational leadership can catalyze innovation since it has the ability to inspire members of society to discover new uses for *harurwa*. Rumpold and Schlüter (2013) pointed out that it is possible to diversify food products, such as making snacks, juices, or supplements from *harurwa*. By instilling a culture of innovation, leaders can encourage entrepreneurs to develop new products that appeals to both the local and international markets.

Research and development are essential for unlocking the full potential of *harurwa*. Scientific inquiry plays a key role in improving the nutritional value and preservation methods of indigenous foods. By fostering collaboration between academic institutions and research organisations, transformational leaders can mobilise knowledge and resources to drive innovation in the processing and value addition of *harurwa*.

Furthermore, integration of technology can foster innovation in *harurwa*'s value chain. Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark (2011) stated that the technological advancement can improve on the processing, packaging, and distribution methods, thereby making the entire value chain efficient. Transformational leaders can advocate for the application of such technologies in an effort to enhance the sector's competitiveness.

Last but not least, forging partnerships with external stakeholders can open up new prospects for innovation. Berkes (2012) emphasized on the role of partnership initiatives in resource management. By engaging with NGOs, government agencies, and private sector actors, transformational leaders can leverage funding and expertise to enable innovative initiatives in the *harurwa* sector, thereby inducing economic growth and sustainability.

Integrating Indigenous Systems into Rural Industrialization Strategies

Integrating local systems into rural industrialization policy is important to make *Bikita* develop sustainably. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer an important foundation for understanding local contexts and practices, which can be leveraged to inform industrialization. They are inherently resilient and context-specific, making them highly valuable for guiding sustainable development initiatives.

Transformational leadership can facilitate the integration of IKS into industrialization strategies through strengthening collaboration among stakeholders in the community. Leaders who integrate indigenous practices are able to develop inclusive development plans that respect local traditions while remaining open to new innovations. This approach helps ensure that industrialization initiatives are both culturally relevant and socially accepted within communities.

Further, such identification of the roles of traditional leaders in governing can render industrialization policies more efficient. Matsiliza, (2024) observes that traditional leaders have a tendency to enable decisions regarding the running of resources, providing a bridge between modern and traditional practices. Through their involvement in industrialization initiatives, individuals are able to harness their power and legitimacy to enhance cooperation and collective action.

Incorporating IKS in rural industrialization can also enhance sustainability. As Berkes (2012) recognized that local management interventions can lead to environmental stewardship coupled

with economic growth. Through combining industrialization with sustainable approaches based on local traditional knowledge, communities can establish durable economies.

Finally, an understanding of indigenous systems can inform rural industrialization policy designs. Northouse (2016) emphasized on the need for inclusive leadership in crafting policies that are appropriate for the community values and needs. By integrating indigenous systems into policy translated into the native language, transformational leaders can advocate for mechanisms that increases both economic development and cultural conservation in *Bikita*.

Conceptual Framework

The study is informed by an integrated conceptual framework that places Transformational Leadership as the catalytic factor that itself aligns and mobilizes Indigenous Systems and Value Chain Evolutions to achieve sustainable sectoral growth. The framework posits that effective Transformational Leadership, with its vision, inclusiveness, and innovativeness, does not operate in isolation. It, rather, purposefully engages and intensifies the use of Indigenous Systems that provide the essential pillars of cultural legitimacy, customary governance, and ecological sustainability. Concurrently, it drives and institutionalizes Value Chain Development to build well-organized production, competitiveness, and market efficiency. Critically, the model demonstrates interdependence between Value Chain Development and Indigenous Systems: indigenous governance and knowledge provide the rules and setting for culturally appropriate and sustainable value chain management, and the economic benefits derived from a developed value chain strengthen and support maintaining the indigenous systems. Interaction among the three pillars generates targeted opportunities for innovation in terms of processing, technology, and the access to markets. It is the strategic advantage of such innovations that allows it to be integrated into Rural Industrialization strategies. Therefore, the path to economic growth in the *harurwa* niche sector is not linear but cyclical, where leadership, culture, and commerce are intertwined. This view ensures development is not only economically sustainable but also culturally owned and sustainable, which in turn produces valuable *Harurwa* Sector Outcomes within *Bikita* District.

Independent Variables: Transformational Leadership, Indigenous Systems, Value Chain Development.

Dependent Variables: Opportunities for Innovations, Economic Growth, Sustainable Sectoral Outcomes.

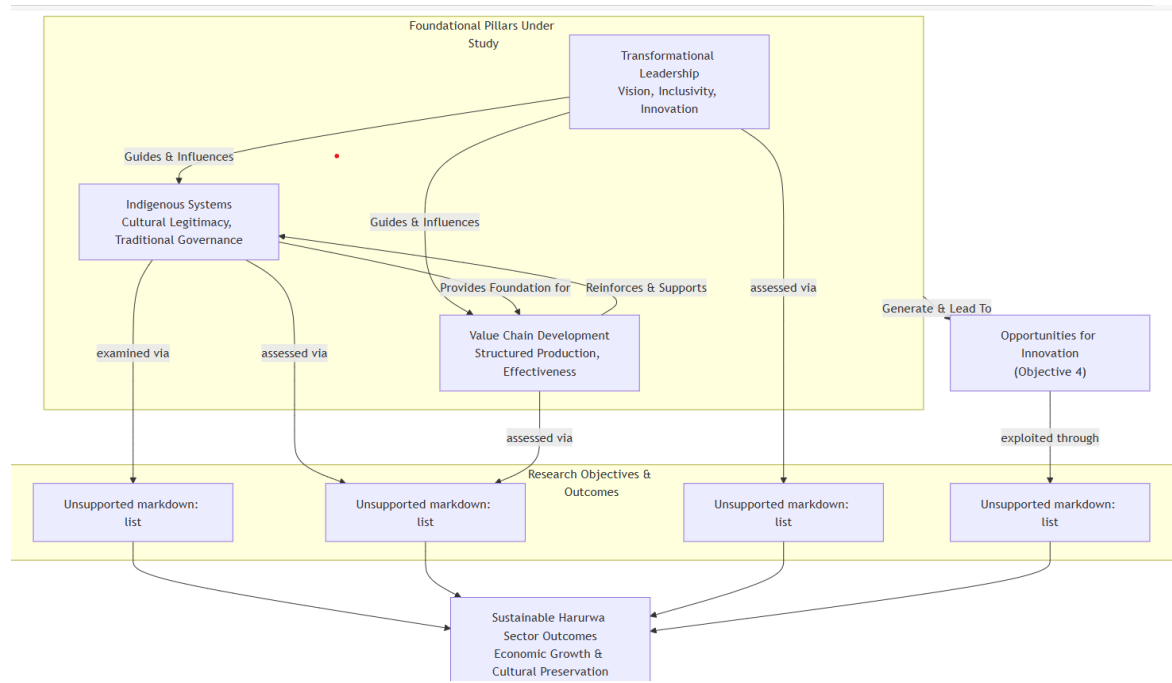


Figure 1: Diagrammatic Illustration of conceptual framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how transformational leadership within indigenous systems can unlock the *harurwa* value chain for economic growth and innovation in *Bikita* District. A case study approach was chosen because it enables in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). The *harurwa* value chain is deeply immersed in the local culture, traditions, and community governance, making the case study design suitable for capturing the nuances of indigenous systems. Furthermore, qualitative methods allow for the exploration of perceptions, values, and lived experiences of local actors, which are central to understanding the dynamics of leadership and innovation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research design was anchored on a constructivist paradigm, which assumes that knowledge is co-created through interaction between the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This paradigm aligns with the study's focus on indigenous knowledge systems, as it respects local voices and recognizes the legitimacy of non-Western epistemologies (Chilisa, 2012). By integrating transformational leadership theory with indigenous governance systems, the study aligns with a decolonial research approach that prioritizes cultural authenticity and local empowerment.

Study Area

Bikita district is located in *Masvingo* Province of *Zimbabwe*, was selected as the study area because it is the cultural hub of *harurwa* harvesting. Communities in *Bikita* like in *Nerumedzo* have developed unique practices around the collection, preparation, and consumption of *harurwa*, making the district an ideal site for investigating indigenous value chains. The district is predominantly rural, with livelihoods based on subsistence farming, small-scale trading, and natural resource utilization (ZimStat, 2022). *Harurwa* is harvested seasonally, often between May to July, when host trees like *musasa* yield the insects in abundance. The Local markets in *Nyika* Growth Point, *Rhoyi* as well as other trading centers have become the hotspots of *harurwa* trade, attracting both the indigenous and external buyers.

Sampling Techniques

There is clear distinction here between the population of interest and the sample. The population of interest, refers to the broad group of interest for generalization, consisted of all individuals in *Bikita* District with an ample experience of *harurwa* harvesting, its leadership structure, and its value chain dynamics. This population included, but not limited to, traditional leaders in the terms of chiefs, headmen, and village elders, both male and female harvesters, local shopkeepers, youth who vend, and rural district council officials. The sample size, however, is the precise, slightly lower number of individuals taken from this broader population actually to participate in the research; this was established at a hoped-for total of forty(40) participants. It was strategically sampled using purposive sampling to ensure it was representative of the diversified voices within the community, and then filtered using snowball methods of sampling for access to out-of-the-way networks, thus being able to obtain data that could be from informants with the depth required in order to advance the purposes of the study.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods employed in this study utilized a qualitative research methodology to gain an in-depth insight into the dynamics of transformational leadership, indigenous systems, and the *harurwa* value chain. This approach included semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders, entrepreneurs, and government officials, which provided rich, contextualized perspectives. Focus group discussions with harvesters and traders further captured collective views and experiences, while participant observation during the harvesting season offered firsthand insights into practices and governance. Additionally, secondary data analysis complemented the qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the context and themes relevant to the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observation.

- **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with traditional leaders, local entrepreneurs, and government officials to understand leadership dynamics, regulatory frameworks, and potential for commercialization. Interviews allowed participants to express their perspectives freely while enabling the researcher to probe for deeper insights (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).
- **Focus group discussions** were held with harvesters and traders, grouped by gender and age, to capture collective views on challenges, opportunities, and innovations in the *harurwa* sector. FGDs were particularly useful in surfacing community narratives and cultural beliefs surrounding *harurwa* (Morgan, 1997).
- **Participant observation** was employed during the *harurwa* harvesting season i.e May to July 2025 to capture practices, rituals, and market dynamics. Observation provided firsthand insights into indigenous governance mechanisms, such as how harvesting rights are allocated and how conflicts are resolved.

Additionally, secondary data such as government reports, policy documents, and academic literature were analyzed to contextualize findings and triangulate primary data sources.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke`s (2006) six-step approach. Interview and focus group transcripts were transcribed verbatim and organized into themes related to transformational leadership, indigenous governance, and value chain development.

Themes were then interpreted within the broader theoretical framework of transformational leadership and indigenous systems. For example, narratives of chiefs mobilizing communities were analyzed in relation to idealized influence and inspirational motivation, while traders` innovations in packaging were linked to intellectual stimulation. The integration of indigenous rituals with leadership practices was examined as evidence of hybrid leadership models.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the traditional leadership in *Bikita*. The study adhered to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity (Israel & Hay, 2006). Participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used in reporting to protect identities. Importantly, the researcher engaged with traditional leaders to seek community entry and approval, respecting indigenous protocols before commencing fieldwork. This decolonial ethical stance ensured the research process was both respectful and legitimate (Chilisa, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

While the qualitative case study design provided deep insights, it also posed limitations. The findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to all edible insect value chains in Zimbabwe. Seasonal constraints also meant that data collection was limited to the *harurwa* harvesting period, potentially excluding off-season dynamics. Furthermore, some participants were hesitant to discuss commercial practices in detail due to fears of regulation or taxation. Despite these limitations, triangulation of methods and sources enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Findings Aligned with Research Objectives

Cultural Significance of *Harurwa* in *Bikita* District

The findings confirm that the cultural significance of *harurwa* is profound and multifaceted, serving as more than just a food source. It is deeply embedded in the spiritual and social fabric of the community. The study revealed that harvesting begins with community rituals to seek ancestral blessings, reflecting a spiritual dimension that governs resource management and reinforces social cohesion. Indigenous knowledge systems dictate the timing of harvesting and methods for minimizing ecological harm, ensuring practices are sustainable and culturally sanctioned. The allocation of harvesting rights by traditional leaders and the enforcement of customary rules through fines and penalties further demonstrate how *harurwa* is central to traditional governance structures. Participants noted that this cultural legitimacy is what sustains the practice and grants it enduring social acceptance. It reflects the broader role of indigenous knowledge in shaping community identity, values, and social order.

Economic Significance of *Harurwa* in *Bikita* District

The economic significance of *harurwa* is substantial yet under-optimized, functioning primarily within an informal, subsistence-oriented framework. The study found that *harurwa* provides critical household income and food security for harvesters, traders, and their families. Local traders and youth involved in vending are active participants in this informal economy. However, participants highlighted that the economic potential is constrained by seasonality, climate variability, and a reliance on informal market networks, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen. The current economic activities, such as sun-drying and basic packaging, though informal, add value and extend the product's shelf life for local trade. The overwhelming consensus among participants was that with improved packaging, market access, and formal recognition, *harurwa* could transition from a local food source to a significant commercial "business," tapping into urban and international markets as a high-protein, culturally authentic product, a potential previously identified by van Huis et al. (2013).

The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Indigenous Value Chain Development

The findings provide clear evidence that transformational leadership is the critical catalyst that influences and mobilizes the indigenous value chain towards development. Traditional leader's chiefs, headmen, and elders exemplify this leadership by providing vision, mentorship, and intellectual stimulation. They coordinate activities, regulate resources, and inspire the community to transcend subsistence harvesting by engaging in value addition like drying and packaging for market-oriented objectives. As one leader stated, this shift in mindset is crucial: from viewing *harurwa* solely as tradition to recognizing its market value. This leadership style fosters inclusivity by actively encouraging youth participation, thereby bridging generational gaps and injecting innovation into the value chain. These actions reflect the ideas of Bass and Riggio, who highlight how leaders inspire and motivate followers toward shared goals. They also support the view that effective leadership in Africa brings together cultural legitimacy and flexible, adaptive innovation in order to promote development.

Opportunities for Innovation within the *Harurwa* Sector

The study identified significant, community-identified opportunities for innovation that span the entire value chain. Key areas for improvement include:

- **Technology & Processing:** Advanced solar drying technologies and hygienic, branded packaging to reduce spoilage, improve quality, and access formal markets.
- **Product Development:** Processing *harurwa* into derivative products such as powders, snacks, or supplements to increase its value and appeal, aligning with global trends in edible insect consumption (Rumpold & Schlüter, 2013).
- **Market Innovation:** Developing formal market linkages to urban centers and potentially for export, moving beyond informal local networks. This includes leveraging its unique selling propositions as an organic, sustainable, and culturally authentic product.
- **Sectoral Linkages:** Innovating by linking the *harurwa* value chain to other sectors such as tourism (as a cultural experience or authentic souvenir) and the bio-economy. Transformational leaders were found to be key in fostering this innovative mindset through community workshops and mentorship without undermining traditional values.

Integration of Indigenous Systems into Rural Industrialization Strategies

The findings demonstrate that indigenous systems are not a barrier but rather the essential foundation for any successful rural industrialization strategy for the *harurwa* sector. The study reveals that effective integration would involve a hybrid model:

- **Governance:** Formal policies and external interventions must recognize and build upon existing indigenous governance structures, such as the conflict resolution and resource allocation mechanisms managed by traditional leaders. This ensures equity, sustainability, and community buy-in, as supported by Berkes (2012).
- **Knowledge:** Industrialization strategies must incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) regarding sustainable harvesting times and methods to ensure ecological sustainability is maintained even at a larger scale.
- **Cultural Legitimacy:** For rural industrialization to be successful, it must respect the cultural and spiritual protocols surrounding *harurwa*. As the findings show, leaders navigate tensions by introducing incremental technological and market improvements that do not violate core traditional values. This method guarantees that industrialization improves rather than eroding the cultural legitimacy that gives the produce its unique market value thereby ensuring its social acceptance.

Challenges Facing the *Harurwa* Value Chain

Despite these opportunities, several challenges constrain the development of the *harurwa* value chain. Seasonality limits continuous supply, making it difficult for traders to maintain consistent markets. Participants noted that climate variability affects the abundance of host trees and, consequently, *harurwa* availability. Market access remains a barrier, as traders rely on informal networks and lack connections to urban or export markets.

Policy and regulatory gaps also emerged as significant constraints. *Harurwa* is not formally recognized in Zimbabwe's food and agricultural policies, which affects food safety certification and commercialization. Participants pointed out that the lack of government support exposes harvesters and traders to exploitation by middlemen. Comparable challenges have also been

observed in other African edible insect value chains, including those involving mopane worms in Botswana and Zambia.

Cultural factors, while largely beneficial, sometimes hinder innovation. Some community members resist changes perceived as violating traditional protocols, such as mechanized processing or off-season harvesting. Transformational leaders address these tensions by finding a balance that respects traditional customs while gradually introducing practical improvements. At the same time, infrastructural constraints such as poor road networks, inadequate cold storage facilities, and limited access to financing continue to limit the growth potential of the harurwa sector.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the study demonstrates that transformational leadership within indigenous systems creates a unique platform for unlocking the *harurwa* value chain. Leaders mobilize communities, stimulate innovation, and integrate cultural practices with market-oriented strategies. Indigenous governance ensures sustainability, equitable resource access, and social legitimacy. Opportunities exist in packaging, branding, and market expansion, but challenges such as seasonality, policy gaps, and infrastructural limitations must be addressed. The findings indicate that hybrid leadership models, which integrate transformational principles with indigenous knowledge, can play a significant role in promoting rural economic growth and innovation in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Discussion

Integrating Transformational Leadership with Indigenous Systems

The study demonstrates how transformational leadership is a key driver in realizing potential in the *harurwa* value chain. The leaders of *Bikita* District do not merely impose regulations; they inspire, encourage, and intellectually stimulate communities to envision *harurwa* as something more than an ordinary dish. This aligns with the view that transformational leaders elevate a sense of shared purpose and motivate others to commit to collective goals. In *Bikita*, integrating transformational leadership with local governance structures allows leaders to maintain cultural legitimacy while driving economic innovation.

The traditional systems provide the platform for transformational leadership to operate on. Leaders follow local rituals, procedures, and government systems such that innovation does not destroy cultural values. For example, customary harvesting ceremonies are preserved while adding improved processing and packaging techniques. The hybrid model subscribes to Wiredu (2004), who maintains that the African epistemologies must be wedded with the contemporary organizational tenets in order to achieve sustainable development.

The study, therefore, confirms that transformational leadership is most effective when culturally grounded, specifying a harmony between theory and indigenous practice. This connectivity between leadership and indigenous authenticity not only encourages community involvement but also generates ownership among indigenous people. In enabling participatory decision-making, leaders enable locals to contribute to the success of the *harurwa* value chain without compromising their own culture.

***Harurwa* Value Chain as a Model of Rural Innovation**

The findings of the study reveal the way the *harurwa* value chain as a model for rural innovation in Zimbabwe can be employed. Through utilization of indigenous knowledge to manage resources and transformational leadership models, the community is able to escape subsistence into organized, market-oriented systems. This is facilitated by innovative strategies such as the use of altered traditional drying methods and hygiene improvement, enhancing product value and marketability.

Harurwa innovation is a showcase of not only economic potential but also environmental and social sustainability. Native knowledge that is adapted into modern practices allows for the production of products that appeal both at the local and international levels. The practices make the value chain profitable as well as sustainable, as shown in broader research on edible insects as a driver for the bio-economy.

These findings support the FAO (2013) and van Huis et al. (2013) conclusions that insects provide an environmentally friendly, high-protein food source that can be integrated into rural economies. The success of community-led innovation in *harurwa* processing reveals how local resources can be transformed into commodities for generating income without losing cultural integrity,

duplicating successful examples in Southern Africa where similar methods have improved livelihoods.

Leadership and Community Mobilization

Transformational *Bikita* leaders play a central role in mobilizing people around shared goals. They plan harvesting seasons, allocate rights of collection, and advise women and youths on processing practices. This indicates that leadership is not only about power but also encompasses mentoring, inspiring, and capacity building (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). Through collaboration culture, leaders induce members of the community to work together, which increases the overall effectiveness of the *harurwa* value chain.

The study identifies that mobilization is most effective when leadership is incorporated within the domestic systems of governance. The convergence of legitimacy and direction gives an arena where the people in the community feel valued and respected. By adopting practices and customs of the locals, the leaders generate trust and facilitate collective action among the community members that is required for the achievement of goals they share.

Moreover, evidence shows that leadership can reverse generational and gender differences in obtaining resources. Transformational leaders, by directly engaging youth and women, enhance equity and inclusiveness, a precondition for sustainable value chain transformation. Through the involvement of more people in innovation, inclusive leadership prevents genius creators from monopolizing innovation and spreading it throughout society, producing a multiplier effect on local economic growth.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Despite these successes, the study identifies significant challenges that could limit the growth of the *harurwa* value chain. Seasonal fluctuations, market access limitations, and policy gaps constrain commercialization, creating barriers that can hinder progress. These findings align with Humphrey and Navas-Alemán (2010), who argue that rural value chains often face structural and institutional barriers that must be addressed to facilitate growth.

Transformational leadership, however, can mitigate some of these challenges by fostering collective problem-solving, strategic planning, and advocacy for supportive policies. Leaders can

organize cooperatives to stabilize supply, negotiate better prices, and access government support, ensuring that communities can weather fluctuations in demand and supply. This proactive approach empowers communities to take charge of their economic futures while navigating external challenges.

Additionally, by promoting incremental innovation in processing and packaging, leaders can create a more resilient value chain that withstands seasonal variability. These strategies echo lessons from Kenya and Botswana, where community-based leadership has facilitated successful integration of indigenous resources into formal markets. By learning from these examples, *Bikita* leaders can adapt and implement similar strategies to overcome local challenges effectively.

Implications for Rural Industrialization and Policy

The study underscores the potential of indigenous resource-based value chains as vehicles for rural industrialization. By combining transformational leadership with local governance, communities can enhance productivity, create employment, and stimulate local economies. The *harurwa* case shows that leadership models rooted in culture can encourage innovation while still preserving traditional values, which is an important factor for sustainable development in Africa.

Policy implications are significant. *Zimbabwean* policymakers should recognize edible insects as strategic resources, providing technical support, access to finance, and regulatory frameworks that ensure food safety and market expansion. This recognition can lead to a more favorable environment for the development of the *harurwa* value chain, enabling communities to capitalize on their indigenous resources.

Integrating community-led leadership with formal policy structures can create a conducive environment for scaling up the *harurwa* value chain. By fostering collaboration between local leaders and policymakers, *Zimbabwe* can enhance food security and economic diversification while promoting sustainable practices that respect cultural heritage and community values.

Comparative Insights

A comparison of *Bikita's harurwa* value chain with other edible insect value chains across Africa reveals similar trends. In Botswana, for example, mopane worm cooperatives have utilized strong

leadership and indigenous knowledge to access regional markets while still upholding sustainable harvesting practices.

These successful models illustrate the power of combining traditional practices with innovative strategies to enhance market access and community livelihoods.

The Malawian context now represents, baobab value chains integration with traditional collection practices as well as modern processing to supply both local and international markets. This approach highlights the versatility of indigenous resources and the potential for rural communities to engage in diverse markets. Such comparisons reinforce the notion that effective leadership and respect for indigenous systems can drive rural innovation across different contexts.

The *harurwa* case in *Bikita* extends these lessons by emphasizing the centrality of cultural legitimacy in leadership. Unlike purely commercial approaches, hybrid leadership ensures that community values, rituals, and governance structures are preserved while fostering innovation. This supports the view that rural development in Africa should be grounded in local culture, led by communities, and focused on innovation.

Synthesis

In sum, the discussion confirms that transformational leadership within indigenous systems provides a robust mechanism for unlocking rural value chains. The *harurwa* sector exemplifies how cultural resources, when strategically mobilized, can contribute to economic growth, food security, and innovation. Challenges exist; however, the leadership, community mobilization, and hybrid governance offer pathways to overcome them which emphasizes acceptance by the rural communities.

The findings contribute to scholarly debates on leadership, indigenous knowledge, and rural industrialization and offers a replicable model for other indigenous resource-based value chains in Africa. By demonstrating the effectiveness of culturally contextualized leadership, the study highlights the importance of integrating local practices with contemporary strategies for sustainable development.

Ultimately, the research underscores the potential for indigenous value chains to drive economic and social change. By unlocking the full potential of resources like *harurwa* through innovative leadership and community engagement, rural areas can achieve greater resilience and prosperity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study explored how transformational leadership, embedded within indigenous systems, can unlock the *harurwa* value chain for economic growth and innovation in *Bikita District, Zimbabwe*. The findings demonstrate that traditional leaders, including chiefs and village elders, act as transformational agents by inspiring communities, facilitating knowledge transfer, and promoting innovation while respecting cultural norms. Through mentorship, vision-casting, and collective mobilization, leaders encourage harvesters, traders, and youth to engage in value addition activities, thereby enhancing the productivity and sustainability of the *harurwa* sector.

Indigenous knowledge systems form the foundation of governance and operational practices within the *harurwa* value chain. Rituals, taboos, and community-based rules help ensure sustainable harvesting, fair access, and strong social cohesion. When transformational leadership principles are combined with these indigenous systems, communities are able to modernize practices, improve hygiene in processing, and pursue market-driven innovations without losing cultural legitimacy. This blended approach demonstrates the value of culturally grounded leadership in promoting rural economic development in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa.

The study also identified significant opportunities for value addition and innovation. Packaging, branding, drying technologies, and market expansion were cited as potential areas for improving the *harurwa* sector's competitiveness. By leveraging these opportunities, communities can transform *harurwa* from a seasonal delicacy into a strategic resource that contributes to rural livelihoods, food security, and broader economic growth. These findings align with global literature on edible insects as sustainable, high-value food sources and as components of the emerging bio-economy (FAO, 2013; van Huis et al., 2013; Rumpold & Schlüter, 2013).

Despite the potential, the *harurwa* value chain faces challenges such as seasonality, limited market access, infrastructural constraints, and policy gaps. Cultural resistance to certain innovations and the informal nature of the sector further constrain commercialization. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that transformational leadership within indigenous systems can mitigate these

challenges by fostering collective problem-solving, capacity building, and strategic engagement with external stakeholders that include government agencies and market actors.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

1. **Policy Recognition and Support:** Policymakers in *Zimbabwe* should formally acknowledge edible insects, including *harurwa*, as important strategic resources for both food security and economic development. There is a need for policies that offer technical assistance, establish food safety standards, and support market access in order to better integrate indigenous value chains into national and regional economies.
2. **Capacity Building and Leadership Development:** Training programmes should be established to strengthen transformational leadership skills among traditional leaders and community champions. Emphasis should be placed on integrating innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive community mobilization within indigenous governance frameworks (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013).
3. **Value Addition and Market Expansion:** Communities should be supported to improve processing, packaging, and branding of *harurwa*. Investment in drying technologies, cold storage facilities, and quality assurance can increase market access and reduce post-harvest losses. Partnerships with urban traders and e-commerce platforms could expand domestic and international markets.
4. **Sustainable Resource Management:** Indigenous harvesting practices should be preserved to ensure ecological sustainability. Community-based monitoring systems and rotational harvesting schedules can prevent overexploitation of host trees while maintaining cultural rituals and social cohesion (Berkes, 2012).
5. **Research and Innovation:** Further studies should explore product diversification, nutritional analysis, and potential applications of *harurwa* in processed foods, pharmaceuticals, and animal feed. Action research involving communities can promote incremental innovation while respecting cultural norms (Matiza Ruzengwe et al, 2022).

6. **Community Cooperatives and Collective Action:** Establishing cooperatives can enhance bargaining power, stabilize supply, and facilitate access to finance. Cooperatives can also serve as platforms for knowledge exchange, mentorship, and training, reinforcing the transformational leadership model at the community level.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

The study contributes to theory by demonstrating that transformational leadership, when embedded within indigenous systems, provides a culturally informed and contextually relevant model for rural economic development. It also enriches the literature on edible insects and bio-economy by presenting a case where traditional knowledge and leadership intersect with innovation and market-oriented strategies.

From a practical perspective, the study offers actionable insights for community leaders, policymakers, and development practitioners seeking to leverage indigenous resources for economic growth. By adopting hybrid leadership models, rural communities can balance cultural preservation with innovation, creating sustainable value chains that enhance livelihoods and contribute to national development goals.

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