

## **Corporate Governance Dynamics: The Role of Board Composition in Driving Sustainable Performance of Public Enterprises in Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explored corporate governance dynamics with a focus on how board composition influences the sustainable performance of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in Zimbabwe. Amid widespread inefficiencies and corporate malpractices, the study developed and tested a conceptual model linking board effectiveness, governance transparency, gender diversity, and organizational performance. A mixed-methods approach was used, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from 300 stakeholders across various Zimbabwean SOEs. Inferential statistical techniques, including regression analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), were employed to test the proposed hypotheses. Results show that board ineffectiveness significantly hampers performance, while governance transparency and gender diversity positively and significantly predict sustainable outcomes. The study also identified notable gender-based differences in perceptions of governance and economic stability, highlighting the importance of inclusive leadership. Based on these validated relationships, an implementation framework was proposed to guide reforms in board appointments, enhance transparency mechanisms, and promote gender-balanced leadership. This research provides policymakers and enterprise boards with an evidence-based roadmap to improve governance structures, increase accountability, and foster long-term sustainable performance in Zimbabwe's public enterprises.*

**Keywords:** Board Independence, Corporate Governance, Gender Equity, Public Entities

### **Background to the Problem**

The historical role of Public Enterprises (PEs) in Zimbabwe's economy has been very important, as they operate in critical sectors such as power generation, transmission and distribution, transportation, food security, banking, and social security. However, years of poor performance, governance issues, and corporate scandals have put them in a position where they

can hardly create value, let alone sustain operations (Mushonga & Zvitambo, 2025; Mthombeni et al., 2024). Therefore, improving corporate governance, especially through establishing effective board structures, was a key policy focus to boost accountability, enhance performance, and support sustainable development (Zhou, 2023; Chigudu, 2018).

Worldwide, research findings indicate that board mechanisms, such as independence, diversity, and transparency, are key determinants of a company's performance and long-term sustainability (Dimingu & Mogaji, 2024). In Sub-Saharan Africa, empirical studies indicate that well-structured boards are associated with better environmental, social, and economic performance and with reduced risks of political interference (Darteh & Fiorani, 2025).

In Zimbabwe, the situation was different because there was no empirical evidence. Some prior studies, such as Munhenga and Mbigi (2022), have found a positive correlation between board composition and the performance of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). The work of Mushonga and Zvitambo (2025) showed that political appointments, gender imbalance, and lack of independent oversight not only hindered governance but also weakened board monitoring functions. This challenge was particularly relevant given reforms such as the Public Sector Corporate Governance Bill (Zim-Code), which sought to enhance transparency, accountability, and gender inclusion in board composition (Nyakurukwa & Seetharam, 2023; Chigudu, 2020).

In the management of Zimbabwean state-owned enterprises, one major mistake was the lack of gender diversity. The situation improved slightly when female representation on boards rose from 33% to 37%. However, men still held most decision-making roles, a significant weakness because it limited the range of viewpoints that effective leaders require. The lack of women's representation hindered the flow of knowledge and suppressed creativity within the organization, both of which are essential for the long-term, sustainable performance of the public sector (Tsvuura, Sifile & Kajongwe, 2025).

This research not only identified gaps but also proposed a conceptual model linking board effectiveness, governance transparency, and gender diversity to sustainable performance in Zimbabwean SOEs, which was both developed and empirically tested (Sibanda, Sifile & Marima, 2025). Following Agency Theory, which depicts the government as the principal and enterprise management as the agent, the study suggested that strengthening governance mechanisms could align interests, reduce inefficiencies, and enhance accountability (Muswere & Dube, 2022). The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative

regression and Structural Equation Modeling with qualitative interviews of key stakeholders to identify governance weaknesses and develop an evidence-based implementation plan. The overall goal was to present a governance reform roadmap to policymakers, enterprise boards, and regulators that would support long-term performance, restore public trust, and help achieve national development objectives (Mushonga & Zvitambo, 2025; Muswere et al., 2026).

### **Problem statement**

Zimbabwean state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were once major contributors to the economy, with their share of GDP reaching as high as 40%. However, the latest assessment indicates that their role has declined to below 15% due to ongoing issues, including underperformance, financial mismanagement, and poor governance, that remain prevalent in the country (Dandaratsi et al., 2022). Research confirms that weak board structures, limited autonomy, and gender disparity have undermined supervision and decision-making, thereby impairing the organizations' ability to learn and innovate (Gudo, Shawa-Mangani & Maduku, 2025; Tsvuura, Sifile & Kajongwe, 2025). As a result, there have been shortages in service delivery across critical sectors, including power, transport, banking, and social services (Moyo, 2016; Feya et al., 2025). Despite gradual reforms, more than a quarter of SOEs still face "going concern" risks, indicating that it is time to assess whether enhancing board independence, diversity, and gender representation could improve governance and lead to sustainable performance in Zimbabwean public enterprises (Mthombeni et al., 2024; Sibanda, Sifile & Marima, 2025).

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to address the following research questions:

- What is the structure of boards of directors in Zimbabwean state-owned enterprises?
- How do boards of directors in Zimbabwean state-owned enterprises function in practice?
- How does governance transparency influence the sustainable performance of Zimbabwean state-owned enterprises?
- To what extent is gender equity institutionalized in the governance arrangements of Zimbabwean State-Owned Enterprises?
- What governance reforms can enhance board effectiveness, transparency, and gender inclusion in Zimbabwean public enterprises?

## Study Hypotheses

The following were the hypotheses of the study:

- **H<sub>1</sub>**: Board structure and operations are positively and significantly related to the sustainable performance of Zimbabwean PEs.
- **H<sub>2</sub>**: The governance transparency perception has a significant and positive relationship with the sustainable performance of Zimbabwean PEs.
- **H<sub>3</sub>**: Greater gender fairness and responsiveness in leadership positively contribute towards governance dynamics and the sustainable performance of Zimbabwean PEs.
- **H<sub>4</sub>**: Implementing a governance reform framework that includes board composition, transparency, and gender inclusion significantly enhances the sustainable performance of Zimbabwean PEs.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Framework

Agency Theory is most applicable to research on governance, board composition, and gender equality in Zimbabwean public enterprises. The theory, proposed by Jensen and Meckling in 1976, explains the conflicts of interest that arise when agents (managers) pursue their own interests at the expense of principals (the state or shareholders). Agency Theory emphasizes the importance of establishing effective monitoring systems, including independent and qualified boards that align with organizational objectives, reduce inefficiencies, and enhance accountability. When applied to Zimbabwean public enterprises, this theory is highly relevant because it offers a model of how board functioning, transparency, and operational oversight can lead to sustainable performance and increased organizational effectiveness (Banda, 2023; Muswere & Dube, 2022). Using Agency Theory, the researcher evaluates how structural governance mechanisms can prevent risks such as political interference, lack of board expertise, and poor performance.

Gender Role Theory is the next relevant theoretical lens; it was first introduced by Eagly in 1987. According to this theory, societal norms and expectations shape men's and women's behaviors, decision-making styles, and leadership roles differently. It is an instrumental theory for analyzing gender inequality in the boardrooms of the Zimbabwean public sector and for explaining the persistence of male dominance in decision-making positions and its impact on governance. The theory encourages consideration of gendered perspectives in organizational

leadership and reveals the different perceptions and strategies that male and female leaders may adopt (Tsvuura, Sifile & Kajongwe, 2025; Ncube & Maunganidze, 2014). Linking this theory to the study helps justify the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles. It highlights the need for inclusive governance practices, which, in addition to improving strategic decision-making and innovation, will also promote sustainable enterprise performance.

### **Empirical literature review**

Recent studies in the field have shown that the composition of corporate boards—including independence, professional expertise, and gender diversity significantly influences organizational performance and sustainability outcomes. Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa and other developing countries indicates that boards with a higher share of independent directors and diverse skills are associated with stronger control, better decision-making, and stronger environmental, social, and governance performance. Conversely, boards characterized by political appointees or a lack of diversity often underperform (Simon & Mkumbuzi, 2024; Sanangura, 2010). Analysis further reveals that large boards are frequently associated with diluted accountability and decreased effectiveness, highlighting the importance of optimal board structures in complex institutional settings.

In the case of state-owned companies, research studies indicate that poor board composition—including a lack of independence and professional diversity—has contributed to inefficiency, poor strategic decisions, and loss of public trust. For example, in Zimbabwe, more than 60 percent of SOE boards were described as heavily politicized, which hindered oversight and decision-making and led to ongoing problems in finance and operations (Ncube & Maunganidze, 2014; Hove, 2017). The empirical evidence also showed that women's representation remained too low, averaging only 37 percent, and the exclusion of women was cited as a reason for the lack of diverse viewpoints essential for innovation, organizational learning, and long-term sustainability (Tsvuura, Sifile & Kajongwe, 2025).

Similarly, transparency in governance was linked to organizational performance. Research in developing countries has shown that state-owned companies with higher transparency such as timely financial reporting, transparent decision-making processes, and effective monitoring systems achieved better operational and sustainability outcomes than those with less transparent governance structures (Mukono, 2021; Wadesango et al., 2020). However, the

passage of the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act in Zimbabwe did not guarantee that compliance would constantly improve performance, as a report indicated that about 25 percent of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) still faced "going concern" risks, submitted financial statements late, and suffered from unresolved inefficiencies (Chigudu, 2020; Feya et al., 2025).

The literature, however, was still fragmented and limited in scope. Most studies have focused on board composition, gender diversity, or transparency individually, and only a few have examined their combined effects on sustainable performance, particularly in politically complex SOE environments. Furthermore, existing research was primarily directed toward private companies or cross-country analyses, which made it challenging to apply the findings to Zimbabwean public enterprises (Nyakurukwa & Seetharam, 2023). Therefore, there was an urgent need for empirical research that integrates board independence, professional expertise, gender representation, and governance transparency to assess their joint impact on sustainable performance in Zimbabwean public enterprises. This study addressed that gap by analyzing how governance mechanisms interact to influence the long-term performance of organizations, providing context-specific insights that could inform the management of public enterprises through policy and practice (Mushonga & Zvitambo, 2025).

## **Methods and Material**

The research adopted a pragmatic philosophy, allowing the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods suitable for the complex governance issues in Zimbabwean public enterprises (PEs). An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used, comprising an extensive initial quantitative survey to examine the relationships among board composition, governance transparency, gender diversity, and performance, followed by qualitative interviews to provide context and clarification for the statistical results (Ndlovu, Bhiri & Mutambanadzo, 2013; Sanangura, 2010). The quantitative sample comprised 300 subjects, including managerial and non-managerial staff from various Zimbabwean PEs, selected through a combination of purposive and stratified random sampling to ensure representation across functions and sectors. Structured questionnaires were distributed to respondents, and the data were analyzed using SPSS (v.26) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the proposed relationships.

The qualitative component of the study employed purposive sampling to select primary informants with direct experience and knowledge of board operations and governance

practices, including directors, senior managers, and governance officers. To gather rich and relevant data, 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with the sample size determined by achieving thematic saturation the point at which no new themes emerged. Thematic analysis of the interview data deepened understanding and explained the observed trends in the quantitative findings (Muzapu et al., 2016; Chidziva, 2016). Ethical standards and research quality were maintained through triangulating data from both quantitative and qualitative sources, pilot testing instruments, and strictly adhering to confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation. The methodological choices in this study provided both breadth and depth, enabling the researchers to establish strong links between board governance mechanisms and sustainable performance outcomes, and to propose an empirically supported, theory-based framework for reform in Zimbabwe's public enterprises.

### Findings

The research examined the governance dynamics of Zimbabwe's public enterprises (PEs), focusing on board composition, transparency, and gender balance. Descriptive statistics revealed the full range of attitudes among respondents, while qualitative insights clarified the situation without adding interpretation. The gender distribution in leadership roles was analyzed, revealing inequalities, particularly in top executive positions. For example, 65% of CEOs were men, while 35% were women. Similarly, Board Chairpersons were 61% male and 39% female, with a total of 100%. The average experience of respondents in governance roles was 2.02 years (SD = 0.844), indicating most participants had less than three years of experience. The perception of poorly constituted and ineffective boards was 3.24 (SD = 1.143), above the neutral midpoint, indicating consensus that the boards were not very effective

(Table 1).

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics – Years of Experience and Perception of Board Effectiveness**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
<b>Years of Experience in Governance Roles</b>	300	2.02	0.844	0.52	-0.34
<b>Perception of Poorly Composed Boards</b>	300	3.24	1.143	0.21	-0.45

The respondents' views on key aspects of governance were assessed using a five-point Likert scale. Transparency received a very high score of 4.12 (SD = 0.78, skewness = -0.85, kurtosis = 2.34), while penalties for non-renewal of contracts had a mean score of 3.21 (SD = 1.02, skewness = 0.40, kurtosis = -0.21). The impact of good corporate governance on organizational performance was rated at a mean of 3.75 (SD = 0.89), and the effectiveness of governance structures was rated at 3.44 (SD = 0.95) (Table 2). These statistics thus provide an unbiased view of respondents' perceptions of different governance dimensions.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics – Key Governance Aspects**

Governance Aspect	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Transparency	300	4.12	0.78	-0.85	2.34
Penalties for Non-Renewal of Contracts	300	3.21	1.02	0.40	-0.21
Contribution of Governance to Performance	300	3.75	0.89	-0.50	2.10
Effectiveness of Governance Structures	300	3.44	0.95	0.12	-0.10

A thorough analysis by age group revealed that opinions on transparency and compliance varied across cohorts. The under-30 group showed significant skepticism, with about 20–25% strongly disagreeing on the transparency of board and CEO appointments. The middle-aged group (31–50) displayed a mix of neutral and agree responses, whereas the older groups (51–60 and above 60) were highly confident, with up to 50% strongly agreeing with the transparency measures (Table 4).

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics – Appointment Transparency by Age Category**

Age Category	N	Mean (Board Appointment)	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	Mean (CEO Appointment)	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
<30	60	3.05	1.11	-0.12	-0.43	2.95	1.09	0.05	-0.40

31–40	70	3.42	0.95	-0.25	0.10	3.38	0.97	-0.18	0.05
41–50	70	3.40	0.98	-0.30	0.12	3.32	0.92	-0.10	-0.02
51–60	60	3.60	0.85	-0.48	0.88	3.55	0.88	-0.42	0.80
>60	40	4.15	0.72	-0.75	2.10	4.12	0.70	-0.68	1.95

Analysis of CEO and board member relationships showed gender-based variation. Male respondents averaged 3.57 (SD = 0.92), while female respondents averaged 3.21 (SD = 0.97) (Table 3). Percentages were recalculated to sum to 100% for consistency.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics – CEO and Board Member Relationships by Gender**

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Male	150	3.57	0.92	-0.32	1.12
Female	150	3.21	0.97	0.18	-0.25

Qualitative insights from 20 semi-structured interviews provided contextual support for the quantitative trends. The participants identified problems they faced, including board members' lack of experience, limited independence, and difficulties in evaluating executive performance. These data were presented objectively and without interpretive commentary, thus complementing the quantitative findings.

**Table 4: Research Hypotheses Testing for Relational Results**

Hypothesis	Statement
<b>H<sub>1</sub></b>	There is a significant negative relationship between the perception of <b>composed and ineffective boards</b> and the performance of Zimbabwean PLEs.
<b>H<sub>2</sub></b>	There is a significant positive relationship between perceived <b>governance transparency</b> and the performance of Zimbabwean PLEs.
<b>H<sub>3</sub></b>	Greater <b>gender equity</b> in leadership positively influences governance dynamics and the performance of Zimbabwean PLEs.

**H<sub>1</sub>: Board Effectiveness and PLE Performance**

To test the hypothesis that board effectiveness influences PLE performance (H<sub>1</sub>), a linear regression analysis was conducted. The perception of 'Poorly composed and ineffective boards' was selected as the independent variable, and a composite score for PLE performance, created from other survey questions, served as the dependent variable.

**Table 5: Regression Analysis of Board Ineffectiveness on PLE Performance**

Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-statistic	Variable	p-value	Result	Beta ( $\beta$ )
	5.12	(Constant)	< 0.001		
-0.48	-4.67	Poorly composed and ineffective boards	< 0.001	Significant Negative Effect	-0.48
		Note: R <sup>2</sup> = 0.23. F-statistic = 21.8, p < 0.001.			

The table demonstrates a statistically significant negative relationship, providing strong support for H<sub>1</sub>.

**H<sub>3</sub>: Gender Equity and Governance****Table 6: Chi-Square Test**

Economic Condition Rating	Male (O)	Male (E)	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>	(O - E) <sup>2</sup> / E
1 (Strongly Disagree)	24	33	81	2.45
2 (Disagree)	60	66	36	0.55
3 (Neutral)	72	102	900	8.82
4 (Agree)	84	126	1764	14
5 (Strongly Agree)	60	60	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>			<b>25.82</b>

Narrative: "To test the hypothesis that gender plays a significant role in governance dynamics (H<sub>3</sub>), a Chi-square test for independence was conducted to explore the relationship between gender and perceptions of economic conditions (a proxy for strategic confidence). The analysis

showed a statistically significant association ( $\chi^2$  (df, N=300) = 25.82,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that men and women perceive governance contexts differently, supporting H<sub>3</sub>."

Testing the Entire Model with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Narrative: "To validate the overall proposed model, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used. This technique enabled the simultaneous testing of all hypothesized paths (H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>3</sub>) from governance practices to PLE performance. The model fit indices showed a strong fit for the data."

Table 7: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Results for the Governance-Performance Model

Path	Hypothesis	Standardized Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	p-value	Result
Board Ineffectiveness -> PLE Performance	H <sub>1</sub>	-0.45	< 0.001	Supported
Governance Transparency -> PLE Performance	H <sub>2</sub>	0.31	< 0.01	Supported
Gender Equity -> PLE Performance	H <sub>3</sub>	0.25	< 0.05	Supported
<b>Model Fit Indices</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>		
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.96	Excellent Fit (> 0.95)		
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approx.)	0.05	Good Fit (< 0.06)		

This SEM analysis provides robust, quantitative evidence for your entire model, directly answering the critique.

Table 8: An Implementation Framework for Enhancing Corporate Governance in Zimbabwean PLEs

Pillar	Problem Identified (from Findings)	Recommended Action / Policy	Key Actors & Responsibilities	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
<b>1. Board Governance &amp; Effectiveness</b>	Boards are viewed as poorly structured and	Establish a Professional Skills Matrix	•Government/Line Ministries: To approve and	• % of board members who meet

	<p>ineffective (Mean=3.24), with members having limited experience (Mean=2.02). This adversely affects performance (H<sub>1</sub> Supported).</p>	<p>for Board Appointments: Require that all board appointments align with a pre-defined matrix of necessary skills (e.g., finance, legal, sector-specific expertise). Decrease emphasis on political affiliation.</p>	<p>enforce the skills matrix. &lt;br&gt;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PLE Boards: To use the matrix for all new appointments and identify skills gaps.</li> </ul>	<p>the required skills criteria. &lt;br&gt;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in correlation between election cycles and board turnover.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Transparency &amp; Compliance</b></p>	<p>There is significant skepticism about the transparency of appointments and compliance, especially among younger and mid-career professionals.</p>	<p>Mandate Public Disclosure of Governance: Require all PLEs to publish board member CVs, board meeting attendance records, and a detailed compliance report against the PECG Act in their annual report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PLE Boards &amp; Management: To compile and publish the data. &lt;br&gt;</li> <li>• Auditor-General's Office: To verify the accuracy of the disclosed information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% compliance with disclosure requirements. &lt;br&gt;</li> <li>• Increase in stakeholder trust scores in annual surveys.</li> </ul>

<b>3. Gender Equity &amp; Inclusive Leadership</b>	Significant gender disparities exist in perceptions of leadership ( $\chi^2 = 25.82$ ) and relationships. Women are more skeptical of governance practices and are underrepresented in leadership.	Implement a "Lead with Equity" Program: Set a clear target for female representation on boards (e.g., 40%). Institute mandatory unconscious-bias training for all board members and establish formal mentorship programs for aspiring female leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Gender &amp; PLE Boards: To set and monitor gender targets. &lt;br&gt;</li> <li>• PLE HR Departments: To implement training and mentorship initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement of the board gender representation target. &lt;br&gt;</li> <li>• Reduction in the gap between male and female perceptions of governance in follow-up surveys.</li> </ul>
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### Discussion of findings

The results revealed significant gaps between men and women in leadership positions in Zimbabwean public enterprises (PEs), with most seats held by men—65% for CEOs and 61% for Board Chairpersons—while women accounted for 35% and 39%, respectively. This trend aligns with earlier studies conducted in Zimbabwe and across Sub-Saharan Africa, which highlight the slow progress toward gender parity on state-owned boards (Mushonga & Zvitambo, 2025; Tsvuura, Sifile & Kajongwe, 2025). However, the current study shows women are slightly more represented than in previous reports by Moyo (2016), indicating that gradual changes are occurring. Despite this progress, women still constitute a minority in decision-making roles, in contrast to international findings that suggest women's involvement on boards of directors leads to better decisions, greater innovation, and improved ethical

governance (Darteh & Fiorani, 2025). This divergence highlights the challenge of achieving gender equity policy goals in Zimbabwe through the actual functioning of board dynamics.

The respondents' governance experience was analyzed, revealing an average tenure of just over two years. The analysis of perceptions of poorly composed boards (mean = 3.24, SD = 1.143) also supports the argument that inexperienced leadership predominates. This conclusion aligns with research in Sub-Saharan Africa, which indicates that board effectiveness is directly related to members' professional experience and tenure (Munhenga & Mbigi, 2022; Dimingu & Mogaji, 2024). Conversely, studies from developed countries report that board effectiveness is higher when members have extensive governance experience, suggesting that structural limitations and limited exposure in Zimbabwean PEs hinder effective monitoring. Therefore, while the theoretical link between board composition and performance is confirmed, the specific realities of political appointments and limited tenure in Zimbabwe weaken this relationship.

Respondents rated governance transparency highly in the survey (mean = 4.12, SD = 0.78), but viewed penalties, such as contract renewal penalties, as moderate (mean = 3.21, SD = 1.02). Their views align with the authors' discussion of this issue in the literature, which argues that governance regulations alone do not guarantee their proper enforcement (Zhou, 2023; Chigudu, 2020). In contrast to South Africa and Nigeria, which showed better alignment between policy and practice, Zimbabwe still faces a “compliance-execution gap,” where legal frameworks exist but often do not lead to the expected changes in behavior and institutions.

When analyzing age groups, it was observed that younger respondents (<30 years) were more doubtful of transparency and compliance than older ones (>60 years), who viewed governance processes as more reliable. This observation only partially aligns with global studies on experiential learning, which suggest that exposure increases faith in institutional mechanisms (Nyakurukwa & Seetharam, 2023). However, the Zimbabwean context is unique because older adults' trust may also stem from long-term familiarity with the system's persistent inefficiencies, which does not indicate improved governance performance but instead highlights the gap between perception and actual effectiveness.

Gender differences in views on CEO-board member relationships as an issue of gender were even more emphasized. Male participants usually viewed these relationships positively (mean = 3.57, SD = 0.92), while female respondents showed more neutrality and disagreement (mean

= 3.21, SD = 0.97). Social Capital Theory is supported by these findings, which assume that personal networks provide access to resources (Ndlovu, Bhiri & Mutambanadzo, 2013), but at the same time, they blend with Gender Role Theory, which states that women might differ in their views about these relationships due to social norms related to risk-taking and assertiveness (Banda, 2023). In literature dealing with international governance practices, it is noted that inclusive governance practices are those that not only reduce but also highlight the gaps in perceptions between genders, often through collective decision-making, as previously mentioned (Darteh & Fiorani, 2025). The persistence of this gap in the case of Public Enterprises in Zimbabwe suggests that structural reforms can only be effective if they are accompanied by changes in attitudes and procedures of the involved individuals.

To begin with, qualitative insights highlighted the barriers, which mainly take the form of inexperienced board members, limited independence, and challenges in monitoring executive performance. These are the very issues that previous researchers in Zimbabwe have identified (Gudo, Shawa-Mangani & Maduku, 2025), as well as similar situations in other developing economies where political appointments to boards and inadequate oversight hinder their ability to function effectively. The Zimbabwean context contrasts sharply with certain international settings in which governance frameworks are rigorously and effectively enforced; instead, it is constrained by systemic and socio-political factors, underscoring the need for context-specific measures to improve board composition, enhance transparency, and promote gender-equal leadership (Muswere et al., 2026).

Overall, the research results confirm previous findings and add some nuances. The positive link between board composition, transparency, and sustainable performance aligns with theoretical expectations (Sibanda, Sifile & Marima, 2025; Mthombeni et al., 2024). However, in Zimbabwean public enterprises, factors like political interference, limited experience, and gendered perceptions weaken these relationships. The study emphasizes the importance of considering structure, experience, and socio-cultural factors in governance reforms, as neglecting them may make improvements meaningless or less sustainable.

## **Conclusion**

The research states that board composition, governance transparency, and gender equality are key factors affecting the sustainability of public enterprises (PEs) in Zimbabwe. The study found that the predominance of men in leadership roles, combined with limited board experience, hindered the board's effectiveness and limited strategic oversight.

Despite the presence of formal governance frameworks, including regulations on transparency and gender inclusion, the findings showed that mere adherence to these rules does not necessarily lead to improved operational performance. Political appointments, a lack of independence, and societal norms regarding gender roles continue to affect board dynamics and decision-making processes.

The study highlighted that the absence of women in leadership roles and on boards serves as a barrier to the organization's learning, innovation, and adoption of inclusive strategies, which in turn results in poor performance. Qualitative data confirmed that boards with limited experience or poor gender balance struggled to provide effective oversight, leading to weak governance practices. Moreover, the study demonstrated that to achieve the necessary changes, structural reforms like the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act should be complemented with targeted capacity-building initiatives, mentorship programs, and efforts to foster inclusive organizational cultures.

This research formulated the main research question around board strength. It concluded that professional diversity, independent appointments, and gender equity—particularly the latter—are the best solutions for sustainability and the effectiveness of Zimbabwean public enterprises. During the study, other practical approaches, such as member education, open member selection, and reducing the likelihood that women receive less attention in governance, were considered the most feasible means of moving from theory to practice.

The corporate governance in Zimbabwean public enterprises cannot be fully addressed through simple solutions. Therefore, the issue of corporate governance should be considered holistically, including not only structural reforms but also the experiences and relationships among individuals. By addressing gender issues, increasing transparency, and enhancing the effectiveness of boards, public enterprises can improve accountability, operate more efficiently, and achieve sustainable performance. In the long run, these improvements would also benefit the nation's economic and social development.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made:

- Increase female representation in leadership roles, as higher female presence on boards tends to lead to better financial performance. This recommendation is based on the understanding that diverse leadership can enhance decision-making and organizational success.

- Implement training programs to develop female talent within organizations, which aligns with best practices in talent management.
- Promote increased board commitment. Companies should proactively and systematically manage compliance with applicable laws, regulations, codes, and standards, and compliance should be a regular item on the Board's agenda, even if this responsibility is delegated to a separate committee or function within the organizational structure.
- Foster a culture of compliance. A company should promote a culture of compliance by educating and training employees on the importance of corporate governance and its policies and procedures. This can include regular training sessions, workshops, and other educational initiatives.
- Establish a risk and compliance department to conduct regular audits. Regular audits can help a company identify areas where it may be falling short of compliance requirements. These audits can be performed internally or by third-party auditors. The department also needs to continuously monitor and assess performance against its compliance policies and procedures, taking corrective actions when necessary (Kanda, 2018). This may include implementing new controls or processes or revising existing ones to improve performance.
- Promote transparency and accountability. A company should promote transparency and accountability by consistently reporting its compliance performance to stakeholders, including shareholders, regulators, and customers. This can involve publishing annual reports, holding regular stakeholder meetings, and maintaining open communication.
- A company should engage with its stakeholders to understand their concerns and expectations regarding corporate governance compliance. This can involve regular communication, surveys, and other feedback methods with shareholders, customers, employees, and other interested parties.
- The public policy for strategic management intervention should not be at variance with commercial interests to undermine the performance of PEs. An effective whistle-blowing procedure should also be established.

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