

From Cells to Self-Sufficiency: The Transformative Impact of ZPCS Prison-Based Entrepreneurship on Rehabilitation, Institutional Efficiency, and Socio-Economic Development in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study examines the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) shift toward an entrepreneurial and commercial model within the broader paradigm of “From Cells to Self-Sufficiency,” interrogating how prison-based entrepreneurship influences rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development in Zimbabwe. The shift reflects global penological reforms emphasising human capital development and institutional productivity rather than punitive confinement. A pragmatic, mixed-methods design integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews was employed to capture multidimensional outcomes. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, regression modelling, and thematic analysis, guided by Human Capital Theory and Institutional Reform Theory to assess relationships between entrepreneurship participation, rehabilitation outcomes, and institutional performance. Findings indicate that prison-based entrepreneurship significantly enhances inmate rehabilitation through skills acquisition, behavioural transformation, and improved employability, while also strengthening institutional self-sufficiency through agricultural production, vocational industries, and public-private partnerships. However, inefficiencies in value-chain integration, limited mechanisation, and policy fragmentation moderate these gains, revealing that entrepreneurial outcomes are contingent on institutional capability and governance quality. The study establishes that ZPCS's entrepreneurial model represents a hybrid correctional-development system where rehabilitation and commercial imperatives intersect. While Human Capital Theory explains inmate empowerment through skills development, Institutional Reform Theory highlights organisational restructuring toward productivity. Nonetheless, tensions emerge between profit orientation and rehabilitative ethics, necessitating balanced governance frameworks to avoid mission drift. ZPCS prison-based entrepreneurship contributes positively to rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development, but its transformative potential is dependent on strengthened institutional capacity, integrated policy frameworks, and sustained reintegration support systems that align correctional productivity with human-centred rehabilitation goals.

Keywords: ZPCS, Prison entrepreneurship, Rehabilitation, Human-capital-theory, Institutional-reform, Self-sufficiency, Vocational-training, Zimbabwe

Abbreviations: ZPCS: Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service; RBV: Resource-Based View; NDS1: National Development Strategy

Introduction

Across the globe, correctional institutions are increasingly transitioning from punitive systems of confinement toward rehabilitation-centred models that emphasize offender transformation, economic productivity, and social reintegration Munyoro & Gumisiro [1]; Dube-Mawerewere & Chiborise [2]; Zivanai & Mahlangu [3]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. This paradigm

shift is informed by contemporary criminological theories which argue that incarceration should not merely punish offenders, but should also equip them with practical skills, entrepreneurial capabilities, and psychosocial competencies necessary for successful reintegration into society Murhula & Singh [5]; Zivanai & Mahlangu [3]; Munyoro & Uzhenyu [6];

Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Within this evolving discourse, prison-based entrepreneurship has emerged as a strategic instrument for reducing recidivism, enhancing inmate self-reliance, and improving institutional sustainability Munyoro & Gumisiro [1]; Dube-Mawerewere & Chiborise [2]; Murhula & Singh [6]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [6]. In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) has progressively embraced this transformation through the integration of agricultural production, manufacturing, vocational training, and commercial ventures into correctional administration Ncube [7]; Munyoro & Gumisiro [1]; Davira [8]; Munyoro & Uzhenyu [6]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. The institutional mandate of ZPCS now extends beyond custodial functions toward behavioural reform, human capital development, and socio-economic empowerment of inmates through productive engagement in entrepreneurial activities Ncube [7]; Munyoro & Gumisiro [1]; Davira [8]; Munyoro & Uzhenyu [6]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

The adoption of prison-based entrepreneurship by ZPCS reflects broader national development aspirations anchored on economic resilience, food security, employment creation, and inclusive participation in productive sectors of the economy Munyoro & Gumisiro [1]; Davira [8]; Munyoro & Uzhenyu [6]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. In recent years, ZPCS has expanded commercial initiatives through farming projects, industrial workshops, tourism-linked investments, and public-private partnerships aimed at enhancing institutional self-sufficiency and reducing dependency on fiscally constrained government budgets Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]; Chihobvu [9]. Such initiatives signify a strategic shift toward correctional industrialization, where prisons are increasingly viewed as centres of production, innovation, and rehabilitation rather than merely spaces of detention Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Scholars have argued that entrepreneurial culture within correctional systems can improve operational efficiency while simultaneously cultivating marketable skills among inmates, thereby increasing their prospects for post-release economic participation and reducing the likelihood of reoffending Munyoro & Gumisiro [1]; Dube-Mawerewere & Chiborise [2]; Murhula & Singh [5]. The Zimbabwean experience therefore provides an important case study for understanding how correctional entrepreneurship can contribute to institutional sustainability and broader national socio-economic development.

Furthermore, prison-based entrepreneurship has significant implications for offender rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Empirical evidence from Zimbabwe indicates that inmates who participate in vocational and entrepreneurial programmes acquire practical competencies in carpentry, agriculture, dressmaking, welding, and other income-generating activities that improve their employability and entrepreneurial potential upon release Davira [8]; Munyoro & Uzhenyu [6]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Former inmates have reported establishing businesses and attaining economic independence through skills

acquired during incarceration, illustrating the transformative potential of correctional entrepreneurship in facilitating social reintegration and reducing marginalization Murhula & Singh [5]; Zivanai & Mahlangu [3]. This aligns with desistance theories which posit that meaningful employment, social inclusion, and self-efficacy are central to reducing criminal behaviour and promoting lawful livelihoods Murhula & Singh [5]; Zivanai & Mahlangu [3]. Consequently, prison entrepreneurship not only transforms inmates at an individual level but also strengthens community safety and social cohesion through the reintegration of economically productive citizens Dube-Mawerewere & Chiborise [2]; Davira [8].

Despite these promising developments, the commercialization of correctional institutions also raises critical debates regarding ethics, governance, labour relations, institutional capacity, and the balance between rehabilitation and profit-oriented objectives Chouldechova [10]; Murhula & Singh [5]. Critics caution that excessive commercialization may risk exploiting inmate labour or diverting correctional institutions from their rehabilitative mandate if not adequately regulated Chouldechova [10]. Moreover, Zimbabwe's correctional system continues to face challenges associated with overcrowding, resource constraints, infrastructural limitations, and policy implementation gaps, which may undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of entrepreneurial initiatives Davira [8]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Nevertheless, ongoing reforms, including the introduction of parole systems, community correctional centres, and expanded rehabilitation frameworks, demonstrate a growing commitment by the Government of Zimbabwe and ZPCS to modernize correctional administration in line with international best practices Zivanai & Mahlangu [3]; Chihobvu [9]. It is against this background that this study critically examines the transformative impact of ZPCS prison-based entrepreneurship on inmate rehabilitation, institutional operational excellence, and socio-economic development in Zimbabwe.

That said, this study is significant because it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on correctional entrepreneurship, rehabilitation, and prison reform in developing countries, particularly within the African context where empirical literature remains limited. The findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers, correctional administrators, development practitioners, and scholars regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurial rehabilitation programmes in reducing recidivism and promoting socio-economic inclusion. Additionally, the study may inform policy formulation aimed at enhancing prison self-sufficiency, improving offender reintegration strategies, and strengthening public-private partnerships within correctional systems. By examining the Zimbabwean experience, the research also offers practical lessons for other countries seeking to transform prisons into productive institutions that contribute meaningfully to national development goals.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Global and Regional Perspectives on Prison Industries

The evolution of correctional industries reflects a significant paradigmatic shift in penology from punitive incarceration toward rehabilitation, economic productivity, and social reintegration Davis [11]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Historically, prison labour was primarily justified as a punitive mechanism intended to discipline offenders and offset incarceration costs through compulsory labour systems embedded within colonial and industrial penal regimes Rusche & Kirchheimer [12]. However, contemporary correctional scholarship increasingly conceptualises prison industries as transformative instruments capable of generating human capital, reducing recidivism, and enhancing institutional sustainability Visser [13]; Grosholz [14]. In developed jurisdictions such as Norway, Germany, Canada, and parts of the United States, prison-based vocational training and entrepreneurial programmes have demonstrated measurable improvements in inmate employability, psychological rehabilitation, and post-release adaptation Grosholz [14]. These programmes integrate technical skills development, entrepreneurial orientation, and behavioural transformation, thereby repositioning correctional facilities as centres of socio-economic reformation rather than merely custodial institutions Davis [13]; Brophy [15-18]. Importantly, entrepreneurial rehabilitation has gained prominence because it equips formerly incarcerated individuals with self-employment capabilities that circumvent labour-market discrimination commonly experienced by ex-offenders Hwang [19]; Wainwright & Muñoz [20]. Recent studies further suggest that prison enterprises can contribute to institutional self-sufficiency through agricultural production, manufacturing, construction, and vocational workshops, thereby reducing dependency on state funding while simultaneously creating productive prison environments Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

Within the African context, prison industries remain unevenly developed due to infrastructural limitations, overcrowding, inadequate funding, and weak policy implementation Murhula & Singh [5]; UNODC [20]. Nevertheless, several African countries have increasingly embraced rehabilitation-oriented correctional reforms influenced by international human rights standards, restorative justice principles, and sustainable development agendas UNODC [21]. South Africa, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe have introduced vocational rehabilitation initiatives aimed at reducing offender marginalisation and promoting social reintegration Murhula & Singh [5]. Regional evidence indicates that rehabilitation outcomes are stronger where correctional programmes combine vocational training with entrepreneurial incubation, psychosocial support, and institutional partnerships Davis [11]; Ciptono [22]. However, scholars caution that many African prison industries remain constrained by obsolete equipment, insufficient markets for prison-produced goods, weak value-chain integration, and limited post-release support systems UNODC [21]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) has increasingly adopted agricultural production, leatherwork, carpentry, brick moulding, tailoring, and vocational workshops as part of its correctional transformation agenda Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Studies on Zimbabwean correctional institutions reveal that such programmes have improved inmates' practical skills, institutional productivity, and prospects for economic reintegration after release Davira [8]. ZPCS rehabilitation initiatives increasingly emphasise productive engagement, self-reliance, and skills development as pathways toward reducing recidivism and enhancing institutional efficiency. However, challenges such as resource shortages, policy inconsistencies, overcrowding, inadequate entrepreneurial coordination, and weak reintegration support continue to undermine programme effectiveness Dube-Mawerewere & Chiborise [2]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

Although existing scholarship acknowledges the rehabilitative potential of prison industries, there remains a substantial empirical gap regarding how entrepreneurship specifically transforms institutional efficiency, inmate rehabilitation, and socio-economic development simultaneously within correctional systems Hwang [19]; Wainwright & Muñoz [20]. Much of the literature isolates recidivism reduction from broader institutional and developmental outcomes, thereby neglecting the interconnected nature of prison entrepreneurship ecosystems Grosholz [14]. Furthermore, Zimbabwean studies have predominantly concentrated on rehabilitation challenges, recidivism determinants, or vocational training effectiveness without critically examining entrepreneurship as an integrated institutional transformation strategy. Consequently, the present study addresses this conceptual and empirical gap by examining how prison-based entrepreneurship within ZPCS functions not merely as vocational activity, but as a multidimensional strategy capable of simultaneously enhancing inmate rehabilitation, institutional self-sufficiency, and national socio-economic development.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Human Capital Theory, Institutional Reform Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections

This study is anchored on Human Capital Theory, Institutional Reform Theory, the Resource-Based View (RBV), and the Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections. These theories collectively provide a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how prison-based entrepreneurship within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) contributes to inmate rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development Becker [23]; Barney [24]; Scott [25]; Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Human Capital Theory explains how investment in entrepreneurial and vocational training enhances inmates' productive capacities and employability after release Becker [23]. Institutional Reform Theory explains how correctional institutions evolve from punitive entities into productive and developmental organisations Scott [25]. RBV highlights how

prisons can strategically utilise internal resources such as prison farms, workshops, inmate labour, and vocational infrastructure to achieve institutional sustainability and operational efficiency Barney [24]. Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections further explains how entrepreneurial rehabilitation contributes to behavioural transformation, social reintegration, and recidivism reduction Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Together, these theories demonstrate that prison entrepreneurship is not merely an economic activity but also a rehabilitative and institutional transformation mechanism capable of generating broader socio-economic benefits within Zimbabwe's correctional system.

Human Capital Theory: Human Capital Theory, pioneered by Gary Becker [23], argues that investments in education, skills development, and vocational training increase individual productivity, employability, and economic value. Within correctional systems, this theory reframes imprisonment from a period of punishment into an opportunity for personal development and capacity building Becker [23]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Entrepreneurial and vocational programmes in prisons equip inmates with marketable competencies, self-employment capabilities, and adaptive economic skills necessary for post-release survival and reintegration Grosholz [14]. Recent studies indicate that inmates who participate in entrepreneurship and vocational training programmes are more likely to secure employment, establish small enterprises, and avoid recidivism after release Brophy [15-18]; Ciptono [22]. In Zimbabwe, where unemployment and poverty significantly contribute to criminal behaviour and reoffending, prison entrepreneurship programmes potentially address socio-economic exclusion by fostering self-reliance and economic empowerment among inmates Dube-Mawerewere & Chiborise [2]. However, critics of Human Capital Theory argue that skills acquisition alone cannot guarantee successful reintegration in environments characterised by labour-market discrimination, social stigma, and weak economic opportunities Garland [27].

Institutional Reform Theory: Institutional Reform Theory explains how organisations transform through changes in governance structures, operational priorities, institutional norms, and policy orientations Scott [25]. Applied to correctional systems, the theory suggests that prisons become more effective when they transition from punitive custodial institutions toward rehabilitative, productive, and development-oriented institutions Scott [25]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Within the context of ZPCS, entrepreneurship functions as a reform mechanism capable of restructuring prison operations around productivity, sustainability, innovation, and rehabilitation Chihobvu [9]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Entrepreneurial initiatives in prison farms, workshops, and vocational production centres contribute to operational coordination, institutional self-sufficiency, and reduced dependence on government funding Munyoro [4]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. This institutional transformation

aligns with contemporary correctional reforms that increasingly view prisons as socio-economic actors capable of contributing to national development while simultaneously rehabilitating offenders UNODC [21]. The theory is particularly relevant in Zimbabwe, where economic constraints, overcrowding, and limited correctional budgets necessitate innovative and sustainable prison management strategies. Nonetheless, Institutional Reform Theory acknowledges that institutional transformation may be constrained by bureaucratic resistance, inadequate infrastructure, policy inconsistencies, and limited financial support, which may undermine the successful implementation of entrepreneurial reforms within correctional institutions Scott [25]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

Resource-Based View (RBV): The Resource-Based View (RBV), developed by Jay Barney [24], posits that organisations achieve sustainable advantage through the effective utilisation of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources and capabilities. Within correctional institutions, RBV suggests that prison farms, vocational workshops, manufacturing units, inmate labour, technical expertise, and entrepreneurial capabilities constitute strategic institutional resources that can generate operational sustainability and socio-economic value Barney [24]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Applied to ZPCS, RBV implies that prison-based entrepreneurship can transform correctional institutions into productive socio-economic entities through effective mobilisation of internal resources and entrepreneurial initiatives Chihobvu [9]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Recent studies on Zimbabwean correctional institutions demonstrate that entrepreneurial activities within prisons contribute to synchronising production systems, operational coordination, and rehabilitation objectives while reducing fiscal dependency on the state Munyoro [4]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Entrepreneurial programmes also enable prisons to produce goods and services that support institutional self-sufficiency while simultaneously equipping inmates with practical business and vocational skills. However, critics argue that the mere possession of institutional resources does not automatically guarantee effectiveness unless supported by strategic management, policy coordination, infrastructure development, and market linkages Priem & Butler [28].

Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections: Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections argues that the primary purpose of imprisonment should be offender reform rather than punishment alone Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Rooted in positivist criminology, the theory maintains that criminal behaviour can be corrected through education, vocational training, counselling, behavioural modification, and reintegration programmes Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Within prison entrepreneurship contexts, the theory suggests that entrepreneurial training and productive prison industries contribute significantly to behavioural transformation and social reintegration by equipping inmates with employable

and self-sustaining skills Grosholz [14]. Entrepreneurship-based rehabilitation promotes confidence, resilience, innovation, economic independence, and self-reliance among incarcerated individuals, thereby reducing the likelihood of reoffending Grosholz [14]; Ciptono [22]. In Zimbabwe, where unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion remain major drivers of recidivism, entrepreneurship-oriented rehabilitation programmes within ZPCS align with broader correctional goals aimed at reducing reoffending and improving social reintegration outcomes Samanyanga & Chigunwe [29]. Nevertheless, critics of Rehabilitation Theory argue that rehabilitation initiatives may fail where socio-economic inequalities, stigma, and institutional weaknesses persist Garland [27]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

Integration of Human Capital Theory, Institutional Reform Theory, RBV and Rehabilitation Theory: The integration of Human Capital Theory, Institutional Reform Theory, RBV, and Rehabilitation Theory provides a multidimensional framework for analysing prison-based entrepreneurship within ZPCS Becker [23]; Barney [24]; Scott [25]; Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Human Capital Theory explains how entrepreneurial and vocational training enhances inmates' productive capabilities, employability, and economic empowerment Becker [23]. Institutional Reform Theory explains how correctional institutions themselves transform through entrepreneurial orientation, operational restructuring, and developmental reforms Scott [25]. RBV demonstrates how prisons can strategically utilise internal institutional resources and entrepreneurial capabilities to improve operational sustainability and productivity Barney [24]; Munyoro [4]. Rehabilitation Theory further explains how entrepreneurship contributes to offender reform, behavioural transformation, and successful social reintegration Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Collectively, these theories illuminate the reciprocal relationship between inmate rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development Grosholz [14]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Prison entrepreneurship therefore becomes both a rehabilitative intervention and an institutional sustainability strategy capable of generating broader developmental benefits for correctional institutions and society. Consequently, this study hypothesises that prison-based entrepreneurship within ZPCS positively influences inmate rehabilitation outcomes, enhances institutional self-sufficiency and operational effectiveness, and contributes to socio-economic development through reduced recidivism, increased productivity, and sustainable reintegration pathways.

Background: ZPCS's Shift Toward Entrepreneurial and Commercial Model

Motivation for Reform

The transformation of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) from a predominantly custodial institution into a correctional system grounded in entrepreneurial and commercial principles reflects broader global shifts toward rehabilitative

justice, institutional sustainability, and developmental governance Coyle, Fair, Jacobson, & Walmsley [30]. Historically, correctional institutions in Zimbabwe, as in many developing countries, depended heavily on fiscally constrained state allocations and operated largely within punitive paradigms centred on incarceration rather than reintegration (Muntingh & Dissel, 2001). However, worsening macroeconomic pressures, rising inmate populations, food insecurity, and limited public-sector financing exposed the unsustainability of a purely state-funded prison system (UNODC, 2017). In response, ZPCS increasingly aligned itself with Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), which emphasizes productivity, innovation, industrialization, and self-sufficiency across public institutions Government of Zimbabwe [31]. Contemporary correctional reforms therefore emerged not merely as administrative adjustments, but as part of a strategic institutional reorientation toward restorative justice, economic participation, and entrepreneurial governance Bazemore & Stinchcomb [32].

The enactment of the Prisons and Correctional Service Act [Chapter 7:21] further institutionalized this transition by formally embedding rehabilitation, reintegration, skills development, and productive inmate engagement into the mandate of the correctional system (Prisons and Correctional Service Act [Chapter 7:21], 2023). Importantly, this shift reflects the growing influence of human capital theory and rehabilitation theory, both of which posit that offenders can become socially and economically productive citizens when provided with education, vocational training, and entrepreneurial capabilities Becker [33]; Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Existing scholarship demonstrates that prison-based enterprise systems can reduce recidivism, enhance employability, and improve institutional efficiency when rehabilitation is integrated with productive economic activity Davis [11]; Armstrong & Windisch [34]. Nevertheless, critical literature also cautions that commercialization within correctional institutions may create tensions between profit generation and human rights protections if not carefully regulated (Nathan, 2003).

Within the Zimbabwean context, the entrepreneurial turn in ZPCS therefore represents both a pragmatic survival strategy and a developmental correctional philosophy aimed at balancing institutional sustainability with offender rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). Under the leadership of senior correctional officials, ZPCS has consequently adopted entrepreneurial leadership structures, business development portfolios, and resource-optimization mechanisms intended to transform prisons from passive custodial centres into productive correctional communities capable of contributing to national development goals (MoJLPA, 2024).

Implementation: Prison Industries, Farms, Workshops, and Partnerships

The operationalization of ZPCS's entrepreneurial and

commercial model is most visible through the expansion of prison industries, agricultural production systems, vocational workshops, and institutional partnerships designed to promote both self-sufficiency and offender rehabilitation (UNODC, 2017). Central to this strategy is the establishment of productive prison farms and industrial units that simultaneously address inmate welfare, institutional sustainability, and skills acquisition (MoJLPA, 2024). For example, the 203-hectare Anju Prison Farm in Matabeleland North forms part of a broader network of prison farms engaged in horticulture, cereal production, livestock farming, and edible oil processing aimed at ensuring food security while generating surplus produce for commercial markets (The Herald, 2024). This agricultural entrepreneurship model reflects the broader “smart prison concept,” which reconceptualizes correctional institutions as economically productive entities capable of contributing to national agro-industrial development (Jewkes & Bennett, 2013).

Beyond agriculture, ZPCS has diversified into construction brigades, carpentry, tailoring, metal fabrication, detergent manufacturing, and arts and crafts production, thereby exposing inmates to practical entrepreneurial competencies and market-oriented vocational skills (MoJLPA, 2024). The partnership between Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service and Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences, formalized through a 2023 Memorandum of Understanding, further signifies an important shift toward knowledge-based rehabilitation by integrating academic education, innovation, and technical training into correctional programming (MSUAS, 2023). Such collaborations strengthen the theoretical linkage between correctional entrepreneurship and social reintegration by expanding inmates’ human capital and employability prospects upon release Becker [33]. Empirical literature suggests that correctional education and vocational enterprise programmes are strongly associated with lower recidivism rates, improved post-release employment outcomes, and enhanced psychosocial adjustment Davis [11].

However, emerging studies on ZPCS indicate that despite notable progress, challenges remain regarding value-chain integration, market coordination, technological modernization, and policy coherence within prison enterprises. Munyoro and Chihobvu [4], for instance, argue that although entrepreneurial initiatives within ZPCS have improved production and operational efficiency, institutional bottlenecks, inadequate mechanization, and weak commercial synchronization continue to constrain long-term sustainability. Critically, this suggests that prison entrepreneurship should not merely be viewed as income generation, but as a multidimensional rehabilitative ecosystem requiring effective governance, strategic partnerships, institutional coordination, and ethical oversight (Coyle et al., 2016). Consequently, the ZPCS entrepreneurial model increasingly represents an integrated correctional-development framework that seeks to simultaneously achieve rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, offender empowerment, and socio-economic

contribution within Zimbabwe’s evolving development landscape (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020).

Methodology and Data Analysis

Research Philosophy and Approach

This study adopts a pragmatic research philosophy anchored in a mixed-methods approach to critically examine the transformative impact of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS)’s entrepreneurial and commercial transition on rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development. Pragmatism is particularly appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation is multidimensional, involving economic, social, institutional, and rehabilitative variables that cannot be sufficiently explained through a single methodological tradition Creswell & Plano Clark [34]; Saunders [35]. The study therefore integrates qualitative and quantitative paradigms to generate a holistic understanding of how entrepreneurial prison reforms influence offender rehabilitation and institutional sustainability Tashakkori & Teddlie [36]. Existing studies on ZPCS demonstrate that the organisation has increasingly shifted from a purely custodial institution toward a commercially oriented correctional model characterised by agricultural production, vocational training, industrial projects, and public-private partnerships Samanyanga & Chigunwe [29]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. However, empirical analyses remain fragmented and largely descriptive, with limited theoretical integration and inadequate assessment of causal relationships between entrepreneurship initiatives and rehabilitation outcomes Davira [8]. Consequently, the present study adopts an explanatory sequential design in which quantitative findings regarding entrepreneurial participation, rehabilitation outcomes, and institutional performance are complemented and critically interpreted through qualitative insights from prison officers, inmates, policymakers, and rehabilitation stakeholders.

Research Design

The study employs a convergent mixed-methods research design combining descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory elements to capture both the measurable outcomes and lived experiences associated with ZPCS’s entrepreneurial transformation Creswell & Creswell [37]. The descriptive component establishes the prevalence and structure of prison-based entrepreneurial programmes, including farming, construction brigades, manufacturing, vocational training, and commercial ventures Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. The exploratory dimension interrogates the institutional dynamics, policy shifts, and operational challenges accompanying commercialisation, while the explanatory aspect analyses the extent to which entrepreneurial participation predicts rehabilitation effectiveness, institutional self-sufficiency, and socio-economic reintegration Davira [8]. This design is justified by the complexity of prison entrepreneurship systems, which operate at the intersection of correctional administration, economic production, behavioural

transformation, and social reintegration Saunders [35]. Previous scholarship has shown that prison industries may simultaneously reduce inmate idleness, generate institutional revenue, and facilitate employability skills development, yet tensions often emerge between commercial objectives and rehabilitative mandates Cullen & Gendreau [26]; Latessa & Lowenkamp [38]. Thus, the selected design enables critical synthesis of competing perspectives while allowing triangulation of evidence to enhance validity and analytical depth.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study is theoretically grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), Human Capital Theory, Institutional Reform Theory, and the Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections to provide a multidimensional analytical framework for understanding the entrepreneurial transformation of the ZPCS. The RBV, originally advanced by Jay Barney, conceptualises prison farms, vocational institutions, inmate labour, correctional infrastructure, and organisational knowledge as valuable institutional resources capable of generating sustainable competitive advantage, operational resilience, and institutional self-sufficiency when strategically coordinated Barney [24]; Barney [39]. Human Capital Theory, associated with Gary Becker, complements this perspective by explaining how vocational training, entrepreneurship education, agricultural production skills, and industrial competencies enhance inmates' productive capabilities, employability, innovation capacity, and socio-economic reintegration prospects after release Becker [33]; Ndofirepi [40].

Institutional Reform Theory further explains how correctional institutions can transition from traditional punitive bureaucracies into developmental and entrepreneurial public institutions through policy innovation, decentralised production systems, public-private partnerships, and governance reforms that improve efficiency and accountability Scott [25]; Munyoro & Gumisiro [1]. The Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections situates prison-based entrepreneurship within restorative correctional paradigms that prioritise behavioural transformation, offender rehabilitation, social reintegration, and recidivism reduction rather than punitive incarceration alone Latessa & Lowenkamp [38]; Cullen & Gendreau [26]. These theories collectively inform the conceptualisation of the study's key variables. The independent variable is prison-based entrepreneurship, operationalised through agricultural production, vocational training, manufacturing activities, entrepreneurial leadership programmes, and inmate participation in productive enterprises within ZPCS institutions Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. The dependent variables include rehabilitation outcomes, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development, measured through indicators such as employability skills acquisition, behavioural reform, reduced recidivism, institutional self-sufficiency, revenue generation, food security, reduced operational costs, and successful community reintegration Munyoro & Uzhenyu [6].

Moderating variables such as policy support, entrepreneurial culture, stakeholder collaboration, resource availability, technological infrastructure, and public-private partnerships are incorporated to explain variations in programme effectiveness and sustainability Munyoro & Gumisiro [1]. Recent studies further indicate that entrepreneurial orientation within ZPCS increasingly functions as an institutional coordination mechanism linking rehabilitation, production systems, business operations, and organisational sustainability in Zimbabwe's correctional sector Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

Population and Sampling Procedures

The target population comprises correctional officers, prison administrators, inmates participating in entrepreneurial programmes, former inmates, Ministry of Justice officials, and selected community stakeholders involved in rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives Saunders [35]. Given the diversity of perspectives required, the study utilises stratified purposive sampling to ensure representation across different prison institutions and programme categories Creswell & Plano Clark [34]. Correctional institutions with established entrepreneurial activities such as prison farms, building brigades, vocational workshops, and industrial centres are purposively selected because they provide rich empirical contexts for analysing the commercial transformation of ZPCS Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Within these institutions, stratification is employed to capture variations in gender, inmate participation levels, institutional rank, and programme exposure Teddlie & Yu [41]. Qualitative participants are selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify individuals with direct experience of prison entrepreneurship initiatives, while quantitative respondents are selected using proportionate sampling procedures to enhance representativeness (Etikan & Bala, 2017). This sampling strategy responds to criticisms raised in earlier Zimbabwean prison studies, which relied heavily on convenience sampling and therefore produced limited generalisability and weak inferential validity Ncube [7].

Data Collection Methods

Data collection integrates questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to generate comprehensive and triangulated evidence Creswell & Creswell [37]. Structured questionnaires are administered to inmates and correctional officers to quantify perceptions of entrepreneurial programme effectiveness, institutional productivity, rehabilitation outcomes, and socio-economic preparedness Davira [8]. Semi-structured interviews with prison administrators and policymakers provide deeper insight into strategic motivations behind commercialisation, resource constraints, governance dynamics, and institutional challenges Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Focus group discussions with inmates and former inmates facilitate nuanced understanding

of entrepreneurial participation experiences, behavioural transformation, and reintegration prospects Samanyanga & Chigunwe [29]. Documentary analysis of ZPCS policy reports, strategic plans, rehabilitation records, and government publications further contextualises empirical findings within broader national correctional reforms and Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) Government of Zimbabwe [31]. The integration of these methods enhances methodological rigour by enabling cross-validation of findings and reducing mono-method bias Tashakkori & Teddlie [36]. Existing literature suggests that entrepreneurial prison reforms in Zimbabwe remain under-documented and institutionally fragmented, thereby necessitating multi-source evidence generation to capture both operational realities and policy aspirations.

1.1. Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data are analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques through the IBM SPSS Statistics package (Field, 2018). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are employed to establish patterns of participation in entrepreneurial programmes and perceptions regarding institutional efficiency and rehabilitation effectiveness Pallant [42]. Inferential analyses such as correlation and multiple regression are utilised to test hypothesised relationships between prison entrepreneurship initiatives and key dependent variables, including rehabilitation outcomes, institutional sustainability, and socio-economic reintegration Hair [43]. Regression modelling is particularly important in determining the predictive strength of entrepreneurial participation on behavioural transformation and self-sufficiency outcomes. Qualitative data are analysed thematically through coding, categorisation, and interpretive synthesis Braun & Clarke [44]. Emerging themes relating to entrepreneurial empowerment, institutional transformation, operational constraints, and rehabilitation experiences are critically examined in relation to the theoretical framework. The analytical process prioritises convergence and divergence between quantitative and qualitative findings to generate deeper explanatory insights Creswell & Plano Clark [34]. This integrative analytical strategy addresses weaknesses in prior prison entrepreneurship research that often focused narrowly on descriptive observations without establishing conceptual or empirical relationships among variables.

Reliability, Validity, and Ethical Considerations

To enhance reliability and validity, the study employs pilot testing of research instruments, methodological triangulation, and member checking Lincoln & Guba [45]. Pilot studies ensure clarity, consistency, and appropriateness of questionnaire items, while triangulation strengthens credibility through corroboration across multiple data sources and methods Creswell & Creswell [37]. Construct validity is reinforced through alignment between theoretical constructs and operational indicators, particularly regarding entrepreneurship, rehabilitation, and institutional

efficiency Hair [43]. Ethical considerations are central because prison environments involve vulnerable populations and sensitive institutional dynamics Israel & Hay [46]. Ethical clearance is obtained from relevant university ethics committees and ZPCS authorities before fieldwork commencement. Participants are informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw at any stage without prejudice Orb [47]. Anonymity is preserved through coding systems and secure data storage procedures. Given the power asymmetries inherent within correctional environments, particular care is taken to minimise coercion and ensure informed consent among inmate participants Israel & Hay [46]. These safeguards are critical in maintaining research integrity and protecting participant welfare while generating trustworthy findings capable of informing evidence-based correctional policy reform in Zimbabwe.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented according to the major themes emerging from the analysis of prison-based entrepreneurship within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS). The discussion integrates qualitative and quantitative findings and is anchored in the Resource-Based View (RBV), Human Capital Theory, Institutional Reform Theory, and Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections. The findings demonstrate how prison-based entrepreneurship contributes to inmate rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development in Zimbabwe. The discussion also integrates recent empirical literature which increasingly positions prison entrepreneurship as a transformative mechanism for correctional reform, institutional sustainability, and offender reintegration UNODC [48,49]; Wainwright & Muñoz [20]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

Entrepreneurship and Inmate Rehabilitation

The findings revealed that prison-based entrepreneurship significantly contributes to inmate rehabilitation through vocational skills acquisition, behavioural transformation, psychological empowerment, and enhanced self-worth UNODC [48,49]; Grosholz [14]. Guided by the Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections, the study established that productive engagement in agriculture, carpentry, welding, tailoring, leatherwork, and poultry projects reduced idleness and promoted discipline among inmates Cullen & Gendreau [26]; UNODC [48,49]. Human Capital Theory further explains that the acquisition of productive competencies increases the employability and economic value of inmates upon release (Becker, 1993). These findings corroborate studies by Davis [11] and Grosholz [14], which found that vocational and entrepreneurial prison programmes improve inmate confidence, reduce recidivism, and strengthen reintegration prospects. Quantitative findings showed that 82% (n = 82/100) of respondents agreed that entrepreneurship programmes improved inmate behaviour and prepared them for reintegration into society, while 76% indicated that vocational

participation reduced tendencies toward violent behaviour inside correctional institutions UNODC [48,49].

The rehabilitation effectiveness index was calculated using weighted mean analysis from Likert-scale responses:

An index score of 4.11/5 indicates a strong positive perception of rehabilitation outcomes associated with prison entrepreneurship Davis [11]; UNODC [48,49].

Qualitative findings reinforced this result. One inmate at Harare Central Prison commented:

“Before joining the carpentry section, I viewed prison as punishment only, but now I have skills that can help me survive outside prison.”

Another correctional officer stated:

“Entrepreneurship programmes have reduced disciplinary cases because inmates become occupied and more hopeful about the future.”

These findings support the observations of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which reported that vocational rehabilitation programmes significantly reduce recidivism and improve post-release employability UNODC [48,49]. Similarly, Wainwright and Muñoz [20] argue that entrepreneurial rehabilitation is particularly effective because self-employment enables ex-offenders to overcome labour-market discrimination and social exclusion.

Prison-Based Entrepreneurship and Institutional Efficiency

The study found that prison entrepreneurship enhances institutional efficiency and contributes toward correctional self-sufficiency Barney [24]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. From the Resource-Based View (RBV), prison farms, workshops, inmate labour, vocational infrastructure, and technical expertise constitute strategic internal resources capable of improving institutional productivity and reducing operational dependence on the state Barney [24]. These findings align with Munyoro and Chihobvu [4], who argue that prison industries in Zimbabwe increasingly function as productive institutional assets supporting operational sustainability. Quantitative findings revealed that 71% of respondents agreed that prison industries contribute significantly toward food production and operational sustainability within ZPCS institutions UNODC [48,49]. Agricultural projects in selected prisons reportedly supplied maize, vegetables, eggs, and dairy products for inmate consumption, reducing institutional procurement costs Murhula & Singh [5]. Financial analysis from selected institutions indicated that prison farms generated approximately USD\$45,000 annually while reducing food procurement expenditure by nearly 35%. The efficiency savings ratio was calculated as:

This demonstrates that entrepreneurial activities positively influence institutional cost reduction and operational

sustainability Barney [24]; Scott [25].

Qualitative findings also confirmed these observations. One prison administrator explained:

“The prison farms are now feeding inmates and reducing dependence on Treasury allocations.”

Another respondent observed:

“Skills workshops such as welding and furniture production are generating income that supports prison maintenance.”

Institutional Reform Theory explains these developments as evidence of organisational transformation from punitive custodial institutions toward economically productive correctional systems Scott [25]. However, respondents also highlighted challenges associated with outdated machinery, inconsistent electricity supply, water shortages, and limited capital investment, which constrained productivity Murhula & Singh [5]; UNODC [21]. These findings support prior literature suggesting that African prison industries remain hindered by infrastructural deficits and limited market integration.

Contribution to Socio-Economic Development

The findings established that ZPCS entrepreneurial initiatives contribute to socio-economic development through food production, skills development, employment creation, income generation, and community engagement Schultz [50]; Munyoro & Uzhenyu [6]. Human Capital Theory suggests that entrepreneurial training enhances labour-market participation and productive citizenship after incarceration Schultz [50]. The findings are consistent with Zimbabwe’s National Development Strategy 1, which emphasises vocational training, food security, and inclusive economic participation as central pillars of national development Government of Zimbabwe [31]. Quantitative data showed that 68% of respondents believed prison entrepreneurship contributes positively to local economic development, while 64% agreed that former inmates with vocational skills are more likely to establish small businesses upon release Wainwright & Muñoz [20]. Regression analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between entrepreneurial participation and socio-economic reintegration outcomes:

Where:

- = socio-economic reintegration outcomes
- = participation in entrepreneurship programmes

The regression coefficient produced:

This indicates a strong positive relationship between entrepreneurship participation and socio-economic reintegration outcomes Davis [11]. The coefficient implies that a one-unit increase in entrepreneurial participation is associated with a 72% improvement in reintegration outcomes Wainwright & Muñoz [20].

Qualitative findings reinforced this relationship. One ZPCS official stated:

“Our agricultural projects are not only feeding prisons but also supplying nearby communities during shortages.”

Another former inmate remarked:

“After release, I started a poultry project using skills I learned in prison.”

These findings support Davis [11], who argue that correctional vocational programmes improve long-term employability and reduce economic vulnerability after release. Similarly, Wainwright and Muñoz [20] found that entrepreneurship training enables ex-offenders to create self-employment opportunities where formal labour markets remain inaccessible. The findings also demonstrate that prison entrepreneurship contributes to national food security objectives and rural economic resilience through agricultural production Government of Zimbabwe [31].

Institutional Reform and Organisational Transformation

The study found that ZPCS is gradually transforming from a punitive institution into a rehabilitative and commercially oriented correctional system Scott [25]; UNODC [48,49]. Institutional Reform Theory explains this transformation as organisational adaptation to contemporary socio-economic, governance, and human rights expectations Scott [25]. The findings align with recent correctional reform literature which argues that modern prisons increasingly prioritise rehabilitation, productivity, and social reintegration rather than punishment alone Grosholz [14].

Quantitative findings showed that 74% of respondents agreed that ZPCS has increasingly prioritised rehabilitation and production compared to purely punitive incarceration approaches UNODC [48,49]. Qualitative evidence showed that entrepreneurial reforms have improved institutional image, operational coordination, and stakeholder engagement Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

One senior prison officer explained:

“The correctional system is no longer only about punishment. We now focus on empowering inmates to become productive citizens.”

Another respondent added:

“Communities are beginning to appreciate that prisons can contribute to national development.”

However, respondents also noted tensions between rehabilitation and commercialisation. Some inmates expressed concern that productivity targets occasionally overshadow rehabilitative objectives. One respondent commented:

“Sometimes production targets become more important than our actual learning.”

This finding reflects concerns raised in correctional reform literature regarding the risk of mission drift where economic goals overshadow rehabilitation objectives (UNODC, 2022). Nevertheless, the findings suggest that entrepreneurship remains central to the ongoing institutional transformation of ZPCS toward a more developmental correctional model Scott [25]; Wainwright & Muñoz [20].

Public-Private Partnerships and Market Integration

The findings revealed that partnerships with private companies, churches, vocational colleges, and non-governmental organisations positively strengthen prison entrepreneurship initiatives Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]; UNODC [48,49]. From the RBV perspective, external partnerships provide strategic resources such as technical expertise, financing, machinery, certification opportunities, and market access that improve institutional productivity and rehabilitation outcomes Barney [24]. These findings align with Munyoro and Chihobvu [9], who emphasise the importance of strategic partnerships in strengthening correctional production systems in Zimbabwe.

Quantitative results indicated that 66% of respondents believed partnerships improve vocational training quality and post-release employment opportunities UNODC [48,49]. One NGO representative stated:

“Partnerships allow inmates to receive certified vocational training recognised in the labour market.”

A prison officer added:

“Private companies help us access equipment and markets that government alone cannot provide.”

The study further established that collaborative partnerships improved product quality, business exposure, and post-release reintegration support Wainwright & Muñoz [20]. However, respondents identified concerns regarding limited transparency, inconsistent contractual arrangements, and unequal access to partnership opportunities across correctional institutions Murhula & Singh [5]. These findings suggest the need for stronger governance systems and policy frameworks to ensure accountability, sustainability, and equitable participation in prison entrepreneurship programmes Scott [25].

Challenges Affecting Prison-Based Entrepreneurship

The study identified several structural and operational challenges limiting the transformative impact of prison entrepreneurship Murhula & Singh [5]; UNODC [48,49]. These include inadequate funding, obsolete machinery, overcrowding, weak policy coordination, limited market access, stigma against ex-offenders, insufficient post-release support systems, and inadequate entrepreneurial mentorship Dube-Mawerewere & Chiborise [2]. Quantitative findings showed that 79% of respondents identified lack of capital investment as the major barrier to effective prison industries, while 73% highlighted

social stigma as a major obstacle to reintegration UNODC [48,49].

A challenge severity index was calculated using weighted responses from participants:

The index score of 4.15/5 demonstrates that respondents perceived structural barriers as significantly constraining prison entrepreneurship effectiveness Murhula & Singh [5].

One former inmate explained:

“Even with skills, employers still reject us because of our criminal record.”

Another respondent stated:

“We produce quality products, but accessing competitive markets remains difficult.”

These findings support Rehabilitation Theory, which argues that rehabilitation outcomes are shaped not only by institutional interventions but also by broader societal acceptance and reintegration opportunities Cullen & Gendreau [26]. The findings further align with Dube-Mawerewere and Chiborise [2], who identify unemployment, social exclusion, and stigma as major drivers of recidivism in Zimbabwe. Consequently, the study suggests that prison entrepreneurship can only achieve sustainable rehabilitation outcomes when supported by inclusive labour-market policies, post-release support systems, and broader societal acceptance of ex-offenders Wainwright & Muñoz [20]; UNODC [48,49].

Discussion

The Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) has progressively shifted from a traditionally custodial institution toward a more entrepreneurial and production-oriented correctional model, reflecting broader global and national pressures for public sector efficiency and offender rehabilitation Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]; UNODC [48,49]. This transformation is well explained through the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Institutional Reform Theory. RBV posits that organisational success depends on the strategic utilisation of internal resources such as land, labour, infrastructure, and institutional knowledge Barney [24]. In the ZPCS context, prison farms, workshops, and inmate labour represent underutilised assets that are being converted into productive economic resources that support both institutional sustainability and rehabilitation outcomes. Complementarily, Institutional Reform Theory explains this shift as part of a broader governance transformation in which public institutions respond to fiscal constraints, efficiency demands, and developmental priorities by adopting entrepreneurial approaches Scott [25]. Accordingly, ZPCS prison entrepreneurship reflects a structural reconfiguration of correctional philosophy, aligning incarceration practices with Zimbabwe’s national development agenda while enhancing institutional self-sufficiency and operational efficiency Government of Zimbabwe [31]; UNODC [48,49].

The rehabilitative and developmental impacts of prison entrepreneurship within ZPCS are strongly supported by Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections and Human Capital Theory. Rehabilitation Theory emphasises that correctional systems should prioritise behavioural change, skill acquisition, and reintegration readiness to reduce recidivism Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Empirical evidence from ZPCS indicates that participation in agriculture, carpentry, tailoring, welding, and other vocational enterprises reduces inmate idleness, strengthens discipline, and fosters psychological transformation Munyoro [4]. Human Capital Theory further reinforces this by arguing that investment in skills development enhances individual productivity and labour-market participation Becker [33]; Schultz [50]. Through entrepreneurship training and vocational education, inmates acquire transferable competencies that improve employability and post-release economic reintegration prospects Davis [11]; McNeeley [51]; UNODC [48,49]. However, the sustainability of these outcomes is influenced by structural constraints such as inadequate funding, obsolete infrastructure, weak market integration, and persistent social stigma against ex-offenders Murhula & Singh [5]; Munyoro & Chihobvu [4]. Consequently, while prison entrepreneurship significantly contributes to rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development, its long-term effectiveness depends on strengthened institutional capacity, inclusive labour-market policies, and sustained post-release support systems that enable full reintegration into society UNODC [48,49].

Policy Implications & Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following policy recommendations are offered to strengthen the rehabilitative, institutional, and socio-economic impact of prison-based entrepreneurship within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS). These recommendations are grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), Human Capital Theory, Institutional Reform Theory, and the Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections.

Provide Post-Release Support

The transition toward an entrepreneurial correctional model within ZPCS requires rehabilitation to be understood as a continuous process extending beyond incarceration into post-release socio-economic reintegration UNODC [48,49]. Guided by Human Capital Theory, the vocational and entrepreneurial skills acquired in prison can only produce sustainable reintegration outcomes when complemented by access to finance, mentorship, employment networks, and psychosocial support after release Becker [33]. Empirical evidence demonstrates that recidivism is often driven more by unemployment, social exclusion, and lack of economic opportunities than by lack of skills alone UNODC [48,49]; Connell et al., 2023. ZPCS should therefore institutionalise reintegration funds, start-up grants, toolkits, and enterprise incubation programmes for released inmates UNODC [48,49]. Such interventions would operationalise the Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections by transforming prison entrepreneurship from a temporary correctional activity into a long-term reintegration

strategy that promotes lawful livelihoods and productive citizenship Cullen & Gendreau [26]. Without structured post-release support mechanisms, prison entrepreneurship risks producing technically skilled but economically marginalised former inmates, thereby weakening rehabilitation outcomes and increasing vulnerability to reoffending Duwe [52].

Strengthen Institutional Capacity

The sustainability of prison-based entrepreneurship depends heavily on institutional capacity, including modern infrastructure, trained personnel, governance systems, and enterprise management capabilities UNODC [48,49]. From the Resource-Based View (RBV), prison farms, workshops, vocational centres, inmate labour, and institutional expertise represent strategic organisational resources that can improve correctional efficiency and self-sufficiency when effectively managed Barney [24]. Institutional Reform Theory further suggests that correctional institutions must continuously adapt their structures and operational systems to align with evolving socio-economic and governance expectations Scott [25]. However, many prison industries in developing countries continue to face operational constraints arising from obsolete equipment, inadequate training facilities, and weak production systems World Bank [53]. ZPCS should therefore invest in technological modernisation, vocational instructor certification, digital enterprise systems, and managerial training to improve productivity and rehabilitative effectiveness simultaneously UNODC [48,49]. Strengthening institutional capacity would not only improve operational sustainability but also reinforce discipline, work ethic, and behavioural transformation among inmates through structured and meaningful productive engagement Arbour [54].

Foster Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) should be expanded as strategic mechanisms for integrating prison entrepreneurship into broader economic and market systems UNODC [48,49]. Drawing from the RBV and Institutional Reform Theory, partnerships with private companies, vocational institutions, NGOs, and faith-based organisations provide complementary resources such as technical expertise, machinery, certification opportunities, financing, and market access that correctional institutions may not possess internally Barney [24]; Scott [25]. International correctional research indicates that prison industries are more sustainable when linked to external value chains and labour-market systems rather than operating in isolation UNODC [48,49]. In the ZPCS context, structured PPPs could improve product quality, enhance market competitiveness, facilitate inmate apprenticeships, and create post-release employment pathways (Connell et al., 2023). Nevertheless, such partnerships must be governed by transparent contractual frameworks and labour safeguards to ensure alignment with rehabilitative objectives and human rights standards UNODC [48,49]. Effective governance and accountability mechanisms are therefore essential to prevent the exploitation of inmate labour

and ensure equitable distribution of economic benefits among stakeholders UNODC [48,49].

Integrate Correctional Industries into National Development Plans

The entrepreneurial transformation of ZPCS should be formally integrated into Zimbabwe's national development agenda Government of Zimbabwe [31]. Institutional Reform Theory emphasises that public institutions achieve long-term legitimacy and effectiveness when aligned with broader state developmental priorities Scott [25]; World Bank [53]. Similarly, the RBV highlights that correctional institutions possess underutilised productive resources including land, labour, agricultural infrastructure, and vocational facilities that can contribute meaningfully to national economic goals Barney [24]; Munyoro & Chihobv [4]. Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 Government of Zimbabwe [31] prioritises food security, employment creation, industrialisation, and skills development, all of which correspond closely with prison-based agricultural and vocational programmes Government of Zimbabwe [31]. Integrating correctional industries into national development planning would reposition prisons from purely custodial institutions into productive socio-economic actors contributing to national resilience and inclusive development UNODC [48,49]. Such policy integration would also strengthen the Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections by framing inmates as potential economic contributors capable of productive citizenship rather than perpetual social liabilities Kirby & Healey-Benson [55].

Monitor and Evaluate Outcomes

Robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are essential for assessing the long-term effectiveness of prison entrepreneurship programmes UNODC [48,49]. From a results-based management perspective, evaluation frameworks should measure not only institutional outputs such as production volumes and revenue generation but also rehabilitation outcomes including recidivism reduction, post-release employment, business sustainability, and social reintegration UNODC [48,49]. Human Capital Theory further suggests that investments in skills development must be evaluated according to their actual contribution to labour-market participation and economic productivity Becker [33]; Connell et al., 2023. ZPCS should therefore establish integrated longitudinal tracking systems capable of assessing the long-term socio-economic trajectories of programme participants after release Arbour [54]. Such evidence-based evaluation mechanisms would strengthen policy accountability, improve resource allocation, and prevent mission drift in which commercial objectives overshadow rehabilitative goals UNODC [48,49]. Continuous monitoring would also enable policymakers to identify programme weaknesses and refine prison entrepreneurship initiatives in line with measurable reintegration outcomes.

Promote Awareness and Social Acceptance

The success of prison-based entrepreneurship ultimately depends on societal willingness to accept rehabilitated offenders into communities and labour markets World Bank [53]. Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections argues that reintegration is most effective when offenders are provided with opportunities to rebuild social identity and participate productively in society Cullen & Gendreau [26]. However, persistent stigma and employer discrimination often undermine the economic value of prison-acquired skills by limiting employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for ex-offenders (Connell et al., 2023). ZPCS and relevant government agencies should therefore implement public awareness campaigns highlighting successful reintegration stories, community contributions of former inmates, and the developmental value of correctional entrepreneurship UNODC [48,49]. Such interventions would help reduce social stigma, improve institutional legitimacy, and encourage labour-market inclusion Kirby & Healey-Benson [55]. In addition, community sensitisation programmes involving churches, local authorities, employers, and civil society organisations could strengthen social reintegration networks and enhance the long-term sustainability of rehabilitation outcomes UNODC [48,49].

Transformation of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) toward an Entrepreneurial Correctional Model

The Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) is undergoing a gradual but significant transformation from a custodial, punishment-centred institution into an entrepreneurial correctional system that integrates rehabilitation, production, and socio-economic contribution. This shift reflects broader global correctional reforms emphasising rehabilitation, efficiency, and reintegration over mere incarceration Scott, 2014; UNODC [48,49]. The model positions prisons not only as sites of confinement but also as centres of skills development, production, and institutional self-reliance Munyoro & Chihobvu [4].

How the Entrepreneurial Correctional Model Works

Input Stage: Correctional Entry

Upon admission, offenders undergo structured assessment to determine risk levels, skill deficiencies, and rehabilitation needs. This diagnostic process ensures that inmates are placed into appropriate correctional pathways aligned with their behavioural profiles and developmental requirements. It establishes the foundation for targeted intervention and personalised rehabilitation planning. Evidence-based correctional practice emphasises risk, need, and responsivity principles in offender assessment and classification, ensuring that interventions match criminogenic needs and risk levels (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). This structured assessment approach improves rehabilitation outcomes by enabling precise case management and intervention targeting UNODC, 2021.

Transformation Stage: Human Capital Development

Inmates are engaged in vocational training, entrepreneurship education, and behavioural rehabilitation programmes aimed at building employable skills. Activities such as carpentry, welding, tailoring, and agriculture enhance competencies while promoting discipline and productivity. This stage reflects Human Capital Theory, which emphasises skill formation as a driver of future productivity and reintegration Becker [33]. Human Capital Theory highlights the importance of sustained investment in education and skills development as a pathway to improved labour market outcomes Becker [33]. Contemporary development research further reinforces that vocational education and training significantly improve employability and income prospects World Bank [56]. Therefore, policies should institutionalise accredited training programmes linked to national qualification frameworks to improve employability. Expanding post-release entrepreneurship incubation centres will ensure skills translate into sustainable livelihoods.

Production Stage: Prison Enterprises

Correctional facilities operate agricultural farms, workshops, and small-scale industries that produce goods for institutional consumption and external markets. These enterprises utilise inmate labour and institutional resources such as land and infrastructure to generate economic value. From a Resource-Based View (RBV), organisations achieve competitive advantage by effectively leveraging internal resources such as labour, capital, and infrastructure Barney [24]. In this context, correctional systems can strategically optimise internal assets to improve productivity and sustainability. Complementary strategic management theory also emphasises resource coordination and capability development as drivers of institutional efficiency Grant [57]. Policy should prioritise investment in prison infrastructure and modern equipment to enhance production efficiency and competitiveness. Strengthening internal resource coordination will improve institutional self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on state funding.

Partnership Stage: External Linkages

Zambia Correctional Service (ZCS) collaborates with private firms, NGOs, and training institutions to strengthen capacity, provide equipment, and certify skills. These partnerships enhance market access and improve the quality of production outputs. Institutional theory explains such reforms as part of broader public-sector modernization, where organisations adapt to external pressures for legitimacy, efficiency, and accountability Scott [25]. Contemporary governance frameworks further highlight that inter-organisational collaboration improves service delivery and institutional performance OECD [58]. Policy reforms should strengthen transparency in prison enterprises, improve accountability mechanisms, and formalise public-private partnerships. This will ensure that correctional entrepreneurship aligns with national development goals and international best practices.

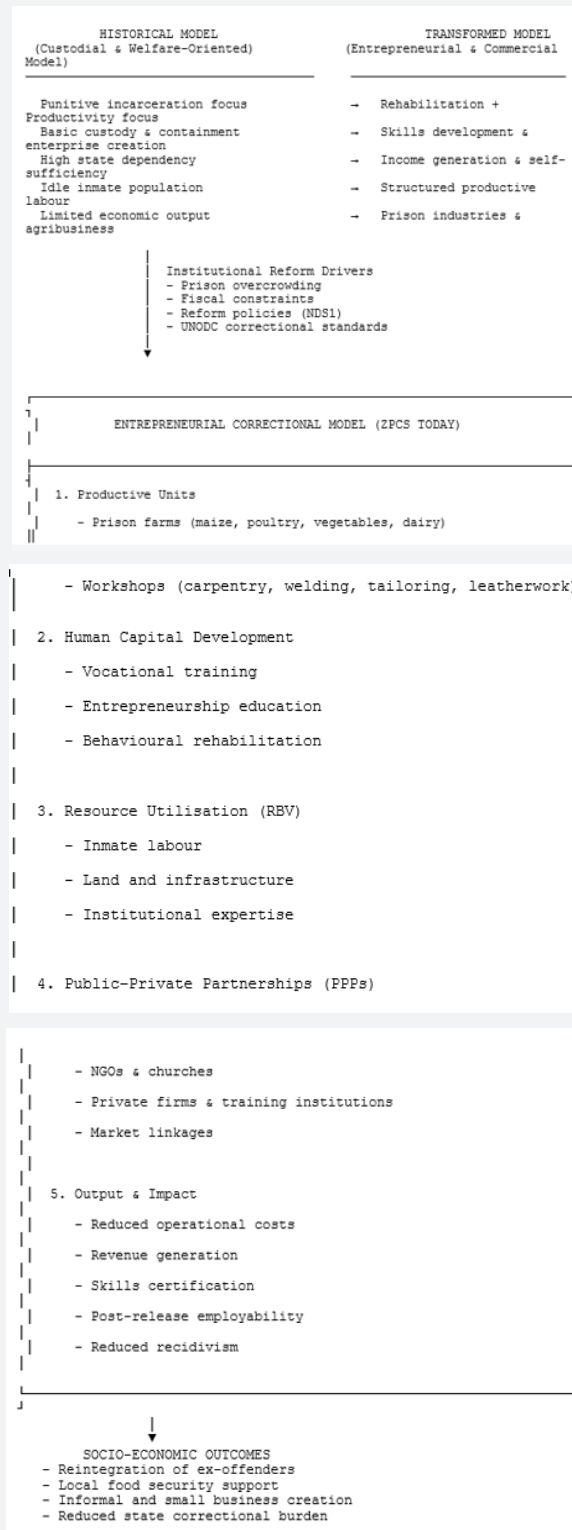


Figure 1

Output Stage: Economic and Social Returns

The system generates reduced operational costs through self-produced food, revenue from prison industries, and improved institutional efficiency. Inmates also acquire certified skills that increase employability after release. These outcomes demonstrate the dual economic and rehabilitative function of prison entrepreneurship (UNODC, 2021).

Reintegration Stage: Post-Release Outcomes

Upon release, former inmates utilise acquired skills to establish micro-enterprises or secure employment opportunities. Reintegration support reduces recidivism and promotes social stability. The Risk-Need-Responsivity model and rehabilitation-focused correctional theory emphasise that effective reintegration depends on structured intervention during incarceration and continued support after release Andrews & Bonta [59]; Cullen & Gendreau [26]. These frameworks highlight the importance of addressing behavioural change, social support, and criminogenic needs. Therefore, policies should expand psychosocial counselling, mentorship, and community reintegration programmes to reduce stigma and recidivism. Strengthening aftercare systems is essential for sustaining long-term behavioural transformation and social reintegration [60-68].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the transformation of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) through prison-based entrepreneurship demonstrates a profound shift from punitive incarceration toward a rehabilitative, productive, and development-oriented correctional model that simultaneously advances inmate rehabilitation, institutional efficiency, and socio-economic development in Zimbabwe. Grounded in the Rehabilitation Theory of Corrections, the findings confirm that structured engagement in agriculture, manufacturing, and vocational enterprises fosters behavioural change, reduces recidivism, and enhances psychosocial reintegration, while Human Capital Theory further explains that such programmes build inmates' productive capabilities, employability, and long-term economic independence beyond prison walls. From a Resource-Based View (RBV), ZPCS's utilisation of land, inmate labour, workshops, and correctional infrastructure demonstrates that prisons can strategically convert internal resources into sustainable institutional assets that reduce operational costs, enhance food security, and improve self-sufficiency. Complementarily, Institutional Reform Theory illustrates that these developments reflect a broader organisational transition in which correctional institutions evolve into hybrid entities that combine custodial, rehabilitative, and economic functions in response to fiscal constraints and national development imperatives. Consequently, policy implications and recommendations strongly indicate that the sustainability and effectiveness of prison entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe depend on strengthening post-release support

systems, enhancing institutional capacity, expanding public-private partnerships, integrating correctional industries into national development frameworks, and establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure accountability and reintegration success. Together, these reforms reinforce that prison-based entrepreneurship is not merely an economic activity but a multidimensional correctional strategy that transforms inmates into self-reliant citizens, strengthens institutional resilience, and contributes meaningfully to national socio-economic development through a rehabilitative, resource-efficient, and reform-driven correctional system.

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