


# Informal transport operator perspectives on entrepreneurship, mobility and gendered vulnerability in rural Zimbabwe

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**Background:** In many rural towns, especially in developing countries, the collapse or absence of formal public transport systems has led to the rise in informal mobility services. Informal transport serves as an innovative solution for mobility at the grassroots level and an entrepreneurial avenue that addresses the transport gap whilst providing income opportunities in economically disadvantaged areas.

**Objectives:** This study explores informal transport operators' perspectives on how the informal transport mode *Mushikashika* supports local enterprises and provides everyday mobility in rural towns in Zimbabwe, whilst also examining gendered vulnerability.

**Method:** In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 21 informal transport operators to explore their experiences, challenges and perspectives within the transport sector.

**Results:** The findings show how informal transport adapts to evolving mobility needs, revealing its potential for grassroots innovation in underserved areas. Informal transport provides livelihoods for operators and sustains informal economies, such as street vending; however, it also exposes vulnerabilities, particularly for women who face safety risks and harassment in unregulated spaces.

**Conclusion:** This study highlights how informal transport systems can adopt local innovation, inclusive mobility and resilient economic activities in underserved areas. This study advocates recognising *Mushikashika* within the broader transport system in rural towns.

**Contribution:** This study contributes to debates on informal transport and everyday mobility provision in contexts where formal public transport is absent, using evidence from rural Zimbabwe. This study also contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

**Keywords:** informal transport; drivers; operators; *Mushikashika*; innovation; resilience; mobility; entrepreneurship.

## Introduction

The provision of transport infrastructure and services is central to social inclusion and spatial equity for people living in rural and remote communities (Horn, Gifford & Ting 2021; Pillay 2023). Access to transport enables the movement of people and goods, supports livelihoods and connects communities to services and opportunities. In rural and peri-urban areas in African countries, formal transport is either absent or insufficient, which contributes to mobility poverty, a condition in which people face significant challenges in accessing affordable and safe transport (Pillay 2023). Formal public transport systems are underdeveloped, fragmented or have deteriorated in many developing countries (Evans, O'Brien & Ng 2018; Toro López & Van den Broeck 2022). In the absence of formal transport services, informal transport entrepreneurs play a crucial role in bridging mobility gaps. An informal transport entrepreneur refers to an individual or small-scale operator who establishes and manages transport services to meet local transport needs and generate income (Rekhviashvili & Sgibnev 2020). Transport entrepreneurs organise transport alternatives that are flexible, adaptive and deeply embedded in the informal economy (Rekhviashvili & Sgibnev 2020).

Informal transport systems are more than just a response to gaps in formal planning; they represent entrepreneurial innovations. Informal transport entrepreneurs mostly operate outside formal regulatory frameworks, relying on adaptive strategies and community-based knowledge

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to provide flexible, low-cost transport solutions, especially in areas underserved by formal public transport (Cervero & Golub 2007; Kerzhner 2023). In the context of Zimbabwe, the drivers of informal transport represent grassroots mobility innovators who adapt their services to persistent economic crises, inadequate transport infrastructure and the evolving mobility needs of transport users in both urban and rural settings (Chigwenya & Dube 2018; Tichagwa 2016). Informal transport operators often engage in resource and service innovation by customising services to local needs and making effective use of limited resources. Whilst social innovation is typically overlooked in formal innovation frameworks, it plays a crucial role in enabling access, supporting local economies and addressing the practical mobility needs of marginalised populations.

In Zimbabwe, the informal transport system, known locally as *Mushikashika*, has become a routine mode of mobility in both urban and rural areas (Madamombe 2023; Tichagwa 2016). However, in rural towns where formal public transport is non-existent, informal transport services play an even more crucial role in meeting daily mobility needs. Years of economic instability have contributed to the collapse of formal public transport in many areas of the country (Munuhwa et al. 2020). Existing studies on informal transport in Zimbabwe focus largely on the problematic aspects of *Mushikashika*, such as congestion, pollution and safety concerns (Dumba 2017; Munuhwa et al. 2020). However, there is limited research on how *Mushikashika* services in rural towns sustain local livelihoods and serve as critical mobility solutions where formal transport has failed. There is a lack of research on how *Mushikashika* adapts to operating challenges in rural settings.

The aim of this study is to explore informal transport operators' perspectives on how an informal transport mode, *Mushikashika*, supports local enterprises and provides everyday mobility in rural towns in Zimbabwe, whilst also examining gendered vulnerability. To address this, the following objectives were formulated:

- To examine how *Mushikashika* operators describe their role in supporting local enterprises and everyday mobility in rural towns.
- To identify the operational challenges faced by *Mushikashika* operators in delivering informal transport services.
- To explore how operators perceive gendered vulnerabilities and risks experienced by women within informal transport systems.

For this study, the terms drivers and operators are used interchangeably. Both refer to individuals who manage and run vehicles in the informal transport sector.

## Literature review

Entrepreneurship is a concept with no single universally accepted definition. Richard Cantillon, in the early 18<sup>th</sup>

century, first coined the concept, which emphasised the entrepreneur's economic function rather than the personal characteristics of the individual undertaking that role. The definition of entrepreneurship has evolved significantly over time in both academic discourse and practice (Ratten 2023). The meaning and application of entrepreneurship vary considerably across fields (Ratten 2023). Entrepreneurship is often viewed as a dynamic process of identifying, developing and exploiting opportunities, irrespective of the scale of the enterprise or formality of the market (Ratten 2023; Shane & Venkataraman 2000). Besides job creation, entrepreneurship contributes significantly to poverty alleviation, especially in developing regions, such as Africa (Ajide 2020).

Entrepreneurship in transport systems plays a vital role in bridging mobility gaps in underserved areas. In rural and remote communities where formal systems are absent, informal transport becomes a necessity and an opportunity for local entrepreneurship. In many African countries, informal transport systems are not only mobility solutions but also crucial avenues for economic survival. Unlike opportunity entrepreneurs, who innovate out of ambition or market gaps, necessity entrepreneurs are driven by economic hardship and structural unemployment (Kunawotor et al. 2025). Amongst informal transport entrepreneurs in African countries, many are necessity entrepreneurs who engage in entrepreneurial activities due to a lack of employment. However, informal transport operators often engage in resource and service innovation by customising services based on local needs and making use of limited resources.

In Zimbabwe, prolonged economic instability and public sector contraction have limited formal job prospects (Bandaiko & Arku 2025; Bandaiko & Mandisvika 2015; Mbara, Dumba & Mukwashi 2014). Therefore, many individuals have turned to informal livelihoods as a means of survival (Dube & Chirisa 2023). This has led to the proliferation of activities in the informal sector, including street vending and informal transport systems, such as *Mushikashika* (Dube & Chirisa 2023). *Mushikashika* operators demonstrate the necessity of entrepreneurship; however, they operate unlicensed and outside of formal regulatory systems (Chigwenya & Dube 2018; Tichagwa 2016). Operators have created grassroots mobility innovations that sustain livelihoods, fill service voids and respond to fluctuating transport demands in both urban and rural areas. However, their operations are deeply shaped by entrepreneurial framework conditions, weak institutional support, poor infrastructure and regulations (Chigwenya & Dube 2018; Madamombe 2023; Mbara et al. 2014).

In many rural towns in Zimbabwe, where public transport systems have collapsed entirely, informal transport operators establish pick-up points and respond to seasonal demand shifts, such as market days. On the demand side, *Mushikashika* users include anyone whose daily lives depend on public transport. Though *Mushikashika* improves access, users are not immune to transport challenges and risks (Madamombe 2023).

Safety concerns are common, especially amongst women, children, and people with disabilities, who face risks of harassment and overloading in these unregulated vehicles (Madamombe 2023; Tom 2024). Women are the majority of passengers who rely on informal transport services (Munuhwa et al. 2020). *Mushikashika* drivers, often working under economic pressure and without structured oversight, engage in reckless driving, passenger overloading, or poor vehicle maintenance, all of which elevate accident risks (Dumba 2017; Foya 2019).

## Study context

This study was conducted in Chipinge, a small, remote town in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe, near the Mozambique border. In many rural towns in Zimbabwe, including Chipinge, formal transport systems are either underdeveloped or absent, leaving communities with limited mobility. With a population of approximately 360 000 (Zimbabwe Statistics 2022), Chipinge is the commercial and administrative centre of the district (Chipinge Town Council 2024). For many years, Chipinge town has experienced infrastructural and economic challenges, and the transport sector in particular (Chipinge Town Council 2024).

In response to mobility challenges, *Mushikashika*, an informal, unregulated transport system, has emerged as the foremost mode of transport in Chipinge. *Mushikashika* is more than just a transport solution; it represents entrepreneurial mobility innovation, where individuals leverage available personal resources to create transport services that meet local needs. *Mushikashika* provides essential access to goods and services where formal transport is scarce or non-existent. Despite its important role, authorities view it as a nuisance and illegal activity rather than a legitimate response to systemic transport failure (High Court of Zimbabwe 2021). This study challenges this notion by positioning *Mushikashika* as a bottom-up innovation that should be integrated into formal national transport planning.

## Research methods and design

This study adopted a qualitative research method to explore entrepreneurial mobility innovations in informal transport systems in rural towns, using Chipinge as a case study. This research method captured the lived experiences of informal transport operators using purposive sampling, targeting drivers who operate *Mushikashika* vehicles in Chipinge. A total of 21 in-depth interviews were conducted with drivers in Chipinge Town. The sample size was guided by the concept of data saturation, where no new themes or insights emerged from any additional interviews (Morse 2015).

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing drivers to articulate their experiences, entrepreneurial strategies, challenges and perspectives in their own words. Interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language to ensure openness and authenticity. Shona-speaking participants were interviewed in their first language to allow them to express themselves

more naturally and comfortably. The researcher subsequently translated the interviews into English to facilitate analysis and reporting. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using ATLAS.ti Version 25.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is an effective method for identifying, interpreting and reporting patterns within qualitative data, recognising that meaning is actively constructed through the analytical process. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and imported into ATLAS.ti Version 25 for organisation and coding. Analysis began with repeated readings of the transcripts to achieve deep familiarisation with participants' accounts. Inductive coding was then undertaken to derive codes directly from the data, focusing on issues such as motivations for entering *Mushikashika*, livelihood strategies, mobility service patterns, operational constraints (for example, fuel costs, road conditions, vehicle maintenance), interactions with law enforcement, and passenger safety concerns. These codes were subsequently clustered into conceptually coherent categories, for instance, grouping 'police roadblocks', 'being chased' and 'confiscation threats' under law enforcement harassment, and grouping 'overcrowding', 'harassment' and 'touts coercing women' under passenger vulnerability. Themes were iteratively reviewed against the full dataset to ensure internal coherence and clear distinction, with overlapping or redundant codes refined. Final themes were defined and named to clearly articulate their central organising concepts, and the write-up interpreted these themes in relation to entrepreneurship, rural mobility provision, and transport equity. The researcher conducted the core analysis, supported by regular peer debriefing sessions with an independent qualitative researcher to discuss coding decisions and thematic interpretations, thereby enhancing analytical rigour and limiting potential individual bias.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Transport and Supply Chain Management at the University of Johannesburg (No. 2024-TSCM027) on 25 November 2024. The participants were fully informed of the purpose and scope of the study and provided their informed consent to participate. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals could withdraw at any time. All identifiable information was anonymised, and pseudonyms were used in transcripts, field notes and reports to ensure privacy. Because the study relied on interviews with *Mushikashika* operators, findings on user vulnerabilities reflect driver perspectives rather than direct passenger accounts. This complements existing research that has examined user experiences more directly.

## Results

This section presents the key findings from the interviews with *Mushikashika* drivers in Chipinge. The findings were organised into themes that highlight both the economic

significance of informal transport and the challenges surrounding its operation. The findings illustrate how *Mushikashika* functions as a livelihood strategy, mobility solution and site of vulnerability, whilst also pointing to its contested future. It is important to emphasise that the vulnerabilities identified in this study are based on the operator's perspective. Whilst these accounts provide valuable insights into how drivers perceive passenger risks, they do not substitute for passenger narratives. This distinction situates the findings within the broader project of understanding informal transport from multiple vantage points. Operators provided detailed accounts of passenger-related concerns, particularly regarding women's safety and dignity when using informal transport.

### Necessity entrepreneurship and everyday mobility provision

The proliferation of *Mushikashika* in rural towns, such as Chipinge, is fundamentally driven by economic necessity rather than entrepreneurial opportunity. Drivers consistently linked their involvement in the informal transport system to the collapse of formal public transport and the broader employment crisis.

A participant explained:

'The government is not providing transport services and not funding the transport system.' (Participant 2)

Whilst another emphasised:

'Many of us are not employed. We have decided to work as drivers so that we can provide for our families.' (Participant 4)

This aligned with the necessity entrepreneurship theory, where individuals enter business activities to survive in contexts of high unemployment:

'There is high level of unemployment, and many people have converted their personal vehicles into *Mushikashika* to earn some income.' (Participant 16)

This highlighted how personal assets are repurposed to generate livelihoods. Similarly, another observed:

'The state of the economy has caused *Mushikashika* to become popular. People are buying cars to operate so that they can generate income since employment is a big challenge in Zimbabwe.' (Participant 9)

In addition to operating transport services, many diversify their income streams by trading goods, such as fruit and vegetables, whilst the service itself stimulates ancillary activities, such as street vending. This suggests that *Mushikashika* is not only a transport solution, but also a catalyst for microeconomic ecosystems in rural areas.

Though operators described *Mushikashika* as an entrepreneurial activity, entry into the sector was strongly influenced by resource constraints and limited access to formal finance. Several participants explained that many operators repurposed personal vehicles into *Mushikashika* as

a survival strategy, whilst others acquired vehicles specifically for transport operations in response to unemployment. These accounts suggest that the sector is sustained through personal assets and informal resource mobilisation rather than formal financing mechanisms, reinforcing the character of *Mushikashika* as necessity-driven entrepreneurship in a constrained economic environment.

Beyond income generation, operators consistently framed *Mushikashika* as everyday mobility provision in contexts where formal public transport is absent or unreliable. Participants described their work as filling a transport gap that affects routine movement within and beyond the town, including travel linked to trading activities, market-day mobility and access to services. In this way, *Mushikashika* was positioned not only as a livelihood strategy, but also as a flexible, demand-responsive transport service embedded in daily rural mobility practices. This highlights how entrepreneurship and mobility are intertwined within informal transport systems, particularly in rural towns where mobility needs persist despite the collapse of formal provision.

### Operational challenges

This study did not formally rank the challenges, but operators noted that these factors directly impact daily profitability, service continuity and the ability to provide reliable mobility. Operators experience operational challenges in transport services, including poor road infrastructure, high maintenance and fuel costs, fare disputes and persistent law enforcement harassment, which undermine service sustainability. Whilst *Mushikashika* offers critical mobility services, its operations are shaped by chronic infrastructural and regulatory barriers. Poor road conditions, particularly during rainy seasons, emerged as a persistent strain on vehicle longevity:

'The roads are bad and full of potholes. When it rains, the vehicle's suspension is affected by the bad roads.' (Participant 2)

These challenges are compounded by escalating fuel costs, scarcity, and high maintenance expenses, which erode already narrow profit margins. Law enforcement interactions add another layer of difficulty:

'Law enforcement is a big problem to us, we are constantly stopped.' (Participant 11)

Whilst another added:

'Police are always chasing us.' (Participant 15)

Such policing reflects the legal invisibility of *Mushikashika*, which are prohibited from carrying passengers. However, operators see their work as an economic necessity, with one participant acknowledging:

'*Mushikashika* is not allowed to carry passengers, but the state of the economy is bad, and we are trying to survive. However, I think the regulation of *Mushikashika* is very important to maintain order and structure.' (Participant 9)

Operating transport at night carries heightened risks of robbery and reckless driving, and disputes over fares create additional friction with passengers. The persistence of these challenges points to a structural gap in rural mobility provision, where unregulated services bear the operational costs of state neglect.

## User vulnerability

The findings reveal that *Mushikashika* passengers, especially women, encounter safety and dignity risks due to the unregulated nature of the service:

‘Women are vulnerable transport users of *Mushikashika*, by getting into a car of someone they do not know.’ (Participant 6)

Whilst another noted:

‘Women are sometimes bullied and passengers in general are always overcrowded in vehicles.’ (Participant 2)

Reports of sexual harassment were common, with one participant recounting:

‘There are instances where women can be violated, whereby a driver can touch a female passenger inappropriately. Women who sit in front of or next to the driver experience this violation when the driver changes gears, and this is abuse. The safety of women at night is poor. Some vehicles pose as *Mushikashika* and rob women when they get into these vehicles.’ (Participant 5)

Touts were repeatedly identified as key perpetrators of intimidation and coercion, with one participant explaining:

‘Touts can intimidate women and force them into vehicles they do not want.’ (Participant 21)

‘Touts can yell at women ... Touts also take advantage of women.’ (Participant 16)

The issue extends to verbal abuse:

‘The language used by touts is not good. It is foul language.’ (Participant 11)

Whilst Participant 10 highlighted problematic seating arrangements where physical proximity enabled harassment, another confirmed that:

‘... touts fight over passengers and sometimes they end up touching women inappropriately.’ (Participant 12)

These accounts suggest that whilst *Mushikashika* fills a vital mobility gap, it also perpetuates gendered vulnerabilities that undermine safe and equitable access to transport in rural areas.

## Future outlook

The participants expressed both optimism and uncertainty regarding *Mushikashika*'s future. Many anticipate continued growth, with Participant 11 stating, ‘*Mushikashika* is growing’, whilst others point to enforcement threats, as one participant warned:

‘Law enforcement wants to close down *Mushikashika* operation.’ (Participant 16)

One participant articulated the conditional nature of its survival:

‘*Mushikashika* is addressing an economic gap. We cannot predict the future. It is not possible to see if it will be formalised.’ (Participant 7)

This highlights a policy crossroad between criminalisation, which could exacerbate rural transport poverty, and integration into formal transport planning, which could professionalise services and address safety concerns in the region. These conflicting perspectives suggest that *Mushikashika* largely depends on whether policymakers recognise its embedded role in rural livelihoods and choose to regulate rather than suppress it.

## Discussion

This study aimed to understand informal transport as a grassroots mobility innovation and an entrepreneurial lifeline that bridges transport gaps whilst generating income opportunities in economically marginalised areas. The findings of this study highlight the dual role of *Mushikashika* as both a livelihood strategy and a contested form of providing informal transport. The findings are consistent with those of other researchers who position informal transport as both essential for mobility and problematic in terms of safety, regulations and governance (Cervero & Golub 2007; Durant et al. 2023; Rekhviashvili et al. 2022; Sunio et al. 2021).

The prominence of *Mushikashika* as a livelihood strategy resonates with broader research on informality as a vital source of employment and income generation (Chigwenya & Dube 2018; Horn et al. 2021; Nani et al. 2025). Previous studies have described Zimbabwe's urban centres as increasingly defined by informality, where small-scale entrepreneurship and informal transport provide critical income opportunities amidst formal sector collapse (Dube & Chirisa 2012, 2023). Similar observations were made by Gukurume (2018), who noted that youth in Zimbabwe's small and medium enterprises (SME) sector navigate precarious but vital livelihoods within the informal economy. Comparable patterns emerge across Africa. For example, Stasik (2015) documents how informal transport in Ghana functions not only as a mobility system, but also as an entrepreneurial space. In Ghana, most public transport is provided by small-scale entrepreneurs. The expansion of the informal sector in developing economies, particularly in the Global South, has positioned it as the primary source of employment and a key driver of economic growth (Nani et al. 2025). From this study, *Mushikashika* has emerged as a necessary livelihood strategy for many, demonstrating the entrepreneurial capacity of local actors. The informal sector has become a central engine of employment and mobility across African urban centres.

This study found that operational challenges ranged from harassment by law enforcement and regulatory uncertainty to poor road infrastructure, competition amongst operators and the risk of vehicle breakdowns. Law enforcement harassment is a recurrent problem, as drivers are frequently stopped for operating without proper licenses. This resonates with Tichagwa's (2016) study, which highlighted that unlicensed taxis in Zimbabwe operate in a climate of constant police crackdowns, creating a precarious and costly environment for drivers. Similarly, in Harare, informal drivers often adopt unsafe behaviour partly because of the pressure to evade police and to maximise earnings in a hostile regulatory context (Dumba 2017). Like other small towns in Zimbabwe, Chipinge suffers from a poor transport infrastructure and deteriorating roads, which increase vehicle maintenance costs and contribute to accidents. Similar challenges were identified by Munuhwa et al. (2020), who argued that inadequate urban infrastructure in Harare undermines the sustainability of transport. Competition has also emerged as a major operational issue. As noted by Kerzhner (2022), informal transport networks evolve dynamically because individual vehicles compete for passengers across the city, each functioning as a separate business. This can lead to an oversupply of transport in some areas, fare wars and aggressive passenger solicitation. In Chipinge, similar dynamics were observed, with drivers reporting conflicts over loading points and difficulties in sustaining consistent incomes.

The abuse of women who use *Mushikashika* is concerning. Touts, who act as informal middlemen between passengers and drivers, forced women to board vehicles against their preference, sometimes through coercion or harassment. Women who sit in the front passenger seat are prone to abuse by drivers, especially during gear changing. According to Madamombe (2023), women and children in Zimbabwe remain the most vulnerable groups in public transport. In Zimbabwe, this vulnerability is compounded by the weak regulations governing informal transport (Dumba 2017; Tichagwa 2016), exposing women and children to both physical insecurity and social exclusion. Infrastructure design in many developing countries does not prioritise women's comfort and safety (Borker 2024). Consequently, women's perceptions of violence, combined with their actual experiences of insecurity in public spaces, directly affect their mobility and economic choices.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that *Mushikashika* represents a paradox within Zimbabwe's public transport space. On the one hand, informal transport is a vital entrepreneurial response to state neglect and economic crisis, sustaining livelihoods and bridging critical transport gaps in rural towns like Chipinge. However, informal transport remains deeply embedded in challenges of safety, gendered abuse, competition and weak regulations that limit its long-term sustainability. The findings of this study affirm previous studies that view informal transport as both indispensable and problematic (Cervero & Golub 2007; Dube & Chirisa 2012, 2023; Rekhviashvili & Sgibnev 2020), whilst

also extending the debate by highlighting women's embodied vulnerabilities as a central issue. Though the study draws on operators' accounts rather than direct passenger interviews, the findings provide evidence of how informal transport functions as everyday mobility provision in rural towns. Operators' narratives illustrate that *Mushikashika* sustains routine movement and supports microeconomic activity, whilst simultaneously generating risks associated with informality and weak regulation.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to understand informal transport by exploring *Mushikashika* as a grassroots mobility innovation and an entrepreneurial lifeline that bridges transport gaps. This would generate income opportunities in economically marginalised areas because of the collapse of formal transport in Zimbabwe's town of Chipinge. The findings revealed that informal transport has become both an essential livelihood strategy and a crucial mobility solution in the context of economic precarity and infrastructural neglect. For many operators, *Mushikashika* is a necessity-driven survival mechanism, reflecting wider trends of informality across Zimbabwe and the Global South. The study exposed the vulnerabilities and risks inherent in unregulated systems. Women emerged as the most disadvantaged group, facing harassment, coercion and insecurity when accessing *Mushikashika* services. Operational challenges, such as police harassment, poor road conditions, high costs and intense competition, further constrain the service's sustainability. These findings confirm that whilst informal transport fills critical service gaps, it simultaneously generates new forms of exclusion and insecurity.

Based on the findings, the government should consider regulatory integration rather than criminalisation of informal transport. Instead of suppressing *Mushikashika*, especially in areas where there is non-existent formal public transport, policymakers should develop frameworks that recognise its economic and social role. This could include the introduction of low-cost, tiered licensing systems for drivers and vehicles, accompanied by clear guidelines on safety and operational standards. Measures should include training for drivers on gender sensitivity, stricter penalties for harassment, and the incorporation of women's voices in transport policymaking. Investment in road infrastructure of small towns is critical to reduce vehicle deterioration, improve safety and lower operational costs for transport operators. Chipinge and similar towns would benefit from targeted road rehabilitation programmes that prioritise commuter routes. Since touts are central to the functioning of informal transport but often contribute to harassment and disorder, there is a need to formalise their role. This could involve registering touts, providing basic training in passenger relations, and introducing accountability measures under local council supervision.

Whilst this study provides important insights into the role of informal transport as a grassroots mobility innovation in Chipinge, it is not without limitations. The study was

confined to a single rural town. Though the findings offer valuable perspectives, they may not fully capture the diversity of informal transport practices across different urban and rural contexts in Zimbabwe. Future studies could conduct comparative studies across multiple towns and cities in Zimbabwe to help identify variations in the operation and governance of *Mushikashika* between rural, peri-urban and urban contexts.

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The author, Babra Duri, declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

### CRedit authorship contribution

Babra Duri: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Visualisation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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### Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, Babra Duri.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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