



**Analysing the Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Home-based Businesses in the
Era of Electricity Loadshedding in Steve Tshwete Local Municipality, Newtown.**

by

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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

To the infinite source of strength, wisdom, and inspiration, I dedicate this dissertation to God. Your guidance and grace have been my constant companions throughout this journey. Every word penned here is a testament to your endless blessings.

To my precious daughter, Mandile Madinawe: You are the light of my life and the embodiment of my dreams. As I pen these words and complete this chapter in my academic journey, I dedicate this dissertation to you.

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I extend my deepest gratitude to my parents, John and Nomvula Magagula, for their unending love, support, and encouragement. Your belief in me fuelled this journey and made it possible. I love you so much and I pray that God keeps you so that you can enjoy the fruits of your investments in and through me.

To my precious daughter, Mandile Madinawe: You are the light of my life and the embodiment of my dreams. As I pen these words and complete this chapter in my academic journey, I dedicate this dissertation to you. Your arrival in my life brought an immeasurable sense of purpose, and I promise to continue working hard to create a better world for you. With your coos and giggles in the background, this accomplishment becomes even more meaningful. May these words be a testament to the love, hope, and dreams I hold for you.

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To all those who played a part, no matter how big or small, in this dissertation's journey, I am deeply grateful. This work stands as a testament to our collective efforts.

DECLARATION

I, Vuyelwa Caroline Magagula, hereby declare that this dissertation, titled “**Analysing the Sustainability of Women-Owned Informal Home-based Businesses in the Era of Electricity Loadshedding in Steve Tshwete Local Municipality**,” is my original work. I affirm that this research work was carried out under the guidance of my supervisor, Dr N. E. Yende and my co-supervisor Prof. T. Sabela at The University of Mpumalanga. All external sources of information used in this dissertation have been duly acknowledged and referenced.

I declare that this dissertation has not been previously submitted, in part or in full, for any other academic qualification. It represents my own intellectual efforts and has not been ghostwritten or authored by any other individual or entity. Any contributions from other researchers or scholars have been appropriately credited.

I understand the university’s policies regarding academic honesty and plagiarism, and I have fully complied with these guidelines throughout the research and writing of this dissertation.

I further understand that any breach of academic integrity, including plagiarism or fraudulent misrepresentation, may lead to disciplinary actions in accordance with the university’s regulations.

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ABSTRACT

Women-owned home-based businesses are key players in the informal sector in South Africa; however, these businesses struggle due to electricity loadshedding (planned power outages). It is against this background that this research study explored the sustainability of informal home-based businesses owned by women in Newtown, Mpumalanga, South Africa. The research utilised the sustainable livelihoods approach as a guiding framework to analyse the findings. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and non-probability sampling methods to recruit 10 women entrepreneurs from women-owned home-based businesses in Newtown. The data collection involved in-depth interviews and structured observations to gain in-depth insights into their experiences, coping mechanisms, and perspectives on business sustainability. The sustainable livelihoods approach emphasised the interconnectedness of various factors influencing livelihoods, including natural, financial, human, social, and political capital. Thus, the findings of the study indicate and affirm that women-owned informal home-based businesses face multifaceted challenges, highlighting the adverse impacts of electricity loadshedding on their operations and sustainability. These challenges include loss of financial stability attributed to the costs of investing in alternative power sources. The study concludes that the sustainability of these businesses is greatly affected. Even though the majority of the businesses are still operational, the study concludes that this sustainability varies greatly due to financial, emotional and additional negative factors exacerbated by loadshedding. The study concludes by recommending interventions aimed at addressing these challenges, advocating for local government to support the resilience and viability of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector.

Keywords: Informal home-based businesses, Women home-based businesses, loadshedding, sustainability, sustainable livelihoods approach

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CHAPTER 1 ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Against the backdrop of South Africa's energy crisis, this study probes into the experiences of women entrepreneurs managing home-based businesses, exploring their responses to the formidable challenges posed by loadshedding. Loadshedding is the deliberate shutdown of electric power in a part or parts of a power-distribution system, generally to prevent the failure of the entire system when the demand strains the capacity of the system (Dictionary.com, n.d.). Informal businesses, though described as survivalist in nature and largely owned by women, have been the hardest hit by loadshedding (Masuku & Nzwani, 2021).

In recent years, the global emphasis on sustainability has transcended various sectors, becoming a focal point in entrepreneurship and economic development (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). However, the escalating challenges posed by climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion have ignited an enthusiasm for sustainable practices across all facets of business operations (Sasson, 2016; Schaltegger & Burritt, 2018). Notably, a growing sphere of interest in the entrepreneurial landscape is women-owned home-based businesses (WHBBS), and, this dynamic sector has been experiencing remarkable growth, manifesting a potent narrative of women's economic empowerment on a global scale (Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, M. 2019a; Fu, 2020).

Within the context of these businesses lies a complex fusion of economic independence and personal well-being, primarily facilitated by the unique flexibility they offer. Women entrepreneurs, particularly those in home-based settings, have harnessed the ability to harmonise their professional pursuits with their familial responsibilities, fundamentally altering conventional paradigms of work-life balance (DeMartino & Barbato, 2003; Marlow & Patton, 2005). As such, the sustainable progress of these enterprises carries profound implications for the economic independence and societal well-being of women, in addition to broader implications for economic development.

As this sector has grown, an exigent issue has emerged in the form of electricity loadshedding. Electricity loadshedding, in its essence, is the premeditated and temporary suspension of electricity supply within a specific geographic area. Its primary purpose is to balance the demand and supply dynamics in the overarching power grid, a vital initiative aimed at

preventing energy overloads and sustaining the integrity of the power infrastructure (Inglesi-Lotz, 2023).

In numerous developing countries, like India and Pakistan to mention a few, electricity loadshedding has multiplied into a pervasive problem, fundamentally driven by a dearth of power generation and infrastructure inadequacies (Kemausuor, 2019). The result is a constant pattern of power outages, which underscore the vulnerability of businesses, both small and large. The repercussions of electricity loadshedding are extensive, transcending business productivity and profitability to profoundly impact their overarching sustainability (Van Deventer et al., 2015).

While a substantial body of research has addressed the impacts of electricity loadshedding on businesses, a notable research gap exists. For instance, Guta (2021) and Kassahun (2022) discuss the impacts of electricity outages on micro and small enterprises, providing insights into the challenges faced by small businesses. However, they do not specifically address the home-based businesses run by women. Mudenda et al. (2020) highlight the effects of loadshedding on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) but do not emphasise the specific challenges faced by women in maintaining sustainability. Additionally, they often underscore the lack of tailored support but do not explicitly address the situation of home-based businesses owned by women. Therefore, a limited number of studies examining the sustainability of WHBBs within the specific context of electricity loadshedding is available.

It is crucial to grasp the various challenges that WHBBs encounter, especially in the turbulent times of electricity loadshedding. Women entrepreneurs, often operating under the constrictions of limited resources and support networks, compared to their male counterparts, become more susceptible to external shocks (Marlow & Patton, 2005; Patel & Patel, 2021). The gendered dimensions of entrepreneurship unveil unique vulnerabilities within the women's entrepreneurial sector, where traditional norms and biases continue to influence access to resources and opportunities (Wilson et al., 2019).

Electricity loadshedding, with its pervasive power interruptions, disrupts the daily routines and operational activities of these businesses, thereby presenting distinct and multifaceted challenges (Akpeji, 2019). It creates a challenge for businesses that are operating in domestic spaces, such as home-based enterprises (Mudenda et al., 2020). As kitchens transform into catering hubs, living rooms into design studios, and bedrooms into consultancy offices, women entrepreneurs are confronted with the need to preserve productivity within a disrupted

environment (Alessa et al., 2021). Beyond the realm of individual entrepreneurship, the sustainability of WHBBs is intrinsically interlinked with broader socio-economic development. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how women running businesses from home deal with the challenges of electricity loadshedding. By looking closely at the experiences of these entrepreneurs, the study sought to understand how these women sustain their businesses despite the difficulties caused by power outages.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women-owned home-based businesses are widely acknowledged as a vital catalyst for economic development and female empowerment (Sajuyigbe, 2017). This is because such businesses offer a unique blend of flexibility, autonomy, and the ability for women to effectively manage both their professional work and personal responsibilities. However, in numerous regions, especially across developing nations, electricity loadshedding is a pressing predicament profoundly affecting the functionality and productivity of businesses, with a particularly severe impact on home-based enterprises predominantly managed by women.

Extensive research by the World Bank (2019) underscores how these scheduled power disruptions severely hamper daily operations, interrupt workflow, and ultimately culminate in substantial financial losses. In South Africa, the electricity supply from Eskom is an indispensable resource for a multitude of businesses (Jonathan et al., 2020). Thus, the implementation of loadshedding has become a threat to the livelihoods of many, since they are tied to a consistent and reliable power supply, a principle that resonates profoundly within the realm of women-owned informal home-based businesses. Furthermore, this phenomenon has threatened the sustainability of these businesses. For example, Mhlanga (2018) indicates an alarming failure rate of 87% of businesses within the first five years of operation, with 62% closing within the very first year — a crisis primarily caused by the unreliability and inconsistency of power supply.

Women-owned home-based businesses are notably reliant on various electrical appliances, including computers, sewing machines, and kitchen equipment, all pivotal to their operations. The pervasive power outages attributed to electricity loadshedding disrupt not only the production process but also compel additional expenditures for alternative power sources, such as generators or inverters. These supplementary costs inevitably gradually reduce profitability, imperilling the long-term sustainability of these businesses.

Beyond the immediate financial implications, electricity loadshedding has other far-reaching effects. Women entrepreneurs engaged in home-based businesses contend with societal expectations and norms that impose additional responsibilities on them, ranging from household chores to caregiving duties. The delicate balancing act of fulfilling these societal roles becomes a further struggle when electricity loadshedding disrupts the regular workflow, truncating the time available for business activities. This unsettling dynamic amplifies stress levels and impedes efforts to maintain a harmonious work-life equilibrium, often resulting in burnout and a palpable erosion of motivation to persist in their entrepreneurial ventures (Beutell & Witthaut, 2016).

Despite a growing body of literature on entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods, there remains a notable gap in comprehending the different challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in such informal setups during loadshedding (Boateng, 2017). Existing research primarily focuses on formal businesses and often overlooks the unique dynamics of informal, home-based enterprises (Thai, Stevens, Rogers, 2022). Furthermore, the specific coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies employed by these women as a result of loadshedding have not been extensively explored (Koirala & Acharya, 2022). Consequently, this study sought to fill these gaps by examining the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in Newtown, South Africa, within the context of loadshedding, aiming to explain their experiences and coping mechanisms.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question for this proposed study was:

- How does loadshedding affect the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses?

1.3.1 Subsidiary Questions

- What types of home-based businesses are women in Newtown engaged in?
- What are the perceptions of women in Newtown regarding the effect of loadshedding on the sustainability of their home-based businesses?
- Which mechanisms have been developed to cope with loadshedding among WHBBs in Newtown?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the study was to analyse the sustainability of WHBBs in the era of loadshedding.

1.4.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify the types of home-based businesses in which women in Newtown are engaged.
- Explore the perceptions of women who own home-based businesses in Newtown regarding the effect of loadshedding on the sustainability of their businesses.
- To examine the mechanisms developed by WHBBs in Newtown to cope with loadshedding.

1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS/ TERMS

This section provides the operational definition of key concepts used in this study.

1.5.1 Sustainability of Businesses

A sustainable business is one that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) The United Nations Global Compact defines business sustainability as one that creates long-term value for its stakeholders by integrating economic, environmental, and social considerations into its decision-making and operations." (United Nations Global Compact, 2018)

In the context of this study, sustainability of businesses refers to the capacity of a business to endure and thrive over the long term, while considering the economic, social, and environmental impacts of its operations. Sustainable businesses prioritise responsible resource usage, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility, aiming to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Elkington, 1997).

1.5.2 Informal Home-Based Businesses

Informal home-based businesses are entrepreneurial activities that operate in a non-structured and often unregistered manner, primarily conducted from a residence (Ustek, 2015). These businesses are characterised by simplicity, limited scale, and often involve family members or

a small number of employees. They play a significant role in the informal economy, contributing to livelihoods and economic growth (ILO, 2002).

1.5.3 Electricity Loadshedding

Load shedding is defined as a deliberate, temporary reduction in the supply of electricity to customers in order to maintain the stability of the power grid." (International Energy Agency, 2023). The National Grid defines it as controlled interruptions of electricity supply to specific areas for a predetermined period to balance demand and supply." (National Grid, 2023)

In the context of this study, electricity loadshedding is a deliberate and controlled interruption of electrical power supply by a utility company (Tembe, 2023). It is typically used to reduce strain on the power grid during periods of high demand or when the power supply is insufficient. During loadshedding, power is cut off in certain areas for specified periods to balance the demand and supply of electricity (Marais & Conradie, 2012).

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study on the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in the era of loadshedding is immensely significant, resonating with the urgent need to:

- **Bridge knowledge gaps:** This research serves to bridge critical knowledge gaps at the intersection of gender dynamics, economic development, and energy challenges in various developing regions. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities faced by WHBBs during periods of electricity loadshedding.
- **Examine a vital economic segment:** Focusing on informal home-based businesses, a substantial part of many economies, especially in developing countries, this study critically examines the unique challenges and opportunities these businesses face during energy crises. The aim is to inform policymaking and provide targeted support for this significant economic segment.
- **Contribute to women's economic empowerment:** With women's economic empowerment being a global imperative, this research directly contributes to this agenda. By exploring the distinctive challenges faced by women entrepreneurs due to societal, economic, and gender-related factors during energy disruptions, the study positions the foundation for strategies to enhance their resilience and foster growth.
- **Promote sustainable economic development:** Aligned with the fundamental goal of sustainable economic development, particularly for businesses led by women, this

study provides insights into promoting sustainable practices in the context of energy disruptions. It also contributes to strategies for enhancing energy resilience at the grassroots level, offering valuable lessons for local energy systems, and facilitating future research in related areas.

1.7 OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Chapter 1: Orientation of the Study

Chapter 1, the orientation of the study, served as the introductory platform for the research. This chapter provided a comprehensive background to the study's context and purpose. The significance of the research problem has been established, demonstrating the gap in understanding the experiences and strategies of women entrepreneurs in managing the impact of loadshedding. The research aims and objectives have been set out with definitions of key concepts and terms. This chapter provides the foundation for the subsequent chapters, aligning the research within a well-defined scope.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 examines the existing body of knowledge related to the study's research problem. It provides an in-depth exploration of the theoretical framework. Literature on WHBBs, entrepreneurship, gender dynamics, and the challenges posed by electricity loadshedding is critically reviewed. The chapter not only identifies gaps and limitations in the existing literature but also situates the study within a broad scholarly discourse.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Chapter 3 elaborates on the research methodology adopted for the study. It provides a comprehensive explanation of the chosen research paradigm, the rationale behind it, and its alignment with the research problem. The chapter elucidates the research approach, data collection methods (in-depth interviews and structured observations), and sampling techniques (convenience and purposive sampling). Moreover, it discusses the data quality control measures that were implemented to ensure the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis

Chapter 4 is dedicated to presenting and analysing the data collected during the study. The data are shared in a coherent and organised manner, highlighting themes, patterns, and findings. This chapter offers valuable insights into the experiences of these women, portraying a vivid

picture of their daily struggles, innovations, and resilience. The presentation of the data is accompanied by an analysis, ensuring the research questions are addressed, and the research objectives are met.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusion

Chapter 5 revolves around the discussion of the findings. It delves into the interpretation of the data and its significance in the context of the research questions and objectives. The chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in dealing with loadshedding and the strategies they employ to ensure business sustainability. The findings are situated within the framework of the existing literature, highlighting the contribution of the research to the field. Throughout this chapter, the research's implications and relevance to theory and practice are thoroughly explored.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter 6 serves as the culmination of the research. It consolidates the research findings and discusses their broader implications. The chapter outlines the conclusions drawn from the study, summarising key insights into the experiences of WHBBs in the era of loadshedding. It also offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and women entrepreneurs to mitigate the challenges posed by loadshedding. The chapter concludes the research, with a clear sense of the study's contributions and its potential to inform interventions and policies.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter of a research report served as an orientation to the study. It introduced the research topic, provides context, emphasised its significance, and outlined the central research problem. Chapter 1 began by discussing the global importance of sustainability and the rise of WHBBs. It introduced the disruptive factor of electricity loadshedding and its potential impact on these businesses, particularly for women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the aims and objectives of the study were outlined on how the research problem will be addressed. This chapter established the foundation for the research report, guiding readers towards the core research problem and its relevance, ensuring that they grasp the context and significance of the study.

The next chapter will examine literature relevant to the study and critically discuss the theoretical framework that guided the interpretation of the study's findings.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter established the foundation for this research, presenting the introduction, background, and the motivation behind this study. Therefore, this chapter discusses the theoretical framework and literature review that explores key themes and existing knowledge related to women-owned informal home-based businesses, loadshedding, and sustainable livelihoods.

This chapter commences with an exploration of the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) of which serves as relevant theoretical frameworks for this study. Thereafter, this chapter critically examines studies on the various types of home-based businesses women are engaged in, delving into the diverse economic activities they undertake to sustain their households and communities. The chapter also examines the perceptions of women entrepreneurs regarding the impact of electricity loadshedding on the sustainability of their businesses, uncovering the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to cope with power disruptions.

The chapter further investigates the mechanisms developed by women to navigate the adverse effects of electricity loadshedding on their businesses. It explores the innovative solutions, adaptations, and resilience-building strategies employed by women entrepreneurs to maintain their livelihoods amidst energy shortages. It concludes with the chapter summary.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The SLA is a conceptual framework that provides a holistic understanding of livelihoods by considering the multiple dimensions and assets that influence individuals' ability to secure sustainable and resilient livelihoods (Serrat & Serrat, 2017). Developed by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) in the late 1990s, the SLA recognises that livelihoods are influenced by various factors, including economic, social, human, natural, and physical capital, as well as institutions and policies. The concept of a livelihood refers to the skills, resources, and activities necessary for sustaining oneself. A sustainable livelihood can withstand disruptions and retain or improve its assets without compromising natural resources (DFID, 1999).

2.2.2 Definition and Components of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

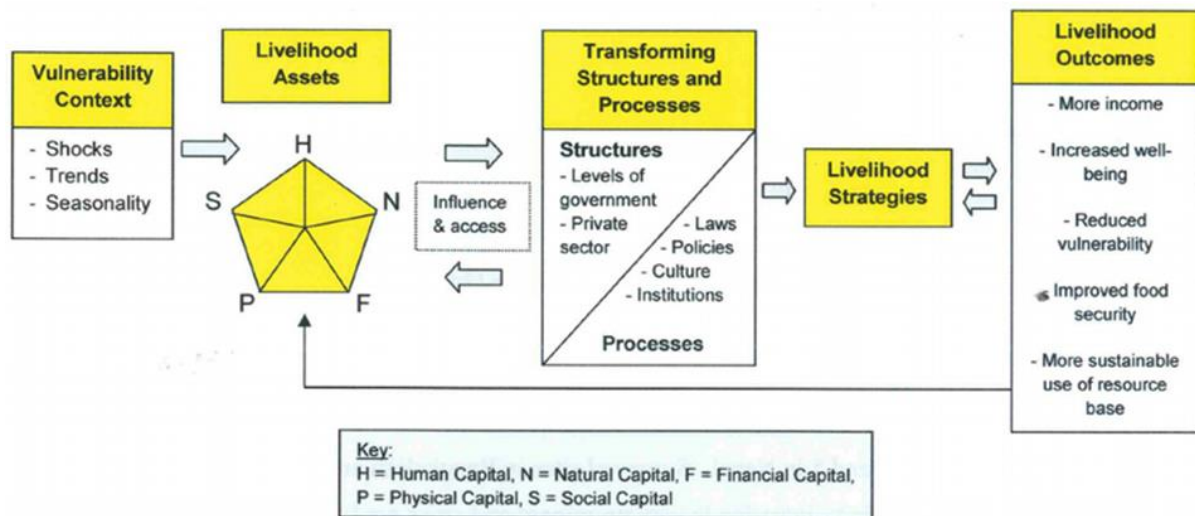


Figure 2.1: The Components of SLA 1

The SLA views livelihoods as the capabilities, assets, and activities that enable individuals and households to secure the necessities of life and improve their well-being. It emphasises the interplay between different forms of capital and the vulnerability context in which people operate (Scoones, 1998). The approach identifies five key components that contribute to sustainable livelihoods:

2.2.2.1 Livelihood Assets

- **Economic Capital:** This refers to the financial resources, assets, and income-generating activities that individuals and households possess. It includes savings, access to credit, employment opportunities, and productive assets such as land, livestock, or tools.
- **Social Capital:** Social capital encompasses the relationships, networks, and social support systems that individuals can rely on. It includes trust, reciprocity, community organisations, and social cohesion that can provide access to information, resources, and opportunities.
- **Human Capital:** Human capital comprises of the knowledge, skills, education, health, and capacity of individuals to engage in livelihood activities. It includes formal education, vocational training, health services, and the ability to learn and adapt to new circumstances.
- **Natural Capital:** Natural capital refers to the natural resources and environmental assets that individuals depend on for their livelihoods. It includes land, water, forests,

biodiversity, and ecosystem services that provide food, energy, and other essential resources.

- **Physical Capital:** Physical capital represents the infrastructure, technology, and built environment that support livelihood activities. It includes transport, energy, communication systems, housing, and basic services such as water and sanitation.

2.2.2.2 Vulnerability in the Sustainable Livelihoods Context:

The SLA offers a robust framework to dissect the vulnerability context of WHBBs amid electricity loadshedding, considering the dynamics of shocks, trends, and seasonality. Vulnerability, within this context, represents the multidimensional exposure of these businesses to risks and their capacity to navigate shocks, adapt to trends, and manage seasonality (Wisner et al., 2020; Scoones, 1998).

In the face of electricity loadshedding, businesses encounter economic vulnerability marked by both shocks and trends. Shocks, such as sudden power outages, disrupt normal operations, causing financial losses (Mudenda et al., 2020). Trends, characterised by the recurring nature of loadshedding, contribute to a chronic economic vulnerability, hindering consistent revenue generation and financial planning. Seasonal patterns of loadshedding can exacerbate economic vulnerability, aligning with business cycles and impacting income streams differently throughout the year. Social vulnerability, as perceived in the SLA, is sensitive to shocks, trends, and seasonality. Shocks, such as extended power outages, can strain social networks as collaborative support networks may weaken under the stress of disrupted business interactions (Ellis, 2000). Trends in loadshedding can erode social capital gradually, affecting the reliability of community relationships. Seasonal variations in loadshedding can intensify social vulnerability by disrupting the patterns of shared resources, information exchange, and coping strategies among women entrepreneurs.

Human capital vulnerability, encompassing skills and adaptability, is subject to shocks, trends, and seasonality during electricity loadshedding. Sudden power outages act as shocks, challenging the ability of entrepreneurs to devise coping strategies promptly (Tibesigwa et al., 2020). Trends in loadshedding contribute to a continuous strain on human capital, requiring sustained adaptability. Seasonal variations in loadshedding can impact the resilience of human capital differently, with heightened stress during peak business periods. The accessibility of natural and physical capital, which includes energy resources and infrastructure, faces shocks, trends, and seasonality challenges. Sudden power outages are shocks that expose vulnerabilities

in the infrastructure, disrupting operations (Guta et al., 2021). Trends in loadshedding reveal chronic infrastructure vulnerabilities, urging the need for alternative power sources. Seasonal patterns in loadshedding can intensify infrastructure vulnerabilities by aligning with increased energy demand during specific seasons, further stressing an already strained infrastructure.

2.2.2.3 What Determines Sustainable Livelihoods: A Holistic Perspective

Sustainable livelihoods, within the framework of the SLA, extend beyond the mere continuity of economic activities. It involves the establishment of resilience, adaptability, and flourishing amidst the complexities of diverse challenges, considering economic, social, human, and physical dimensions (Kiptoo, 2023). Economic sustainability implies the ability of livelihoods to withstand shocks, navigate trends, and adapt to seasonal variations (Peng et al., 2022). For businesses, this entails not only surviving unforeseen disruptions but also strategically responding to long-term shifts in economics. A sustainable livelihood in an economic context is marked by diversified income sources, sound financial planning, and the capacity to mitigate the adverse effects of economic shocks and trends (Rakodi, 2014). It means having the ability to absorb sudden financial blows, adapt to evolving market dynamics, and foresee and manage economic challenges associated with seasonal fluctuations.

In a broader social and human context, sustainable livelihoods denote the ability of individuals and communities to maintain robust social networks, support structures, and human capital even amidst shocks and trends (Madin, Peprah, Abudu & Inkoom, 2023). . Social sustainability involves nurturing collaborative relationships, community cohesion, and shared resources. Human sustainability encompasses continuous skill development, adaptability, and emotional resilience (Udo, 2023). A sustainable livelihood in the social and human dimensions means thriving amid adversity, preserving community ties, and enhancing individual and collective capabilities to face challenges (Kiptoo, 2023). Seasonal variations, in this context, are navigated with sustained social harmony and ongoing human development. Sustainable livelihoods, as conceptualised by the SLA, imply a dynamic equilibrium where economic, social, and human dimensions are resilient to shocks, adaptable to trends, and responsive to seasonality. It signifies not just the survival of livelihoods but their ability to flourish, evolve, and contribute positively to the well-being of individuals and communities over the long term.

2.2.2.4 Transforming Structures and Processes in Sustainable Livelihoods:

In the SLA, the dimension of “transforming structures and processes” delves into the broader institutional and systemic factors that shape and influence the opportunities and constraints

faced by individuals and communities in their pursuit of sustainable livelihoods. At its core, transforming structures and processes involves challenging and reshaping existing institutions and systems that may perpetuate vulnerability and inequality. Institutions, both formal and informal, play a crucial role in shaping access to resources, opportunities, and power (Agrawal, 2001; Jones & Jessop, 2014). This dimension of the SLA recognises the need to transform institutional frameworks that may function as barriers to sustainable livelihoods. This transformation could involve changes in policies, governance structures, or societal norms that impact the ability of individuals, especially marginalised groups, to secure sustainable livelihoods.

In terms of structures, the SLA encourages an examination of the institutions, encompassing both the public and private sectors. Various levels of government and private entities contribute to the transformative structures that either support or impede businesses facing challenges. Government structures at various levels can enact policies, allocate resources, and create environments that influence businesses' sustainability. Simultaneously, the private sector, including industry associations and support networks, can play a role by offering resources, mentorship, and collaborative opportunities for entrepreneurs. Transforming structures also encompasses addressing power dynamics and social processes that contribute to vulnerability. Certain social structures and power relations can perpetuate inequality and limit the agency of certain groups. Within the SLA, the emphasis is on understanding and altering these dynamics to create more equitable opportunities (Narayan, 2008; Alsop & Heinsohn, 2015). This involves challenging existing norms, fostering inclusive decision-making processes, and empowering marginalised communities to participate actively in shaping the structures that influence their livelihoods. Economic and environmental structures are also central to this dimension. Economic systems, including markets and access to resources, need to be transformed to ensure that they contribute to, rather than hinder, sustainable livelihoods (UNEP, 2021; Raworth, 2017). Similarly, considering the environmental dimension, the SLA calls for transformative changes in how communities interact with and manage natural resources, promoting sustainable practices that ensure long-term environmental health.

Within processes, the SLA prompts exploration of the dynamic interplay between laws, policies, culture, and institutions. Laws and policies function as pivotal mechanisms that can either facilitate or impede businesses in adapting to challenges. A supportive legal framework can provide incentives and protections, while cultural norms and expectations can shape the environment for business growth (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006; Stenholm et al., 2015). Exploring

country-level institutional arrangements on the rate and type of entrepreneurial activity. Institutions, both formal and informal, play a significant role by providing essential resources or presenting obstacles. This broad perspective underlines the comprehensive analysis needed to understand how these elements collectively influence the sustainability of businesses across diverse contexts. A critical aspect of this transformation is building adaptive capacity at various levels. This involves equipping individuals and communities with the skills, knowledge, and resources to navigate and influence these structures and processes actively (Folke, 2006; Berkes, 2009). Adaptive capacity empowers people to respond to changing circumstances, whether due to economic shifts, environmental changes, or evolving societal expectations. “Transforming structures and processes” in the SLA underscores the importance of not only adapting to existing structures but actively engaging in processes that challenge, reshape, and create more favourable conditions for sustainable livelihoods. It is about fostering an initiative-taking role in transforming the systems that shape the opportunities and challenges faced by individuals and communities on their livelihood journey.

2.2.2.5 Livelihood Strategies

The SLA also underscores the significance of livelihood strategies in shaping the resilience and sustainability of individuals and communities across diverse contexts (Scoones, 1998). This holistic perspective recognises the dynamic interplay between various components, providing insights into how livelihood strategies serve as adaptive mechanisms, especially in the face of complex challenges such as electricity loadshedding.

Livelihood strategies, within the domain of SLA, encapsulate a range of activities and choices individuals make to uphold and enhance their livelihoods (Owen et al., 2018). In the specific context of loadshedding, these strategies extend beyond merely coping with power disruptions; they involve navigating economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Examples of such strategies include diversifying income sources, adopting energy-efficient technologies, or exploring alternative business models (Gauthier & Gilomen, 2016). The SLA framework invites exploration into the dynamic nature of these strategies, acknowledging their evolution in response to ever-changing circumstances (Berner et al., 2022). A crucial part illuminated by SLA is the relationship between different livelihood assets, such as human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital, and the strategies individuals deploy. For instance, the human capital of entrepreneurs, encompassing skills and knowledge, becomes a hub in the formulation of adaptive strategies. Social capital, manifested through community support networks, emerges as a vital resource shaping, fortifying, and amplifying these strategies. This

interconnectedness reflects the complexity of factors that entrepreneurs navigate as they seek sustainable solutions (Ellis, 2000).

In the broader spectrum of literature, studies across various fields (Tohidimoghadam, PourSaeed, Bijani & Samani, 2023). (Liu, Ross & Ariyawardana, 2023), including agriculture and entrepreneurship, have explored the ways in which different livelihood strategies contribute to resilience. For instance, in agricultural settings, diversification of crops or income sources has been identified as a key strategy to mitigate risks associated with climate variability and market fluctuations (Mustafa et al., 2019).

2.2.2.6 Livelihoods Outcomes

Within the SLA, livelihood outcomes represent the tangible results or impacts of the strategies individuals employ to sustain their livelihoods. In the broader conceptualisation of livelihood outcomes, the SLA offers a comprehensive framework to understand how these outcomes extend beyond economic factors to encompass social, environmental, and personal dimensions. Economically, livelihood outcomes can be measured through financial indicators such as income levels, profitability, and economic growth. For instance, businesses adopting effective energy management strategies during electricity loadshedding may experience reduced financial losses and maintain profitability. This aligns with the SLA's emphasis on economic capital as one of the crucial livelihood assets. On a social level, livelihood outcomes relate to the strengthening of social networks, community cohesion, and improved well-being. Through community support mechanisms, women entrepreneurs facing loadshedding may build resilient social capital, leading to enhanced coping strategies and the sharing of innovative solutions. This social dimension aligns with the SLA's recognition of the interconnectedness between social capital and sustainable livelihoods (Ellis, 2000).

Environmental livelihood outcomes pertain to the impact of livelihood strategies on the surrounding ecosystem. In the context of loadshedding, adopting energy-efficient technologies or renewable energy sources as part of coping strategies can contribute to reduced environmental degradation. This resonates with the SLA's acknowledgment of the significance of natural capital in influencing livelihoods. Moreover, personal outcomes encompass the well-being, empowerment, and quality of life of individuals engaging livelihood strategies. For women entrepreneurs navigating the challenges of loadshedding, effective strategies may lead to increased resilience, self-efficacy, and improved mental well-being. This personal dimension aligns with the SLA's focus on human capital as a critical livelihood asset.

The application of the SLA in various fields of study is well-documented, reflecting its versatility and effectiveness in understanding diverse livelihood outcomes. In the realm of rural development, several scholars have employed the SLA to assess the impacts of different interventions on the livelihoods of rural communities. For example, Ndhlovu (2018) discusses the application of the SLA in Zimbabwe to analyse how land reform policies influenced the livelihoods of rural households. This demonstrates the approach's utility in unravelling the complexities of rural development and its impact on the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of livelihoods. Concerning environmental sustainability, the SLA has been used to investigate the intersection between natural resource management and livelihoods. In the study by Njagi (2005), the SLA was applied to examine the linkages between conservation efforts and the livelihood strategies of communities in Botswana. This research highlights the effectiveness of the SLA in elucidating the relationships between environmental factors and livelihood outcomes. In the context of business resilience, scholars have utilised the SLA to understand how businesses adapt to external shocks. For instance, Hsu and Peng (2023) applied the SLA to study the resilience of small enterprises to climate change in Taiwan. This research demonstrates the adaptability of the SLA to diverse contexts and its effectiveness in capturing the economic, social, and personal dimensions of livelihoods in the face of environmental challenges. In the context of electricity loadshedding and WHBBs, adopting the SLA framework provides a holistic lens to scrutinise the multifaceted impacts of livelihood strategies, going beyond mere economic considerations to encompass the broader spectrum of social, environmental, and personal well-being.

2.2.2.7 Participation and Bottom-up Approach

The SLA places a strong emphasis on participation and a bottom-up approach, highlighting the active involvement of individuals and communities in the analysis and planning of their livelihood strategies. This participatory nature ensures that the perspectives and voices of those directly affected are considered, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of livelihood dynamics. In the realm of rural development, the participatory nature of the SLA has been employed to engage local communities in decision-making processes. Chambers (1994) discusses the use of participatory methods within the SLA framework to empower communities in the planning and implementation of development projects. By involving community members in the decision-making process, the SLA acknowledges their unique knowledge, priorities, and aspirations, thereby contributing to more effective and sustainable development outcomes.

The SLA's participatory and bottom-up approach is also evident in environmental sustainability studies. Researchers have utilised community-based participatory research methods within the SLA to engage local communities in natural resource management. This approach is reflected in studies such as Pretty et al. (2009) and Nelson and St. Clair (2018), where communities actively participated in assessing and managing their environment, aligning with the principles of the SLA's bottom-up philosophy. In business resilience research, the SLA's participatory approach has been used to involve employees and stakeholders in decision-making processes. This ensures that the strategies developed are contextually relevant and consider the unique needs and capacities of the individuals involved. This bottom-up engagement is crucial for fostering a sense of ownership and commitment, as seen in studies such as Reed et al. (2010) that applied the SLA to assess community resilience to economic shocks.

2.2.3 Relevance of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to the Study

The SLA is relevant to the study on the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in the era of electricity loadshedding for several reasons: By adopting this approach, the research gains an appreciation for the interconnectedness of various livelihood dimensions and their impact on the overall sustainability of these businesses (Scoones, 1998). This is of particular importance because loadshedding has far-reaching implications, touching upon not only economic aspects but also social, human, natural, and physical capital, all of which are vital to comprehending the resilience and adaptability of women entrepreneurs in this challenging environment.

In the context of sustainable livelihoods for women-owned informal home-based businesses, the economic capital dimension is most important when contending with the challenges of loadshedding. The direct impact on profitability, stemming from disrupted operations during power outages, paints a vivid picture of the strain on financial stability. As documented in various studies, financial losses are tangible outcomes, closely tied to decreased productivity, order cancellations, and additional operational costs (Mudenda et al., 2020). Mitigating these economic challenges becomes imperative, prompting the exploration of strategies to enhance financial resilience. However, within the SLA, the concept of sustainability extends beyond the economic domain. Social capital, a cornerstone according to Ellis (2000), plays a pivotal role in the livelihoods of women entrepreneurs. The support networks, relationships, and social bonds cultivated within the community become integral during loadshedding. This social capital reinforces a collaborative spirit, wherein women can rely on one another for assistance

and share innovative coping mechanisms. The broader literature underscores the potency of such social networks as powerful assets for entrepreneurs navigating crises (Aldrich, 2012).

The SLA approach accentuates the significance of human capital, encapsulating skills, knowledge, and capabilities. In the context of loadshedding, women entrepreneurs leverage their human capital to navigate challenges, as evident in their ability to devise coping strategies, optimise resource management, and adapt to changing circumstances (Tibesigwa et al., 2020). This aligns with existing research highlighting the pivotal role of skills and knowledge in mitigating the adverse effects of power interruptions on businesses (Adenikinju et al., 2018). Additionally, the accessibility of natural and physical capital emerges as a crucial consideration within the SLA framework. The availability of energy sources, reliable infrastructure, and access to markets significantly influence productivity and viability when faced with power outages (Guta et al., 2021). In the realm of loadshedding challenges, women entrepreneurs often grapple with securing alternative power sources, reflecting the impact of inadequate infrastructure and unreliable access to energy resources. This dimension adds complexity to the challenges faced by women in sustaining their businesses during loadshedding, accentuating the multifaceted nature of sustainable livelihoods in this context.

Embedded within the SLA, vulnerability and adaptation emerge as pivotal components when scrutinising the challenges faced by WHBBs during electricity loadshedding (Scoones, 1998). Loadshedding acts as a significant stressor, disrupting operations and instigating both financial and emotional stress among entrepreneurs (Amoah et al., 2020a). This disruption places these businesses in a precarious position, emphasising the imperative to comprehend vulnerability for the formulation of targeted interventions and support mechanisms. In response to heightened vulnerability, women entrepreneurs exhibit adaptability as a core element of resilience in the face of adversity. As articulated by Berner et al. (2022), these adaptations range from diversifying income sources and integrating energy-efficient technologies to exploring alternative business models. Within the sustainable livelihoods' context, these adaptations represent creative and strategic responses employed by women to mitigate the adverse impacts of power outages. Analysing these adaptive strategies provides valuable insights into the capacity of women entrepreneurs to cope with loadshedding.

The SLA offers valuable insights by highlighting the pivotal role of institutions and policies in shaping livelihood outcomes (Scoones, 1998). For WHBBs contending with the challenges of electricity loadshedding, it is essential to recognise that this issue extends beyond individual enterprises; it is a systemic concern requiring comprehensive policy interventions and

institutional support for mitigation and resilience. Within the SLA framework, government policies emerge as influential determinants of sustainability for these businesses. Policies targeting investments in renewable energy sources or facilitating backup power solutions hold the potential to augment their resilience (Kassahun et al., 2022). Thus, the SLA serves as an invaluable analytical tool for evaluating the collective impact of institutions, policies, and governance structures. This approach enables researchers to gauge how these elements collectively shape an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs to not just endure but flourish despite the multifaceted challenges presented by electricity loadshedding. The SLA's emphasis on institutions and policies as critical determinants gains relevance in the context of loadshedding. It reinforces the understanding that challenges faced by women entrepreneurs are not solely products of individual efforts or resource constraints but are deeply entwined with the broader socio-political and economic milieu. The SLA concludes with an emphasis on a participatory and bottom-up approach, which places a strong emphasis on the active involvement of individuals and communities in the analysis and planning of their livelihood strategies. When applied to the current study, the SLA presents an invaluable framework for involving women entrepreneurs in shaping the narrative of their own experiences. By utilising the SLA, this research positions women entrepreneurs as active participants in the study's exploration of the challenges posed by loadshedding. This approach extends an invitation to these women to share their unique perspectives, needs, and aspirations. It ensures their voices are not only heard but actively incorporated into the understanding and response to these challenges. Women entrepreneurs themselves become integral to the study's narrative, underlining the participatory nature of the SLA. Therefore, the SLA offers a relevant theoretical framework for this research on the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in the era of loadshedding. By considering the multidimensional aspects of livelihoods, vulnerability, adaptation, and the role of government institutions, this approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs in maintaining sustainable businesses in the face of power outages.

2.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF ELECTRICITY LOADSHEDDING

Electricity loadshedding, the deliberate reduction of power supply to prevent a total blackout, is a critical phenomenon that impacts various sectors globally. This literature review aims to explore the conceptualisation of electricity loadshedding, delving into its definitions, causes, and implications. Understanding the diverse perspectives and scholarly discussions surrounding this issue is vital for comprehending its multifaceted nature. Loadshedding is often

defined as a controlled and temporary interruption of electrical services. Sambo (2017) describes it as a strategy employed by power utilities to balance the demand and supply of electricity, especially during peak periods. The definition extends beyond a mere technical manoeuvre, encompassing broader social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The causes of electricity loadshedding are manifold, rooted in both technical and non-technical factors. Technical issues include insufficient generation capacity, transmission constraints, and aging infrastructure (Chakravorty et al., 2019). Non-technical factors encompass economic constraints, mismanagement, and policy inadequacies. Understanding these causes is crucial for formulating effective strategies to mitigate the impacts.

Literature highlights the far-reaching consequences of loadshedding on different sectors. In the industrial sector, for instance, loadshedding can lead to production disruptions, revenue losses, and decreased competitiveness (Matarayi & Hove, 2018). In the residential sector, it affects the quality of life, productivity, and overall well-being of the population. Agricultural activities, healthcare, and education are also significantly impacted (Akter et al., 2020). Beyond the immediate disruptions, loadshedding has broader socio-economic and environmental ramifications. It exacerbates existing socio-economic disparities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations (Kessides, 2021). Additionally, the increased reliance on backup generators during loadshedding contributes to environmental challenges, with implications for air quality and carbon emissions (Kumar et al., 2016).

2.3.1 Electricity Loadshedding: A Global Phenomenon

Electricity loadshedding and power cuts are a global phenomenon that affects many countries, particularly those with inadequate power generation infrastructure or those facing challenges in the distribution of electricity. Examples include South Africa, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Brazil, among others. These countries often experience periods of high demand or supply shortages, leading to controlled interruptions in electricity supply.. These power outages can have severe economic and social consequences, from reduced productivity to disruptions in critical services such as healthcare, education, and transportation (Jebran, 2014).

A case study conducted in Venezuela by Nava (2023) shows how power cuts have become a frequent occurrence since 2013. The country has experienced extended blackouts due to a combination of factors, including underinvestment in the power sector, corruption, and political instability. The power cuts have affected nearly all aspects of daily life, including access to

clean water, healthcare services, and communication. They have also led to the closure of many businesses, increased food insecurity, and significant public unrest (Nava, 2023)

A case by Homsy (2023) in Lebanon, demonstrates how a financial crisis and political instability have exacerbated the country's power generation issues. The electricity grid in the country has long been plagued by frequent power cuts, with some areas experiencing up to 20 hours of blackouts a day. The lack of reliable electricity has had a significant impact on businesses, healthcare services, and education. It has also led to the widespread use of generators, which are costly and contribute to air pollution (Homsy, 2023).

In India, power cuts are a common occurrence, particularly in rural areas (BusinessToday, 2022). The country has made considerable progress in recent years in expanding access to electricity, but many areas still suffer from insufficient power generation capacity and inadequate infrastructure. The impact of power cuts is particularly severe for small businesses and farmers who rely on electricity for their livelihoods. In some cases, power cuts have led to widespread protests and social unrest (BusinessToday, 2022). Electricity loadshedding and power cuts are a global issue that affects many countries, with significant economic and social consequences (Semenya, 2019). The case studies highlighted demonstrate that power generation and distribution challenges can arise from a variety of factors, including underinvestment in infrastructure, political instability, and corruption. Addressing these issues requires a coordinated effort between governments, utilities, and other stakeholders to ensure reliable access to electricity for all.

Electricity loadshedding and power cuts have been a longstanding issue in many African countries, with frequent disruptions to electricity supply affecting businesses, households, and overall economic development. The causes of these power outages can vary, but common factors include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient investment in power generation, transmission, and distribution, and inefficient management of energy resources. Additionally, power theft and illegal connections also contribute to the problem, as it undermines the reliability of the electricity grid. Electricity loadshedding and power cuts have severe economic consequences, as they disrupt productivity and impede the growth of businesses. They also have social implications, with households being unable to carry out daily activities that require electricity, such as cooking, heating, and lighting. These disruptions also put a strain on healthcare facilities, which require reliable electricity to function (Kusakana, 2020).

2.3.2 Eskom and Electricity Loadshedding in South Africa

Eskom is the largest electricity supplier in South Africa, responsible for generating, transmitting, and distributing electricity to millions of customers throughout the country. Eskom generates electricity using a mix of coal-fired power stations, nuclear power stations, gas turbines, and renewable energy sources. The Electricity Act No. 42 of 1922 was published in 1923, establishing Eskom as South Africa's primary energy provider (Amusa et al., 2009). To properly meet its patrons' future needs, Eskom was assigned the task in this legislative instrument to provide power to all South Africans in a sustainable and efficient manner (Steenkamp et al., 2016). Over time, additional pertinent laws were passed, including the Energy Act No. 42 of 1922 repealed by the Electricity Act No. 40 of 1958, the name of the electricity supplier changed to "Escom" by the Electricity Act No. 50 of 1985, and the name of the electricity provider changed from "Escom" to "Eskom" by the Electricity Act No. 40 of 1987 (Amusa et al., 2009).

Electricity loadshedding is a controlled power outage that is implemented by Eskom when the demand for electricity exceeds the supply to prevent a total blackout of the electricity system. Eskom implements electricity loadshedding through a process of rotating power outages, and the severity of the electricity loadshedding is determined by the amount of electricity that needs to be shed to balance the supply and demand. Eskom uses a system called the Electricity loadshedding management system to predict the demand and supply of electricity and to determine the best course of action to balance the system. Electricity loadshedding has been implemented in South Africa since 2008 and has been attributed to factors such as corruption, domestic mismanagement, and design defects in power plants. The very worst situation for electricity loadshedding throughout 2008 and 2019 involved the loss of up to 4000 MW of power supplies for a four-hour convergence rate. As all commercial organisations depend on energy to function, it is not unexpected that studies determined that electricity loadshedding costs the national economy US\$65.7 million per day. SMMEs in South Africa are negatively impacted by a nonconductive economic circumstance in addition to the power shedding issue.

2.4 IMPACT OF ELECTRICITY LOADSHEDDING ON BUSINESSES: ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

Electricity loadshedding significantly affects businesses, with the severity of the impact contingent upon the duration and frequency of power cuts. Van Deventer et al. (2015) emphasise that interruptions in electricity supply led to downtime, operational delays, and

reduced efficiency, impacting overall production capacity. Furthermore, businesses may struggle to meet deadlines and orders, negatively affecting customer relationships and reputation (Weise, 2014). The economic implications extend to equipment damage, particularly for sensitive electronic devices. Power cuts can harm computers, servers, and other equipment, necessitating costly repairs or replacements, posing a financial burden, especially for smaller enterprises (Serame, 2019).

Beyond economic consequences, electricity loadshedding also affects productivity, profitability, and growth. Power outages disrupt operations, resulting in downtime and reduced time for productive activities (Eversole & Tilley, 2021). Businesses heavily reliant on electricity, such as manufacturing and service industries, face disruptions in production processes, impacting overall competitiveness. The fluctuating availability of electricity undermines effective production planning and execution. This productivity slump has lasting effects on businesses, affecting their overall performance. The financial toll on businesses is evident in increased costs related to backup power solutions, such as generators and inverters (Mazhar et al., 2018). Revenue losses occur due to the inability to operate during power outages or meet customer demands promptly. The SMEs are particularly vulnerable due to potential difficulties in investing in backup power solutions or sustaining revenue losses over an extended period (Mazhar et al., 2018). The impact extends to the growth and expansion of businesses. Uncertainty surrounding electricity availability hinders business planning and investment decisions, deterring domestic and foreign investors from regions with frequent power outages. Supply chain disruptions and delayed deliveries affect customer satisfaction and hinder market expansion opportunities, emphasising the need for effective mitigation strategies and sustainable energy solutions (Eversole & Tilley, 2021; Munir et al., 2017).

2.5 THE RISE OF WOMEN-OWNED HOME-BASED BUSINESSES

Women-owned businesses have been on the rise globally, contributing significantly to economic growth, employment generation, and social development. Within the realm of women entrepreneurship, home-based businesses have emerged as a prominent sector, offering unique opportunities and challenges for women entrepreneurs. Women-owned businesses have experienced remarkable growth and have become a vital part of the global economy. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2023), women-owned businesses constitute nearly 40% of all enterprises worldwide. As of 2023, there are approximately 12.4 million women-owned businesses in the U.S., generating nearly \$2 trillion in revenue annually. While

specific figures may vary, women-owned businesses in South Africa have seen significant growth in recent years, contributing to economic development and job creation (Rietveld & Patel, 2023). Research indicates that women entrepreneurs are creating businesses at a faster rate than their male counterparts (Brush et al., 2018). This rise can be attributed to several factors, including increased access to education, changes in societal norms, and improved policy support for women entrepreneurship. Women-owned businesses are significant contributors to economic development, job creation, and poverty alleviation. They play a crucial role in enhancing social inclusion and gender equality by providing economic opportunities for women, empowering them to become self-reliant and independent (Budeli, 2019). Furthermore, women-owned businesses contribute to local and national economies, fostering innovation, and driving sustainable development.

Women entrepreneurs in the informal sector face a distinctive set of challenges and opportunities. The informal sector is characterised by businesses that are not formally registered, lack legal protection, and operate outside of traditional regulatory frameworks. Despite these challenges, women in the informal sector have leveraged their skills, creativity, and resourcefulness to create successful businesses. Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the informal sector include limited access to financial resources, lack of formal business networks, and gender-based discrimination (Budeli, 2019). Additionally, women often bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work and household responsibilities, which can impede their ability to fully engage in business activities. However, the informal sector also offers unique opportunities for women entrepreneurs, such as flexibility in working hours, lower start-up costs, and the ability to combine business activities with household responsibilities.

Home-based businesses provide distinct advantages for women's empowerment and work-life balance. By operating their businesses from home, women entrepreneurs can overcome some of the barriers associated with traditional workplaces, such as lack of childcare facilities or transportation constraints. This allows women to actively participate in economic activities while fulfilling their caregiving responsibilities (Yousefzadeh et al., 2020). Home-based businesses also contribute to women's empowerment by providing them with greater control over their economic lives and decision-making processes. Women entrepreneurs can leverage their skills, knowledge, and creativity within the comfort and safety of their homes (Budeli, 2019). Home-based businesses enable women to navigate societal norms and gender roles, providing them with a platform to challenge traditional notions of work and gender roles. Additionally, home-based businesses offer increased flexibility in managing work-life balance.

Women entrepreneurs can structure their work hours around their family commitments, allowing them to achieve a harmonious integration of their personal and professional lives (Kumar et al., 2022). This flexibility promotes overall well-being, reduces stress levels, and enhances job satisfaction among women entrepreneurs.

Women-owned home-based businesses have gained significant importance in the entrepreneurial setting. They contribute to economic growth, social development, and women's empowerment. While women entrepreneurs face unique challenges in the informal sector, home-based businesses offer distinct opportunities for achieving work-life balance and challenging societal norms.

2.6 SUSTAINABILITY OF WOMEN-OWNED HOME-BASED BUSINESSES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Sustainability in the context of small businesses refers to the ability to maintain long-term viability while considering economic, social, and environmental factors (Shaw et al., 2019). It encompasses aspects such as profitability, growth, innovation, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Sustainable businesses are those that effectively manage resources, adapt to changing circumstances, and contribute to the well-being of stakeholders, including owners, employees, customers, and the community (Gibcus & Kemp, 2016).

2.6.1 Factors Influencing the Sustainability of Women-Owned Businesses

Several factors influence the sustainability of women-owned businesses, both in general and specifically in the context of loadshedding. First, access to financial resources and capital is crucial for sustaining and growing businesses (Budeli, 2019). Women entrepreneurs often face challenges in accessing financing due to gender biases, lack of collateral, and limited financial literacy (Brush et al., 2018). In loadshedding-affected areas, the financial burden of investing in alternative power sources or backup systems further exacerbates these challenges. Second, social and support networks play a significant role in the sustainability of women-owned businesses. Strong social capital, including networks, mentorship, and access to information, can provide crucial support and opportunities for growth (Kumar et al., 2022). Women entrepreneurs often rely on informal networks within their communities to share resources, knowledge, and advice. These networks can be particularly valuable during loadshedding, as collaboration and shared resources can help mitigate the impact of power outages. Third, the availability and accessibility of infrastructure, including energy and physical capital, significantly influence the sustainability of home-based businesses. Electricity loadshedding

disrupts operations, productivity, and the delivery of goods and services (Van Deventer et al., 2015). Women entrepreneurs may need to invest in alternative energy sources, such as solar panels or generators, to ensure uninterrupted power supply. However, the affordability and feasibility of such investments vary, and access to reliable energy infrastructure remains a challenge in many areas.

2.6.2 Resilience Strategies Employed by Women Entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs employ various resilience strategies to adapt to challenges, including loadshedding. One strategy is diversification, where women expand their product/service offerings or target new markets (Munir et al., 2017). By diversifying their businesses, women entrepreneurs can reduce their dependency on specific sectors or customers that may be more affected by loadshedding. Additionally, innovation and technology adoption play a vital role in enhancing resilience. Women entrepreneurs may invest in energy-efficient technologies, such as energy-saving lighting or energy-saving appliances, to reduce power consumption during electricity loadshedding (Mazhar et al., 2018). Furthermore, leveraging on digital platforms and e-commerce can enable women entrepreneurs to continue their operations and reach customers despite physical limitations.

Case studies provided valuable insights into the resilience strategies employed by WHBBs. For example, in a study conducted by Budeli (2019) in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, women entrepreneurs in the clothing and textile industry adapted to electricity loadshedding by diversifying their product lines and developing relationships with multiple suppliers. This allowed them to maintain production and meet customer demands during power outages. Another case study by Bakas (2017) highlights the resilience strategies of women entrepreneurs in the handicraft sector. Women engaged in collective action, formed cooperatives, and collaborated with local organisations to access energy-efficient technologies and share resources during loadshedding. These collaborative efforts helped mitigate the adverse effects of power outages and fostered community resilience.

2.7 CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ACROSS THE GLOBE DURING POWER OUTAGES

Women entrepreneurs face specific challenges during power outages, exacerbating the impact of electricity loadshedding on their businesses; one such challenge is the limited access to alternative sources of energy. In many developing countries, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and India, women entrepreneurs in home-based businesses rely heavily on grid

electricity and lack access to backup power solutions (Amoah et al., 2020b). This dependency on unreliable electricity infrastructure makes them particularly vulnerable to the disruptions caused by loadshedding. A study by Guta et al. (2021) in Ethiopia revealed that WHBBs faced difficulties in accessing and affording alternative energy sources such as generators or solar panels, leading to prolonged business interruptions during power outages. Moreover, electricity loadshedding often exacerbates pre-existing gender inequalities. Women entrepreneurs may face additional challenges due to their societal roles, limited mobility, and cultural expectations. For example, Kumar et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study on women entrepreneurs' work-life balance and found that power outages affected their ability to fulfil household duties, childcare responsibilities, and social obligations. The burden of balancing work and domestic responsibilities becomes even more pronounced during extended periods of loadshedding.

Inadequate information and awareness about electricity loadshedding schedules and updates pose another challenge for women entrepreneurs. The unpredictability and lack of communication about power outages make it difficult for them to plan and adjust their business activities accordingly. A case study from South Africa by Munir et al. (2017) highlights the importance of clear communication from utility companies and government agencies to help women entrepreneurs in home-based businesses prepare for and manage electricity loadshedding effectively.

One can draw from more case studies that have provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs during power outages. For instance, in a study conducted in India, Roy et al. (2019) examines the experiences of women entrepreneurs in the garment sector during power outages. The study revealed that electricity loadshedding disrupted production schedules, increased production costs, and affected product quality, thereby impacting the overall business performance. In another case study from Bangladesh, Fatema et al. (2021) explores the coping strategies of women entrepreneurs in the handicraft sector during power outages. The study identified the use of alternative lighting sources, coordination with other women entrepreneurs, and adaptability in product design as key strategies employed by women to mitigate the challenges posed by loadshedding.

Electricity loadshedding has specific impacts on WHBBs, including disruptions in productivity, financial losses, and social challenges such as limited access to essential services, increased risk of disease, food insecurity, educational disruptions, and social isolation. Women entrepreneurs face unique challenges during power outages, such as limited access to

alternative energy sources, gender inequalities, and inadequate information. Case studies have provided valuable insights into these challenges and highlighted coping strategies employed by women entrepreneurs. Understanding these specific impacts and challenges is essential for developing targeted interventions and policies to support the sustainability and resilience of WHBBs in the era of loadshedding.

2.8 COPING MECHANISMS AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Despite the different challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, the literature highlights that social support and networking have been identified as critical coping mechanisms for women entrepreneurs. Building strong support networks, both within and outside their business environment, provides women entrepreneurs with emotional support, access to information, and mentorship, enabling them to navigate challenges effectively (Bailey & Henry, 2017; Matzler et al., 2020). In rural communities in developing countries, social networks play an essential role in the daily lives of entrepreneurs. Studies have shown that women entrepreneurs often rely on family members, friends, and other women entrepreneurs for encouragement and advice, which enhances their ability to overcome obstacles (Yaşlak et al., 2021)

Engaging in problem-focused coping, empowers women entrepreneurs to actively seek solutions to specific stressors or challenges, enabling them to take charge of their circumstances and make strategic decisions to address obstacles and enhance business performance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When facing loadshedding-induced disruptions, women entrepreneurs may adopt creative problem-solving approaches, such as adjusting business hours, rescheduling tasks, or optimising the use of available resources to maintain operations during power outages. The ability to address challenges proactively and strategically contributes to their resilience. In addition to coping mechanisms, adaptation strategies play a pivotal role in sustaining women-owned businesses in similar contexts where electricity loadshedding is a recurring challenge. A diversification of income streams is frequently adopted by women entrepreneurs to minimise the impact of market fluctuations and external disruptions. Eversole and Alexander (2021) emphasise that diversification allows women to explore multiple revenue streams, potentially reducing their vulnerability to economic shocks. In the face of loadshedding, women entrepreneurs may diversify their product or service offerings to cater to different customer needs, ensuring a more stable income stream.

The adoption of technology and innovation is another key adaptation strategy utilised by women entrepreneurs in these contexts. Leveraging technology enhances operational efficiency, expands market reach, and contributes to business resilience. Many WHBBs have integrated digital platforms to connect with customers and market their products or services beyond their local area (Yi et al., 2018). Technology also enables women entrepreneurs to access information, financial services, and market trends, facilitating better decision-making and improved business performance. Moreover, women entrepreneurs often adopt flexible business models that can quickly adapt to changing circumstances. In resource-constrained areas where access to resources and infrastructure may be limited, flexibility becomes a crucial survival strategy (Terjesen et al., 2016). This adaptability allows women to respond swiftly to challenges, capitalise on emerging opportunities, and sustain their businesses in dynamic environments. During loadshedding, women entrepreneurs may adjust their operating hours, modify their business processes, or collaborate with other businesses to share resources and mitigate the impact of power disruptions.

The coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies employed by women entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in their ability to thrive amidst challenges and uncertainties. Social support, problem-focused coping, income stream diversification, technology adoption, innovation, and flexible business models are crucial elements in fostering resilience and sustaining women-owned businesses, especially in contexts with recurrent electricity loadshedding challenges. As the study progresses, these insights will inform the empirical investigation of coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies among women entrepreneurs in similar locations, highlighting their experiences and providing valuable guidance for supporting and empowering women entrepreneurs in diverse settings. By understanding and supporting these coping mechanisms and strategies, policymakers and stakeholders can promote the long-term sustainability and growth of women-owned informal home-based businesses, contributing to economic growth, gender equality, and community development in various regions.

2.9 POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE HOME-BASED BUSINESSES

Ensuring the sustainability and growth of women-owned informal home-based businesses requires a supportive policy and institutional environment. Understanding the impact of policies and institutional frameworks can provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by home-based businesses and the opportunities for fostering their long-term viability. Studies

have emphasised the role of supportive policies in facilitating the growth of home-based businesses. Governments can play a significant role in creating an enabling environment by introducing policies that recognise and support the unique needs of home-based entrepreneurs. Policies addressing licensing, zoning, and taxation specific to home-based businesses can reduce regulatory burdens and promote entrepreneurship (Guilherme, 2019). Moreover, targeted policies that promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment contribute to a favourable business environment for women entrepreneurs (Neneh, 2020). Access to finance remains a critical challenge for many home-based businesses, particularly those owned by women in resource-constrained settings. Research has shown that limited access to credit hinders business growth and expansion (Izquierdo, 2017). Governments and financial institutions can implement measures such as microcredit programmes and financial literacy training to enhance the financial inclusion of home-based entrepreneurs, enabling them to invest in their businesses and access opportunities for growth. Institutional support in the form of training and capacity-building programmes can significantly impact the sustainability of home-based businesses. Entrepreneurial training, skill development workshops, and mentorship programmes empower women entrepreneurs with the necessary knowledge and expertise to run their businesses effectively (Abubakar & Abdulsalam, 2020). Such support equips them to adapt to market changes, leverage recent technologies, and enhance business resilience.

Institutional support that facilitates market linkages and networking opportunities can open new avenues for home-based businesses. Collaborations with larger enterprises, business associations, and local chambers of commerce provide access to new markets and distribution channels (Kibicho, 2019). Strengthening the connectivity between home-based entrepreneurs and established market players enhances their visibility and competitiveness. Institutional and policy support must be complemented by community-based initiatives that foster social support networks for home-based entrepreneurs. Community organisations, women's groups, and cooperative structures create a conducive environment for sharing experiences, resources, and knowledge (Oketch & Kakuru, 2018). These networks provide emotional support, facilitate knowledge exchange, and collectively address challenges faced by home-based entrepreneurs.

2.10 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND POLICIES TO ADDRESS ELECTRICITY LOADSHEDDING AND SUPPORT WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Women entrepreneurs operating informal home-based businesses often bear a significant burden due to these power disruptions. This section of the literature review explores various government initiatives and policies aimed at mitigating the impact of electricity loadshedding on businesses, especially those led by women. These initiatives focus on providing a conducive environment for the sustainable growth of women-owned informal home-based businesses.

Improvement of Energy Infrastructure: One of the primary strategies governments employ is investing in and upgrading energy infrastructure. This includes developing power plants, enhancing distribution networks, and implementing smart grid technologies. These improvements aim to reduce electricity loadshedding by bolstering the energy supply, ensuring a more stable power source for businesses (World Bank, 2017).

Promotion of Renewable Energy: Governments often incentivise the adoption of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and biomass. These initiatives aim to reduce dependence on traditional power sources and promote sustainability. In many cases, financial incentives, subsidies, and tax breaks are provided to encourage the integration of renewable energy solutions within businesses, including home-based ones (UN Women, 2019).

Access to Credit and Financial Support: Governments facilitate access to credit for women entrepreneurs affected by shock. Special loan schemes with favourable terms and interest rates are introduced to help them invest in technologies such as backup power systems or energy-efficient equipment. This financial support enhances their resilience to power disruptions and helps sustain their businesses (Kabeer & Natali, 2018).

Entrepreneurial Training and Skill Development: Skill development programmes and entrepreneurial training are vital components of government initiatives. These programmes equip women entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to adapt to challenging circumstances, including loadshedding. By enhancing their business acumen and technical capabilities, governments aim to foster resilience and sustainability (Asian Development Bank, 2020).

Advocacy and Policy Formation: Governments play a pivotal role in advocating for policies that support women entrepreneurs. This includes lobbying for gender-inclusive policies that consider the unique challenges women face, especially during energy crises such as

loadshedding. Advocacy efforts help shape policies that foster gender equality and economic empowerment (IFC, 2016).

2.11 THE ROLE OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS IN PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Local institutions and organisations play a crucial role in providing assistance to women-owned businesses, especially those operating informally from homes. These entities form a vital part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, offering a range of support mechanisms tailored to the unique needs and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. They function as catalysts for empowerment by providing financial support, training, mentorship, networking opportunities, and advocacy for women entrepreneurs (Parker, 2018). Financial assistance is often extended in the form of grants, loans, or subsidies, enabling women to invest in their businesses, procure necessary equipment, or diversify their product lines. These financial aids are often accompanied by training and capacity-building programmes, equipping women entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge needed to efficiently manage and grow their businesses (Brush et al., 2019b).

Mentorship programmes are another essential aspect of the assistance provided by local institutions. Experienced entrepreneurs or professionals guide and advise women entrepreneurs, sharing their expertise and helping them navigate the complexities of the business world. These mentorship relationships foster personal and professional growth, enhancing the resilience and sustainability of women-owned businesses (Carter & Rosa, 2018). Additionally, local institutions often facilitate networking opportunities, creating platforms for women entrepreneurs to connect with peers, share experiences, and explore potential collaborations. Networking not only promotes business expansion but also instils a sense of community and empowerment among women entrepreneurs (Jennings & McDougald, 2019).

Advocacy and representation are significant roles undertaken by local organisations. They advocate for policies that address gender disparities, support women's economic empowerment, and create an enabling environment for women-owned businesses to thrive (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). These advocacy efforts influence policy formulation and promote the inclusion of women's perspectives in business-related policies and regulations. Overall, local institutions and organisations function as powerful agents of change, fostering an

ecosystem that nurtures and supports women entrepreneurs, enabling them to overcome barriers and contribute significantly to economic development.

2.12 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In this chapter, an in-depth literature review was conducted and established a solid theoretical framework using the SLA. The literature review explored the significant rise of WHBBs, emphasising their role in empowering women and fostering a work-life balance. It also examined the challenges posed by electricity loadshedding, particularly in developing countries, and how this issue affects these businesses.

In the next chapter, Chapter 3, the report will discuss the research methodology looking at the approach that was adopted to meet the research objectives.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research process that was followed to address the research questions and objectives. This chapter is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research design, data collection methods, and analytical frameworks. It unfolds in four sections. Firstly, the research design is clarified, justifying the choice of a qualitative approach for its ability to capture the nuanced experiences of women entrepreneurs. Subsequently, the chapter looks into the specifics of data collection methods, presenting a detailed account of in-depth interviews and observations with women entrepreneurs and authorities in the study area. The third section outlines the process of data analysis, incorporating thematic coding to derive meaningful patterns and insights. The closing section offers a glimpse into ethical considerations and measures taken to ensure the research's integrity. In summary, this chapter establishes the groundwork for a meticulous exploration into the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs navigating the challenges posed by electricity loadshedding. The methodological choices are tailored to unearth rich narratives and nuanced perspectives, ensuring a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis in Chapter 4.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in Newtown, commonly known as Avalon. Newtown is a modest squatter settlement situated on the outskirts of Mhluzi in Middelburg; a town located in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. It falls within the administrative jurisdiction of Ward 22, the local governing authority. The community primarily consists of individuals from the Zulu and Swati tribes. According to the available data from MapCarta (2021), the racial composition is predominantly Black (6999), with smaller representations of White (6), Coloured (89), and Other (12) residents, totalling a population of 7106 (MapCarta, 2021).

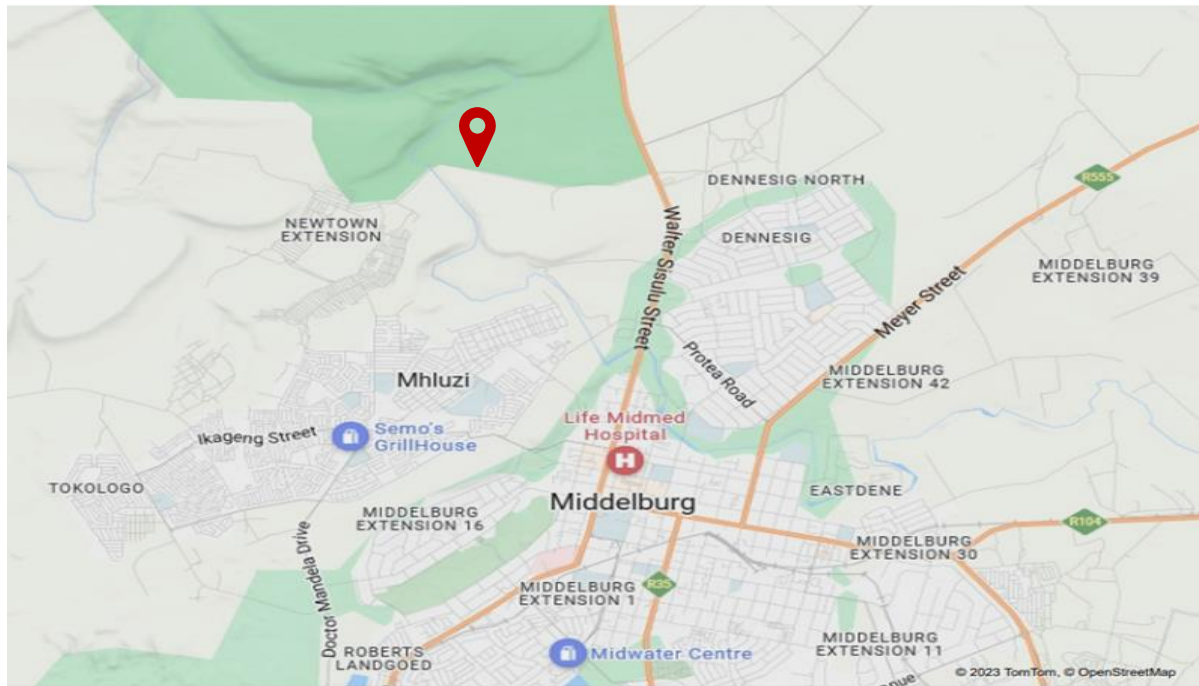


Figure 3.5: Study Area 1

Regular loadshedding is a persistent challenge faced by the community. Additionally, a noteworthy aspect is the gender distribution, with women constituting a substantial majority of the population in comparison to men (MapCarta, 2021). This gender imbalance is highly pertinent to the study, as women in Newtown play a pivotal role in the local economy, notably through their involvement in informal home-based businesses. The rural setting of Newtown accentuates the study's complexity. Being situated away from urban centres and having limited access to resources, the township presents additional hurdles for women-owned businesses. This rural context likely influences the types of businesses present, the accessibility of essential infrastructure, and the available support networks for women entrepreneurs. Moreover, the challenging socioeconomic conditions further exacerbate the vulnerability of the community, characterised by high poverty levels and limited access to fundamental services such as education and healthcare. Loadshedding intensifies these challenges, disrupting the normal functioning of businesses and households, thereby affecting livelihoods and economic stability. The study provided critical insights into the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses within this specific context, offering valuable information for targeted interventions and policies to address the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Newtown. Conducted within this rural township of South Africa, the research explored the experiences, perspectives, and coping mechanisms of women entrepreneurs in a marginalised community struggling with both loadshedding and socio-economic constraints.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, a descriptive research design was adopted, aligning suitably with the research objectives, and facilitating a comprehensive analysis and documentation of the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses during loadshedding. As emphasised by Neuman (2014), a descriptive research design primarily involves collecting data to portray the existing conditions of a phenomenon. It aims to answer fundamental questions concerning ‘who, what, when, where, and how’ related to the topic of interest, thereby providing a detailed understanding of the subject within its natural context. As highlighted by Msabila and Nalaila (2013), a research design serves as a strategic framework to address research challenges and maintain a clear trajectory.

In line with this perspective and the assertion by Orodho (2003), it can be affirmed that a well-structured research design is crucial in formulating solutions to research inquiries. The choice of a descriptive research design was substantiated by its appropriateness in elucidating the multifaceted dimensions of sustainability, challenges, perceptions, and coping mechanisms prevalent among women-owned informal home-based businesses during instances of loadshedding. This design enabled the study to document the characteristics and dynamics of these businesses in the specified context. Additionally, it provided an avenue to comprehensively address research questions pertaining to the types of informal home-based businesses engaged in by women in Newtown, their perspectives on sustainability, the adversities encountered, and the strategies implemented to sustain their enterprises amidst loadshedding episodes.

The descriptive research design yielded a rich foundation of knowledge regarding the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in the context of loadshedding, contributing significantly to the broader understanding of this vital subject matter. This design stands as an instrumental tool in advancing knowledge and instigating positive changes in support of women entrepreneurs in the face of energy challenges.

3.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The study was firmly situated within the interpretivist research paradigm, anchoring its epistemological and methodological foundations in the works of influential scholars such as Denzin and Lincoln (2006) and Pidgeon (2019). This paradigm fundamentally places emphasis on comprehending social meanings and subjective interpretations, acknowledging the dynamics of human experiences and the diverse ways in which individuals construct their

realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006). It promotes a worldview that acknowledges the complexity and richness of human understanding, valuing the interchange of perspectives, emotions, and socio-cultural contexts. Thus, in this study this paradigm provided a framework through which researchers can explore and decipher the dynamics within a given social setting. It underscores the situatedness of individuals within their environments and the significant role of their perspectives in shaping their understanding of the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This approach encourages a departure from an objective, detached viewpoint often associated with positivism and adopts a more participatory and subjective engagement with the subject matter. Within this paradigm, the study sought to disentangle the complexity of sustainability in the realm of women-owned informal home-based businesses during the challenging era of loadshedding. Loadshedding is not merely an energy challenge; it encompasses a range of societal, economic, and personal implications. By utilising the interpretivist paradigm, the research aimed to capture the multifaceted dimensions of how women entrepreneurs perceive, adapt to, and strategise around the phenomenon of loadshedding impacting their businesses.

Table 3.3: The Interpretivist Paradigm

Feature	Description
Research Purpose	To Analyse the Sustainability of Women-Owned home-based businesses in the era of Electricity Loadshedding in Steve Tshwete Local Municipality. The purpose of the research was not merely to uncover objective facts but to understand and interpret the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs. The interpretivist paradigm acknowledges multiple realities, and the study aimed to explore how these entrepreneurs make sense of their social worlds amid the challenges of electricity loadshedding.
Ontology	• Social reality is multifaceted, shaped by diverse human experiences, interpretations, and interactions. This includes everything from everyday conversations to written and visual communication. • By examining how people navigate their social worlds – their routines, discussions, and creative expressions – we can explore and understand the realities they construct. The interpretivist paradigm, emphasising multiple realities and constructing meaning through interactions, aligns with this study's ontology (e.g., structured observations). By observing the daily routines and discussions of women entrepreneurs, the research aimed to capture the diverse social realities shaped by their individual perspectives and understandings.
Epistemology	• Events are comprehended through mental processes of interpretation, which are influenced by interaction with social contexts. • Those involved in the research process socially construct knowledge by interacting with people in real life or in natural settings. • The inquirer and the inquired-into are intertwined in a process of talking and listening, reading, and writing. The research design fostered a more interactive mode of knowledge generation. Data collection methods such as in-depth interviews and observations involved direct interaction with participants in natural settings. This “talking and listening” approach, along with analysing participants’ actions and behaviours through observations, allowed the researcher to co-construct knowledge with the participants, gaining a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.
Methodology	• Data collection processes such as interviews, and introspective sessions. • Research is a product of the researcher's attributes. The chosen data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews are in harmony with the interpretivist paradigm. These methods allowed for a personalised and immersive data capture mode, facilitating a deep understanding of the subjective experiences and perspectives of women entrepreneurs.

Source: Researcher (2024)

3.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

In keeping with the research design, the study adopted qualitative methods to comprehensively explore the details of the subject matter. Also, this methodological choice aligned with the interpretivist paradigm, which values understanding the complex and diverse realities of human experiences (Creswell, 2013). As posited by Carlsson (2010), qualitative research involves a careful process of collecting and analysing non-numerical data, encompassing interviews, observations, and documents. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of the research topic, providing an understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The alignment between the chosen qualitative approach and the interpretivist paradigm is further emphasised by Denzin and Lincoln (2006), who contend that qualitative methods are particularly suited to better understand the intricacies of human interpretations and meanings. Within the context of this study, qualitative methods were of great importance due to their ability to capture the distinctions of women business owners' experiences, particularly in the face of challenges such as loadshedding. The qualitative approach facilitated a deep understanding of the perspectives, emotions, and strategies adopted by women entrepreneurs to sustain their businesses during challenging circumstances.

3.6 ENTRY TO THE STUDY AREA

For the successful execution of the study, access to Newtown, also known as Avalon, was facilitated through close collaboration with local community leaders and key stakeholders. The researcher recognised the significant role of these community leaders as gatekeepers, essential not only for logistical access but also for fostering trust and cooperation within the community. The process commenced with a thorough introduction of the research objectives to the identified community leaders at meeting at the Municipal Office. The researcher detailed the purpose of the study, emphasising its potential positive impact on the community. Building a foundation of trust involved addressing any concerns or questions these leaders might have had and ensuring transparency about the goals and methodology of the research.

Following this initial engagement, a formal request for access was made. This step involved obtaining official permissions (see Annexure 3) and providing a clear outline of the research methodology. The researcher communicated the voluntary nature of participation, the measures in place to ensure confidentiality, and the ethical considerations guiding the study.

To extend awareness and engagement beyond community leaders, the researcher requested to form part of the next community meeting. This session would have provided a platform to

introduce the research to a broader audience within Newtown, allowing residents to express their thoughts, concerns, and expectations regarding the study. Unfortunately, the meeting did not sit due to limited attendance. However, the researcher made transparent informal communication with the few people who attended the meeting with the aim of building a sense of trust and understanding. Once permissions were secured (see Annexure 4), the researcher initiated the fieldwork. This involved a meticulous combination of interviews and observations. Throughout this process, the researcher-maintained sensitivity to the cultural differences, norms, and dynamics of Newtown, ensuring that the study was conducted ethically and with respect for the community.

Establishing a strong rapport with the community was instrumental in gaining trust and creating a conducive environment for the research activities, to better understand the community dynamics, the researcher actively listened to community members, acknowledging their perspectives, concerns, and expectations regarding the research. The researcher showed respect for the community's cultural norms and traditions. This involved learning and respecting local customs, greetings, and forms of address. The researcher also demonstrated a long-term commitment to the community's well-being, beyond the scope of the research. The researcher committed that she would share findings with the community and local leaders after the research was completed to help in exploring possibilities for positive interventions or contributing to community development.

3.7 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

In this study, the target population was defined by individuals displaying the specific characteristics under investigation. The focus was on women engaged in home-based businesses in Newtown, relying significantly on electricity for their day-to-day operations. Given their dependence on energy, these businesses emerged as a crucial subset for analysis. Additionally, the study included the community leader and Local Economic Development (LED) manager of the area to glean insights into the governance and support structures related to these businesses. These two groups were used as a sample, since the research cannot study the entire population. Sampling, as described by Fraenkel et al. (2012), involves selecting ideal study subjects from the study population to accurately aid in achieving the study's set aims. The unit of analysis in this study was the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in the era of loadshedding, while the unit of observation comprised the identified stakeholders.

Thus, the study employed two non-probability sampling methods: convenience and purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is a method where the researcher intentionally selects individuals or cases that possess specific characteristics or meet certain criteria relevant to the research objective (Dhivyadeepa, 2015). This method was ideal for allowing the selection of participants based on specific criteria, such as their relevance to the research question. Municipal authorities such as the LED manager and the community leader who possessed crucial information regarding programmes and mechanisms related to WHBBs and loadshedding were thus selected.

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected based on their easy availability and accessibility to the researcher (Setia, 2016). Convenience sampling was relevant as it selected participants based on their availability and accessibility, women operating homebased businesses within their neighbourhoods were chosen for their convenience and willingness to participate. In qualitative research, the selection of participants significantly influences the depth and richness of the findings, as emphasised by Guest et al. (2006).

The study initially aimed to interview 15 women participants. However, data saturation was achieved earlier, at the 10th interview. This signifies that by the 10th interview, no significant new information was emerging from the interviews. This concept of “data saturation” aligns with Mason’s (2017) definition. Saturation is reached when new information ceases to emerge, indicating a comprehensive understanding has been achieved. In this case, by the 10th interview, the researcher felt they had a thorough grasp of the challenges, strategies, and experiences these women faced. The research design, with a minimum of 10 participants, aligns with Guest et al. (2006), who suggest that in-depth interviews with around 10 participants can be sufficient to achieve data saturation. This is because in-depth interviews tend to generate rich and detailed data, allowing researchers to reach a point of saturation sooner than with more superficial data collection methods. By strategically targeting a minimum of 10 participants and closely monitoring for emerging themes, the study was able to effectively utilise data saturation to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic with a focused sample size. This approach maximised efficiency while still achieving the desired level of in-depth exploration.

Table 3.6: Sampling Justifications

Target Population		
Participant		Justification for selection
A	Women engaged in informal home-based businesses	The women who are engaged in informal home-based business were the focus of the study. They are affected (or impacted) directly by the power crisis and therefore were in the correct position to share their day-to-day experiences, which proved paramount to the study.
B	Municipal officials (LED and local councillor)	Provide in-depth information in answer to research questions on mechanisms put in place by the municipality.

Source: Researcher (2023)

3.8 DATA COLLECTION

The process of data collection is a fundamental stage in any research endeavour, where information is systematically gathered to address the research questions and objectives (Johnson et al., 2020). This section outlines the methods employed to collect data in the study on the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in the era of loadshedding.

3.8.1 In-Depth Interviews

To gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of WHBBs and their sustainability amidst loadshedding, this study relied heavily on in-depth interviews. This qualitative method, as highlighted by Patton (2002), and further emphasised in this research, is particularly adept at eliciting rich and detailed information about participants' experiences and perspectives. The unique strength of in-depth interviews lies in their ability to dive into the subjective experiences of individuals (Pacho, 2015). This exploration was crucial for understanding how they perceive and overcome these multifaceted obstacles. The flexible nature of in-depth interviews (Azad et al., 2021) allowed the research to tailor questioning techniques to each participant's unique circumstances. This adaptability ensured that crucial topics were comprehensively explored, leading to a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives on sustainability during loadshedding.

One of the crucial aspects of in-depth interviews was their capacity to give voice to marginalised groups as noted by other scholars (Kolar et al., 2015). In-depth interviews provided a platform for these women to express their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms openly. This approach was essential for acknowledging and addressing the unique

circumstances faced by women entrepreneurs in home-based businesses during loadshedding. In-depth interviews allowed the research to build trust and rapport with the study participants. One-on-one interactions between the researcher and the participants fostered an environment of trust. This trust was essential in encouraging participants to share their experiences openly and honestly. It contributed to the quality of the data collected and ensured that the responses reflected the true sentiments of the participants.

The process commenced wherein women entrepreneurs in Newtown were deliberately chosen based on their extensive experience in home-based businesses. Local community leaders played a pivotal role in facilitating access to these potential participants. The researcher approached the identified women through personal visits to their homes or businesses (after the unsuccessful meeting), emphasising the collaborative nature of the study. The initial meetings were focused on establishing rapport, explaining the research purpose, and addressing any concerns, ensuring a foundation of trust. Proceeding, the researcher meticulously explained the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained, offering participants the autonomy to withdraw at any stage without repercussions. In-depth interviews unfolded in a semi-structured format, allowing for flexibility in questioning based on the participants' responses. This adaptive structure facilitated a natural flow of conversation, ensuring that participants could express their experiences freely. The interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, fostering an open and conducive environment for participants to share their perspectives.

Considering the linguistic diversity of the community, interviews were conducted in both English and isiZulu, being the dominant languages in the area. The researcher is bilingual, therefore, a total of 4 interviews were conducted in isiZulu. This was done to ensure that participants could express themselves comfortably and authentically in their native language as suggested and documented by Lidén and Laihonon (2016). This multilingual approach aimed at capturing a more nuanced and culturally embedded understanding of the participants' experiences. Questioning techniques were designed to explore various dimensions, including the economic, social, and personal aspects of running a home-based business during loadshedding. The participants were encouraged to share their subjective experiences, challenges faced, and coping mechanisms adopted. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted realities these women encountered.

3.8.2 Structured Observations

To complement the in-depth interviews, the study utilised structured observations with a predefined checklist (Annexure 1.2) for systematic data collection. Structured observations played a crucial role, involving meticulous monitoring and recording of specific aspects of these women-owned businesses, particularly their response to loadshedding. Prior to observation, a comprehensive plan was created. This involved defining key areas of observation, such as alternative energy sources, infrastructure, resource management, and productivity. Additionally, informed consent was obtained, ensuring participants understood the study's purpose, scope, and ethical considerations. The observations occurred during business hours, capturing a realistic portrayal of daily operations. The researcher actively observed interactions, reactions, and strategies employed by the women entrepreneurs to navigate loadshedding challenges. Detailed notes captured qualitative data on resource utilisation, adaptation strategies, customer service, and overall business dynamics.

These observations provided a rich dataset, supplementing the interview data. Structured observations strategically complemented the qualitative depth of interviews. By systematically recording data during site visits, the research could assess the impact of loadshedding on productivity and how these entrepreneurs adapted to maintain efficiency. The data from both methods were then analysed together. This triangulation (using multiple data sources) added depth and richness to the findings, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the research topic. It validated and enriched the primary data, revealing how women entrepreneurs maintained customer relationships, communicated disruptions, and ensured service continuity despite loadshedding.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis was done in two parts: the transcription and translation of the data collected, and followed by the thematic analysis.

3.9.1 Transcription and Translation

The researcher's bilingualism in isiZulu and English played a critical role in ensuring the authenticity of participants' voices throughout the research process. This fluency allowed for a deep understanding of cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions during the isiZulu interviews. Following these interviews, the recordings were meticulously transcribed verbatim by the researcher with the help of a bilingual transcriber. This process captured not only the

spoken words but also the tone, emphasis, and cultural richness embedded within the language, ensuring an accurate representation of the participants' narratives.

For the isiZulu interviews, a detailed translation process followed. The bilingual researcher first converted the transcribed data into English, focusing on preserving the essence and cultural richness of the participants' responses. To ensure linguistic accuracy and an unbiased perspective, an external isiZulu-English translator reviewed the initial translations. This involved iterative discussions between the researcher and the translator to refine the translations, address any ambiguities, and achieve the highest level of linguistic precision. Particular attention was given to cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions that may not have direct English equivalents. By retaining these elements, the translated data preserved the cultural context of the participants' narratives. The translation process culminated in a set of English transcripts that faithfully conveyed the participants' voices while maintaining linguistic coherence for further analysis.

3.9.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a widely used method for analysing qualitative data that involves identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within the data. The research utilised the NVivo 12 software in the data analysis,

The researcher then engaged in the thematic analysis as follows:

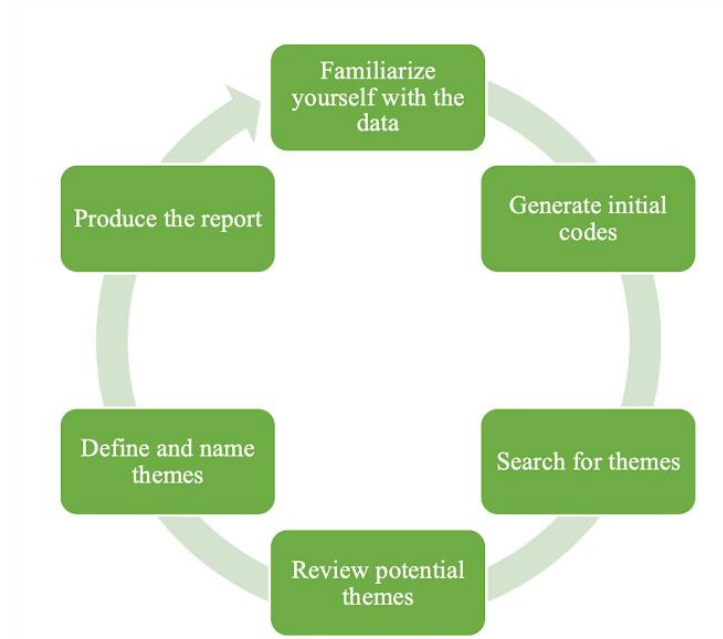


Figure 3.8: The Thematic Analysis Source: (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Familiarisation with Data: The initial step in thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), emphasises becoming intimately familiar with the data. In the context of this study, the researcher meticulously engaged in this foundational step, employing a comprehensive approach: Each interview transcript and structured observation note underwent multiple iterative readings. The researcher conscientiously immersed themselves in the textual data to discern nuances, identify recurring patterns, and grasp the details embedded in participants' narratives. A commitment to open-minded exploration characterised the familiarisation process. The researcher approached the data without preconceived notions, allowing emerging themes and patterns to reveal themselves organically through a close examination of participants' expressions. Concurrent with the readings, the researcher engaged in notetaking and annotating. This involved jotting down preliminary thoughts, initial impressions, and potential codes or themes that started to emerge during the familiarisation process.

Structured observation notes, capturing real-time insights into the daily operations of women-owned businesses, were seamlessly integrated into the familiarisation process. This amalgamation ensured a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences, encompassing both verbal expressions in interviews and tangible actions observed during structured observations. Reflective practices played a crucial role in this phase. The researcher took the time to reflect on their own assumptions, biases, and perspectives, acknowledging the influence of their positionality on the interpretation of the data. Throughout the familiarisation process, a conscious effort was made to maintain the context of each participant's unique experience. This involved revisiting contextual information about the participants, the setting, and the specific challenges they faced during loadshedding. While not the primary focus of this step, initial code generation organically emerged during the familiarisation process. Some initial codes and potential themes appeared, serving as a foundation for the subsequent coding phases in the thematic analysis. Rigor was ensured through the systematic and thorough nature of the familiarisation process. The researcher's commitment to data immersion, combined with reflective practices, contributed to the reliability and depth of the subsequent analysis.

Generating Initial Codes: Building upon the foundational step of data immersion, the second stage involved the systematic process of generating initial codes, as delineated by Saldaña (2015). Coding, in this context, was not a mechanical exercise but a nuanced and iterative engagement with the data. The primary objective was to identify and label segments of data that held relevance to the overarching research question, thus encapsulating the essence of the

sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses during loadshedding. This coding endeavour unfolded in a meticulous and inductive manner, with the researcher discerning meaningful patterns, concepts, and recurrent ideas embedded in the data. It was a process of distillation, where the richness of participants' narratives was condensed into succinct codes that encapsulated the diverse dimensions of their experiences. Drawing on the interpretivist paradigm, the codes aimed to capture the multifaceted and context-dependent nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

As codes began to proliferate, the researcher organised them in a coherent and comprehensive manner, creating an initial coding framework. This framework served as a provisional map, structuring the evolving understanding of the data, and laying the groundwork for subsequent stages of analysis. The researcher remained attuned to the nuanced variations within codes, recognising the subtleties that distinguished one code from another. This discerning approach contributed to the depth and granularity of the subsequent thematic development. Throughout this phase, reflexivity remained a guiding principle. The researcher continuously reflected on the subjective nature of coding, acknowledging their own perspectives, biases, and preconceptions. Regular consultations with the research objectives ensured that the generated codes authentically reflected the participants' voices and experiences. This second step, thus, facilitated the transition from raw data to a systematically organised coding framework, setting the stage for the subsequent stages of thematic analysis.

Searching for Themes: With the initial coding framework in place, the analysis seamlessly progressed to the pivotal phase of searching for themes. As highlighted by Creswell and Creswell (2017), themes are the discernible patterns and central ideas that organically emerge from the coded data, providing a comprehensive way through which the research questions can be addressed. This phase involved an exploration of the coded segments, seeking recurrent patterns, shared concepts, and underlying threads that resonated across multiple instances within the data. The identification of themes was not a rigid or predetermined process; rather, it was a dynamic and iterative engagement with the nuanced intricacies of the participants' narratives. Drawing on the richness of the coded data, the researcher discerned the latent structures and commonalities that encapsulated the essence of women-owned informal home-based businesses' sustainability during loadshedding.

The themes that surfaced were multifaceted, encapsulating diverse aspects related to the challenges confronted by women entrepreneurs, the strategies employed to navigate these challenges, and the broader landscape of business sustainability within the context of

loadshedding. The thematic development was guided by a commitment to capturing the depth and complexity of the participants' experiences. In adherence to the interpretivist paradigm, the process of theme identification was inherently reflexive. The researcher constantly interrogated the evolving themes in relation to the research objectives, ensuring that they authentically reflected the diverse realities of the participants. This reflexive stance enhanced the validity and credibility of the emerging themes, anchoring them in the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs in the specific context of Newtown.

Reviewing Themes: Having identified the emergent themes, the study seamlessly transitioned into the critical phase of reviewing and refining these thematic constructs. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that this step is essential for ensuring that the identified themes faithfully represent the richness of the dataset, aligning closely with the diverse narratives and experiences of the participants. In this iterative process, the researcher diligently scrutinised each theme, subjecting them to a rigorous evaluation against the backdrop of the research objectives. The aim was to ascertain the coherence and consistency of each theme in capturing the essence of women-owned informal home-based businesses' sustainability during loadshedding in Newtown. The refinement process was characterised by an ongoing dialogue with the data, with the researcher continually revisiting the coded segments, participant narratives, and the thematic interconnections. This iterative engagement allowed for a nuanced exploration of the themes, ensuring that they were not only representative of the dataset but also resonated with the authenticity of the participants' experiences. Moreover, the process involved refining the thematic boundaries, clarifying distinctions between themes, and identifying potential overlaps or intersections. Through this meticulous review, the themes evolved from preliminary constructs into refined and coherent representations of the multifaceted dimensions of the research phenomenon. A reflexive stance, inherent in the interpretivist paradigm, guided this phase. The researcher maintained a keen awareness of the evolving themes in relation to the broader research context, fostering a dynamic and responsive approach to theme refinement. This reflexive engagement enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the identified themes, grounding them firmly in the lived realities of women entrepreneurs in the specific context of Newtown. The review and refinement phase served as a crucial checkpoint, ensuring the themes were robust, meaningful, and resonant with the complexities encapsulated in the qualitative data.

Defining and Naming Themes: With the identified themes thoroughly reviewed and refined, the study proceeded to the crucial phase of clearly defining and naming each theme. As

advocated by Nowell et al. (2017), this step is pivotal for ensuring that themes are distinct, well-articulated, and encapsulate the richness of the data in a concise manner. During this phase, each theme underwent a meticulous process of articulation, where its boundaries, components, and conceptual underpinnings were precisely defined. This involved a detailed examination of the coded segments, ensuring that the thematic constructs accurately reflected the distinctions and intricacies embedded in the participants' narratives. The definition process aimed at providing a clear and comprehensive understanding of each theme, avoiding ambiguity or overlap. Each theme was crafted to encapsulate a unique aspect of the sustainability challenges faced by women-owned informal home-based businesses during loadshedding. This clarity in definition facilitated a more precise interpretation of the findings, contributing to the overall coherence of the thematic analysis.

Simultaneously, the themes were bestowed with names that succinctly captured their essence. Nowell et al. (2017) advocate for names that are both descriptive and evocative, enabling researchers and readers alike to grasp the thematic content briefly. The researcher ensured that naming process involved a thoughtful consideration of the focal points within each theme, ensuring that the titles resonated with the substantive meanings derived from the data. This phase was conducted with a keen eye on the overarching research objectives, ensuring that the defined and named themes were aligned with the study's interpretive framework and the specific context of women entrepreneurs in Newtown.

Writing the Report: The conclusive phase of the thematic analysis involved the integration of identified themes into the narrative structure of the study. Following the guidance of Creswell and Creswell (2017), this last step was characterised by the meticulous crafting of a detailed report that effectively communicated the essence of the themes. The participant quotes and vivid descriptions served as the backbone of this narrative, acting as illustrative elements to highlight the intricacies captured within each theme. Each theme was carefully woven into the study, aligning with the chronological flow of the research objectives, and overarching interpretive framework.

This process aimed at providing readers with a textured and immersive journey through the identified themes, allowing them to engage first hand with the voices and experiences of women entrepreneurs in the specific context of Newtown. The researcher recognised the narrative power inherent in participant quotes, utilising them strategically to bring forth the authenticity and depth embedded in the qualitative data. Themes served as the organising framework for the study's findings, offering readers a structured exploration of the

sustainability challenges faced by women-owned informal home-based businesses during loadshedding. This approach not only enhanced the clarity and coherence of the research report but also facilitated a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between themes. The crafting of the report was a culmination of the entire thematic analysis process, transforming raw data into a compelling narrative that encapsulated the essence of the research. This final product aimed at not only presenting findings but also inviting readers into the lived experiences of the women entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to a richer comprehension of the study's focal phenomenon.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are paramount in any research undertaking, and this study on the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses during loadshedding is no exception. By adhering to ethical principles and guidelines, the research ensures the welfare, rights, and privacy of the participants are protected. The study went through a rigorous process of ethical clearance, hence the provision of the ethical clearance certificate provided by the University of Mpumalanga Ethics Committee, see Annexure 5.

1. **Informed Consent:** Obtaining informed consent from the study participants was a foundational ethical principle. In accordance with Guest et al. (2006), it is imperative to seek and receive informed consent from participants prior to engaging in data collection. All participants were provided with detailed information about the research, its objectives, and the data collection process. They were given the opportunity to ask questions and provide their consent to participate voluntarily.
2. **Confidentiality:** The study ensured that participants' identities and sensitive information were kept confidential. As emphasised by Bryman (2016), maintaining confidentiality is vital in qualitative research to protect participants from potential harm. All data collected during the interviews and observations were anonymised, and pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities.
3. **Privacy and Dignity:** Respecting the privacy and dignity of participants was of utmost importance. Creswell and Creswell (2017) highlight the significance of safeguarding participants' dignity and privacy in qualitative research. The study ensured that interviews were conducted in private settings where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Moreover, the research adopted a respectful and empathetic

approach during data collection to create a safe and supportive environment for participants.

4. ***Non-Maleficence:*** The principle of non-maleficence, as emphasised by Guest et al. (2006), was adhered to diligently. The research was conducted with the intention of not causing harm to the participants. The participants were not exposed to any form of risk, harm, or discomfort during the interviews or structured observations. The research aimed to be as non-intrusive as possible while gathering valuable data.

3.11 DATA QUALITY CONTROL MEASURES

The study had a comprehensive strategy for data quality control, following established guidelines to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Data quality control measures were particularly essential in ensuring that the research's objectives were met and that the results were valid and reliable.

3.11.1 Trustworthiness:

In qualitative research, ensuring trustworthiness is essential to demonstrate the rigor, credibility, and dependability of a study's findings. Trustworthiness in qualitative research, as emphasised by Polit and Beck (2012), encompasses various components, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity. This section examines the two central components of trustworthiness, reliability and validity, as well as the actions undertaken to ensure these elements in the study.

Reliability

In qualitative research, where the focus is on understanding the lived experiences of participants, establishing the reliability of the data collection instruments is crucial. Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of findings over time (Polit & Beck, 2012). In this study, thorough efforts were made to ensure the research yielded trustworthy and dependable results. The basis of this effort was the development of a reliable and valid data collection instruments. These instruments were informed by the research objectives and literature, ensuring that all questions and observations directly addressed the study's goals.

Central to the instrument's reliability was its ability to effectively capture the intended information. This ensured it effectively elicited the nuanced experiences and perspectives of the women entrepreneurs about loadshedding challenges. Furthermore, the instruments

underwent a rigorous review process by the Faculty Research Committee of the University of Mpumalanga and two supervisors to ensure its relevance and appropriateness within the field. Maintaining consistency was another critical focus. The instruments used clear and unambiguous language to minimise misinterpretation. Pilot testing with a small sample group of three (3) participants allowed the researcher to identify and address any ambiguities or potential issues. Based on this feedback, refinements were made to enhance the instruments' reliability. The final versions of the interview guide and observation checklist were the product of this rigorous process.

These instruments were not only grounded in theory, but also demonstrably practical and applicable to the specific context of the study. Their reliability and validity provided a solid foundation for the subsequent data collection phase, ensuring that the gathered insights were accurate, meaningful, and truly reflected the lived experiences of the women entrepreneurs. This emphasis on reliable data collection instruments significantly contributed to the overall robustness of the study's findings.

Furthermore, as detailed in the data analysis section, the study adhered to established qualitative research methods, which further bolstered the reliability of the research outcomes. By implementing these strategies, the study ensured the trustworthiness and dependability of its results.

Validity

Validity pertains to the authenticity of interpretations and conclusions (Polit & Beck, 2012). In the context of this study, ensuring the validity of the findings was paramount. Validity was upheld by using a rigorous research design and methodology, adhering to established research protocols. These protocols facilitated the collection and analysis of data using appropriate techniques, ensuring that the data accurately reflected the research question. This strong focus on maintaining the integrity of the research process, from data collection to analysis, reinforced the validity of the study's findings.

The following actions were, according to Polit and Beck (2012), taken as part of the study:

Credibility: Credibility was of paramount importance in the study, aiming to establish the believability and trustworthiness of the findings (Polit & Beck, 2012). To ensure credibility, the research employed a rigorous research design and methodology, adhering to established research protocols. This encompassed the collection and analysis of data using appropriate techniques and ensuring that the data accurately reflected the research question. By maintaining

a structured and systematic approach to data collection and analysis, the study upheld the credibility of its findings.

Dependability: Dependability was a critical consideration in maintaining the consistency and stability of the study's findings over time (Polit & Beck, 2012). To address dependability, the research used reliable and valid data collection instruments. The data collection process was conducted consistently, ensuring that the information received remained stable and dependable. Additionally, established methods, as described in the data analysis section, were employed to analyse the data, further reinforcing the dependability of the findings.

Transferability: Transferability, which relates to the applicability and generalisability of the study's findings to other contexts, was a key aspect of the study's data quality control (Polit & Beck, 2012). To ensure transferability, the research employed a sample that was sufficient to give information of interest and provided comprehensive descriptions of the sample's characteristics. Additionally, the study ensured that sufficient detail was provided about the research methodology and findings, enabling other researchers to apply the results to their unique contexts.

Confirmability: Confirmability focused on the objectivity and neutrality of the study's findings (Polit & Beck, 2012). To establish confirmability, the research followed a transparent research process. This process included clearly stating the research question, data collection methods, and analytical techniques. Furthermore, the researcher diligently documented the research process, including quoting the exact ideas of the participants in the presentation of findings, to ensure that it could be replicated by other researchers, reinforcing the confirmability of the study's outcomes.

3.12 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In this chapter, the research methodology for exploring the sustainability of WHBBs during loadshedding was detailed. Grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, the study emphasised understanding social meanings and subjective interpretations. A qualitative approach, aligned with interpretivism, utilised in-depth interviews and structured observations to delve into women entrepreneurs' experiences amid loadshedding. In-depth interviews captured richness, while observations provided valuable secondary data. Non-probability sampling, including convenience and purposive methods, selected participants for context-specific insights, ensuring rich, relevant data. Trustworthiness was maintained through credibility,

dependability, and authenticity, and reliability was upheld by consistent data collection and analysis.

The subsequent chapter will present and analyse the collected data, exploring challenges and strategies of women-owned businesses during loadshedding. Thematic analysis aims to uncover innovative strategies and challenges, offering insights into the intersection of gender, entrepreneurship, and contextual challenges. The findings will contribute to understanding the unique struggles of women entrepreneurs in a marginalised community dealing with loadshedding and socio-economic constraints, informing the broader discourse on gender, entrepreneurship, and sustainability.

CHAPTER 4 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter outlined the research methodology, detailing the methods and rationale behind the adoption and the usage of the qualitative research approach. Furthermore, it systematically discussed how the study was executed. Subsequently, in Chapter 4, the focus is on the presentation and analysis of the collected data, offering a deeper view into the experiences of women entrepreneurs dealing with the challenges posed by loadshedding. As indicated in the previous chapter, a thematic analysis was applied to analyse and interpret the qualitative data using NVivo 12 software.

This chapter commences with an overview of the demographic profile of the participants, such as their age, educational background, and marital status. Thereafter, this chapter discusses the themes emerging from the findings, which include, but are not limited to, (i) business profile, (ii) general perception about loadshedding, (iii) socioeconomic impact of loadshedding, (vi) impact of loadshedding on emotional well-being and (v) coping mechanisms amidst loadshedding.

To enhance the depth of understanding, a rigorous analysis contextualises the findings within the existing literature, establishing connections and contributing to a broader comprehension of the subject matter. The chapter culminates in a summary, encapsulating the key recommendations presented by the study participants and facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the subsequent chapter.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Understanding the demographic profile of women entrepreneurs is fundamental for contextualising their experiences and challenges within the broader society. Examining the aspects of age distribution, educational backgrounds, and marital status allows for a comprehensive exploration of the varied factors that may shape these entrepreneurs' perspectives and responses to external challenges, particularly the impact of loadshedding on their home-based businesses.

Table 4.1: Demographic information of the participants

Age Category	Number of Participants in Category	Educational Background	Marital Status
20–30 years	3	Tertiary Education (2) High school education (1)	2 Single, 1 Married
31–40 years	4	Matric (2) Tertiary Education (1) Primary Education (1)	All Married
41–50 years	2	Never Attended School (1) Tertiary Education (1)	1 Divorced, 1 Married
51–60 years	1	Never attended school (1)	1 Widowed

Table 4.1 reflects that three of the participants were between 20 and 30 years old, reflecting a relatively younger segment. The presence of participants in the 20 to 30 age group, comprising 30% of the sample, suggests a potential avenue for addressing youth unemployment. Young entrepreneurs, equipped with qualifications and entering the business landscape, exemplify a positive response to economic challenges. A larger proportion, of four participants, were within the 31 to 40 age range, indicating a substantial representation from the early 30s age group. Only two of the participants were in the 41 to 50 age group, and the remaining participant was between 51 and 60 years old, representing the older segment of the participants.

The participants' educational backgrounds varied significantly. Only one of them had only completed primary education, while two others had achieved high school education. A majority, constituting 50% of the sample, possessed tertiary education qualifications, reflecting a well-educated number of the participants. In contrast, 20% of the participants had never attended school, underlining the diversity in educational backgrounds within the sample.

The participants' marital statuses also exhibited diversity. Notably, two of them were single, highlighting the presence of unmarried participants. The majority, comprising six of the participants, were married, indicating a strong representation of married women among the participants. Only one participant reported being divorced, while the remaining number were widowed, reflecting the range of marital statuses within the sample.

Age distribution among women entrepreneurs is a crucial factor. This is because it often correlates with different life stages, levels of experience, and adaptability to change within the sector (GEM, 2021). For instance, younger entrepreneurs may bring a fresh perspective and technological proficiency, while older entrepreneurs might draw upon extensive experience but may face challenges in adapting to rapidly evolving business environments (Pavlenko et al., 2020).

Furthermore, educational backgrounds play a pivotal role in influencing the skill set, decision-making processes, and problem-solving abilities of entrepreneurs. Access to education is often associated with increased opportunities and a broader outlook, contributing to enhanced resilience in the face of adversities such as power disruptions (Moriña, 2019).

Marital status is another significant aspect, influencing the support systems available to entrepreneurs. Married entrepreneurs may have familial support, potentially positively affecting their ability to cope with challenges. Conversely, unmarried entrepreneurs might rely more heavily on personal resilience and networks. Therefore, examining the critical link between demographic factors and how individuals perceive and navigate challenges such as loadshedding was crucial in this study.

These factors align with existing literature highlighting the intersectionality of gender, demographics, and entrepreneurship (Brush et al., 2014). Research has shown that the experiences of women entrepreneurs are not homogenous; rather, they are shaped by various contextual factors (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Moreover, the impact of external factors, such as power disruptions, is mediated by individual characteristics and resources. Mooijekweek and Verduijn (2020) discuss the importance of understanding how entrepreneurs draw upon their personal and social resources to navigate challenges. Therefore, the demographic profile reflected in Table 4.1 allows for comprehension of the diverse responses of women entrepreneurs to the multifaceted challenges posed by loadshedding.

4.3 BUSINESS PROFILE

The following Table 4.2 provides a comprehensive overview of the business profiles within the study, highlighting key aspects, such as the type of business, its size and scale, duration of operation, and current activity status. This concise summary facilitates a clear understanding of the diverse entrepreneurial landscape examined in the research.

Table 4.2: Business Profile

Participant	Type of Business	Size and Scale	Duration of Operation	Activity Status
1	Beauty salon (Service)	Micro-enterprise	3 years	Active
2	Sewing workshop (Service)	Micro-enterprise	4 years	Active
3	Home-based bakery (Product)	Micro-enterprise	2 years	Active
4	Catering business (Mixed)	Small business	12 years	Closed
5	Spaza shop (Retail)	Small business	Recently started	Active
6	Internet café (Service)	Larger-scale business	12 years	Active
7	Hair salon (Service)	Small business	6 years	Active
8	African cuisine	Micro-enterprise	18 months	Active
9	Sewing workshop and Second hand clothing pawn (Mixed)	Small business	18 years	Active
10	Internet café (Service)	Larger scale business	9 years	Active

Table 4.2 illustrates that the participants in this study engage in various business types with different sizes and scales, duration of operation, and activity status. As shown in the table, the business ventures include service-oriented home-based businesses, such as beauty salons, sewing workshops, and internet cafes, as well as product-based businesses, such as home-based bakeries and spaza shops. The term “spaza” is a South African term for a small, informal convenience store, typically located in townships or residential areas, offering a variety of goods, including groceries, toiletries, and household items (Gastrow, 2019). Of the sizes and scales, the table indicates that they vary from micro-enterprises, to small, and larger-scale businesses. Furthermore, the duration of operation spans from recently started ventures to well-established businesses with up to 18 years of experience. Although one business has subsequently closed, most of the businesses (9 of 10) are still active and operational, reflecting resilience within the entrepreneurial community among the participants.

The diverse array of businesses within Newtown, as illustrated in the participants’ responses, demonstrates the economic activities within the community. Ranging from micro-enterprises,

such as beauty salons and home-based bakeries, to larger-scale ventures, such as internet cafes, the variety reflects not only the entrepreneurial spirit but also the varied needs and preferences of the local population. This diversity signifies a resilient economic ecosystem where individuals engage in an array of activities, contributing collectively to the socio-economic proceedings of Newtown. Moreover, the distinct profiles also suggest the adaptability of Newtown's business landscape. The presence of long-standing businesses, such as catering services, operating for 18 years alongside recently established businesses, such as 'spaza' shops, highlights a community capable of accommodating both tradition and innovation. This adaptability not only showcases the entrepreneurial vitality of the demographic but also suggests a capacity to evolve and respond to changing economic dynamics. The mix of service-oriented enterprises and those involved in product-based activities adds another layer to this diversity, reflecting a balanced blend of consumer-facing services and tangible product offerings within the community.

Remarkably, amidst the challenges posed by loadshedding, a noteworthy trend emerged within the entrepreneurial landscape of the interviewed participants: several businesses initiated operations during this era of loadshedding. This phenomenon may indicate the entrepreneurial spirit prevailing amongst these women and the adaptability of individuals to the circumstances of loadshedding. The inception of businesses during the loadshedding era suggests that, despite the adversities, participants are not deterred from pursuing entrepreneurial endeavours. Instead, they demonstrate a resilient and proactive approach, turning challenges into opportunities. This was expressed by two participants:

Participant 5: *"Poverty is still there and I had no choice but to start even when there is loadshedding. We can't let this get us down. We're determined to succeed, even with the power challenges."*

Participant 4: *"People need food especially when there is no power in the neighbourhood, so I saw this as an opportunity to serve them."*

This trend aligns with the concept of necessity entrepreneurship, where individuals are driven to entrepreneurship not solely by choice but by the necessity to overcome challenges and meet pressing needs (Bosma, 2013b). The entrepreneur who initiated a business during the loadshedding era responded to a perceived gap in the market and leveraged her skills and resources to address the community needs which were intensified by the power disruptions. Such an endeavour not only contributes to economic activities in Newtown but also showcases

the agility and creativity of the individuals who participated in this study. This trend of necessity entrepreneurship also resonates with broader economic shifts seen globally, where external shocks such as economic downturns or crises spur an increase in entrepreneurial activities (Bosma, 2013a; Stephan & Uhlaner, 2015).

Scholars argue that necessity-driven entrepreneurship often arises in environments where traditional avenues of employment are limited or unstable, prompting individuals to create their own opportunities (Bosma & Kelley, 2014). In the case of loadshedding in South Africa, the power disruptions exacerbated existing economic challenges, compelling individuals to seek alternative means of income generation (Stiglitz, 2019). Entrepreneurs initiating businesses during the loadshedding era are not only responding to immediate market needs but are also demonstrating resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity (Stephan & Uhlaner, 2015). Their ability to identify and capitalise on emerging opportunities amid challenging circumstances reflects the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship (Afshan et al., 2021). Moreover, these ventures contribute to the socio-economic activities of Newtown, fostering community development and empowerment (Naude & Rossouw, 2015).

4.4 GENERAL PERCEPTIONS ABOUT LOADSHEDDING

In investigating the perceptions of women entrepreneurs in Newtown regarding the challenges posed by loadshedding, an interesting exploration emerged, revealing both shared frustrations and determination that collectively shaped the complex narrative of sustaining home-based businesses in the face of persistent power disruptions. The collective responses from participants in Newtown offer a view of the relationship between loadshedding and home-based businesses, revealing a spectrum of perceptions within the community. Loadshedding is not merely an isolated inconvenience but a chronic, pervasive challenge that profoundly influences the lives and businesses of entrepreneurs.

The participants consistently expressed frustration and struggle, emphasising how power cuts disrupt their daily routines and pose a serious threat to overall business sustainability. Two participants said:

Participant 10: *“Loadshedding is a constant source of stress for us. It disrupts our daily operations and poses a serious threat to our business.”*

Participant 2: *“Loadshedding is like a never-ending struggle for us. It throws everything off balance and adds stress to our lives.”*

Expressions such as “constant source of stress” and “never-ending struggle” reflect the enduring nature of the challenge, establishing a common ground among participants.

Businesses that heavily rely on continuous power, such as internet cafes or catering services, find themselves particularly vulnerable to the repercussions of loadshedding. This shared sentiment underscores the immediate and tangible impact on their businesses, extending beyond inconvenience to affect fundamental stability and viability. These sentiments echo broader discussions on the socio-economic ramifications of unreliable infrastructure in developing economies (Kapungwe et al., 2015). The shared experiences among participants emphasise the acute and tangible repercussions of loadshedding, extending beyond mere inconvenience to threaten the fundamental stability and viability of their businesses (Makate, 2018).

By contextualising these expressions within the broader discourse on energy infrastructure and economic development, policymakers and stakeholders can better understand the challenges faced by businesses in navigating the complexities of loadshedding (Kapungwe et al., 2015).

Amidst these challenges, a noteworthy perspective emerged, one that reframes loadshedding not merely as an obstacle but as an opportunity for resilience and creativity. The participants in the study exhibited a proactive mindset, illustrating their capacity to turn ‘downtime’ into ‘uptime’ for their businesses. This adaptability underscores their resourcefulness and determination, highlighting their ability to transform setbacks into opportunities for sustainability within their community.

Such resilience aligns with findings in existing literature, which emphasise the importance of entrepreneurial agility in navigating adverse circumstances (Jones & Coviello, 2015; Shepherd, 2015). The participants’ ability to innovate and pivot their business strategies reflects a commendable response to external constraints, contributing to the overall vibrancy and adaptability of the informal economy (Williams & Vorley, 2014). This perspective explains the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship, where challenges are not merely obstacles but catalysts for innovation and growth (Davidsson & Wiklund, 2019). This was captured in a few responses from the women who said:

Participant 6: *“It’s a challenge, but it’s also an opportunity. While it messes up the routine, I’ve found ways to turn downtime into uptime for my business.”*

Participant 9: *“Loadshedding is a challenge, no doubt. But you know, challenges are just opportunities in disguise. It messes up our routine, but we’ve been through a lot in these many years, and we’re still here, standing strong.”*

The varied expressions within the community reflect the complex factors influencing perceptions, including economic considerations, access to resources, and the nature of individual businesses. While some participants viewed loadshedding as a burdensome hurdle, others saw it as a catalyst for ingenuity, emphasising the importance of context in shaping these perspectives. The diverse range of responses underscores the need for tailored interventions and support systems that acknowledge and address the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the context of persistent loadshedding.

4.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LOADSHEDDING FOR WOMEN PARTICIPANTS IN NEWTOWN

Loadshedding, as a recurrent and disruptive phenomenon, exerts a profound socio-economic impact on the women entrepreneurs of Newtown. This multifaceted consequence extends beyond the immediate disruptions to business operations, extending to daily life and the broader economic landscape. At its core, loadshedding imparts economic disruptions that impact the financial well-being of home-based businesses.

The interruptions in power supply directly translate into operational downtime, hindering productivity and the timely completion of orders (Oladapo et al., 2020). This not only compromises the overall efficiency of businesses but also inflicts financial losses due to missed opportunities and the potential inability to meet customer demands (Mishra & Sharma, 2019). For some entrepreneurs, particularly those operating on a smaller scale, the financial strain becomes palpable, as every power outage has a direct impact on their profits. Some participants stated:

Participant 3: *“Every time the power goes out, it’s like money down the drain. Our profits are hit, and we can’t afford that. It affects our orders, deadlines, and overall customer satisfaction.”*

Participant 8: *“I have to buy food in smaller portions which are more expensive than I used to buy in bulk. It’s an additional cost that I didn’t have before.”*

In the socio-economic background of Newtown, where home-based businesses contribute significantly to livelihoods, the impact of loadshedding extends to employment and income

security. Small businesses, often acting as primary sources of income for families, face the dual challenge of keeping operations going and ensuring the livelihoods of those they employ (Carranza et al, 2020). Persistent power disruptions have led to reduced productivity, potential redundancies, or, in extreme cases, the closure of businesses, which was the case with Participant 4, which directly threatens the socio-economic stability of households dependent on these ventures.

Loadshedding introduces a distinctive dimension to socio-economic challenges as the disruption of business operations intersects with entrenched traditional female roles (Elson, 2019). This intersection presents a dynamic challenge for women entrepreneurs, especially those managing home-based businesses, accentuating the complexities of their socio-economic reality. According to Elson (2019), the interaction between loadshedding and traditional female roles intensify the burden on women entrepreneurs, who are often expected to balance business responsibilities with domestic duties. This suggests that the impact of loadshedding extends beyond mere power disruptions, influencing the economic dynamics within communities. This interplay has pronounced effects on the difficult act these women perform between managing their businesses and fulfilling domestic responsibilities, amplifying the complexities of gender dynamics within the household. Some of the women stated:

Participant 1: *“During loadshedding, it’s not just about managing my small business; it’s a constant struggle to keep up with household duties. The pressure is overwhelming as if I’m expected to do it all.”*

Participant 5: *“The disruptions caused by loadshedding spill over into my personal life. While I’m figuring out how to sustain my business, there’s this added stress of meeting marital expectations from my husband and children in the house.”*

In contexts where women entrepreneurs bear the primary responsibility for home-based businesses, the disruptions caused by loadshedding extend beyond the workspace, permeating the domestic sphere. It emerged during the interviews that gendered expectations regarding household duties and caregiving persist even when these women are concurrently managing the challenges posed by power outages in their businesses. This phenomenon reflects broader societal norms that often assign women the role of caretakers and homemakers, irrespective of their professional commitments (Charles & Hurst, 2020).

The strains imposed by loadshedding result in a precarious struggle for women entrepreneurs as they navigate between the demands of sustaining their businesses and meeting traditional

expectations within the household. Scholars have highlighted the interconnectedness of women's economic activities and their roles within the household, emphasising how disruptions in one domain can have negative effects on another (Duflo, 2016; Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Lindsey, 2020). Loadshedding serves as a tangible example of this interconnectedness; the challenges faced by the women entrepreneurs of this study impact their roles as caregivers, affecting not only their businesses but also the well-being of their families.

During the interviews, several observations were made that underscored the intersection of loadshedding with traditional gender roles and household responsibilities. The researcher noted instances where the participants, who were already managing home-based businesses, exhibited signs of added stress and pressure during power outages. For example, in Participant 1's responses the researcher observed visible signs of distress when discussing the simultaneous challenges of maintaining business operations and managing household duties. Facial expressions and body language indicated a sense of being overwhelmed by the dual responsibilities, emphasising the work-life balance struggle required during loadshedding.

In the case of Participant 5, the researcher noted a shift in demeanour when the conversation moved to the impact of loadshedding on social life. The participant appeared to struggle with a balance, expressing the challenges of sustaining a business while meeting traditional expectations at home. Non-verbal cues, such as hesitations and sighs, suggested the added burden experienced by women entrepreneurs in fulfilling both professional and domestic roles during power disruptions.

Literature supporting these observations includes studies by Benería and Floro (2017), who examine the gendered dimensions of economic activities and household responsibilities in developing contexts. Their work emphasises the persistent challenges faced by women in balancing work and domestic duties, particularly in environments with unreliable infrastructure. Similarly, research by Elson (2018) explores the impact of energy crises on gender dynamics, highlighting how women often bear the brunt of household and community burdens during power disruptions. Additionally, findings by Mohan and Shanthi (2019) explore the psychological stress experienced by women entrepreneurs during energy crises, emphasising the need for gender-sensitive policy interventions. These recent scholarly works provide valuable insights into the distinct interaction between gender roles, household responsibilities, and the challenges posed by loadshedding, offering a contemporary understanding of women's experiences in the informal sector.

These observations collectively support the notion that loadshedding introduces a gendered dimension to socio-economic challenges. The interviews provided insights beyond verbal expressions, offering an understanding of the dynamics faced by women entrepreneurs as they navigate the dual responsibilities of home-based businesses and household roles. This aligns with research by Homan et al. (2021), who emphasise the importance of recognising the intersectionality of gender and economic activities, particularly in contexts where women are disproportionately affected by structural inequalities.

4.6 IMPACT OF LOADSHEDDING ON THE PARTICIPANTS' EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

This study establishes that loadshedding, beyond its tangible economic impacts, exerts a profound toll on the emotional and psychological well-being of the participants. This reveals a complex interplay of resilience and vulnerability experienced by the participants. The participants highlighted diverse emotional responses to loadshedding, ranging from frustration and anxiety to a surprising adaptability and resilience.

A prominent point is the emotional toll of uncertainty and the constant disruption caused by loadshedding. The participants expressed overwhelming stress as they navigated the unpredictability of power cuts, particularly during peak business hours. The perpetual battle to plan and manage operations added to their emotional strain, reflecting a sentiment of being caught in an ongoing struggle. The participants declared:

Participant 5: *“Every power cut feels like a personal attack. It’s not just about losing money; it’s about losing hope, this affects our emotional well-being. Our customers get let down, and it’s infuriating.”*

Participant 8: *“It’s challenging; the constant power cuts are exhausting. My family sees it, and it affects my well-being. But I keep going for my children.”*

The sentiment of losing hope reflects the challenges that the women face in maintaining a consistent and routine operational environment. Sustainability often relies on the ability to establish and adhere to efficient processes (Söderholm et al, 2015). However, loadshedding disrupts this consistency, making it difficult for business owners to establish reliable routines. This struggle for stability impedes growth and long-term sustainability of the businesses.

Beyond the professional realm, the personal impact on entrepreneurs is evident. The participants spoke of missing family events due to work disruptions during loadshedding,

underscoring the difficulty to balance business responsibilities and personal life. The exhausting nature of constant power cuts is acknowledged, with participants expressing concern about its effects on their overall well-being.

Despite these challenges, a noteworthy contrast emerges in expressions of determination and resilience. For instance, some participants viewed each power cut as an opportunity to get creative and find innovative ways to connect with customers, emphasising a positive mindset in the face of adversity. The motivation to persevere was evident, with a commitment to success even amid power challenges. The statements from the participants were noted when they said:

Participant 1: *“The impact is there, no denying that. But every power cut is a chance for me to get creative. I have opted for finding new ways to connect with customers even when the lights are out using social media to post my works and styles and respond to queries.”*

Participant 8: *“I’ve been doing this for many years, and my business is not just a dream; it’s my legacy. We’ve faced challenges before, and we’ll face them again with more resilience.”*

The expressions of determination and resilience among participants in the face of loadshedding revealed a striking contrast to the predominant challenges discussed. The positive mindset showcased by some entrepreneurs not only acknowledged the adversity posed by power cuts but their actively seeking opportunities within them.

These sentiments were echoed in specific statements, such as Participant 8’s acknowledgment of the challenges and the toll on well-being but also the unwavering commitment to persist for the sake of family, particularly children. Participant 1’s perspective introduces an innovative approach to turning adversity into opportunity. Participant 1 viewed every power cut as a chance to get creative and find new ways to connect with customers, which reflects a proactive and solution-oriented mindset. Adaptability and resourcefulness were further demonstrated with two participants leveraging social media during outages to showcase their work and styles, as well as responding to queries.

This contrast signifies the multifaceted nature of the participants’ experiences, with a subset showcasing a resilience that goes beyond mere survival. Instead, these entrepreneurs approached loadshedding as a catalyst for innovation and creativity, suggesting a potential avenue for growth amidst challenges.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the devastating impact on businesses, as expressed by one participant when she said:

Participant 4: *“I invested so much into my business, and its heart breaking to see it close down. The impact is devastating, not just for me but for the two other ladies who depended on it for their livelihoods. It feels like a personal failure, and I’m left wondering what could have been done differently to save it.”*

The expression of this participant whose business closed due to the relentless challenges posed by loadshedding underscores the profound impact on both a financial and emotional level. The closure of the business represented not just an economic setback but a deeply personal and emotional experience for that entrepreneur. The participant experienced the emotional toll of seeing a venture in which they had invested time, effort, and passion come to an end. Moreover, the consequent effect of this closure extends beyond the individual entrepreneur. In this instance, the participant mentioned that their business employed two other women. The closure, therefore, translates to a direct loss of employment opportunities for these individuals, further compounding the emotional, psychological and, especially, economic impact.

This case shows that the effect of loadshedding extends beyond the immediate business owner to the livelihoods of others dependent on the enterprise. The termination of employment for two other women highlights the interconnectedness of businesses within the community and the wider implications of loadshedding on local economies. It also emphasises the vulnerability of employment generated by small businesses, particularly in the context of persistent challenges, such as loadshedding (Van De Merwe, 2019).

4.7 COPING MECHANISMS AMIDST LOADSHEDDING

In exploring the coping mechanisms adopted by businesses in Newtown, amidst the persistent challenges of loadshedding, the study found diverse representations of strategies. From investments in alternative power sources to the adoption of technology, businesses navigate the uncertainties of power cuts with varying approaches. This discussion explores the collective responses of participants, illustrating the resource-intensive nature of coping, age-related patterns in adaptation, and the crucial role of community support structures. A few of the responses that were captured during the interview included:

Participant 10: *“We’ve invested in a generator to keep our operations running during power cuts. It’s a significant expense, but it helps us cope with the challenges of loadshedding.”*

Participant 7: *I've embraced technology to keep things rolling. During loadshedding, I take orders and interact with customers on social media. It's not always smooth, but it's a workaround that keeps my business in the game."*

Participant 6: *"To be honest, coping is a real challenge. We can't afford generators or other fancy solutions. We try to plan around the outages, but it's not always possible. We depend a lot on the support of other women in similar situations."*

Amidst the enduring challenge of loadshedding, a prevailing strategy employed by businesses in Newtown involved substantial investments in alternative power sources, with generators emerging as a favoured choice among participants. Despite acknowledging the considerable financial burden associated with acquiring and maintaining generators, the women underscored their effectiveness in sustaining operations during power cuts. This highlights the women's resource-intensive nature as a crucial dimension of coping mechanisms. In navigating the disruptions posed by loadshedding, businesses equipped with the financial means strategically opted for technological interventions, recognising them as instrumental tools to mitigate the adverse effects of power outages.

In addition to investing in alternative power sources, a notable coping mechanism that was observed among participants, particularly the younger demographic, was the strategic adoption of technology. This forward-thinking approach involves leveraging social media and various online platforms to ensure the continuity of business operations and sustained customer interactions, even in the face of power outages. The adoption of digital solutions represents a distinct generational shift in coping mechanisms, signalling a departure from traditional approaches and a keen adaptation to the contemporary business environment.

The innovative use of technology serves as a testament to the agility and adaptability of younger entrepreneurs. By integrating digital platforms into their operations, these businesses not only maintained a degree of functionality during loadshedding but also created a broader market reach. This highlights a crucial aspect of modern resilience, where the integration of technology becomes a pivotal strategy for overcoming infrastructural challenges.

Conversely, older participants exhibited a tendency to rely on interpersonal networks and traditional community support structures as integral coping mechanisms against the challenges posed by loadshedding. This emphasises the enduring role of communal ties and the reliance on established networks to navigate difficulties. The resilience of older entrepreneurs was

evident in their ability to draw on these interpersonal connections to withstand the disruptions caused by power outages.

However, a significant contrast emerged concerning the accessibility of coping mechanisms, unveiling socio-economic disparities among participants. The reliance on traditional community ties might not be universally effective, as the absence of financial resources hindered some participants from adopting comprehensive coping strategies. This discrepancy highlights the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities within the community, where individuals with limited financial means may struggle to adopt comprehensive coping strategies.

Studies by Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2013) and Gulyani and Talukdar (2018) underscore how socio-economic disparities exacerbate vulnerability to external shocks, such as power disruptions, particularly among marginalised groups. The participants struggling with financial constraints found themselves in a challenging position, as the affordability of alternative power sources, such as generators or other technological solutions, becomes a significant obstacle. The inability to invest in these resource-intensive coping mechanisms placed them at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to businesses with more financial flexibility. Consequently, these entrepreneurs were compelled to adopt a coping strategy centred around planning around power outages, a measure that, while cost-effective, is tied to the unpredictable nature of loadshedding.

Planning around outages involves organising business activities and operations with a keen awareness of the anticipated power cuts. However, the efficacy of this strategy is compromised by the inherent irregularity of loadshedding schedules. The irregularity and unpredictability of power interruptions make it challenging for businesses, especially those with limited financial means, to effectively plan and adapt to the disruptions. The broader implication is that the burden of loadshedding disproportionately affects businesses with fewer financial resources, exacerbating existing socio-economic disparities within the community.

Studies by Chigunta et al. (2016) and Kinyanjui (2019) highlight how resource constraints limit the ability of small businesses, particularly those owned by women, to invest in alternative energy sources or resilience-building measures. As a result, these businesses are more vulnerable to the disruptions caused by loadshedding, which can have cascading effects on their financial stability and long-term viability. Moreover, the inability to afford alternative power solutions or invest in infrastructure improvements further entrenches the marginalisation

of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector, perpetuating cycles of poverty and economic exclusion.

4.7.1. Observation Report on Coping Mechanisms

This study employed observations as its secondary data collection method. Observations captured through the checklist offered insight into the responses of women entrepreneurs struggling with the challenges of loadshedding. From alternative energy investments to the adoption of technology and reliance on community ties, these observations revealed the diverse coping mechanisms employed in real-time business settings.

This section discusses the details gleaned from the observation report, providing insights into the practical strategies adopted by the participants to navigate the complexities of power disruptions. One prevalent strategy is the investment in alternative power sources, particularly generators, as noted in the checklist's "alternative energy sources" section. The observational report indicates that businesses, particularly those with more financial capacity, often opt for this resource-intensive solution, emphasising its effectiveness in sustaining operations during power cuts.

Additionally, the report explains the adoption of technology, especially by younger participants, aligning with the checklist's focus on "communication systems" and "energy efficiency measures". The use of social media and online platforms emerged as a key coping mechanism, allowing businesses to adapt and maintain customer interactions even during power outages. The observation report noted the innovative approach of leveraging digital solutions to navigate the challenges of loadshedding, reflecting a generational shift in coping mechanisms.

Conversely, the report underscored the reliance of older participants on interpersonal networks and support structures, as highlighted in the "physical layout and organisation" and "resource management" sections of the checklist. Traditional community ties play a role in mitigating the impact of loadshedding for this demographic. Moreover, the observation report explained the struggles faced by participants with financial constraints, aligning with the checklist's emphasis on "infrastructure and equipment" and "resource management." Planning around outages was a primary coping mechanism for this group, emphasising the duties businesses must perform to synchronise activities with the unpredictable nature of loadshedding, especially when constrained by limited financial means.

4.8 AVAILABLE SUPPORT FROM GOVERNMENT

The examination of available support initiatives from the government was a critical aspect of understanding how external interventions or the lack thereof impact the homebased businesses during loadshedding. This section examines the collective sentiments of participants, including the municipal officials and the business owners, regarding government initiatives, offering valuable insights into the perceived adequacy or insufficiency of support. The contrasting views expressed by entrepreneurs and local authorities illustrates the dynamics between the community and governing bodies. The business owners claimed no government support, but municipal officials argued otherwise. Some participants stated:

Participant 2: *“Honestly, we haven’t seen much in terms of government initiatives. It feels like we are left to deal with this on our own. Some support or policies would go a long way to help us cope with loadshedding. But it’s like they don’t even see us.”*

Participant 7: *“I attended a community meeting where they promised change. But what changed? Nothing! It’s like they think we’re fools. No help, no support. It’s infuriating.”*

Participant 1: *“The government initiatives? Well, they didn’t reach us.”*

The participants collectively express a pervasive frustration and discouragement stemming from what they perceived as a lack of concrete government initiatives to mitigate the adversities caused by loadshedding on their businesses. The prevailing sentiment is one of being left to navigate these challenges independently, with a shared perception of neglect and invisibility from governmental bodies. The assurances made during community meetings, which were anticipated to bring about positive change, seem to have fallen short of expectations, resulting in a sense of unsatisfactory support. This, in turn, prompts entrepreneurs to question the effectiveness and commitment of government interventions in addressing the tangible impacts of loadshedding. T

he observed frustrations are indicative of a broader narrative wherein businesses, reliant on consistent power supply, feel let down by the perceived inadequacies in governmental responses. The absence of tangible support initiatives amplifies the challenges faced by these entrepreneurs, intensifying the struggle to maintain operational stability during power outages. This collective sentiment is not merely a personal grievance but points to a systemic issue that extends beyond individual experiences. It reflects a broader disconnect between the expectations of the entrepreneurial community and the perceived efficacy of government

measures. As businesses grapple with the disruptive effects of loadshedding, the absence of visible, effective interventions contributes to a growing scepticism about the role of the government in alleviating these challenges.

Studies by Mwaura and Githui (2020) and Ongore et al. (2020) highlight the importance of government intervention in facilitating the growth and sustainability of businesses, particularly in challenging environments. However, the absence of tangible support measures for women entrepreneurs during loadshedding undermines the perceived role of the government as a facilitator of economic development. This scepticism is further compounded by the persistence of power disruptions and the adverse impact they have on business operations. Without proactive measures to mitigate the effects of loadshedding, entrepreneurs may increasingly view government interventions as ineffective or insufficient in addressing their needs.

The responses from local authorities present a contrasting narrative to the sentiments expressed by entrepreneurs, as they highlighted existing initiatives and efforts to address the challenges posed by loadshedding. According to local authorities, various measures and support systems have been implemented, demonstrating a commitment to mitigating the impact on businesses within the community. These initiatives encompass both short-term relief mechanisms and long-term strategies aimed at enhancing resilience. This was captured from the responses of the two local authorities who said:

Local Municipal Leader 1: *“We’ve put in place several initiatives to support businesses during loadshedding, but community participation is crucial. Unfortunately, attendance at meetings discussing these initiatives has been limited, hindering the effective communication of available support mechanisms.”*

Local Municipal Leader 2: *“Honestly, we are trying to help these people, but they don’t appreciate. Others don’t even pitch to ask for help, they only insult us. Programmes are there but people don’t use them, and funds go back.”*

Local authorities complained about a lack of community engagement and participation, noting that crucial information about available support often goes unnoticed. They emphasised the importance of community members attending meetings, at which these initiatives are discussed, and decisions are made. The authorities asserted that greater collaboration and active involvement from the community are essential for the success and sustainability of government interventions. However, the responses from the local authorities reflect a concerning lack of

clarity and specificity regarding initiatives aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs during loadshedding.

Despite efforts made by the researcher to probe and elicit detailed responses, the authorities' vagueness suggests a potential absence or inadequacy of proactive measures to address the challenges faced by women in the informal sector. This discrepancy between the experiences reported by women entrepreneurs and the responses provided by local authorities raises questions about the efficacy and transparency of existing support mechanisms. It is reasonable that the women's accounts of limited government initiatives are indeed accurate, highlighting a significant gap between policy intentions and practical implementation.

The observed discordance between the community members' sentiments and the perspectives of local authorities resonates with a prevalent phenomenon discussed in the existing literature on local governance. Studies by scholars Mees et al. (2019) and Johnson (2023) state the potential for misalignment between the needs of community members and the actions of governing bodies. This recurring phenomenon points to the dynamics inherent in local governance structures where communities often have contrary views as compared to local authorities in terms of governance.

The disagreement in viewpoints regarding government initiatives during loadshedding introduces an additional layer of complexity to this discourse. According to Gumede (2022), various factors contribute to the disjunction observed, and these have been recognised in scholarly works on local governance. Communication gaps, where the information about government initiatives does not effectively reach the community, can lead to misunderstandings and perceptions of neglect. Divergent priorities between the authorities and the community members may also contribute to these disparities.

4.9 PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants' recommendations offer valuable insights into the strategies they believe would enhance the sustainability of their home-based businesses in the context of loadshedding. A predominant suggestion revolved around the improvement of infrastructure at home to ensure a more reliable power supply. This recommendation aligns with the participants' shared perspective that creating an environment with stable electricity is crucial not only for individual businesses but also for fostering an overall environment where women-owned enterprises can thrive. Moreover, the participants expressed a need for a comprehensive approach that combines financial support and potential training programmes. This multifaceted

strategy is seen as essential for not only enduring the challenges posed by loadshedding but also for contributing to the sustained growth of their businesses. This was evident in some of the responses:

Participant 5: *“A comprehensive approach that combines financial support, better infrastructure, and maybe even training programmes for more sustainable practices. This would not only help us survive loadshedding but also contribute to the overall growth of our business.”*

Participant 10: *Financial aid, affordable power solutions, and real support for women. It's not just a request; it's what we deserve after all we're going through.”*

The emphasis placed on training programmes aligns with existing literature highlighting the significance of skill acquisition and capacity building for entrepreneurship in challenging environments (Cassar, 2007; Masurel, 2005). Research suggests that access to training and mentorship programmes can significantly enhance the success rates of small businesses, particularly those operated by women (Ahl, 2006; Brush et al., 2009). By advocating for training initiatives, the participants recognised the value of continuous learning and adaptation in navigating the complexities of the informal sector amidst persistent challenges such as loadshedding.

Furthermore, the demand for financial aid and affordable power solutions is similar to findings from studies emphasising the importance of access to finance and reliable infrastructure for sustainable business operations (Beck et al., 2004; World Bank, 2020). Women entrepreneurs, in particular, often face barriers in accessing capital and affordable utilities, hindering their ability to grow and thrive (Kabeer & Natali, 2013; Field, 2005). Therefore, the participants' call for targeted financial support and infrastructure improvements reflects a strategic approach to addressing systemic inequalities and promoting economic empowerment among women-owned enterprises.

Importantly, the participants' insistence that these recommendations are not mere requests but essential considerations underscores the urgency of addressing the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs (Brush et al., 2009; Kabeer & Natali, 2013). The demand for accountability and tangible support signals a shift towards more inclusive policies and programmes that acknowledge the diverse needs and contributions of women in the informal sector (Ahl, 2006; Masurel, 2005). By intensifying the needs of women entrepreneurs and

advocating for systemic change, this collective call highlights the imperative of fostering an enabling environment where women can thrive despite adversities such as loadshedding.

4.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented and analysed the findings, delving into the experiences of women entrepreneurs struggling with challenges during loadshedding. It showed distinct patterns, themes, and resilient strategies, offering a profound understanding of their diverse journeys of the women. Beginning with a comprehensive overview of participant demographics, the chapter navigated through emotional and psychological dimensions, diverse perceptions about government support initiatives, and strategies employed for business sustainability. Furthermore, it provided a thorough exploration of the multifaceted impact of loadshedding on business sustainability, unveiling coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies embraced by women entrepreneurs. An analysis seamlessly contextualised the findings within the existing literature, enriching the comprehension of the studied phenomenon. As transition to the next chapter happens, a discussion will be established to weave together the findings and derive meaningful insights.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the main findings of the study, and an overall conclusion with recommendations.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter delves into the discussion of the findings, aiming to elucidate the underlying dynamics and implications arising from the data. Through the lens of the SLA, this chapter critically examines the sustainability of WHBBs, explores perceptions regarding the impact of loadshedding, and delves into the coping mechanisms employed by entrepreneurs. By synthesising qualitative data with relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, Chapter 5 provides a holistic understanding of the complexities inherent in sustaining home-based businesses in the informal sector. The conclusion synthesises key findings and reflects on their implications for policy, practice, and future research within the SLA framework. It acknowledges the agency and resilience of women entrepreneurs while advocating for targeted interventions to empower them economically and socially. Finally, the chapter provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, government agencies, and civil society organisations. These recommendations aim to address the identified challenges and create an enabling environment for the growth and prosperity of WHBBs in South Africa's informal sector.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study analysed the sustainability of WHBBs in Newtown, South Africa, amidst the challenge of loadshedding. Employing the SLA framework (DFID, 1999) as a guiding framework, the research explored the livelihood strategies and resilience of these women entrepreneurs.

The findings reveal a complex interaction of vulnerabilities, assets, and coping mechanisms employed by the women to navigate the challenges posed by loadshedding. The SLA emphasises diversification of income sources as a key strategy for building resilience (Carney, 1998). The study demonstrates this principle in action, as the women entrepreneurs adopted various strategies to keep their businesses afloat during power outages.

Additionally, this aligns with the core tenet of the SLA, with some women shifting their business models from service-based to product-based, or even a combination of both (Scoones,

1998). This diversification reduces vulnerability and strengthens their resilience, as highlighted by the SLA framework (Ellis, 2000). Beyond business models, the study identified a diverse range of operation scales, encompassing micro-enterprises, small businesses, and even larger ventures. This adaptability, a key aspect of the SLA, empowers the women to operate at different scales based on their resources and circumstances, ultimately contributing to long-term sustainability (Ellis, 2000). Furthermore, the duration of operation plays a crucial role.

The study captured the evolving trajectory of these livelihoods, from 'start-ups' navigating initial challenges, to established businesses with greater experience (Zahra et al., 2020; Carney, 1998). While start-ups exhibit greater vulnerability, established businesses demonstrate a stronger capacity to withstand external shocks such as loadshedding. The ability to sustain operations over time, a core indicator of resilience (Scoones, 1998), is reflected in the varied durations observed within the study.

The research also explains the multifaceted vulnerabilities faced by WHBBs in the context of loadshedding, drawing upon the SLA's concept of vulnerability contexts (Carney, 1998). The study positions loadshedding as a significant challenge that disproportionately impacts these businesses, aligning with the SLA's emphasis on the vulnerability of specific groups to external pressures. These vulnerabilities are further compounded by the gendered realities of the women entrepreneurs.

The persistent challenge of balancing family responsibilities with business operations is magnified by loadshedding (Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013). As primary caregivers, navigating external disruptions such as loadshedding becomes particularly complex, limiting their ability to effectively manage their businesses. Furthermore, societal expectations often dictate that women prioritise family needs when allocating income (Kabeer, 2005). This dynamic can hinder business sustainability during periods of power outages. Such financial pressures place WHBBs in a precarious position, vulnerable not only to external factors but also constrained by familial obligations.

These findings resonate with broader literature on structural gender inequalities. Molyneux (2006) highlights the persistent burden of domestic responsibilities and financial expectations placed on women across societies, exacerbating their vulnerability in crisis situations. Loadshedding acts as a microcosm of these larger dynamics, revealing how deeply entrenched gendered expectations limit women's economic autonomy and perpetuate their vulnerability.

The study's insights offer crucial considerations for policy interventions aimed at supporting WHBBs amidst loadshedding disruptions. The SLA framework emphasises the interconnectedness between enabling policies and vulnerable groups (DFID, 1999). The research exposes the vulnerability of WHBBs due to a lack of government or local council interventions (Lerner et al., 2018). This absence translates to a critical policy gap demanding recognition of their unique challenges and implementation of targeted solutions.

Financial support, training programmes, and improved access to alternative power sources are potential interventions aligned with the SLA's emphasis on enabling policy (DFID, 1999). Furthermore, WHBBs, as a vulnerable group, necessitate specific policy attention (DFID, 1999). Gender-sensitive policies promoting financial inclusion, reducing barriers to resources, and nurturing growth align with the SLA's focus on vulnerable groups. Such policies should aim to empower women in building sustainable livelihoods resilient to external shocks such as loadshedding.

The study has also highlighted the vital role of community support in sustaining WHBBs, resonating with the SLA's emphasis on social capital (DFID, 1999). Interventions that leverage community networks and initiatives, such as training, mentorship programmes, and experience-sharing platforms, can bolster women entrepreneurs and contribute to the resilience and sustainability of their businesses.

The economic impact of power disruptions, including financial losses and operational costs, underscores the importance of affordable energy access. Policies subsidising energy costs for small businesses, as suggested by Lerner et al. (2018), can alleviate the financial burden on WHBBs.

In summary, the study presents a complex representation: while some WHBBs demonstrate resilience and adaptive capacity in the face of loadshedding, sustaining their operations over time remains a considerable challenge. The sustainability of these businesses varies. Many have proven to be sustainable and will likely withstand shocks in the long run. However, others have shown to be unsustainable, running the risk of not surviving the era of loadshedding.

Reflecting on the research objectives

This research aimed to analyse the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in the context of electricity loadshedding. To achieve this goal, the study pursued three specific objectives, 1) to identify the types of home-based businesses in which women in Newtown are engaged, 2) to explore the perceptions of women who own home-based

businesses in Newtown regarding the effect of loadshedding on the sustainability of their home-based businesses, and 3) To examine the mechanisms developed by women-owned home-based businesses in Newtown to cope with loadshedding.

Objective 1: *To identify the types of home-based businesses in which women in Newtown are engaged.*

The research investigated the diversity of home-based businesses operated by women in Newtown. This involved systematic analysis of interviews and observations, revealing a wide array of business types such as hair salons, spaza shops, food catering, sewing businesses, and internet cafes. These findings highlight the impressive diversity of these women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the socio-economic landscape.

Objective 2: *To explore the perceptions of women who own home-based businesses in Newtown regarding the effect of loadshedding on the sustainability of their home-based businesses.*

The second objective focused on capturing the perceptions of women entrepreneurs regarding the impact of loadshedding on their business sustainability. Structured interviews and observations gathered in-depth data on how loadshedding disrupts daily operations, causes economic consequences, and influences the emotional and psychological well-being of these women. The analysis revealed a range of insights, including disruptions to workflow and increased stress levels. By addressing this objective, the study illuminated the subjective experiences of women entrepreneurs facing electricity challenges.

Objective 3:

Objective 3 aimed to delve into the coping mechanisms employed by women entrepreneurs to deal with loadshedding. Through thematic analysis of the collected data, a spectrum of strategies was unveiled. These included using alternative power sources such as generators and inverters, employing flexible scheduling and time management approaches, and leveraging community and government support initiatives. By addressing this objective, the study provided a richer understanding of how WHBBs navigate the adverse effects of electricity loadshedding and showcase resourcefulness and adaptability in the face of challenges.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This research comprehensively investigated WHBBs in Newtown, South Africa, using the SLA as its guiding framework. The study began by discussing the background of the informal sector

in Newtown, highlighting the challenges posed by frequent power outages (loadshedding). It then presented the diverse range of businesses operated by these women entrepreneurs.

Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study gave valuable insights into the women's perspectives on the sustainability of their businesses under loadshedding conditions and the coping mechanisms they employed to navigate these disruptions. The research revealed the multifaceted challenges faced by these women entrepreneurs, including limited access to financial resources, difficulties in accessing markets, and the significant impact of loadshedding.

While the women demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, many businesses, particularly those newly established, struggled to achieve long-term sustainability. The analysis emphasised the interconnectedness of vulnerability, assets, and strategies within the SLA framework. Key coping strategies included investing in alternative energy sources, adapting business models, diversifying income streams, and leveraging social networks.

Verbatim quotes from the participants highlighted the emotional and financial burdens caused by loadshedding, underlining the need for comprehensive support systems. The qualitative approach, with its use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, allowed for a deep exploration of the women's lived experiences, capturing the nuances of home-based business dynamics. The SLA framework provided a robust lens for analysing the data, examining the interplay between the women's livelihood assets, their coping strategies, and the overall outcomes.

Therefore, the study makes the following recommendations for future research:

- **Investigate the effectiveness of existing support programmes:** Research the impact of current initiatives aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs in the informal sector, identifying areas for improvement and potential gaps in addressing their specific needs.
- **Explore innovative solutions for loadshedding:** Investigate the feasibility and accessibility of alternative energy solutions or business models specifically designed to mitigate the disruptions caused by loadshedding.
- **Foster collaborative partnerships:** Encourage partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector to develop and implement targeted interventions that address the systemic barriers and challenges faced by women in the informal economy.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study, despite its valuable insights, is not without its limitations. It is crucial to acknowledge these constraints as they offer a perspective on the generalisability and scope of the research findings.

One primary limitation lies in the size of the study's sample, consisting of 10 women entrepreneurs and two municipal leaders. While these participants provided rich and diverse narratives, the small sample size may impact the generalisability of the findings. The study focused on a specific locality, Steve Tshwete Local Municipality, and caution is warranted when extrapolating the results to broader contexts. Future research could benefit from a more extensive and varied participant sample to enhance the external validity of the findings.

The study was conducted during a specific period, and the impact of loadshedding on WHBBs may evolve over time. Economic, social, or political changes could alter the dynamics explored in this research. Therefore, the findings may be time-sensitive and might not fully capture the long-term effects of loadshedding on these businesses. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to track changes and developments over an extended period.

Another notable limitation is the absence of direct data from government or council representatives on interventions or support measures. The study relied on the perceptions and experiences of women entrepreneurs and municipal leaders, potentially missing nuanced insights into governmental policies and actions. Access to official documents, reports, or interviews with government officials could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the support mechanisms in place or lacking.

The study primarily focused on the impact of loadshedding on WHBBs. While efforts were made to consider a broad spectrum of factors, certain external elements influencing these businesses might not have been fully explored. Economic policies, global market trends, or other unforeseen external factors could contribute to the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and were beyond the study's immediate scope.

Acknowledging these limitations, future research endeavours could build on this foundation by addressing these constraints. A larger and more diverse sample, a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, and collaboration with governmental bodies for a more comprehensive understanding would enhance the robustness and applicability of future studies in this domain. Additionally, exploring the experiences of women entrepreneurs over an extended period and

in different geographical locations could offer a more nuanced perspective on the sustainability of their businesses in the context of loadshedding.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure 1.1: Interview Guide

Research Topic: The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Homebased Businesses in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities, South Africa.

1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- 1.1. Age category: 18-35 ☐ 36-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61+ ☐
- 1.2. Gender: Female ☐ Other ☐
- 1.3. Level of Education: Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Higher Edu. ☐
- 1.4. Years in the business

QUESTIONS RELATED TO LOADSHEDDING.

- 1.5. What is your perception about loadshedding?
- 1.6. How does loadshedding affect your business?
- 1.7. What are your coping mechanisms during loadshedding?
- 1.8. How have you managed to sustain your business during loadshedding?
- 1.9. What are the challenges you have experienced because of loadshedding?
- 1.10. What are alternative sources of energy you have used to mitigate the impact of loadshedding on your business?
- 1.11. What government initiatives implemented to assist during loadshedding?
- 1.12. What kind of support or assistance would you like to receive from the government to sustain your business?
- 1.13. Have you sought any support or resources specifically aimed at supporting women-owned businesses during loadshedding?
- 1.14. What are strategies that you think can assist the sustainability of your business during loadshedding?
- 1.15. What would you recommend as a best strategy for your business during loadshedding?

Annexure 1.2: Observation Checklist

Research Topic: Analysing The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Homebased Businesses in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities, South Africa.

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	OBSERVATION
Availability of Electricity:	Note the presence or absence of electricity during the observation. Observe if the business is currently experiencing loadshedding or power interruptions	
Alternative Energy Sources:	Look for the presence of backup power sources such as generators, solar panels, or batteries. Note the functionality and utilisation of these alternative energy sources during power outages.	
Lighting and Illumination:	Assess the adequacy and type of lighting used in the business premises. Note if additional lighting solutions or adjustments are made during loadshedding.	
Resource Management:	Observe the storage and management of resources (e.g., inventory, raw materials, finished products). Assess how the business adapts its resource management practices during loadshedding.	
Infrastructure and Equipment:	Note the availability and condition of essential equipment and machinery used in the business. Observe if any modifications or adjustments are made to accommodate power disruptions.	
Physical Layout and Organisation:	Assess the layout and organisation of the business premises. Observe if any spatial considerations or rearrangements to optimise operations during loadshedding.	
Communication Systems:	Observe the availability and functionality of communication systems (e.g., telephone, internet) during loadshedding. Note any alternative communication methods used in the absence of regular power supply.	
Energy Efficiency Measures:	Look for the implementation of energy-saving measures or technologies within the business. Observe any initiatives to reduce energy consumption or optimise energy efficiency.	
Safety and Security:	Assess the measures taken to ensure the safety and security of the business premises during loadshedding. Observe if any adaptations to maintain safety protocols or security measures in the absence of electricity.	

Annexure 1.3: Interview Guide (IsiZulu Translation)

Research Topic: Analysing The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Homebased Businesses in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities, South Africa.

1. ULWAZI LWABANTU

- 1.1. Isigaba sobudala: 18-35 ☐ 36-50 ☐ 51-60 61+ ☐
- 1.2. Ubulili: Owesifazane ☐ Okunye ☐
- 1.3. Izinga leMfundo: Isikole samabanga aphansi ☐ Isikole samabanga aphezulu ☐
Imfundo ye-Tertiary. ☐
- 1.4. Iminyaka ebhizinisini

IMIBUZO EHLOBENE NE-LOADSHEDDING.

- 1.5. Uyini umbono wakho mayelana ne-loadshedding?
- 1.6. Ukuchithwa kwemithwalo wegezi (loadshedding) kuthinta kanjani ibhizinisi lakho?
- 1.7. Yiziphi izindlela zakho zokubhekana nazo ngesikhathi sokuchitha imithwalo yegezi?
- 1.8. Ukwazile kanjani ukugcina ibhizinisi lakho ngesikhathi sokuchitha imithwalo yegezi (iLoadshedding)?
- 1.9. Yiziphi izinselelo ohlangabezane nazo ngenxa yokuchitha imithwalo?
- 1.10. Yimiphi eminye imithombo yamandla oyisebenzisile ukunciphisa umthelela we-loadshedding ebhizinisini lakho?
- 1.11. Yiziphi izinyathelo zikahulumeni ezisetshenzisiwe ukusiza ngesikhathi sokuchithwa kwemithwalo yegezi?
- 1.12. Hlobo luni loxhaso noma usizo ongathanda ukuluthola kuhulumeni ukuze ugcine ibhizinisi lakho?
- 1.13. Usume wafuna ukwesekwa noma izinsiza ezihlose ngokukhethekile ukusekela amabhizinisi abesifazane ngesikhathi sokuchithwa kwemithwalo?
- 1.14. Yimaphi amasu ocabanga ukuthi angasiza ukusimama kwebhizinisi lakho ngesikhathi sokuchitha imithwalo yegezi?
- 1.15. Yini ongayincoma njengeqhinga elihle kakhulu lebhizinisi lakho ngesikhathi sokuchitha imithwalo yegezi?

Annexure 1.4: Interview Guide (Authorities)

Research Topic: Analysing The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Homebased Businesses in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities, South Africa.

1. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS:

- 1.1 Age category: 18-35 ☐ 36-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61+ ☐
- 1.2 Gender: Female ☐ Other ☐
- 1.3 Level of Education: Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Higher Edu. ☐
- 1.4 Years in the position

Questions related to loadshedding.

- 1.5. What are your perceptions regarding loadshedding?
- 1.6. How has loadshedding affected women-owned informal home-based businesses in your locality?
- 1.7. What are prevailing challenges faced by these businesses during loadshedding?
- 1.8. How has loadshedding impacted growth potential of women-owned informal home-based businesses?
- 1.9. What measures are developed to support women-owned informal home-based businesses during loadshedding?
- 1.10. How effective do you think these mechanisms have been in ensuring the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses during loadshedding?
- 1.11. What strategies would you recommend enhancing the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in your locality during loadshedding?
- 1.12. Is there any additional information or perspective you would like to share regarding the sustainability of women-owned informal home-based businesses in the era of loadshedding?

Annexure 1.5: Interview Guide for Authorities (IsiZulu Translation)

Research Topic: Analysing The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Homebased Businesses in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities, South Africa.

1. ULWAZI LWABANTU

- 1.1. Isigaba sobudala: 18-35 ☐ 36-50 ☐ 51-60 61+ ☐
- 1.2. Ubulili: Owesifazane ☐ Owesilisa ☐ Okunye ☐
- 1.3. Izinga leMfundo: Isikole samabanga aphansi ☐ Isikole samabanga aphezulu ☐
Imfundo ye-Tertiary. ☐
- 1.4. Iminyaka esikhundleni

IMIBUZO EHLOBENE NE-LOADSHEDDING.

- 1.5. Yimiphi imibono yakho mayelana ne-loadshedding?
- 1.6. Ukuchithwa kwemithwalo yegezi kuye kwathinta kanjani amabhizinisi angahlelekile asekhaya aphethwe ngabesifazane endaweni yangakini?
- 1.7. Yiziphi izinselelo ezikhona ezibhekene nala mabhizinisi ngesikhathi sokuchithwa kwemithwalo?
- 1.8. Ukuchithwa kwemithwalo kuye kwaba nomthelela kanjani emandleni okukhula kwamabhizinisi angahlelekile asekhaya aphethwe ngabesifazane?
- 1.9. Yiziphi izinyathelo ezithuthukisiwe zokusekela amabhizinisi angahlelekile asekhaya aphethwe ngabesifazane ngesikhathi sokuchithwa kwemithwalo yegezi?
- 1.10. Ucabanga ukuthi lezi zindlela ziye zasebenza kangakanani ekuqinisekiseni ukusimama kwamabhizinisi angahlelekile asekhaya aphethwe ngabesifazane ngesikhathi sokuchithwa kwemithwalo yegezi?
- 1.11. Yimaphi amasu ongawancoma ukuthuthukisa ukusimama kwamabhizinisi angahlelekile asekhaya aphethwe ngabesifazane endaweni yakho ngesikhathi sokuchithwa kwemithwalo yegezi?
- 1.12. Ingabe lukhona ulwazi olwengeziwe noma umbono ongathanda ukwabelana ngawo mayelana nokuzinza kwamabhizinisi angahlelekile asekhaya aphethwe ngabesifazane esikhathini sokuchithwa kwemithwalo yegezi?

Annexure 2.1: Informed Consent Form for Use of Data and Participation

CONSENT FORM

_____: The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Homebased Businesses in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities, South Africa.

I, the undersigned, confirm that (Please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about this study, as provided in the information sheet dated	☐
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my participation	☐
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.	☐
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn	☐
5.	the procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g., use of names, pseudonym, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	☐
6.	if applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	☐
7.	the use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me	☐
8.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	☐
9.	I, along with the researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	☐

Participant:

Name of Participant Signature Date

Researcher:

Name of Researcher Signature Date

Annexure 2.2: Informed Consent Form for Use of Data and Participation (IsiZulu Translation)

IFOMU LOKUVUMA

IFOMU LOKUVUMA: Analysing The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Homebased Businesses in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities, South Africa.

1.	Ngifunde futhi ngaqonda ulwazi mayelana nalolu cwaningo, njengoba kuhlinzekwe ephepheni lolwazi elibhalwe	
2.	Nginikwe ithuba lokubuza imibuzo mayelana nocwaningo nokubamba kwami iqhaza	
3.	Ngivuma ngokuzithandela ukubamba iqhaza ocwaningweni	
4.	Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ngingahoxa nganoma yisiphi isikhathi ngaphandle kokunikeza izizathu nokuthi ngeke ngijeziswe ngokuhoxa futhi ngeke ngibuzwe ukuthi kungani ngihoxisile	
5.	izinqubo eziphathelene nokugcinwa kwemfihlo ziye zachazwa ngokucacile (isib. ukusetshenziswa kwamagama, i-pseudonym, ukungaziwa kwedatha, njll) kimi.	
6.	uma kusebenza, imigomo ehlukile yemvume yezingxoxo, umsindo, ividiyo noma ezinye izinhlobo zokuqoqwa kwedatha ziye zachazwa futhi zanikezwa kimi.	
7.	ukusetshenziswa kwedatha ocwaningweni, izincwadi, ukwabelana nokugcina kuye kwachazwa kimi	
8.	Ngiyaqonda ukuthi abanye abacwaningi bazokwazi ukufinyelela kule datha kuphela uma bevuma ukulondoloza imfihlo yedatha futhi uma bevumelana nemigomo engiyicacisile kuleli fomu.	
9.	khetha okukodwa kuphela kwalokhu okulandelayo: • Ngingathanda ukuthi igama lami lisetshenziswe futhi ngiqonde ukuthi ngishilo noma ngibhale njengengxenywe yalolu cwaningo luzosetshenziswa emibikweni, ezincwadini nakwezinye izinto ezikhipha ucwaningo ukuze noma yini engiyifake isandla kule phrojekthi iqashelwe • Angifuni igama lami lisetshenziswe kule phrojekthi	
10.	Mina, kanye nomcwaningi, ngiyavuma ukusayina nokuthandana naleli fomu lokuvuma elinolwazi.	

Umhlanganyeli:

Igama Lomhlanganyeli

Isiginesha

Usuku

Umcwaningi:

Igama loMcwaningi

Isiginesha

Usuku

Annexure 3: Letter Requesting Permission to Conduct Study



Private Bag X11283, Mbombela 1200, South Africa, Tel: (013) 002 0232

Office of The Municipal Manager
Steve Tshwete Local Municipality
C/o Wanderers Ave and Walter Sisulu Street
Middelburg
1050

Dear Sir/Madam

Request to conduct research.

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Development Studies Degree, our students are expected to complete a research project. In this regard, we are kindly requesting permission for Ms. Vuyelwa Caroline Magagula to conduct her project in your local municipality, Newtown. The title of the project is:

Analysing The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Homebased Businesses in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities, South Africa. Community members and municipal officials who are willing to participate, would be asked to respond to the interview questions as attached on Annexure 1-4 as documented in this request.

We would like to make it clear that the project is solely for academic purposes, and the community members names or the municipal officials who will participate in the project will remain anonymous. The project will be guided by the University of Mpumalanga's ethics policy, together with the POPI Act in ensuring that personal information is kept private. Accordingly, details of the project will not be publicised without consent or permission from the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality.

A copy of the completed feedback report will be available to you on request. For further details please contact the undersigned.

Your approval will be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards

Signature

Date: 9 October 2023

Dr N Yende

Work telephone number: 0130020495

E-mail: ntsizwazonke.yende@ump.ac.za

Annexure 4: Approval Letter to Conduct Study



Steve Tshwete
Local Municipality

PO Box 14 | Middelburg | 1050
Cnr Walter Sisulu Str & Wanderers Ave
Middelburg | Mpumalanga
T: +27 (0)13 249 7000 | F: +27 (0)13 243 2550
council@stlm.gov.za

Your reference:

Our reference: (MM/lm)10/2/2/5

Ms. V C Magagula
Student No. 201919052
School of Development Studies
University of Mpumalanga
Private Bag X11283
Mbombela
1200

Dear Ms. Magagula

RE: APPROVAL TO CONDUCT A STUDY AT STEVE TSHWETE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

1. The above-mentioned subject bears reference and your request dated 09 October 2023 refers.
2. On the 07 November 2023, this office received a request from the above-mentioned student, to conduct a research under the topic Analysing The Sustainability of Woman-owned Informal Homebased Business in the era of Loadshedding in Newtown, Steve Tshwete Local Municipality in Mpumalanga Province.
3. Permission is therefore granted to Ms. Magagula as per the request, to conduct research as part of her studies for academic year 2023.
4. It will be appreciated if findings or conclusions of the research can be shared with this office after completion in order for us to improve our services.

Yours sincerely

Mr. S.M. Mnguni
Municipal Manager
Date:



Annexure 5: Ethical Clearance Certificate

Faculty Research Ethics Committee

FREC-UMP



UNIVERSITY OF
MPUMALANGA

Ref: UMP/Magagula/10/2023

Date: 09 October 2023

Vuyelwa Caroline Magagula [201919052]

School of Development Studies

University of Mpumalanga

RE: APPROVAL FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR THE STUDY:

Analyzing The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Home-based Businesses in the Era of Electricity Loadshedding in Steve Tshwete Local Municipality

Reference is made to the above heading.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences) UMP, approved the ethical clearance of the above-mentioned study. Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e., Questionnaire/Interviews Schedule, Informed Consent form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach, and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be stored securely in the school/division for a period of 5 years.

The Ethical Clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter, Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ogujiuba Kanayo'.

Prof. Ogujiuba Kanayo

Chairperson: FREC,

Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences

University of Mpumalanga

Annexure 6: Plagiarism Report

Master's Dissertation_Vuyelwa Magagula2024.pdf

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Annexure 7: Certificate of Editing and Proof Reading



18 March 2024

CERTIFICATE

Vuyelwa Caroline Magagula

Dear Vuyelwa

Thank you for using Impela Editing Services to edit your Master's thesis entitled "*Analysing The Sustainability of Women-owned Informal Home-based Businesses in the Era of Electricity Loadshedding in Steve Tshwete Local Municipality*".

I have proofread for errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax and typing mistakes. I have formatted your work and checked the references (this means checking the formatting).

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I wish you the very best in your submission.

Kind regards

Helen Bond (Bachelor of Arts, HDE)