




**COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND ASSET-BASED
GOVERNANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT:
EVIDENCE FROM ZIMBABWE**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51193/IJAER.2026.12302>

Received: 18 Apr. 2026 / Accepted: 28 Apr. 2026 / Published: 09 May 2026

ABSTRACT

The need to combine endogenous resources and institutional support in the form of integrated governance strategies to achieve sustainable local development in resource-constrained communities has been underspecified in terms of how such mechanisms create social impacts. This study examines the social outcomes and community resilience arising from Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and government support, with community leadership positioned as a mediating mechanism, in Ward 23, Murehwa South District, Zimbabwe. The study used a mixed-methods design which involved a structured survey of 180 respondents that was analyzed with the aid of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) and qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. Quantitative results indicate that the adoption of ABCD and government support have a significant positive impact on social capital, livelihood diversification and access to services and community leadership has the most significant direct impact on social well-being and adaptive capacity. Mediation analysis shows that leadership mediates the two relationships partially, enhancing the conversion of assets and public support into long-term community initiatives. Qualitative findings recognize leadership-mediated asset mapping, collective action, and co-designed extension services as critical processes yielding community gardens, micro-enterprises and improved coping strategies that strengthen resilience. The research provides an empirically tested model that sustainable development in vulnerable environments depends on leadership-based, asset-based governance, providing evidence-based information to enhance institutional capacity and social cohesion in similar situations elsewhere in the world.

Keywords: *Asset-Based community development, Community resilience, Community leadership, Government support, Community development*

1. INTRODUCTION

Rural transformation and sustainable development have become important policy and research concerns, especially because rural areas continue to face poverty, climate-related vulnerability and institutional weaknesses [1]. In such contexts, development is increasingly understood as a multidimensional process that extends beyond income generation to include the strengthening of livelihoods, resilience and community agency[2]. The change is particularly pertinent in the agrarian contexts where livelihoods are directly related to natural endowments hence prone to the shocks of the environment as well as governance and resource constraints [3], [4]. Recent studies emphasize that long-term sustainability in these environments depends not only on access to resources, but also on the capacity of communities to organize collectively, manage local assets, and adapt to changing socio-economic and ecological conditions [5], [6].

In this shifting paradigm, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) has become prominent as a participatory method that places focus on local asset instead of local shortcoming [7]. ABCD aims to develop self-reliance and decrease dependence on outside assistance by targeting available human, social, and physical resources [8], [9]. Empirical evidence suggests that asset mobilization can enhance collective action, strengthen local ownership, and improve the sustainability of development interventions [10], [11], [12]. However, Ward, [13] also indicates that asset-based strategies alone may not be sufficient, particularly in environments where institutional capacity is limited. According to Shapland, [14], endogenous methods may have difficulties with producing a lasting impact unless there are conducive governance frameworks and external coordination.

Government support therefore remains a critical component of rural development processes [15], [16], [17]. Agricultural extension services, training programmes, subsidies, and provision of infrastructure are among the public interventions that play a crucial role in facilitating communities to convert local initiatives into economic and social achievements [16], [18]. At the same time Breuer, [19], García and Jackson, [20] argue that there is growing recognition that top-down development models may undermine local ownership and reduce long-term sustainability if they are not aligned with community priorities. Studies have shown that development outcomes are more effective when institutional support is delivered in ways that complement local capacities and encourage participation [11], [21]. This highlights the importance of understanding not only what resources are provided, but how they are integrated into local systems of governance and decision-making [14].

Community leadership plays a central role in this integration process, as Cloete et al. [22] and Nzimakwe and Zuma, [23] present leadership as a relational force that develops through

community practice and supports development outcomes. Leaders are organizers who engage locals, enable communication, and create a bridge between local efforts and external support systems [24], [25]. Effective leadership has been linked to increased trust, cooperation, and continuity of development projects [23]. On the other hand, a weak or externally imposed leadership structure may restrict the involvement and weaken long-term sustainability [14], [26]. Gisevius et al, [27] and Kahl [25] position leadership as a mediating mechanism through which local assets and institutional backing are translated into development results, especially in resource-limited rural settings. Such a mediating position is especially valued in rural contexts that are resource-limited, where formal governance systems might be inadequate, and where local organization is vital in maintaining development initiatives.

Despite these insights, existing research continues to treat ABCD, government support, and community leadership as largely separate domains of analysis [13], [26]. Consequently, little empirical evidence exists as to how these factors interact to determine community development and resiliency. Much of the literature provides conceptual support for participatory and asset-based approaches, but fewer studies have examined the causal pathways through which local assets, institutional support, and leadership combine to produce measurable outcomes [13]. This disparity is particularly high in rural and agricultural settings where the development processes are influenced by the multifaceted relationships between the environmental conditions, social organization, and the system of governance.

To address this gap, the current research paper examines social impacts and community resilience relating to ABCD and government-backed interventions in Ward 23, Murehwa South District, Zimbabwe by testing the following hypothesis;

- **H1:** Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) has a positive and significant effect on community development.
- **H2:** Government support has a positive and significant effect on community development.
- **H3:** Community leadership has a positive and significant effect on community development.
- **H4:** Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) has a positive and significant effect on community leadership.
- **H5:** Government support has a positive and significant effect on community leadership.
- **H6:** Community leadership mediates the relationship between ABCD and community development.
- **H7:** Community leadership mediates the relationship between government support and community development.

By adopting a mixed-methods approach and applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), the study examines both the direct and indirect relationships among these variables. The results will be used to create a more comprehensive understanding of rural development by showing the relationship between leadership, assets, and institutional support in the process of creating sustainable results. By so doing, the study offers not only theoretical knowledge but also practical advice to develop interventions that can be used to enhance development in resource limited agricultural societies.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

In this study, the research design that was used was a mixed-methods research design to study the association between Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), government support, community leadership, and community development outcomes. Mixed-methods designs are those in which both quantitative and qualitative methods are combined to give a more detailed picture of complex social phenomena [28]. Whereas quantitative methods can provide statistical testing of hypothesized relationships, qualitative methods can help to give an in-depth account of contextual meanings and lived experiences [29]. Analytical rigour is increased through the methodological triangulation and it further contributes to the credibility of the research findings [28]. As it is consistent with the pragmatic research philosophy, this design focused on practical solutions to development issues and the use of empirical evidence in community context [30].

2.2 Study Area and Sample

The research was done in Ward 23, Murehwa South District, Zimbabwe, which is a mainly agrarian society, with seasonal livelihoods, poor infrastructure and restricted markets. The target population was made of smallholder farmers, community members and Village Development Committee (VIDCOs) members. To achieve proportionality of the subgroup's as put forward by Goyal et al, [31] stratified sampling was used to make sure that the 18 villages of the ward were proportionally represented. Stratification enhances representativeness and minimizes sampling biasness within heterogeneous populations [32]. Each village had ten respondents making the total sample of 180 respondents which offered a sufficient number of community views.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

The structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to gather primary data. The systematic quantitative information on asset mobilization, leadership practices, the government support, and the development outcomes were gathered with the help of structured surveys [33]. Interviews and focus groups were used as techniques of acquiring qualitative data through interviews and focus groups with community leaders, farmers, and

residents to gain experiential experiences of development processes and dynamics of governance. Triangulation involved the use of multiple data sources, which helped reduce bias and improve validity and credibility [34]. Informed consent was given to all participants and ethical considerations that pertained to the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality and anonymity were highly adhered to during the research process.

2.4 Research framework

The research framework for this study conceptualizes community development outcomes as jointly determined by three core drivers, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) adoption, and government support and community leadership.

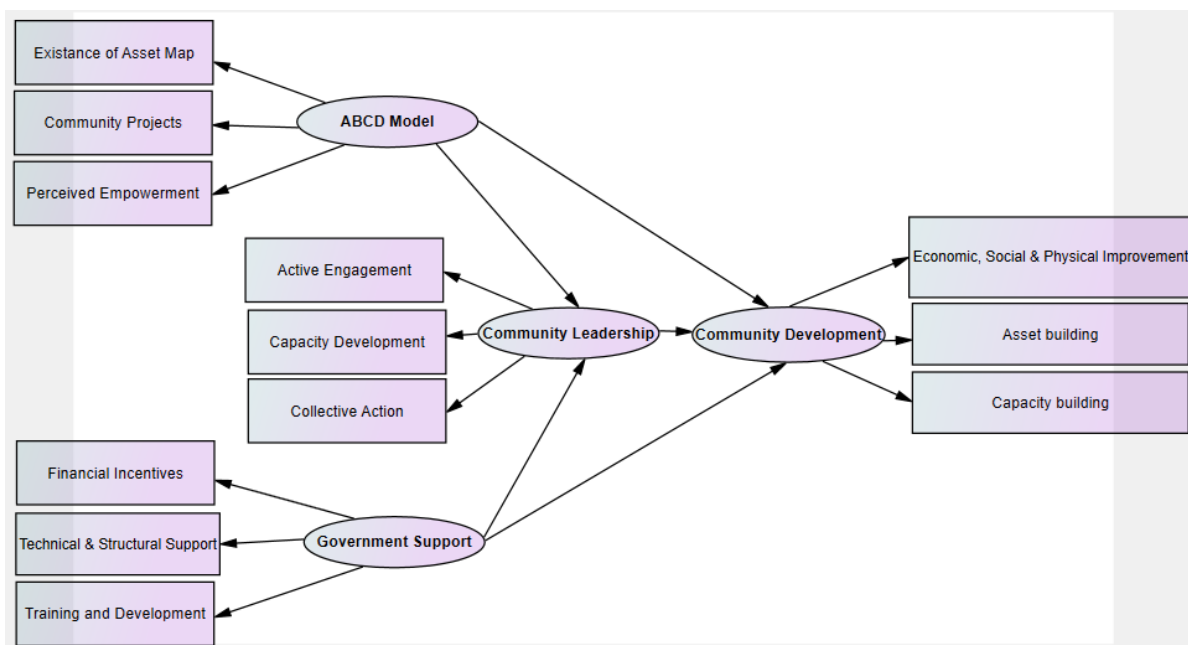


Figure 1: Research framework

Based on the framework presented in Figure 1, H1–H3 propose that each driver independently enhances community development, the ABCD model mobilizes local assets to enhance collective action, friendly government policies and training centers supply vital resources and capacity-building, and community leadership coordinates and sustains initiatives which impacts Community development. Under H4, community leadership mediates the ABCD model’s impact by translating asset inventories into organized, locally owned projects. H5 anticipates a synergistic government–leadership effect, wherein policy incentives, and training programs combine with leadership’s catalytic role to amplify grassroots development. In this framework, ABCD adoption and supportive policies converge on community development, with leadership at the nexus, both mediating and moderating these relationships. These interdependencies will be validated through

empirical testing that employs the multivariate analysis method and that allows quantifying the joint effect of the factors on the developmental path of Ward 23.

2.5 Measurement of Variables.

Table 1 summarizes the key constructs, their definitions, indicators, and measurement scales used in this study. Each variable was operationalized using context-specific items drawn from the literature to capture local realities of governance, leadership, asset mobilization, and development outcomes in Ward 23. These measures provide the basis for reliable empirical testing of the proposed relationships.

Table 1: Operational Variable

Variable	Definition	Indicator	Scale	Sources
Government Support	Government support refers to assistance financial/non-financial, regulatory, and institutional measures that support community development.	Incentives, Technical support, local training and development centres.	5-point Likert	6, 15,47
ABCD model (Asset-Based Community Development)	ABCD refers to a strengths-focused approach that maps and mobilizes existing local assets human skills, associations, physical resources and institutional capacities to drive resident-led development	Existence of an asset map, community-initiated projects, Perceived empowerment	5-point Likert	9, 49
Community Leadership	Community leadership refers to the active engagement and facilitation of local leaders in guiding their communities towards collective growth and improvement	Capacity Development, Active Engagement, Collective Action	5-point Likert	22, 23, 27
Community Development	Community development is as a process and strategy aimed at enhancing the economic, social and physical conditions of a specific community or place, along with the well-being of its residents	Economic, Social, and Physical Improvement, Asset Building, Capacity Building.	5-point Likert	5, 6

The indicators chosen for this study were based on construct validity and reflect context-specific, empirically valid and relevant aspects of social sustainability and community development. Since social sustainability encompasses participation, inclusion, resource access, and well-being the indicator for community development was measured through economic, social, asset-building, and

capacity-building, in line with other sustainability indicators [35]. ABCD adoption was captured through asset mapping, community-led projects, and empowerment because ABCD is a strengths-based approach that focuses on mobilizing local resources to drive resident-led development [8], [9]. Government support was measured through incentives, technical support, local training and development centers because previous research indicates that the effectiveness of government support is reflected in financial support, capacity development, institutional support, and infrastructure [15], [16], [36]. Community leadership was captured through capacity building, participation and collective action because leadership in community development is expressed in mobilization, coordination, participation and translating collective aspirations into action [22], [23], [27]. These indicators offer a valid framework for assessing the impact of community assets, institutional support and leadership on community development in the study area.

2.6 Data Analysis

The hypothesized relationships were analyzed by making use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with the help of SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM is the most appropriate in the situations when the focus of investigation is a prediction, intricate patterns of mediation and medium sample size[37]. This analysis was conducted in two stages, one of which entails the evaluation of the measurement model based on reliability and validity, and the other one is the evaluation of the structural model based on testing hypotheses. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and standard errors were also computed to estimate the standard errors and the statistical significance of path coefficients. It was by this process that inference was strengthened, and sound estimation of both the direct and indirect effect was made possible.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Respondent characteristics

The study obtained responses from 180 participants in Ward 23. As indicated in Table 2, there was a fairly balanced gender distribution with 52.22 percent of the respondents being male and 47.78 percent being female. In terms of ward position, the largest group comprised small-scale farmers (48.3%), followed by residents (32.8%) and VIDCO members (18.9%). Regarding education, most respondents had secondary education (29.4%), while 24.4% had tertiary or college education, 18.9% had primary education, 18.3% had university education, and 8.9% had no formal education. According to this profile, the sample consisted of respondents that have different social positions and educational backgrounds; this point supports the relevance of the findings to the context.

Table 2: Respondent Profile

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	94	52,22%
	Female	86	47,78%
	Total	180	100%
Position in the Ward	Resident	59	32,8%
	Small scale farmer	87	48,3%
	VIDCO	34	18,9%
	Total	180	100%
Level of Education	No formal education	16	8,9%
	Primary	34	18,9%
	Secondary	53	29,4%
	Tertiary/College	44	24,4%
	University	33	18,3%
	Total		180

3.2 Measurement model assessment

The measurement model was assessed to confirm the reliability and validity of the constructs prior to evaluating the structural relationships. As per the set procedures of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, the evaluation was done on the convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity. Measurement robustness is a condition that guarantees meaningful structural model interpretations that are empirically valid [37], [38].

3.2.1 Convergent validity

Convergent validity assesses the extent to which indicators of a construct share a high proportion of variance. Outer loadings must be greater than 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be higher than 0.50 [38], [39].

Table 3: Convergent Validity Results

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	AVE	Description
ABCD Model	X1.1	0.770	0,694	Valid
	X1.2	0.869		Valid
	X1.3	0.856		Valid
Government Support	X2.1	0.805	0,661	Valid
	X2.2	0.861		Valid
	X2.3	0.770		Valid
Community Leadership	X3.1	0.887	0,735	Valid
	X3.2	0.846		Valid
	X3.3	0.839		Valid
Community Development	Y1	0.833	0,664	Valid
	Y2	0.800		Valid
	Y3	0.811		Valid

As shown in Table 3, all indicator loadings exceeded the threshold of 0.70, while AVE values for all constructs in this case, ABCD Model (0.694), Government Support (0.661), Community Leadership (0.735), and Community Development (0.664) were above 0.50. These findings indicate that the constructs have more than half of the variance of the indicators, which is an acceptable level of convergent validity. It is especially relevant in the context of sustainability and governance studies where constructs are usually multidimensional, and situation-dependent [40].

3.2.2 Internal consistency reliability

Internal consistency reliability assesses how measures of the same construct yield the same results. In social science studies, a coefficient of 0.70 or more is an acceptable value of Cronbach alpha and composite reliability [41], [42].

Table 4: Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho A)	Composite Reliability (rho C)
ABCD Model	0.782	0.806	0.871
Community Development	0.747	0.749	0.856
Community Leadership	0.820	0.828	0.893
Government Support	0.744	0.756	0.854

As can be seen in Table 4, all constructs had values above this threshold with Cronbach’s alpha of between 0.744 and 0.820 and composite reliability of between 0.854 and 0.893. These findings confirm that the measurement scales are reliable and suitable for assessing complex relationships among ABCD Model, Government Support, Community Leadership, and Community Development. Reliable measurement is essential to avoid instability in sustainability-related empirical conclusions [43].

3.2.3 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity guarantees that constructs are empirically different, and that they represent different conceptual domains. The Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio is widely recommended, with values below 0.90 indicating adequate discriminant validity [38], [44].

Table 5: Discriminant Validity Results (HTMT)

Variable	ABCD Model	CD	CL	GS
ABCD Model				
Community Development	0.720			
Community Leadership	0.672	0.869		
Government Support	0.766	0.725	0.650	

As presented in Table 5, all HTMT values were below the 0.90 threshold, confirming that the constructs are sufficiently distinct. This indicates that ABCD Model, Community Leadership, Government Support, and Community Development represent related but non-overlapping dimensions. Establishing discriminant validity is particularly critical in governance studies where conceptual overlap between constructs is common [40].

3.3 Structural model assessment

After validating the measurement model, the structural model was assessed to determine the hypothesized relationships between the constructs. Structural model assessment in PLS-SEM involves examining explanatory power (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and path significance using bootstrapping [38], [42].

3.3.1 Explanatory power and predictive relevance

The coefficient of determination (R^2), is used to determine the percentage of the variance that is explained by exogenous variables. Values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 are commonly interpreted as weak, moderate and substantial, respectively [38].

Table 6: R-Square

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Community Development	0,536	0,528
Community Leadership	0,360	0,353

Table 6 indicates that the model accounts 53.6% variation in Community Development ($R^2 = 0.536$), which is moderate to high. Another R^2 of 0.360 was also registered by Community Leadership implying moderate explanatory power. These findings indicate that both ABCD Model and Government Support are significant predictors of the leadership capacity and development outcomes.

The predictive relevance was measured through (Q^2) with a positive value signifying predictive ability [38]. The Q^2 values for Community Development (0.343) and Community Leadership (0.254) confirm that the model has satisfactory predictive relevance, suggesting its applicability beyond the sample context.

3.3.2 Direct effects

Structural relationship significance was assessed by bootstrapping, 5,000 resamples, t-values exceeding 1.96, p-values less than 0.05 demonstrate statistical significance [38].

Table 7: Direct Effect Results

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Description
ABCD Model -> CD	0.187	2.594	0.010	Significant
ABCD Model -> CL	0.382	4.850	0.000	Significant
CL -> CD	0.486	8.157	0.000	Significant
GS -> CD	0.181	2.691	0.007	Significant
GS -> CL	0.288	3.741	0.000	Significant
LO -> SCRM	0.204	2.594	0.010	Significant
SCRM -> SCR	0.273	4.850	0.000	Significant

The Table 11 results show that all the hypothesized relationships are positive and significant. The ABCD Model has a significant impact on Community Development ($\beta = 0.187$, $p = 0.010$) and a greater impact on Community Leadership ($\beta = 0.382$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, Community Development ($\beta = 0.181$, $p = 0.007$) and Community Leadership ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.001$) are both strongly influenced by Government Support.

Community Development is directly influenced by Community Leadership the most ($\beta = 0.486$, $p < 0.001$) which makes it central. This supports the argument that leadership acts as a coordinating mechanism that transforms local assets and institutional support into tangible development outcomes [27].

3.3.3 Mediation effects

The mediation analysis in Table 8 shows that Community Leadership significantly mediated the relationship between ABCD Model and Community Development ($\beta = 0.186$, $p < 0.001$), as well as between Government Support and Community Development ($\beta = 0.140$, $p = 0.001$). Because the direct effects remained significant, the results indicate partial mediation rather than full mediation. This means that ABCD Model and Government Support influence Community Development both directly and indirectly through strengthened Community Leadership.

Table 8: Indirect Effect Results

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Description
ABCD Model -> CL -> CD	0,186	4,159	0,000	Significant
GS -> CL -> CD	0,140	3,294	0,001	Significant

3.4 Qualitative findings

3.4.1. Effect of the ABCD Model on Community Leadership.

Recurring responses indicated that asset-mapping and asset-driven activities regularly pushed local leaders to take stock of ward-level resources and prioritize projects that used existing strengths so as to justify decisions to residents, a pattern that explains the positive and significant effect of the ABCD Model on community leadership.

3.4.2 Effect of Government support on Community leadership.

Many respondents described government funding and technical advice which can be classified as recognition by the Government and also viewed as catalysts that enabled leaders to plan and scale local initiatives, these recurring accounts align with the statistically significant positive effect of government support on community leadership.

3.4.3 Effect of Community Leadership on Community Development.

Interviewees gave credit to proactive local leaders, several times, to transform mapped assets to operation projects like community gardens and small business ventures which justifies why leadership has the greatest positive impact on community development.

3.4.4 Effect of ABCD Model on Community Development.

Participants often reported tangible improvements that began with local asset identification, supporting the finding that ABCD has a direct, positive though smaller effect on community development.

3.4.5 Effect of Government Support on Community Development.

The recurrent themes revealed that government inputs that entail grants and training like the pfumvudza/intwasa initiative supplemented local efforts and opened larger goals which corresponds to the positive and significant direct impact of government support on the development of the community, observed.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Effect of the ABCD Model on Community Leadership

The results show that the ABCD model is an important tool in enhancing community leadership through mobilization of local skills, networks, and physical assets in a manner that promotes participatory, accountable, and locally rooted leadership. The asset mapping process and community-led projects observed in Ward 23 seems to have increased the legitimacy of local leaders, as well as their capacity to plan, coordinate and manage collective action in a more efficient way. This suggests that ABCD does more than identify available resources; it creates a governance environment in which leadership becomes more responsive and more closely connected to community needs. The results are consistent with Gisevius et al, [27] who argue that local leadership becomes more effective when it is embedded in structures that promote coordination and collective responsibility. They are also consistent with Nel, [45] who demonstrates that asset-based strategies can enhance the mobilizing ability of the leaders and increase the community engagement in African settings.

These results also indicate that ABCD helps in developing leadership through promoting more democratic and inclusive local government. Rather than reinforcing hierarchical control, the approach appears to support leadership practices that are shaped by participation, shared decision-making, and greater community voice, which in turn strengthen ownership and accountability. Wajdi, [46] also notes that participatory development processes increase the flexibility of the projects because they are based on local realities and the community is expanded. Similarly, Mohammadi, [47] demonstrates that engagement can be more meaningful when the decision-

support processes render exclusion more visible and allow more inclusive reactions to community concerns. Taken together, the results imply that ABCD strengthens community leadership most effectively when local assets are translated into collective coordination, participatory governance, and sustained engagement around common development priorities.

4.2 Effect of Government Support on Community Leadership

The study findings reveal that government support positively and significantly affects leadership in communities. This indicates that public aid does not just offer material resources but enhances the ability of the local leaders to mobilize, lead and inspire the community action. When government support comes in the form of infrastructure, training, financing, and policy backing, it creates conditions that allow leadership to function more effectively and respond to local needs in a more coordinated way [15], [20]. In this respect, government intervention seems to work in tandem with the current community resources, and not to substitute them, and to strengthen the institutions by which leadership is capable of enlisting participation and maintaining development activity. This is also reflected by Sibanda and Mupfururi, [36] who note that government assistance allows local leaders to plan and grow projects with greater confidence, particularly when they are involved in the design of the programme in the very first step. McCordic et al, [11] further show that leaders gain greater authority and access to resources when officials work with them in shaping development interventions.

The results also suggest that the relationship between government support and leadership is strongest when external assistance is aligned with community priorities. In cases where the policies do not capture the local aspiration, or disregard the resources available in the community, the likelihood of the development endeavors being sustained is low [17]. By contrast, supportive and participatory government involvement broadens networks, improves access to resources, and strengthens the community structures through which development is coordinated [20]. During this process, the community leaders act as an interface between the community and the state converting local issues into feasible programmes and assist in ensuring that the interventions are socially and economically viable [27]. Overall, the findings reinforce the view that effective community-based development depends on collaborative relationships between government institutions and local leadership, since such cooperation improves implementation and supports more sustainable development outcomes [36].

4.3 Effect of Community Leadership on Community Development

The findings of this study indicate that community leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on community development. This suggests that leadership is not only important for coordinating local activities, but also for mobilizing available resources, strengthening social capital, and sustaining the level of community engagement required for long-term development.

With an active and responsive leadership, the community stands at a better position to organize its internal affairs as well as linking with the outside support and the wider development opportunities. This finding aligns with the views of Gisevius et al, [27] who underscore the role of effective local leadership in community adaptability in development processes. Similarly, Nzimakwe and Zuma, [23] propose that participatory and inclusive leadership enhances the engagement of communities in their planning and execution of development projects, especially concerning infrastructure and service provision.

When the leadership is based on the local priorities, development results would be more relevant, sustainable, and acceptable by the community. In this regard, leadership functions as a catalyst that deepens participation, improves coordination, and sustains commitment to collective goals [22]. It also contributes to more efficient and sustainable resource utilization, in particular, when community members are actively engaged in decision-making and implementation. The findings also indicate that the empowerment-based leadership may empower the long-term development programmes to enhance the development of the community welfare, and this can be attributed to the fact that community development as a process is viewed as a social and an institutional process [48]. This is why development interventions must involve intentional work on the ability to build leadership through training, mentoring and other support resources [25]. More inclined communities develop leadership that is inclusive, which enhances mobilization of local resources, maintain participation and make sure that gains of development are anchored in the local ownership and shared responsibility [23].

4.4 Effect of the ABCD Model on Community Development

The findings of this study show that the implementation of the ABCD model has a positive and significant effect on community development. This suggests that communities are more likely to strengthen their capacity and self-reliance when development efforts begin with the assets already available to them rather than with external deficits. Practically, asset mapping can assist communities in recognizing their competencies, social networks, business opportunities, and physical resources, which can, in turn, make it easier to know which activities should be prioritized [9], [49]. When residents are involved in these processes, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership over the programmes being implemented, and this often encourages deeper participation in planning and implementation [26], [48]. Similarly, leaders that are aware of the resource potential of their communities can serve a handy bridging purpose, connecting the local resources with external reinforcement, thus enhancing the level of trust and solidarity between the members of the community and their leaders [50].

The broader implication is that ABCD is not simply a development technique, but a way of organizing community action around local strengths. This is visible in initiatives such as local

enterprises, shared environmental management, and the empowerment of women, all of which reflect the capacity of communities to build from within and respond more effectively to change. According to Dushkova and Ivlieva, [6] communities that use internal strengths tend to be more likely to be more independent and adapt to new challenges, and Nisah et al, [51] demonstrate that ABCD can enhance participation, ownership, and creativity in local development. Collectively, these results indicate that the ABCD strategy helps not only to enhance the economy, but also to promote better social relations, increased participation and more sustainable community development in the long term [49].

4.5 Effect of Government Support on Community Development

The results of this research show that the influence of government support on the community development is positive and statistically significant. This suggests that the state plays an important enabling role in accelerating local development processes by providing policies, financial assistance, training, and infrastructure that support both social and economic activity within the community. Instead of being a mere regulatory player, the government here assists in providing the environment, within which communities can better organize their development endeavours with greater autonomy. In this sense, public support does not replace local initiative, but strengthens it by making resources, services, and institutional backing more accessible to community members.

This interpretation is consistent with Dushkova and Ivlieva, [6] who emphasizes that adaptive policy, funding, and facilitation can strengthen social networks and enhance community capacity for development. It is also consistent with Mokke and Suwandi, [52] who demonstrate that local governments assistance, especially with the involvement of participatory empowerment programmes, also makes a significant contribution to the improvement of welfare and community development. Achmad, [15] also believe that the government should intervene to encourage domestic participation and establish a better base of sustainable development at the community level. Collectively, these results indicate that government assistance is not a secondary input, but a careful aspect that determines the rate and quality of community development by provision of facilities, mentoring, and inclusive policy structures.

4.6 Community Leadership as a Mediator between the ABCD Model and Community Development

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model is rooted in the recognition and mobilization of the inner community resources, such as individual capacities, social connections, local resources and community institutions, as a pillar to promote social change [46]. Asset mapping and collective participation are some of the most important processes that take place in this approach not only to reveal the already existing community strengths but also to give the space

of legitimate and competent local leadership to grow. In these processes, individuals who possess organizational skills, contextual knowledge as well as social legitimacy are in a better place to organize development initiatives. Empirical studies prove this idea, and Rinawati et al, [53] have shown that the use of the ABCD approach improves leadership capacity by boosting competencies in line with leadership practices and community organizational structures. Similarly, Maclure [26] emphasizes that asset-based development success hinges on how well the community leaders are able to mobilize the local resources, maintain the participation and continuity of the development activities.

These findings strengthen the fact that community leadership is a vital mediating variable in the interaction between ABCD approach and community development outcomes. In other words, the extent of maturity of the leadership capacity in the community is a key determinant of asset-based strategies. Effective leadership is the only way that the mobilization of local assets becomes a possibility, as well as to make sure that the development processes are inclusive, coordinated and long-term. This implies that the adoption of ABCD must be coupled by conscious attempts to empower leadership arrangements since the two become more effective in improving the prospects of attaining more significant and sustainable development results.

4.7 Community Leadership as a Mediator between Government Support and Community Development

The results of this research show that government support has a more profound impact on community development when mediated by the community leadership. This finding concurs with the resource mobilization, and community capability views, where an external support may not necessarily translate into any meaningful developmental outcome. Instead, the effectiveness of such kind of assistance lies on the presence of effective leadership that can analyze the available resources, align them to community needs, and bring them into action. Community leadership, in this sense, can be viewed as a key mediating process that converts external inputs into locally based and sustainable projects. This is consistent with Nzimakwe and Zuma, [23] who emphasize that community leaders play a bridging role by communicating local needs, mobilizing participation, and facilitating coordination between government institutions and community networks. The noted applicability of the mediation pathway to the current study, therefore, highlights the applicability of integrating formal supply of resources with informal leadership resource to the achievement of sustainable development outcomes [27].

Practically, these findings imply that government interventions to enhance community development should go beyond resource allocation to include purposeful investments on leadership capacity. This can be in terms of leadership training, administrative support and the development of accountability mechanisms which can increase the efficient utilization of public

resources. Meanwhile, development programmes ought to be structured in a manner that reinforces social networks and fosters social capital since these are the elements that increase capacity of leaders to mobilize communities and maintain engagement in the long term. Through strengthening both institutional and local leadership frameworks, policymakers can enhance the efficiency of development efforts and make sure that the external aid is converted into long-term and community-based results.

4.8 Theoretical Contribution and Managerial Implications

The work is a significant addition to the body of literature on sustainable community development in that it integrates ABCD, government support, and community leadership into a single model rather than looking at them as distinct components. By doing that, it addresses a perceived gap in current literature, in which the causal mechanisms through which asset mobilization, institutional support, and governance processes interact with one another are not sufficiently theorized or empirically studied despite evidence that successful development outcomes are a result of concerted action between these three dimensions [13], [19], [27]. The results indicate that community leadership is a key intervening process by which the local assets and external assistance are transformed into the development outcomes. It means that sustainable development is not a simple input-output process, but a stratified interaction, in the course of which the leadership helps to organize communal resources, decipher institutional support, and transform all of these factors into tangible socio-economic benefits. The work is also relevant to asset-based theory, in that it demonstrates that asset-based community development is more effective when the relevant level of the local leadership can mobilize the asset inventory and enable community discourse and connection between local action and the broader institutional structures. In the absence of this coordinating factor, asset-based strategies might only bring about limited or temporary profits.

The managerial and policy implications of these findings are equally important. Since leadership is a powerful factor in determining the outcomes of development and at the same time the extent to which communities reap benefits of government support and ABCD intervention, leadership development will be viewed as a central strategy to development rather than a supplement. This implies that closer collaboration by the government departments, extension services, traditional leaders and community-based organizations should be made in the development of leadership training, mentorship and conflict management and networking programs. This would result in more community ownership, better utilization of external support and sustainability of development programmes. Practically, the research demonstrates that development initiatives are likely to be successful when the local leaders are enabled to structure participation, sustain action, and coordinate community agenda and institutional resources.

4.9 Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners

Policymakers should move beyond one-off project support and invest in structured leadership development, participatory planning and asset-based implementation systems. Local government and development agencies should begin programme design with community asset mapping so interventions can be built on existing skills, groups, land, facilities and local initiatives. Extension officers and district officials should combine financial aid with training, mentoring and technical coaching to strengthen coordination and sustainability. Ward and village structures should receive training in inclusive leadership, accountability, conflict resolution and project management to improve participation and collective action. Development projects should also be designed through joint decision-making forums involving leaders, farmers, women and youth so as to strengthen ownership and legitimacy. Monitoring should assess not only funds and outputs, but also participation, local ownership and continuity of community-led initiatives. Policymakers should move beyond one-off project support and invest in structured leadership development, participatory planning, and asset-based implementation systems.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Finally, this study shows that sustainable local development in resource-constrained environments is enhanced when community resources, governmental support and leadership are put together under one system of governance. The primary benefit of the research is that it takes an integrated approach and goes beyond discussing ABCD, Government support and Community leadership distinctively and presents how they combine to influence the community development outcomes. The results have practical implications to policymakers and development practitioners by demonstrating that leadership development, participatory asset mapping and co-designed support mechanisms can enhance social cohesion and long-term resilience. At the same time, there are limitations to the research which are to be mentioned. Its results are grounded on a single ward in Zimbabwe, which is hard to generalize, and its cross-sectional nature fails to provide the way these relations evolve with time. Despite this, the model offers a valuable background for future use in similar rural and resource-constrained settings. Future studies may test the framework in alternative geographic contexts using longitudinal designs to gain a more comprehensive insight on how asset-based governance is altered in response to changing environmental, economic and institutional environments. Overall, the study shows that sustainable development is most durable when local leadership helps transform community strengths and public support lasting outcomes.

Author Declarations

I owe it to God Almighty that I had the strength and perseverance to do this thesis.

I also owe the government of Indonesia a debt of gratitude because it is through the KNB (Kemitraan Negara Berkembang) scholarship that I was able to undertake my studies in Indonesia.

I also want to acknowledge the authors whose work I have used and whose knowledge played a significant role in informing some of this thesis.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the University of Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM), or more precisely the International Relations Office (IRO), the BIPA management as well as the administrative and academic staff of the Faculty of Agribusiness because they have welcomed me with great warmth and provided full support to me since my arrival until the date when this research was carried out.

I particularly wish to acknowledge my supervisors, Prof. Jabal Tarik Ibrahim, Prof. Rahayu Relawati and Prof. Ilyas Masudin, who have been instrumental in the guidance, constructive criticism and constant support during my research. The quality of this piece of work was significantly enhanced by their advice and critical reading.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my family and friends. My dad, Chenjerai Nhachi, helped in the fieldwork, his assistance was priceless. My brother, Freeman Mgcini Mwaida Nhachi and friend, Nidhi Priya, helped me in a very important way by offering data analysis assistance and also by giving me the push that I required in the most challenging part of this research. Your realistic assistance and unconditional faith in me are much appreciated.

And to all the names, known and unnamed, who helped in this success, directly or indirectly: thank you. Your guidance, encouragement and counsel have played a critical role in the successful accomplishment of this thesis.

Yours Marshall Nkosana Dzidzai Nhachi.

Funding

This research was supported by the Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship funded by the Government of Indonesia, which provided financial assistance and academic support, enabling the researcher to fully concentrate on completing the study successfully.

Statement of Informed Consent

Prior to conducting the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the research in Ward 23, Murehwa South District, Zimbabwe. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, the research procedures, and the expected benefits related to community development and resilience. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured that they could withdraw at any stage without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity of all information provided were guaranteed, and the collected data were used strictly for academic and research purposes.

Conflict of interest

The authors hereby declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest in terms of authorship, research, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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