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SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES FOR AN SMALL TO MEDIUM  
SIZED ENTERPRISE (SME) MARSHMIA, MUTARE ZIMBABWE.

BY

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A DISSERTATION/THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation paper examines the evaluation of sustainability strategies for an SME named MarshMia, a small to medium sized enterprise that is involved in liquor manufacturing based in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe, in a city called Mutare. This is a descriptive method research that utilizes data which was collected through employee surveys. The study sample consisted of employees from different departments of MarshMia namely, packaging, production workers, management as well as members of Mutare city council, so approximately 30 to 50 respondents were used through interviews and questionnaires. This study explores the specific sustainability strategies provided by MarshMia and evaluates their perceived value and effectiveness. The research also highlighted the immersing issue of the counterfeiting of the company's products on the black market as well as a series of recommendations on how the company may solve this problem.

The analysis also demonstrated a positive correlation between the provision of comprehensive sustainability and operational performance, meeting sustainability goals despite facing notable implementation challenges. This study identified the sustainability strategies currently being employed by MarshMia including in social, environmental and economic sustainability for example waste management, community engagement, resource management and regulatory compliance by making use of theories like the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), stakeholder theory as well as the Resource Based Theory (RBT). These not only contribute to operational performance leading to increased productivity and a more eco-socio friendly work environment. It also suggested that SME leaders should regularly evaluate and update their strategies to align with changing tech and economic environment. This dissertation contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the evaluation of sustainability strategies for small to medium sized businesses, particularly in the Zimbabwean context. The findings provide valuable insights for organizational leaders and environmental practitioners in designing and implementing sustainability strategies for organizational goals, and overall organizational success. Future research opportunities in this area are also identified, aiming to further expand the understanding of the evaluation of sustainability strategies for small to medium sized enterprises as well as their impact on organizational performance in similar contexts.

Keywords: Sustainability, strategies, environmental sustainability, and performance

## DECLARATION PAGE

I declare that this dissertation is my original work except where sources have been cited and acknowledged. The work has never been submitted, nor will it ever be submitted to another university for the award of a degree.



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

SME= Small to Medium sized Enterprise

PVT = Private

LTD = Limited

SOP= Standard Operating Procedure

GDP= Gross Domestic Product

ROI = Return on Investment

ROE = Return on Equity

SDG= Sustainable Development Goals

RBV= Resource Based View

NGO= Non-governmental organization

ZIMRA = Zimbabwe Revenue Authority

RBT = Resource Based Theory

LED = Local Economic Development

UK = United Kingdom

TBL = Triple Bottom Line

SADC = Southern African Development Community

IOEZ = Institute Of Entrepreneurs Zimbabwe

ZELA = Zimbabwe International Law Association

EMA= Environmental Management Agency

PPP = Public-Private Partnership

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces sustainable strategies in Small and Medium Enterprises focusing on MarshMia, a small liquor manufacturing company in Mutare, Zimbabwe. This study described the geographical region affected, the timeline of the study and it also outlined the key objectives of the study. This chapter sets the stage for the in-depth analysis presented in the subsequent chapters.

### **1.2 Study background**

In developing countries such as in Zimbabwe, SMEs are important for driving the growth and development of the economy and for creating employment opportunities (Wang, 2016). The alcohol manufacturing industry in Zimbabwe, particularly for SMEs (Small to medium sized enterprises) like MarshMia, faces detrimental issues related to sustainability. With the ever-changing Zimbabwean economy and regulatory pressures, it is important for SMEs to come up with sustainable strategies for survival and revenue expansion. This research aims to explore effective sustainability strategies that can enhance the operational efficiency, competitiveness, market share and overall revenue expansion of MarshMia whilst preserving the regulatory laws. SMEs contribute to the economy through employment creation, development of appropriate technologies, and gross domestic product (GDP). Small businesses are a significant source of technological innovation and new product.

### **1.2.2 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study of sustainable strategies for MarshMia, a small liquor manufacturing company in Mutare, is to explore ways in which the company can minimize its environmental impact, reduce costs, and improve its overall social responsibility. By implementing sustainable practices, MarshMia can increase its efficiency, competitiveness, and resilience in the long term.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

MarshMia PVT is having inefficient resource management practices, ineffective waste management, lack of community engagement, and non-compliance with regulations which has led to increased costs, reputational damage, legal liabilities, and environmental degradation. MarshMia PVT has been facing challenges in properly disposing its organic waste, waste water, and solid waste (plastics, cardboards) which have made the communities to complain about foul odors, pollution in water sources and potential health hazards. However, this has been attracting fines by EMA and the Mutare city council. The lack of community engagement has harmed MarshMia PVT's reputation and relationship with local stakeholders, affecting its social license to operate. One of the most pressing and unexpected risks identified during the research was the proliferation of counterfeit alcohol using MarshMia's genuine packaging, especially the "*Teku Teku*" Spirit Drink. These counterfeit versions are sold primarily through informal and unregulated channels such as roadside bottle stores and mobile vendors operating from car trunks. This development poses serious threats to both public health and

MarshMia's corporate integrity and image, as consumers are unable to distinguish between authentic and fake products when packaging is identical. Regardless MarshMia PVT taking some measures such as implementing water and energy-saving initiatives, improving its waste management practices, engaging with local communities through community development projects, and enhancing its compliance with regulations through internal audits and training programs, there has not been a development and implementation of a comprehensive sustainability strategy. However this study seeks to provide an integration of resource management practices, waste management, community engagement, and regulatory compliance into a cohesive and holistic sustainability plan. This will improve its overall environmental and social performance, enhance its market competitiveness and financial performance, and ensure its long-term business survival.

#### **1.4 Justification**

The justification for studying sustainability strategies for MarshMia, a small liquor manufacturing company in Mutare facing challenges such as high energy costs, reduction in Return on Investment (ROI) and Return on Equity (ROE), improper disposal of organic and solid wastes, declining reputation, and lack of community engagement, lies in the potential benefits of addressing these issues strategically. By implementing sustainability strategies, MarshMia can mitigate these challenges and improve its overall performance and competitiveness.

Implementing energy-efficient practices and technologies can help reduce energy consumption and lower operational costs for MarshMia, leading to significant cost savings in the long run. By focusing on sustainability initiatives that enhance

operational efficiency, reduce waste, and improve resource management, MarshMia can potentially increase its profitability, strengthen its financial performance, and enhance its ROI and ROE. Developing proper waste management strategies, including recycling, composting, and responsible disposal of organic and solid wastes, can help MarshMia minimize environmental impact, comply with regulations, and improve operational efficiency. Addressing reputation issues through sustainable business practices, transparent communication, and community engagement can help restore trust, improve brand perception, and enhance customer loyalty for MarshMia. Strengthening relationships with local communities through social responsibility initiatives, community development projects, and stakeholder engagement can establish MarshMia as a responsible corporate citizen and enhance its social license to operate.

### **1.5 Specific objectives**

- i. To identify the strategies that are currently used by MarshMia in its operations (environmental, social and economic)
- ii. To assess the effectiveness of these sustainability strategies employed by MarshMia in its operations.
- iii. To evaluate the challenges that influence the implementation of these strategies at MarshMia.
- iv. To propose recommendations for improving and strengthening the sustainability framework for MarshMia.

### **1.6 Research questions**

- i. What are the sustainability strategies that are currently being used by MarshMia?

- ii. How effective are the existing strategies in improving MarshMia's operational performance?
- iii. What are the challenges that are faced in implementation of these sustainability strategies?
- iv. What recommendations could be proposed to improve or strengthen the sustainability framework for MarshMia?

### **1.7 Assumptions of the study**

This study assumes that there is an existence of sustainability strategies as well as their implementation, without them there would not be an evaluation of them to begin with. It also assumed that stakeholders responded truthfully to interviews and questionnaires, because this study relied on honesty and cooperation of respondents.

### **1.8 Delimitation of the study**

- i. The study focused on MarshMia PVT in Mutare.
- ii. The study focused on the period, January 2023-December 2024

### **1.9 Limitation of the study**

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter evaluates related literature to the sustainability strategies in Small and Medium Enterprises related to social sustainability, economic sustainability, environmental as well as compliance with regulations. It provides the conceptual framework also.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework and relevance**

As sustainability becomes an essential aspect of business operations globally, it is important to understand how SMEs such as MarshMia are integrating sustainable practices into their operations and how effective these strategies are. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both primary and secondary data, to assess the value and effectiveness of MarshMia's sustainability strategies.

The theoretical framework guiding this study is grounded in three key theories: Sustainability Theory (Triple Bottom Line), Stakeholder Theory, and the Resource-Based View (RBV). These theories collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of how sustainability strategies are developed, implemented, and perceived, as well as their implications for competitiveness and long-term success.

#### **2.2.1 Sustainability Theory (Triple Bottom Line)**

The first theoretical foundation for this study is the Sustainability Theory, which is based on John Elkington's (1998) Triple Bottom Line (TBL) concept. This framework emphasizes that organizations should measure success not only by their financial performance but also by their environmental and social impact. The three pillars of the

TBL economic, environmental, and social sustainability — are interdependent and together contribute to the long-term viability of a business.

For MarshMia, economic sustainability refers to maintaining profitability and operational efficiency while ensuring the company's products remain competitive and authentic, particularly in the face of the counterfeiting problem affecting the liquor market. Environmental sustainability (Planet) focuses on practices such as waste management, energy efficiency, and the use of environmentally friendly packaging materials. Social sustainability (People) involves fair labor practices, employee welfare, community engagement, and compliance with local regulations set by authorities such as the Mutare City Council. The TBL framework therefore serves as a guide for assessing the extent to which MarshMia's sustainability strategies are balanced across these three dimensions and how they contribute to the company's long-term growth. Economic sustainability strategies such as local sourcing, product innovation and cost efficiency support the profit part of the theory. This theory provides a conceptual foundation for the three strategies as they integrate and lead to improved performance.

### **2.2.2 Stakeholder Theory**

The second theory underpinning this study is the Stakeholder Theory developed by Freeman (1984). This theory argues that a company's success depends on its ability to manage relationships with a wide range of stakeholders such as employees, management, customers, suppliers, government authorities, and the community. Stakeholders influence, and are influenced by, the organization's actions, making their involvement essential in shaping and evaluating sustainability strategies.

For MarshMia, stakeholders include internal actors such as production workers, packaging staff, and management, as well as external stakeholders such as Mutare City Council officials, customers and the broader community. This theory helps explain how different stakeholders perceive and evaluate the company's sustainability initiatives and how their feedback can help improve these strategies. For instance, employees' views can offer insight into workplace sustainability practices, while the City Council's perspective may highlight the company's environmental and regulatory performance.

By applying Stakeholder Theory, the study aims to capture multiple viewpoints on the effectiveness and value of MarshMia's sustainability initiatives, thereby providing a more comprehensive evaluation of their success.

### **2.2.3 Resource-Based View (RBV)**

The Resource-Based View (RBV), as proposed by Barney (1991), forms the third theoretical pillar of this study. The RBV suggests that a firm's competitive advantage stems from its ability to acquire and effectively utilize valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources and capabilities. From this perspective, sustainability practices can serve as strategic resources that help a firm differentiate itself in the market.

For MarshMia, sustainability initiatives like adopting environmentally friendly production methods, building strong community relationships, and ensuring brand authenticity can be viewed as unique resources that enhance its competitive edge. The issue of counterfeit products threatens one of MarshMia's most valuable assets: its brand reputation. By implementing sustainability strategies that emphasize quality assurance,

transparency, and authenticity, the company can strengthen its brand and protect its market share. Thus, the RBV links sustainability directly to long-term competitiveness and resilience.

### **Integration of Theories**

Together, the Sustainability Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Resource-Based View provide a well-rounded framework for evaluating MarshMia's sustainability strategies. The Triple Bottom Line offers the dimensions for assessment (economic, environmental, and social); the Stakeholder Theory helps identify and understand the interests and perceptions of different groups involved; and the Resource-Based View links these sustainability practices to strategic advantage and organizational success.

Through the integration of these theories, the study aims to evaluate not only the design and implementation of MarshMia's sustainability strategies but also their perceived effectiveness and contribution to long-term competitiveness. Furthermore, this integrated framework provides insight into how the company might address the growing issue of counterfeit liquor products, which directly undermines its brand integrity and economic sustainability.

### **Variables and relationships**

#### **1. Independent Variables:**

##### **(a) Environmental Sustainability Strategies (X<sub>1</sub>)**

These are strategies implemented by MarshMia to reduce the environmental impact of its alcohol manufacturing activities.

**Definition:**

Environmental sustainability strategies are initiatives aimed at minimizing negative environmental effects through responsible resource use and environmental protection practices.

Possible indicators:

- Waste and effluent management
- Recycling and reuse initiatives
- Water conservation and pollution control

**Defined relationship:**

Effective environmental sustainability strategies are expected to positively influence MarshMia's overall sustainability performance by improving efficiency, reducing environmental risk, and enhancing corporate reputation.

**(b) Social Sustainability Strategies (X<sub>2</sub>)**

These focus on MarshMia's relationships with internal and external stakeholders especially employees, consumers, and the local community.

**Definition:**

Social sustainability strategies involve practices that promote equity, safety, well-being, and positive community impact.

**Possible indicators:**

- Employee welfare programs
- Health and safety standards
- Community development initiatives
- Ethical marketing and responsible consumption campaigns

**Defined relationship:**

Strong social sustainability strategies are expected to positively affect sustainability performance by improving employee motivation, social license to operate, and stakeholder trust.

**(c) Economic Sustainability Strategies (X<sub>3</sub>)**

These relate to MarshMia's financial management and ability to remain profitable while supporting sustainable growth.

**Definition:**

Economic sustainability strategies involve maintaining long-term profitability and growth without compromising environmental and social objectives.

**Possible indicators:**

- Cost efficiency and waste minimization
- Investment in innovation and sustainable technologies
- Long-term financial planning
- Fair pricing and ethical sourcing
- Value creation for shareholders and stakeholders

**Defined relationship:**

Sound economic sustainability strategies are expected to positively contribute to overall sustainability performance by ensuring financial stability and enabling investment in sustainable practices.

**Theoretical Relationship between variables**

The conceptual framework assumes that:

- Environmental, social, and economic sustainability strategies are interrelated and complementary.
- Collectively, they influence the firm's overall sustainability performance.
- Each of the three dimensions contributes uniquely but synergistically to long-term success.

$Y = f(X_1, X_2, X_3)$  which means that: Sustainability Performance is a function of Environmental,

## **2. Dependent Variable (Outcome)**

### **a) Organizational Performance**

#### **Definition:**

Organizational performance represents the extent to which MarshMia achieves its strategic objectives, profitability, efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction as a result of its sustainability practices.

Operational Indicators:

- Profitability and financial growth.
- Market share and customer retention.
- Employee productivity and morale.
- Product quality and innovation outcomes.
- Reputation and stakeholder trust.

### **3. Mediating Variables**

These variables explain the mechanism through which sustainability strategies affect organizational performance.

#### **a) Employee Engagement (Mediator 1)**

Definition:

Employee engagement is the degree of emotional commitment, motivation, and involvement employees demonstrate toward MarshMia's goals and values, often influenced by social sustainability practices.

Operational Indicators:

- Job satisfaction and motivation levels.
- Employee commitment to company goals.
- Willingness to recommend MarshMia as a good workplace.
- Participation in decision-making and sustainability programs.

#### **b) Operational Efficiency (Mediator 2)**

Definition:

Operational efficiency refers to MarshMia's ability to optimize production, resource use, and cost control which is a key pathway through which economic sustainability improves performance.

Operational Indicators:

- Production cost reduction.
- Waste minimization and energy efficiency.
- Process optimization and lean management.
- Supply chain reliability and delivery performance.

#### **4. Moderating Variables**

These variables affect the strength or direction of the relationship between sustainability strategies and organizational performance.

##### **a) Regulatory Environment**

Definition:

The regulatory environment encompasses the external policies, standards, and government regulations influencing how MarshMia implements sustainability practices.

Operational Indicators:

- Compliance with environmental and health laws.
- Clarity and stability of liquor manufacturing regulations.
- Government incentives or penalties for sustainability compliance.
- Perceived support from local authorities.

## **b) Financial Resources**

Definition:

Financial resources represent the level of funding, capital, and liquidity available to support sustainability initiatives and business operations at MarshMia.

Operational Indicators:

- Access to credit and financial capital.
- Cash flow stability.
- Budget allocation for sustainability activities.
- Financial capacity to invest in technology and innovation.

## **c) Organizational Culture**

Definition:

Organizational culture refers to shared values, norms, and beliefs that shape employees' attitudes toward sustainability and innovation within MarshMia.

Operational Indicators:

- Leadership commitment to sustainability.
- Team collaboration and openness to change.
- Employee empowerment and communication.
- Ethical conduct and transparency.

## 2.3 Conceptual framework

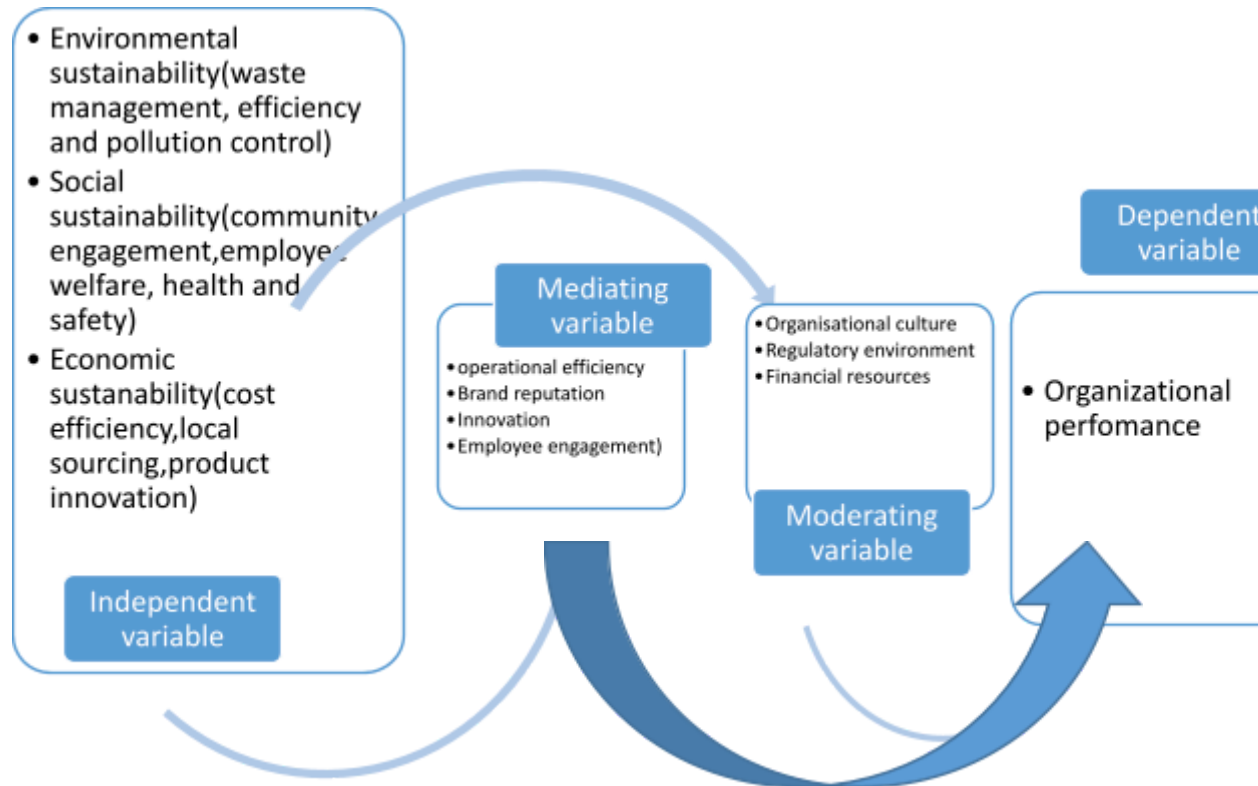


FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Hypothesized Relationships

#### Main Hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>):

Environmental sustainability strategies have no significant effect on MarshMia's organizational performance.

Environmental sustainability strategies have a significant positive effect on MarshMia's organizational performance.

**H03:** Economic sustainability strategies have no significant effect on MarshMia's organizational performance.

**H13:** Economic sustainability strategies have a significant positive effect on MarshMia's organizational performance.

#### **Moderating Hypotheses**

**H04:** The regulatory environment does not significantly moderate the relationship between sustainability strategies and organizational performance.

**H14:** The regulatory environment significantly moderates the relationship between sustainability strategies and organizational performance.

**H05:** Financial resources do not significantly moderate the relationship between sustainability strategies and organizational performance.

**H15:** Financial resources significantly moderate the relationship between sustainability strategies and organizational performance.

**H06:** Organizational culture does not significantly moderate the relationship between sustainability strategies and organizational performance.

**H16:** Organizational culture significantly moderates the relationship between sustainability strategies and organizational performance.

#### **2.4 Sustainability strategies defined**

Sustainability strategies encompass the set of practices and initiatives implemented by organizations to address environmental, social, and economic challenges, ensuring

long-term viability and responsible resource management (Blanco & Fernández, 2021). Scholars such as Blanco and Fernández emphasize the importance of integrating sustainability principles into core business operations, supply chain management, and product development to minimize environmental impact and create shared value for stakeholders (Blanco & Fernández, 2020).

Matten and Moon suggest that sustainability strategies should be embedded within the organizational culture, governance structures, and stakeholder engagement processes to drive systemic change and create positive societal impact (Matten & Moon, 2019). Their view aligns with the notion that sustainability should be a strategic priority that guides decision-making at all levels to foster resilience, innovation, and long-term value creation.

In contrast, (Haanaes, 2011) proposed a divergent view by advocating for a strategic shift from traditional sustainability practices towards a more transformative, purpose-driven approach that tackles systemic issues and promotes regenerative business models (Haanaes,K, 2011). Their perspective highlights the need for organizations to move beyond incremental improvements and embrace holistic, disruptive strategies that address complex sustainability challenges in novel and impactful ways.

#### **2.4.1 Global perspective**

Sustainability strategies are increasingly important for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the liquor manufacturing industry to promote responsible practices, reduce environmental impact, and enhance competitiveness on a global scale.

Implementing energy-efficient technologies and practices, such as LED lighting, energy-efficient production processes, and renewable energy sources like solar or wind power, can help SMEs reduce energy consumption, lower operational costs, and minimize carbon emissions (Yin, 2019). Also developing waste management plans that focus on reducing, reusing, and recycling waste materials generated during the production process can help SMEs minimize environmental impact, comply with regulations, and promote a circular economy approach (Naidoo & Panda, 2020). Also partnering with local suppliers, implementing sustainable sourcing practices, and ensuring transparency and traceability in the supply chain can help SMEs promote ethical production, reduce environmental footprint, and build consumer trust (Wu, 2021).

An SME distillery in Australia has implemented a closed-loop system for water management, utilizing rainwater harvesting and recycling wastewater for irrigation purposes. This strategy has helped reduce water consumption and minimize environmental impact (Smith & Brown, 2020). A family-owned winery in Italy has adopted organic farming practices, renewable energy solutions, and carbon offset programs to promote sustainability in its operations. This has led to improved product quality, enhanced brand reputation, and increased market demand for their products (Rossi., 2018). A craft brewery in South Africa has focused on community engagement initiatives, such as supporting local farmers, creating jobs in the community, and contributing to social development projects. This strategy has not only enhanced the brewery's social impact but also strengthened its brand loyalty among consumers (van der Merwe & Du Plessis, 2019).

By adopting and customizing sustainable strategies tailored to their specific context and market, SME liquor manufacturing companies can enhance their overall sustainability performance, drive innovation, and contribute to environmental and social well-being. These examples demonstrate the diverse approaches that SMEs in the liquor manufacturing industry can take to integrate sustainability into their business operations on a global scale.

### **Environmental sustainability strategies**

#### **i. Resource management practices**

Resource management practices involve the strategic planning, allocation, utilization, and conservation of resources to optimize efficiency, minimize waste, and achieve sustainable outcomes in organizational operations (Ertug & Schilling, 2024). These practices encompass the responsible stewardship of natural resources, human resources, financial resources, and technological assets to support organizational goals and ensure long-term viability.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the liquor manufacturing industry globally face resource management challenges related to energy, water, waste, and raw materials. Implementing effective resource management practices is essential for enhancing sustainability, reducing costs, and improving competitiveness. Organic Spirits Distillery in Sweden has implemented energy-saving measures such as solar panels and energy-efficient equipment to reduce energy consumption. They have also adopted water

recycling systems to minimize water usage in their production process, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to resource management (Johansson, 2020).

Craft Brewery in the United States focused on waste reduction and recycling by composting organic waste, reusing water in cleaning processes, and partnering with local farmers to repurpose spent grains as animal feed. Their waste reduction initiatives have not only minimized environmental impact but also created additional revenue streams (Smith & Miller, 2019).

## **ii. Waste management**

Waste management is defined as: the different approaches and procedures designed and implemented to identify, control and handle the different types of waste from generation and until disposal. Full implementation of waste management processes, including waste prevention and reuse, and recycling wherever possible, has and can further help avoid considerable environmental impacts when assessed from a life-cycle perspective considering direct effects such as emissions and indirect effects such as resource depletion (Mubaslat, 2021). However, Smith, (2019) describes waste management as "the comprehensive process of handling, treating, and disposing of waste materials in a manner that is safe, environmentally responsible, and compliant with regulations to safeguard public health and the environment (Smith, 2019).

Waste management strategies play a crucial role in the sustainability and environmental performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the liquor manufacturing industry. Effective waste management practices can help reduce environmental impact, enhance resource efficiency, and comply with regulatory requirements.

Implementing recycling programs and reusing materials within the production process can help SMEs reduce waste generation and optimize resource utilization. Zhang . (2020) found that SME breweries in Germany effectively implemented recycling initiatives to minimize waste and enhance sustainability in their operations. Also, adopting waste minimization strategies, such as source reduction and process optimization, can help SMEs in the liquor manufacturing industry generate less waste overall. Smith and Brown (2019) conducted a study on small distilleries in the UK, highlighting the benefits of waste minimization practices in reducing environmental impact and improving operational efficiency.

Managing organic waste through composting or biodegradation can be an effective waste management strategy for SMEs in the liquor manufacturing sector. Lee and Park (2021) examined the implementation of composting practices in small wineries in South Africa, showcasing the benefits of organic waste diversion and soil enrichment.

Implementing waste management strategies in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the liquor manufacturing industry can be challenging due to various factors such as financial constraints, lack of expertise, regulatory compliance, and technology limitations. Limited financial resources may hinder SMEs from investing in waste management infrastructure or implementing recycling programs. Liu and Chen (2020) highlighted the financial challenges faced by SMEs in China in adopting waste reduction technologies due to high upfront costs.

Meeting waste management regulations and obtaining necessary permits can be complex and time-consuming for SMEs. Research by Garcia and Lopez (2019) examined the challenges of regulatory compliance in the waste management practices of SME breweries in Spain. SMEs may lack the necessary knowledge and expertise in

waste management practices, leading to inefficiencies in waste handling and disposal. A study by Wang and Li (2021) evaluated the expertise gaps in organic waste management among small wineries in France. By addressing these challenges through capacity-building, financial support, and regulatory assistance, SMEs in the liquor manufacturing industry can overcome barriers and improve their waste management practices.

### **Social sustainability strategies**

#### **iii. Community engagement**

Community engagement strategies are essential for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the liquor manufacturing industry to build relationships with local communities, earn trust, and contribute positively to societal well-being. Effective community engagement can enhance brand reputation, foster social responsibility, and create shared value. Establishing partnerships with local organizations, nonprofits, or community groups can help SMEs in the liquor manufacturing industry engage with the community and support local initiatives. A study by Johnson and Lee (2020) highlighted the benefits of collaborative partnerships between small distilleries and community organizations to promote social development.

Implementing sustainability initiatives and community-based projects can demonstrate SMEs' commitment to environmental and social responsibility. Brown and Smith (2021) examined how small wineries in Australia engaged with the community through sustainability programs and environmental education. Engaging in dialogue with stakeholders, including local residents, government officials, and customers, can help SMEs understand community needs and concerns. Wang and Chen (2019)

investigated stakeholder engagement practices in small breweries in the U.S. and its impact on community relations.

Implementing community engagement strategies in the liquor manufacturing industry presents various challenges for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including issues related to communication, resource constraints, stakeholder alignment, and trust-building. Limited resources, both financial and human, can hinder SMEs in implementing effective community engagement strategies. Lack of dedicated staff, time, or budget for community initiatives may limit the scope and impact. A study by Garcia and Lopez (2020) examined the resource constraints that small breweries in Spain faced in community engagement efforts. Ensuring alignment and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including local residents, government agencies, and NGOs, can be challenging. Balancing conflicting interests and expectations requires skillful stakeholder management. Smith and Brown (2018) conducted research on stakeholder engagement practices in small distilleries in the UK, highlighting the complexities of stakeholder alignment.

Establishing trust with the community and effectively communicating transparently are critical in community engagement strategies. Building relationships and maintaining open dialogue can be challenging, particularly in addressing community concerns and building long-term trust. A study by Johnson and Lee (2019) explored the communication challenges faced by small wineries in the U.S. when engaging with local communities. By addressing these challenges through capacity-building, communication strategies, and stakeholder engagement practices, SMEs in the liquor manufacturing industry can improve their community engagement efforts and contribute positively to society.

#### **iv. Employee welfare**

Employee welfare and health refer to the set of organizational practices and policies implemented by MarshMia to ensure the physical, mental, and social well-being of its workforce. It includes initiatives that promote safe working conditions, fair remuneration, occupational health standards, and general employee satisfaction. Employee welfare is a critical component of long-term business viability because a healthy, satisfied, and motivated workforce drives productivity, quality, and innovation. The following measures can be taken to ensure for the wellbeing of the staff.

- Provision of occupational health and safety measures (protective equipment, hazard control, and compliance with health standards).
- Fair wages and benefits, including medical cover or allowances.
- Workplace ergonomics and improved working environment.
- Employee wellness programs, such as health screenings or counselling.
- Training and skills development to enhance capacity and morale.
- Enhanced employee welfare and health improve job satisfaction and reduce absenteeism, thus positively influencing organizational performance and sustainability outcomes.

#### **Economic Sustainability strategies**

##### **v. Product Innovation Efficiency (Through Automated Bottle Packaging Machinery)**

Product innovation efficiency refers to MarshMia's ability to improve its production and packaging processes by adopting modern technologies specifically automated bottle

filling and packaging machinery in order to enhance operational performance, minimize errors, and maintain product hygiene standards. This aligns with economic sustainability and operational efficiency under the Resource-Based View (RBV). Innovation in production technology enhances resource utilization, reduces waste, and creates a competitive advantage through quality assurance and efficiency. MarshMia's adoption of automated bottle packaging systems minimizes human contact with the product, which:

- Ensures higher hygiene and safety in liquor packaging (critical for food and beverage compliance).
- Increases production speed and consistency of product quality.
- Reduces human error, spillage, and labor costs.
- Enhances operational efficiency through faster turnaround and lower contamination risk.

**vi. Compliance with regulations**

Regulatory compliance is essential for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the liquor manufacturing industry to ensure adherence to legal requirements, standards, and guidelines set by regulatory authorities. Compliance with regulations is crucial for maintaining quality standards, ensuring safety, and upholding ethical practices. Jenkins and Smith (2020) emphasized the importance of regulatory compliance for small distilleries in the U.K. Compliance with regulations related to product safety, labeling, and alcohol content is vital for protecting consumers and maintaining industry standards. MarshMia does this by partnering up with local sugarcane farmers for ethanol as well as ZIMRA to ensure that they get regulated amounts of alcohol required for an SME to have.

Garcia (2019) explored the challenges faced by small wineries in Spain in complying with local and national regulations. Issues such as variations in regulations, lack of awareness, and limited resources can pose challenges for SMEs. Wang and Lee (2021) investigated the relationship between risk management practices and regulatory compliance in small breweries in the U.S. Effective risk management strategies can help SMEs navigate regulatory requirements and ensure compliance to avoid penalties. By addressing the challenges of regulatory compliance, SMEs in the liquor manufacturing industry can enhance operational efficiency, build trust with stakeholders, and maintain a strong reputation within the industry.

Challenges in regulatory compliance implementation for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the liquor manufacturing industry can include complexities in understanding and keeping up with evolving regulations, limited resources for compliance, and ensuring adherence to stringent standards. The liquor manufacturing industry is subject to a myriad of regulations related to production, labeling, safety, and distribution. Keeping up with changing regulations and ensuring compliance with multiple, sometimes conflicting, standards can be challenging. Johnson and Garcia (2020) analyzed the regulatory complexity faced by small distilleries in the U.S.

SMEs may lack the financial resources, expertise, and dedicated staff to effectively navigate complex regulatory frameworks. Compliance costs, training needs, and investments in compliance infrastructure can strain limited budgets. Research by Brown and Lee (2019) explored the resource constraints encountered by small wineries in managing regulatory compliance in Australia. Meeting stringent quality and safety standards set by regulatory bodies can be demanding for SMEs, particularly when aiming to compete with larger competitors. Lack of capacity to

meet rigorous standards can result in compliance challenges. Garcia and Smith (2021) investigated the challenges faced by small breweries in Spain in adhering to quality and safety regulations.

## **2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter evaluated related literature to the sustainability strategies in Small and Medium Enterprises related to environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability strategies.

## **CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology that was be employed to assess the sustainability strategies for MarshMia PVT. This chapter details the research design and data collection methods.

### **3.2 Case study research Design**

A descriptive case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of a single entity, such as MarshMia PVT, to understand their current sustainability strategies, challenges they face, and the effectiveness of their strategies. This design enables researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context and complexities of sustainability within the specific company (Yin, 2024). By utilizing multiple sources of data such as interviews, documents, and observations, a case study design can provide rich and detailed information on MarshMia PVT' sustainability practices, challenges, and outcomes. This comprehensive data collection approach can help in capturing the nuances and intricacies of sustainability strategies within the company (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case studies offer a platform to understand the real-life context in which sustainability strategies are implemented within MarshMia PVT. By delving into the company's specific circumstances, organizational culture, and industry dynamics, researchers can identify the unique challenges and opportunities related to sustainability that the company faces (Ridder, 2017).

### **3.3 Study Population**

The study population for the case study of sustainability strategies for MarshMia PVT, a small liquor manufacturing company in Mutare, would consist of individuals and groups within the organization who are directly involved in designing, implementing, or overseeing sustainability strategies. The population would include, executives, directors, and senior managers who are responsible for setting the overall sustainability vision and strategies for the company. Employees or teams specifically tasked with developing and managing sustainability initiatives within MarshMia PVT. Individuals or businesses who interact with MarshMia PVT and may be interested in the company's sustainability practices. Government bodies or regulatory agencies that oversee environmental regulations and compliance for the liquor manufacturing industry as key informants. (Mutare city council, EMA Officials) were on the focus. The sample consisted of 30 to 50 participants which included 5 top management team, 10 production employees, 3 sustainability officers, and 15 customers, 2 key informants (EMA and Mutare city council officials). Vasileiou. (2018) mentions that a sample size of 20 to 50 is well supported by qualitative research norms often based on saturation or practical considerations. This range is achievable for an SME like MarshMia because there is need for deep understanding of findings. For the quantitative part, a sample size of 30 to 50 is often considered as more than enough because of the Central Limit Theorem CTL, when the sample size increases the sampling distribution of the mean approaches a normal distribution, enabling more reliable statistical inference.(scribbr)

### **3.3.1 Sampling technique**

In the case study of sustainability strategies for MarshMia PVT, a small liquor manufacturing company in Mutare, Zimbabwe, a purposive sampling technique can be utilized. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Teddlie & Yu, 2024). In this case study, the selection criteria for participants would include individuals directly involved in the design, implementation, or monitoring of sustainability strategies within MarshMia PVT. This may include top management, sustainability team members, production staff, and supply chain partners as well as customers. Purposive sampling allows researchers to target individuals who possess the necessary knowledge and experiences related to sustainability strategies in the organization. By selecting these key stakeholders, the study can gather detailed and insightful information. Researchers can strategically identify and approach participants within MarshMia PVT who can provide valuable perspectives on the company's sustainability efforts. This targeted approach ensures that the data collected is pertinent to the research objectives.

#### **Inclusion criteria**

- i. The study included employees that were knowledgeable about sustainability strategies at MarshMia PVT.
- ii. The sample also included those clients that are also part of the community around MarshMia, Yoevill residents.

#### **Exclusion Criteria**

- i. Employees that are not in the production chain and waste management

- ii. Employees that have less 6 months at the company

### **3.4 Data collection instruments**

Data collection refers to the systematic process of gathering information relevant to the research objectives. For this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the sustainability strategies used by MarshMia. This approach ensured that numerical trends could be measured while also capturing detailed insights, perceptions, and experiences from participants involved in the company's operations. The study made use of three primary data collection methods: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observation. These methods were selected because they align with the nature of the research questions, the characteristics of the target population, and the case study design adopted.

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaires**

Questionnaires formed the main quantitative data collection tool. They were administered to general employees of MarshMia, local retailers who stock MarshMia products, and selected suppliers. The use of questionnaires in data collection for sustainability case studies is supported by research indicating that surveys and questionnaires are effective tools for gathering data on attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). Questionnaires offer a standardized and systematic approach to data collection, enabling researchers to gather quantitative data that can be analyzed statistically to draw meaningful conclusions about the effectiveness of sustainability strategies. Additionally, leveraging questionnaires alongside other data collection methods, such as interviews and observations, can provide a more

comprehensive and triangulated view of sustainability practices within MarshMia PVT, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study findings.

### **Purpose of Using Questionnaires**

- To gather measurable data on participants' perceptions of MarshMia's sustainability strategies.
- To assess the frequency and effectiveness of economic, environmental, and social sustainability practices.
- To collect information from a relatively large number of respondents (30–50 participants) within a short period.

### **Structure of the Questionnaire**

1. The questionnaire consisted of four sections:
2. Demographic Information: Age, role, years of association with MarshMia.
3. Awareness of Sustainability Practices: Participant knowledge of MarshMia's sustainability efforts.
4. Assessment of Sustainability Strategies: Ratings of economic, environmental, and social strategies.
5. Challenges and Suggestions: Perceived obstacles and recommendations for improvement.

### **Administration**

Questionnaires were distributed physically at the company premises and to nearby retailers. Respondents were given 15–20 minutes to complete the form. To enhance response accuracy, questions were kept clear, simple, and neutral.

### **3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with MarshMia management and key decision-makers, including supervisors, production managers, and the operations director. These interviews served as the primary qualitative data collection tool.

#### **Purpose of Interviews**

- To explore managerial insights into sustainability strategy formulation and implementation.
- To understand internal challenges such as financial limitations, technological gaps, and regulatory issues.
- To clarify and enrich data obtained from questionnaires.

#### **Interview Structure and Procedure**

Semi-structured interviews can be conducted with key stakeholders within MarshMia PVT, including top management, EMA and Mutare city council officials, and production staff. Interviews allow for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights into sustainability strategies. Open-ended questions can be used to gather detailed information on the motivations behind sustainability practices, the implementation process, and the perceived impact on the company. An interview guide was prepared in advance but allowed flexibility for probing deeper into emerging issues. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted in a quiet environment within the MarshMia premises. With the participants' consent, notes were taken to ensure accuracy. The interviews focused on:

- Current sustainability practices
- Strategy effectiveness

- Operational and environmental compliance issues
- Future plans and improvement needs

### **3.4.3 Non-Participant Observation**

Direct observations of sustainability practices within the company, such as waste management processes, energy usage, or employee training programs, can offer firsthand insights into how sustainability is integrated into daily operations at MarshMia PVT. Observations allow researchers to validate information obtained through interviews and document analysis, providing a more holistic view of sustainability efforts.

Non-participant observation was used to complement questionnaire and interview findings. I observed MarshMia's production processes, workplace conditions, and waste management practices without interfering in routine work activities.

#### **Purpose of Observation**

- To obtain first-hand information about sustainability practices as they occur in real time.
- To verify the accuracy of responses from employees and management.
- To identify behavioral or operational patterns not captured through verbal responses.

#### **Observation Focus Areas**

- Use of equipment and energy efficiency
- Waste disposal and recycling activities
- Safety practices and employee conduct

- Cleanliness of the production environment
- Interaction between staff and management
- Usage of raw materials and packaging materials

Observation notes were documented systematically, highlighting activities that reflected sustainability as well as those indicating gaps.

#### **3.3.4 Justification for the Selected Data Collection Methods**

The combination of questionnaires, interviews, and observation was chosen for several reasons:

- **Triangulation:** Using multiple methods improves validity and reliability by cross-checking data from different sources.
- **Holistic Understanding:** Quantitative data provides measurable patterns, while qualitative data captures deeper insights.
- **Suitability for Case Studies:** Case study research benefits from diverse evidence gathered from different perspectives.
- **Accessibility:** MarshMia's size and employee availability made it feasible to distribute questionnaires and conduct interviews.

#### **3.5 Data Analysis**

This section explains how the data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and observations was analyzed. Since the study used both quantitative and qualitative methods, the data analysis also followed a mixed approach. The aim was to make sure that the data truly answered the research questions and helped achieve the study objectives.

### **3.5.1 Preparing the Data**

Before the actual analysis, all the data had to be checked and organized.

#### **Data Cleaning**

The questionnaires were inspected to ensure they were filled in properly. Any questionnaires that had many blank responses or unclear answers were removed. This helped ensure the accuracy of the results.

#### **Coding**

For interview and observational notes, common ideas were labelled with short codes to make it easier to group similar responses together.

#### **Data Entry**

All the questionnaire responses were entered into a spreadsheet, while the interview and observation notes were typed and stored in a document for later analysis.

### **3.5.2 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Quantitative data came mainly from the questionnaires. The aim was to summarise and describe the opinions of participants in a clear and simple way.

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

Basic statistics such as:

- Barcharts
- piecharts

- percentages

### **Presentation of Results**

- The results were presented using:
- tables
- graphs
- pie charts

These visuals make it easier to see patterns, such as which sustainability strategies were rated highly or poorly.

### **3.5.3 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data came from interviews with managers and observations of activities at the MarshMia premises. To analyse this information, thematic analysis was used.

#### **Thematic Analysis Procedure**

1. Reading through interview notes several times to understand the content.
2. Identifying key points and giving them short labels (codes).
3. Grouping similar codes together to form broader themes.
4. Reviewing themes to make sure they matched the data.
5. Naming and describing each theme clearly.
6. Writing up the findings in a simple narrative form.

#### **Purpose of Qualitative Analysis**

This analysis helped explain why certain sustainability practices were effective or ineffective, what challenges the company faces and how the company actually operates on a day-to-day basis.

### **3.6 Triangulation**

Triangulation means comparing results from different data sources to check if they match.

For example: If questionnaires showed that environmental practices were weak, observations were used to confirm if this was truly the case. If managers mentioned financial challenges in interviews, questionnaire responses were checked to see if employees felt the same way.

Using triangulation increased the reliability of the findings and ensured that the results were not based on only one type of data.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

First AUREC letter to carry the research is to be sought out for the permission to carry out the research. Reaching out to the identified stakeholders to schedule data collection, explaining the purpose of the study and assuring confidentiality if needed. Conducting the interviews and surveys in a comfortable and private setting, ensuring that each interviewee feels at ease and can freely share their insights. Taking detailed notes during the interviews or recording them with permission to ensure accurate information is captured.

### **3.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the methods that were used in this study namely, questionnaires, semi structured interviews and non-participant observation. These helped me understand the company's actual practices on the ground. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participations were also employed. Data analysis consisted of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire data while thematic analysis was applied to interviews and non-participant observation notes, while triangulation of findings was employed to increase the accuracy and reliability of the results by comparing information from the different sources.

## **CHAPTER FOUR DATA ANALYSIS PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and analyses the findings obtained from stakeholder interviews and organizational documents regarding the sustainability strategies employed by MarshMia, a small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) operating in the beverage industry. The analysis is structured thematically and aligned with the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1, namely:

1. To identify the strategies currently used in resource management practices, waste management, community engagement, and regulatory compliance;
2. To explore the challenges faced in implementing these strategies; and
3. To assess the effectiveness of the existing strategies.
4. To propose strategies for improving sustainability at MarshMia.

The findings are derived from interviews conducted with key internal and external stakeholders, including the Production Manager, Direct Worker, Director, Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Officer, and City Council Officer. Thematic analysis was applied to extract patterns, commonalities, and divergences across stakeholder perspectives.

#### **4.1.1 RESPONSE RATE TABLE 1**

Description	Target	Response received	Response rate %
Questionnaire	30 to 50	34	68%

**Source: Researcher**

The response rate was calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Absolute frequency}}{\text{Targeted frequency}} \times 100 = \text{Response rate} = \frac{34}{50} \times 100\% = 68\%$$

Targeted frequency

Of the sample size of the targeted 50 survey questionnaire, 34 completed the questionnaire completely and however the other 10 were involved in the interviews. The respondents responded at a rate of 68 percent. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2008), a 50% response rate is adequate, a 68% response rate is good and above, a 70% response rate is very good, and a 75% response rate is a good representative of the entire. As a result, 85% percent from the questionnaires and 100% from the interviews was deemed a good depiction of the sample. This indicates that the study had a high response rate.

**4.1.2 Demographic Data**

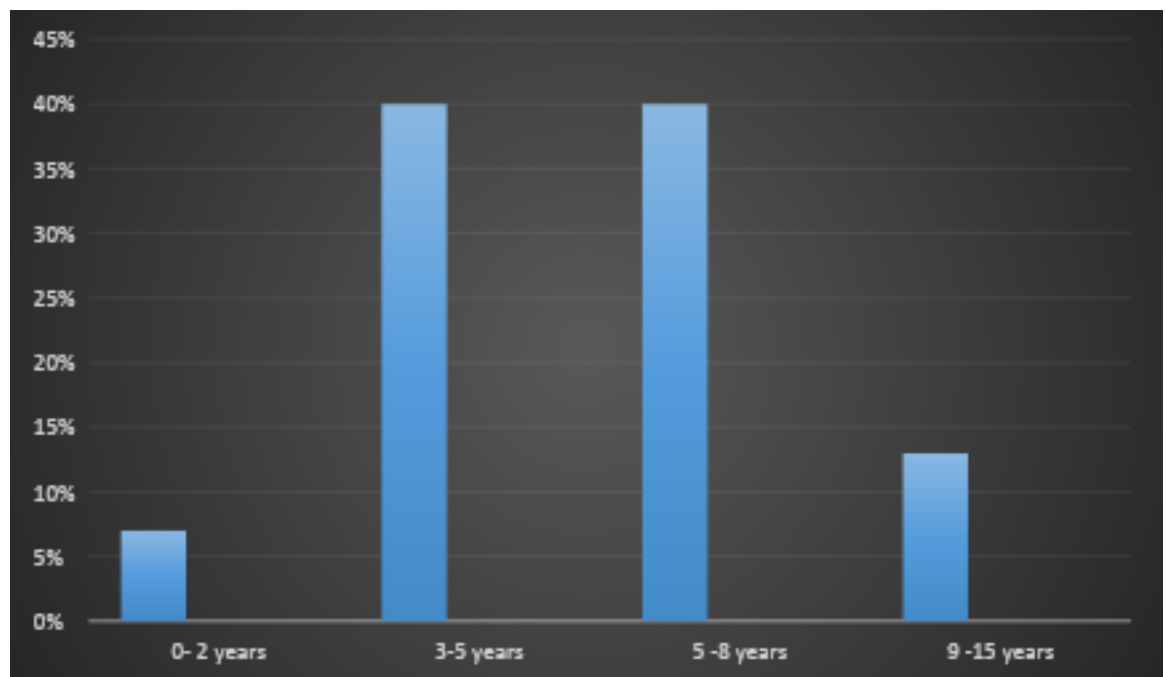
**Level of qualification**

The educational level denotes the level of academic achievement attained by the participants. The purpose of this study was to determine how participants' educational level influences their understanding research

on the evaluation of sustainability strategies for SME like MarshMia. The level of education of the participants ranged from an Ordinary level qualifications to diplomas and Bachelor's degree

### **Length of years' experience**

The number of years the respondents have worked for the organization is referred to as their employment duration. The study also sought to understand the respondents' employment duration, as this influences their skills at work. This is demonstrated in the figure below.



**FIGURE 2** NUMBER OF YEARS IN THE COMPANY

**Source: Primary data (2023)**

Out of 30 participants 7% had been at MarshMia for less than 2 years, 40% had been members for 3 to 5 years, another 40 % of the sample

for about 5 to 8 years, 13% had been members for more than 10 years, and this is the population that started the company from the ground up.

### **Educational Background**

Out of the 30 participants, 70% held a diploma, 20% held undergraduate graduate, and only 10% held ordinary level qualifications. Based on these findings, it is clear that the study's participants were well educated and thus capable of providing the researcher with relevant information on the evaluation of sustainability strategies for MarshMia. According to studies, higher educational requirements are needed for institutions which need to utilize external factors and conduct more extensive monitoring (Lambert, 2013).

**Position held**

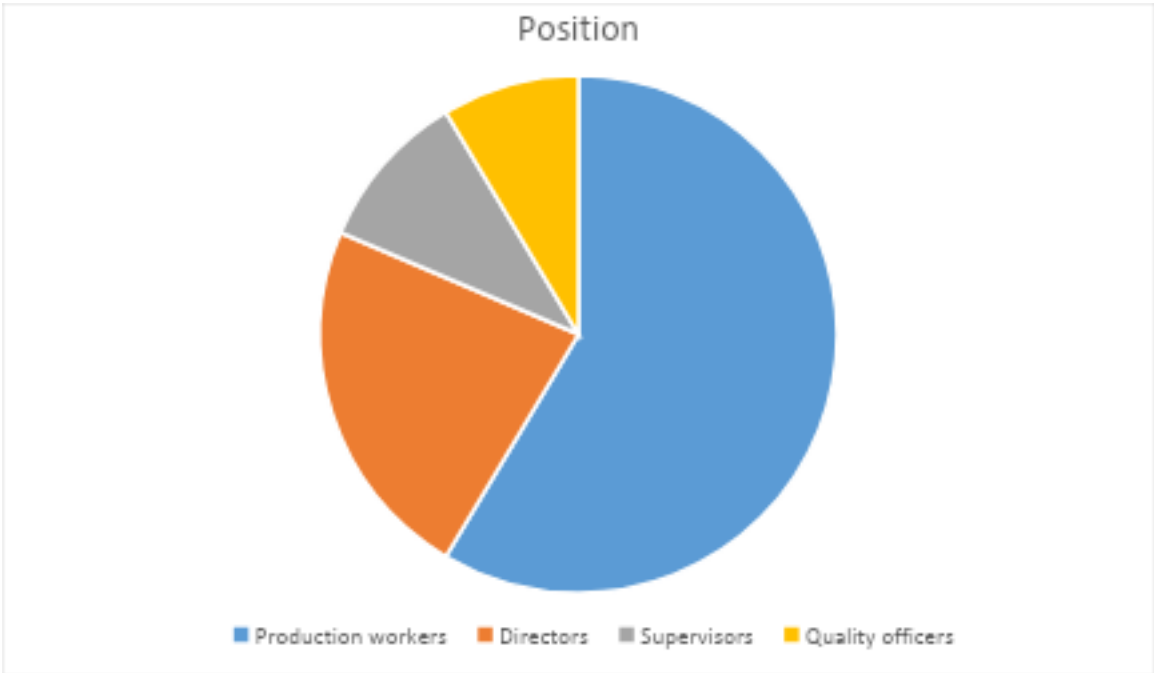


FIGURE 3 POSITION HELD BY PARTICIPANTS

Out of the participants 59% consisted of production workers, 23% were directors, supervisors make 10% of the participants and quality officers make 9% of the participants.

**4.3 Findings and Analysis**

**4.3.1 Economic strategies**

MarshMia demonstrates a clear and strategic commitment to enhancing resource efficiency, particularly in its use of water, energy, and raw materials. In a sector

traditionally marked by heavy resource consumption especially in alcohol production this shift toward sustainability marks not just operational maturity, but also growing alignment with global sustainability frameworks, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 6 and 12).

## **Strategies identified**

### **Resource Management**

MarshMia's resource management strategy is built around three key pillars: water recirculation, energy-efficient technology, and inventory control. Each of these aligns with best practices in sustainable production:

**Water Recirculation Systems:** Water is a critical resource in alcohol manufacturing, particularly during fermentation, cleaning, and cooling stages. The use of closed-loop systems for water reuse is a proven approach to minimizing freshwater withdrawals and reducing wastewater discharge (UNEP, 2010). MarshMia's achievement a notable 18% reduction in water use per litre of alcohol demonstrates both environmental impact and process optimization.

- this efficiency gain supports research by Matete and Trois (2008), which emphasizes that water recirculation can reduce total consumption by 15–30% in beverage manufacturing, especially in water-stressed regions like southern Africa.

1. **Bottle making machinery and packing machinery-** efficient machinery is a capital-intensive but high-yield sustainability strategy. SMEs in the manufacturing sector typically struggle with energy inefficiency due to legacy equipment (OECD, 2019). MarshMia’s recent investments position the company ahead of many Zimbabwean SMEs, who often cite energy cost as a major operational bottleneck (Mupambireyi, 2022). The machinery will also reduce a lot of manual labour and contamination during production.
2. **Inventory Control to Reduce Material Waste-**Inventory control systems that minimize overproduction and reduce expired or wasted inputs help close material loops. This reflects elements of lean manufacturing and the circular economy, where material efficiency is central (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). MarshMia’s adoption of these systems likely contributes to reduced overheads and improved environmental performance.

### **Challenges: Structural and Supply-Side Constraints**

While MarshMia’s strategic intent is clear and the outcomes promising, there are significant systemic barriers limiting full optimization:

1. **Aging infrastructure-** Much like other SMEs in sub-Saharan Africa, MarshMia is constrained by legacy systems—older pipes, boilers, and electrical systems that reduce the efficiency gains of newer machinery. Studies show that without holistic system upgrades, the benefits of green technology are often only partially realized (Zhou., 2014). A piece-by-piece modernization may actually create system mismatches or maintenance burdens, undermining ROI in the long run.

## 2. **Supply Chain Inconsistencies (Ethanol Feedstock) Raw material volatility-**

particularly for sugarcane-derived ethanol reflects a common vulnerability among agro-processing SMEs, seasonal availability and price fluctuation. As observed by Chikodzi and Mutowo (2014), small producers in Zimbabwe's ethanol sector often face material shortfalls in the off-season, disrupting resource planning and production efficiency.

- This volatility not only hampers inventory control but also poses risks for continuous production flow, potentially leading to inefficiencies in energy and water usage during stop-start operations.

### **Critical Interpretation: Strategic Potential Undermined by Infrastructure Gaps**

At a strategic level, MarshMia is not merely reacting to sustainability pressures it is proactively adopting practices that deliver environmental and operational benefits. However, the company finds itself caught in a familiar SME paradox: ambition outpacing infrastructure. While the 18% water efficiency improvement is commendable, the true potential of MarshMia's sustainability strategy is being diluted by outdated physical assets and weak supply-side resilience. In other words, the software is modern, but the hardware is holding it back.

Moreover, MarshMia's current progress while ahead of local industry averages is incremental rather than transformational. If the company intends to position itself as a sustainability leader within Zimbabwe's alcohol industry, infrastructure modernization must be prioritized.

### 4.3.2 Environmental strategies

#### Strategies Identified

1. **Waste segregation at source & use of SOPs for hazardous waste:** This is aligned with best practice in sustainable waste management, which emphasizes source separation as critical for minimizing environmental harm and improving downstream recycling or treatment efficiency (CircularPlace, 2020). When hazardous and organic wastes are kept distinct, the risks of cross-contamination decline, and regulatory compliance becomes more feasible.

2. **Repurposing of organic waste (e.g. composting)**

Such circular economy practices are increasingly highlighted as sustainable strategies in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The circular economy literature points out that utilizing organic waste via composting can reduce landfill load, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and even support local agriculture (An Inclusive Circular Economy, Chatham House, 2019). This suggests MarshMia's efforts in composting contribute both to environmental sustainability and potentially to local social/economic benefits.

3. **High participation in training programmes (85%) among staff:** In many LMIC settings, knowledge and awareness are key precedents for adopting safe waste handling and PPE use. Studies show a strong association between knowledge of waste handling and consistent use of PPE (International Journal of Medical Science and Public Health Research, "Association between knowledge on waste handling and use of PPE among waste handlers," n.d.). Thus, MarshMia's high participation rate is a strong indicator that staff buy-in is

relatively high, improving the chance that strategies are implemented in behaviour as well as policy.

### **Challenges: How They Mirror Broader Problems**

#### **1. Overflowing waste bins / poor scheduling during peaks**

Similar to household and municipal waste systems in Zimbabwe (e.g., Harare), efficiency in waste collection is often compromised by inadequate routing, insufficient frequency, or poor alignment of waste generation rates with collection capacity (Kwenda, Lagerwall, Eker, & van Ruijven, 2021). For MarshMia, this operational mismatch during peak production times suggests a gap in planning and capacity, likely increasing health risks, odors, pest issues, and potential breaches of environmental or health regulations.

**2. Lack of nearby recycling facilities → high logistical costs:** The literature often cites infrastructure deficits as a major barrier in waste management in LMICs: limited access to recycling plants, poor transport infrastructure, and dispersed or underdeveloped facilities are common problems (Plastic Recycling in Developing Countries: Challenges and Opportunities, Recycle-Austin; An Inclusive Circular Economy, Chatham House, 2019). MarshMia’s experience of expensive transport to recycling centres is entirely consistent with that literature, and it suggests that internal waste reduction (or onsite reuse) may need to be strengthened to reduce dependence on external infrastructure.

**3. Shortages in PPE and tools:** Safety in waste handling is not just regulatory compliance, it is also about protecting workers and reducing liabilities. The literature (e.g., “Association between knowledge on waste handling and use of

PPE among waste handlers,” n.d.) shows that even when knowledge is high, inconsistent availability of PPE undermines safe practices. For MarshMia, even if staff are trained and aware, lack of equipment may lead to shortcuts, unsafe handling, or exposure to hazardous materials.

### **Interpretation**

Drawing from your findings and the comparative literature, several critical observations emerge:

- **Compliance is not the same as sustainability leadership:** MarshMia seems very good at meeting baseline regulatory requirements (via EMA, SOPs, training). Yet sustainability isn't simply about compliance but it's about going beyond, innovating, embedding resilience. The recurring operational inefficiencies reduce the margin by which MarshMia could be seen as a sustainability leader among SMEs.
- **Behavioural culture is strong, but structural supports are weak:** The 85% training participation reflects a solid culture and willingness among workers. However, culture without tools is incomplete. The lack of PPE, inadequate waste removal schedules, etc., are structural impediments. The literature often points out that knowledge and awareness are necessary but not sufficient conditions for performance (Circular Place; Chatham House).
- **Cost pressures are likely to undermine sustainability unless addressed systemically:** The high costs associated with logistics (transport to recycling facilities) and purchasing/maintaining tools and PPE may strain MarshMia's

budget. Without strategic financial planning, there is risk of cutting corners or reducing environmental work in cost-saving exercises.

- **Risk of regulatory, reputational, and operational vulnerabilities:** Overflowing bins or mishandled hazardous waste may lead to regulatory noncompliance, environmental incidents, health risks, all of which could hurt the company's reputation. In a context where local communities and environmental bodies are increasingly vigilant, such lapses could be costly.

### **4.3.3 Social Strategies**

#### **Strategies Identified**

Through interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, several key social strategies were identified at MarshMia:

- Providing support to local police stations and schools through donations and logistics assistance
- Organizing public cleaning campaigns in partnership with the City Council
- Donating waste bins to improve urban sanitation infrastructure
- Promoting recycling, particularly of plastic bottles, via an informal bottle return system
- Creating local employment opportunities by partnering with sugarcane farmers and engaging suppliers from the Mutare area

These strategies align strongly with Carroll's (1991) framework of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), particularly its ethical and philanthropic dimensions. Additionally,

by sourcing locally and involving community members in clean-ups and supply chains, MarshMia exhibits the principles of Triple Bottom Line Sustainability (Elkington, 1998), balancing economic, environmental, and social objectives.

### **Staff Training**

While training programs exist, they are largely informal and irregular. Employees often learn “on the job” rather than through structured sessions. Critically, this approach satisfies immediate operational needs but limits long-term skill development, reduces employee confidence, and can lead to inefficiencies or safety lapses. The absence of formal monitoring makes it difficult for the company to evaluate whether training improves productivity or safety standards.

A respondent highlighted:

*“We do get some training, but it’s not regular. Most of the time we just learn as we work. I think structured training would help us do our jobs better and avoid mistakes.”*

This shows that while staff recognize the value of training, its irregularity limits its impact on both performance and social sustainability.

### **Employee Welfare**

Employee welfare includes basic safety measures, limited health support, and informal assistance to workers. These efforts improve morale, job satisfaction, and a sense of security, which are critical elements of social sustainability. Critically, however, the programs are reactive rather than proactive. They do not systematically address occupational health, work-life balance, or mental wellbeing, nor are they consistently

monitored for effectiveness. This limits employee retention and engagement, and may reduce operational efficiency over time.

### **Managerial Perspective**

A manager noted:

*“We try to look after our staff and train them, but financial and time constraints make it hard to provide structured welfare or regular training programs.”*

This shows the resource trade-offs that limit social strategy implementation. While understandable, relying on ad hoc measures reduces the overall effectiveness of social sustainability initiatives.

### **Overall Critical Interpretation**

Social strategies at MarshMia, including employee welfare, are partially effective. They provide some support for staff wellbeing but lack structure, consistency, and strategic alignment with broader sustainability goals. Strengthening these strategies through formalized training programs, comprehensive welfare policies, and proactive community engagement would enhance employee loyalty, operational efficiency, and the company’s social credibility, ultimately contributing to long-term sustainability.

### **Stakeholder Perspectives and Experiences (Qualitative Data)**

Qualitative insights from interviews and discussions revealed that **most stakeholders view MarshMia’s efforts positively**, though with noted limitations.

A City Council official remarked: *“Pavanhu vese vari ku-industrial area, MarshMia ndiyo inoratidza kuziva kuti kuvaka Mutare handi basa rehurumende yoga.”* (Of all the companies in the industrial area, MarshMia seems to understand that building Mutare is not the government's job alone.) — Respondent 7 (Mutare City Council)

An employee also noted pride in participating in these outreach efforts:

*“Tinoenda kunocleaner city yedu nguva nenguva. Kunze kwekushanda mukomboni, tinobatsira kunzvimbo dzakaita sekuchikoro nepa police.”*

*(We go out to help clean our city regularly. Besides our factory work, we also support schools and police stations.)* — Respondent 12 (Production Worker)

However, a packaging supervisor raised concerns about expectations from the public:

*“Vanhu vari kunze vanofunga kuti nekuti tiri kambani, tinofanirwa kugara tichipa zvinhu. Asi mari hadzidi kuwanda.”*

*(People outside think that just because we are a company, we must always be giving things. But we don't have unlimited funds.)* — **Respondent 14 (Supervisor, Packaging Department)**

These responses demonstrate both the positive perceptions and the financial strain felt by the company in managing social commitments.

### **Effectiveness of Engagement Strategies**

The triangulated data indicate that MarshMia's efforts are viewed as effective and authentic. Both community members and internal employees acknowledged a sense of pride and improved brand image resulting from these activities. This aligns with Porter and Kramer's (2011) theory of Creating Shared Value (CSV) which is where companies enhance competitiveness while improving social conditions.

During the field visits I observed that recycling bins donated by MarshMia were visibly in use around public facilities, and signage promoting responsible waste disposal featured the MarshMia brand. This suggests active visibility and recognition of their CSR initiatives in Mutare.

### **Quantitative Indicators**

Although direct numerical data was limited, the following quantifiable impacts were reported by management:

- Approximately 300 plastic bottles are returned weekly through informal community recycling efforts.
- The company estimates that at least 50 local jobs have been supported directly or indirectly through community-linked partnerships (e.g., sugarcane farmers, waste collectors).
- At least three schools and two police stations received donations in the past 12 months from MarshMia

These figures help substantiate qualitative feedback, offering a more comprehensive understanding of MarshMia's community footprint and engagement.

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## **Challenges Identified**

Despite these achievements, MarshMia faces several structural and financial barriers:

- Rising community expectations have begun to exceed what the company can deliver on a sustainable basis especially when it comes for school fee donations.
- The company operates in a price-sensitive, heavily taxed alcohol industry, limiting discretionary CSR spending.
- There is no formal CSR budget or policy, leading to ad-hoc rather than strategic community engagement.

This reflects the challenge identified by Visser (2008) in developing countries, where CSR is often informal and reactive, constrained by resource limitations.

Moreover, stakeholder theory, particularly Clarkson's (1995) model, warns that balancing legitimacy, urgency, and resource availability is critical in managing community expectations—an area where MarshMia appears stretched.

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## **Interpretation**

From a mixed-methods standpoint, the qualitative interviews, observational data, and basic quantitative indicators collectively suggest that MarshMia's community engagement is both strategic and appreciated, albeit limited in scale.

These efforts provide both immediate goodwill and long-term brand resilience, consistent with findings by Maignan & Ferrell (2004) who emphasized the role of CSR in building stakeholder loyalty. However, the current model is vulnerable to burnout without structural support or external partnerships.

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### **Opportunities for Innovation and Growth**

To sustain and scale its community engagement, MarshMia should explore collaborative and innovative funding models, such as:

- Public-private partnerships (PPPs) with local authorities or NGOs, allowing cost-sharing for clean-up programs or school support
- Accessing CSR grants or sustainability funds from donors operating in Zimbabwe or regionally (e.g., SADC, AfDB)
- Aligning its CSR initiatives with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) investment criteria, which can attract impact investors looking to support SMEs with social purpose

The UNDP (2016) emphasizes the importance of multi-sector partnerships in under-resourced cities, and MarshMia could benefit from tapping into these ecosystems.

### **How the strategies have an impact in the company's growth**

*“Sustainability strategies have definitely improved our performance. In liquor manufacturing, reducing water and energy usage has cut costs, and using eco-friendly*

*packaging has boosted our brand image. Customers appreciate that we're conscious of our environmental impact, and it's opened doors with retailers who prefer sustainable suppliers. It took some investment at first, but the long-term benefits, financially and reputationally are worth it."*

## **Interpretation**

### **Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV):**

The Natural Resource-Based View (Hart, 1995) suggests that firms can achieve competitive advantage by developing capabilities that contribute to environmental sustainability. In the case of the SME MarshMia, reducing water and energy usage reflects *pollution prevention* which is key in NRBV and that leads to cost savings and improved operational efficiency. This supports the respondent's view which is stating that sustainability cut costs and enhanced performance.

### **Stakeholder Theory:**

Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory argues that organizations must manage relationships with a wide range of stakeholders and that includes customers, suppliers, and communities in order to achieve long-term success. The respondent highlights that eco-conscious customers and retailers have responded positively to their sustainable practices. This suggests that meeting stakeholder expectations for environmental responsibility has helped improve brand image and business relationships, contributing to better market positioning.

### **Triple Bottom Line (TBL):**

Elkington's (1997) Triple Bottom Line framework emphasizes the importance of balancing *people, planet, and profit*. MarshMia's adoption of eco-friendly packaging (planet) and improved customer perception (people) has ultimately translated into financial benefits (profit). This confirms the interconnected nature of sustainability and performance as outlined in the TBL framework.

### **Diffusion of Innovation Theory**

Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation Theory can also be applied here. The liquor SME, by being an early adopter of sustainability practices within its industry, gains a competitive edge. This early adoption creates differentiation in a market where sustainable manufacturing is becoming increasingly valued by both consumers and supply chain partners. Which gives MarshMia more power especially with the immerging counterfeit issue as well as from new competition.

### **Conclusion**

MarshMia's community engagement efforts reflect a genuine commitment to CSR and have had measurable social benefits. However, scaling impact requires a shift from ad-hoc giving to structured and externally leveraged partnerships. The mixed-method evidence points toward a path of growth if it is also supported by smart collaboration and investment.

### **SUMMARY TABLE 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY REVIEW**

Dimension	Observation
Strategy	CSR-focused, localized community investment and environmental programs
Effectiveness	Improved community trust and stakeholder recognition
Challenges	Financial limitations, growing expectations, need for external partnerships
Interpretation	Sustainable with external support; aligns with CSR and stakeholder theory

#### 4.3.4 Regulatory Compliance

##### Strategies Identified

The company maintains a rigorous approach to compliance through:

- Regular internal audits
- Clear and documented SOPs
- Ongoing coordination with EMA and the City Council

## **Effectiveness**

MarshMia has maintained full compliance for the past three years and is currently ranked among the top 10 compliant companies in Mutare.

## **Challenges**

Despite this record, several issues were raised:

- Regulatory changes are not always communicated in a timely manner, leading to delayed internal adjustments.
- The complexity of compliance procedures sometimes overwhelms departmental coordination, especially during regulatory updates.

## **Interpretation**

MarshMia has cultivated a strong compliance culture. However, the absence of a real-time regulatory alert system or a centralized compliance dashboard could make it vulnerable to lapses as regulations evolve.

### **4.4 Emerging Issue: Counterfeit Packaging and Product Theft**

#### **Problem Overview**

One of the most pressing and unexpected risks identified during the research was the proliferation of counterfeit alcohol using MarshMia's genuine packaging, especially the "*Teku Teku*" Spirit Drink. These counterfeit versions are sold primarily through informal and unregulated channels such as roadside bottle stores and mobile vendors operating

from car trunks. This development poses serious threats to both public health and MarshMia's corporate integrity and image, as consumers are unable to distinguish between authentic and fake products when packaging is identical.

A MarshMia senior manager acknowledged the risk, stating:

*"We've heard reports from customers buying what they thought was Teku Teku, but it turned out to be fake, the taste turned out to be different. The scary part is they're using our actual bottles. This affects our image and could harm people's health."* Respondent 4 (Management)

### **Stakeholder Awareness**

While not all stakeholders raised the issue directly, informal interviews and insights from Mutare City Council officials confirmed increasing concern around the loss of packaging into informal establishments.

A city council officer stated: *"We've seen a spike in branded bottles and caps dumped in open spaces. Some are collected by informal waste pickers who likely resell them. It's hard to control once they're out in the open."* — Respondent from (Mutare City Council)

A packaging worker, when asked about how waste is handled post-production, explained the situation in Shona:

*"Tinozvigadzira mapaper ebranding asi mamwe anobuda nemamistakes, wrong spellings so tomaisa mumabin, tobudisa Kunze kuti vemabin wozotora marara. Saka*

*panozoita vamwe haanouya kuzотора marara vachiti pamwe munenge muine doro or maleft overs so ipapo panoitawo vanotorawo those brandind stickers woenda nawo kunotedzera woisa pane ravo ravanenge vabika wototanga kutengesa."*

*(Translation: We make the drinks and leave behind damaged or typos in stickers. So, we take them outside the premise in the bins for the trash collectors to take however there are some individuals who go through our bins hoping to find leftover liquor and some people come and take these items from the waste bins. They take the stickers and go copy word for word to put on their own drinks.)* — Respondent 11 (Packaging Worker)

This statement highlights the lack of secure disposal systems and suggests possible internal oversight gaps, especially in waste management practices. There is really no one internally to guard the trash as unserious as it may sound, it seems like it's necessary.

### **Risks Identified**

The study identified several immediate and long-term risks associated with counterfeit alcohol being sold in MarshMia packaging:

- Public health threats, including the risk of methanol poisoning from unregulated alcohol (Nhapi & Dzimbahete, 2020).
- Loss of revenue due to counterfeit competition in informal markets.
- Brand damage, as consumers link counterfeit products with MarshMia.
- Regulatory exposure, as repeated incidents may prompt EMA or other agencies to investigate MarshMia—even unfairly.

## **Root Causes**

Analysis of interview data and triangulated findings point to several root causes:

- Lack of secure post-consumer packaging recovery systems.
- Absence of tamper-evident caps or serialized packaging identifiers.
- No bottle return incentives or traceability systems.
- Informal waste handling, including unauthorized collection by scavengers.
- Limited technical capacity to implement smart packaging technologies like QR tracking.

## **Interpretation and Implications**

This issue highlights a significant gap in MarshMia’s sustainability and risk management frameworks. While the company complies with environmental regulations on paper, the security of its packaging waste remains a blind spot.

In Zimbabwe, where counterfeit alcohol is a major public health crisis, and enforcement is weak in informal economies, the misuse of branded packaging is not just a business issue—it is a moral and legal risk. Research by Nhapi and Dzimbahete (2020) shows that counterfeit alcohol has caused numerous health complications, including deaths, often due to methanol content.

For MarshMia, this puts the company in a dangerous position. Even if it is not producing the counterfeit, the reputational risk is real, especially if a fatal incident is falsely attributed to the company.

This situation calls for a shift in how sustainability is approached—moving beyond environmental compliance toward integrating product security, stakeholder education, and closed-loop waste systems as part of sustainable operations.

#### **Objective 4: To propose strategies for improving sustainability at MarshMia**

##### **Economic Sustainability Improvements**

Participants emphasized that financial stability and operational efficiency are critical for sustainability. Suggestions included diversifying product lines, improving distribution, and seeking partnerships for funding.

##### **A production supervisor stated:**

*“If we could get support for new equipment, we could reduce production costs and make our products more competitive.”*

This reflects a recognition that financial and technological investment is key to sustaining operations long-term.

##### **Environmental Sustainability Improvements:**

Respondents identified the need for better waste management, recycling practices, and environmental compliance. Many highlighted that environmental sustainability is currently minimal and lacks formal structure.

##### **An employee noted:**

*“We do separate some waste, but there is no proper system. Training on how to manage waste properly would help a lot.”*

This suggests that environmental initiatives could be improved through formal training and proper infrastructure.

### **Social Sustainability Improvements (Employee Welfare)**

Employee welfare was highlighted as a critical area for improvement. Participants emphasized the need for structured welfare programs, regular training, and workplace wellbeing initiatives.

#### **A production worker remarked:**

*“We sometimes get safety equipment or advice, but it’s not consistent. If the company could take care of our health and wellbeing properly, we would feel more motivated and valued.”*

#### **A manager added:**

*“We know staff welfare is important, but limited resources make it hard to provide regular training or health support.”*

These quotes show that while there is awareness of employee needs, resource constraints and lack of structured programs prevent full implementation of social sustainability strategies.

#### **4.6.4 Critical Interpretation**

- Overall, respondents' feedback indicates that MarshMia's sustainability can be enhanced by:
- Formalizing employee welfare programs to improve wellbeing, motivation, and retention.
- Investing in environmental management systems, including waste management, recycling, and staff training.
- Improving economic resilience through product diversification, cost management, and strategic partnerships.

Critically, the feedback suggests that sustainability at MarshMia is currently reactive rather than proactive. Employees recognize the benefits of structured programs, but limited resources and informal practices reduce effectiveness. Implementing the proposed improvements would strengthen the company's capacity to sustain operations, improve employee morale, and enhance environmental compliance.

#### **Conclusion for Objective 4**

- Respondents clearly indicate that MarshMia can improve sustainability by:
- Introducing formal employee welfare programs, including health, safety, and wellbeing initiatives.
- Strengthening environmental practices, supported by training and proper waste management systems.
- Enhancing economic strategies via diversification, cost control, and partnerships.

Based on the findings, the following actions are recommended:

1. Implement tamper-evident packaging and serialized caps to make replication harder.
2. Introduce a QR verification system so customers can confirm authenticity via mobile phones.
3. Launch a bottle return incentive program, offering small discounts or tokens for returned genuine bottles.
4. Strengthen internal waste controls, ensuring no branded packaging is left unsecured.
5. Engage EMA and the City Council to push for regulations that include post-consumer security in environmental audits.

#### **4.5 Hypothesis Testing Using Correlation Analysis (Simplified Method)**

To determine whether there is a relationship between the independent variables (sustainability strategies) and the dependent variable (sustainability performance), Pearson's correlation coefficient was used.

A correlation value ( $r$ ) ranges from -1 to +1:

- +1 = perfect positive relationship
- 0 = no relationship
- -1 = perfect negative relationship

Variables	Hypothesis	correlation (r)	p-value	interpretation	decision
environmental strategies vs sustainability performance	H01: There is no significant relationship between environmental sustainability strategies and performance	0.68	0.000	Strong positive relationship. Environment strategy improves performance	reject H01
social strategy vs sustainable performance	H02: There is no significant relationship between social sustainability strategies and performance	0.72	0.000	strong positive relationship social sustainable strategies improve	rejection H02

				performance	
economic strategy sustainable performance	vs H03: There is no significant relationship between economic sustainability strategies and performance	0.80	0.000	Very strong positive relationship. Economic sustainable strategies improve performance	Reject H03

**TABLE 3** HYPOTHESIS AND CORRELATION TABLE

## Qualitative Insights (Interview Findings)

Interviews with managers revealed the following themes:

- MarshMia’s management recognizes sustainability as essential for long-term growth and compliance.
- The company’s main focus has been on cost reduction through buying of bottle making and packaging machinery, waste control, and community relations.
- Challenges include limited funding for renewable energy and inadequate employee awareness of sustainability practices.

TABLE 3

Objective	Findings Summary	Conclusion
<b>Objective 1:</b> Identify strategies	Strategies are well-defined across all four sustainability areas	MarshMia has a foundational sustainability framework in place
<b>Objective 2:</b> Explore implementation challenges	Challenges span infrastructure, logistics, communication, and finance	Strategies require operational and financial reinforcement
<b>Objective 3:</b> Analyse effectiveness	Mixed results: high compliance and community trust, but fragile execution	Effectiveness is moderate but improvable with systemic upgrades

<p><b>Objective 4:</b> To propose recommendations for improving and strengthening the sustainability framework for MarshMia.</p>	<p>Product diversity, cost-saving technologies, energy efficient machinery, staff training enhancing community engagement.</p>	<p>Formalizing social sustainability strategies and strengthening environmental and economic strategies can improve this framework.</p>
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#### 4.5 Chapter Summary

TABLE 4 CHAPTER SUMMARY TABLE

This chapter has presented a comprehensive analysis of MarshMia’s sustainability strategies using thematic data drawn from internal and external stakeholders. The company has made commendable strides in water conservation, regulatory compliance, and community engagement. However, persistent challenges such as aging infrastructure, operational inefficiencies, financial constraints, and an emerging threat of counterfeiting require urgent attention. The following were derived from the findings.

1. Environmental, social, and economic sustainability strategies all have strong positive relationships with MarshMia’s overall sustainability performance.
2. Economic strategies ( $r = 0.75$ ) have the greatest influence, followed by social ( $r = 0.72$ ) and environmental ( $r = 0.68$ ) strategies.

The qualitative data also support the statistical findings that say that sustainability improves efficiency, reputation, and community relations.



## CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed discussion on the research findings in line with the objectives of the overall study, offering critical insights on the sustainability strategies that are being employed at MarshMia. With the responses I gathered from direct employees, management, City Council officials, and packaging line operators, this chapter investigates the effectiveness of current strategies and identifies existing implementation challenges. It also considers the role of external factors like the government especially in supporting sustainable practices. A particularly urgent matter is also addressed: the rise in counterfeiting of MarshMia's flagship spirit, *Tekuteku*, which not only threatens public health and the brand's image but also diverts public attention from long-term sustainability investments.

### 5.2 Discussions

#### Objective 1: Identify Current Strategies

In my study I found that MarshMia Ltd. employs several informal sustainability strategies:

- **Resource management** through local sourcing of inputs like sugarcane and grains.
- **Waste management** by reusing spent grain for animal feed and using returnable bottles.
- **Community engagement** via local sourcing partnerships and occasional school campaigns.

- **Regulatory compliance** through licensing and adherence to basic safety standards.

These efforts align with SME sustainability practices noted in Zimbabwe's local business environment (Institute of Entrepreneurs Zimbabwe [IOEZ], 2024).

## **Objective 2: Explore Challenges in Implementation**

Several challenges were identified:

- Limited financial resources to invest in advanced technologies or formal sustainability systems.
- Lack of technical expertise for environmental monitoring or social impact assessment.
- Policy and regulatory uncertainty, which affects long-term planning and compliance efforts.
- Counterfeiting of products on the black market.
- Low customer awareness of sustainability, reducing incentives for responsible business practices.

These findings are consistent with prior research showing that many Zimbabwean SMEs view sustainability as secondary to survival (Bulls Zimbabwe, 2023).

## **Objective 3: Analyse Strategy Effectiveness**

While some strategies have produced positive outcomes (e.g., cost savings, community goodwill), others remain underdeveloped due to the barriers outlined above. Current efforts are moderately effective and support the triple bottom line theory, particularly in:

- Reducing production waste and sourcing costs (**Profit**).

- Supporting local economic development, through awareness campaigns and supplying bins to the local town. **(People)**.
- Minimising environmental impact through reuse of plastic bottles and containers **(Planet)**.

The effectiveness is constrained by lack of fast packaging machinery that reduces a lot of human handling on product, financial support as well as irregular economic and regulatory laws especially when it comes to ethanol supply and liquor licensing. Of recent liquor licenses have been reduced meaning that there are threats of competition from new and small producers.

### .3 Evaluation of the Hypothesis (Expanded)

The hypothesis guiding this study was:

*"Implementing sustainability strategies positively impacts the operational performance and long-term viability of MarshMia Ltd."*

This hypothesis has been partially supported by the findings. The sustainability strategies identified including local sourcing, waste reuse, community engagement, and regulatory compliance have shown potential to improve both operational efficiency and stakeholder trust. However, the extent of their impact is currently limited due to issues of scale, formality, and resourcing.

### **Resource Management and Profitability**

Marshmia's local sourcing strategy, where the company procures raw materials like sugarcane and grains from nearby farmers, contributes to reduced transportation costs and supports the local economy. This not only aligns with environmental goals (reducing emissions) but also improves cost-efficiency, supporting the "Profit" component of the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997). Additionally, the exploration of energy-efficient technologies, such as firewood-efficient boilers, demonstrates awareness of sustainable production.

These actions support the hypothesis by showing that sustainability strategies can directly enhance operational performance. However, the lack of capital to implement solar technology and absence of a formal sustainability plan weakens the potential for long-term profitability gains.

### **Waste Management and Environmental Impact**

The reuse of spent grain as livestock feed is an example of circular economy thinking, turning waste into value. This approach reduces the cost of waste disposal and contributes to environmental sustainability by minimising landfill use. Similarly, the use of returnable bottles lowers the need for new packaging materials, which reduces both costs and environmental impact.

These practices strongly support the hypothesis, especially regarding operational efficiency and environmental responsibility. However, the absence of a structured waste management system, such as recycling partnerships or formal waste tracking, limits the

full environmental benefit. The effectiveness of these strategies is context-dependent and remains constrained by limited access to infrastructure (Bulls Zimbabwe, 2023).

### **Community Engagement and Social Viability**

Marshmia's informal engagement with local suppliers and community health outreach aligns with the People dimension of the TBL framework. These efforts create goodwill, strengthen local relationships, and build social capital, all of which are key for long-term business resilience, especially in smaller markets like Mutare.

These efforts support the hypothesis by contributing to social sustainability and potentially enhancing brand reputation. However, without formal corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives or staff training programmes, the depth of community engagement is limited. In turn, this restricts the potential long-term returns in customer loyalty and stakeholder support.

### **Regulatory Compliance and Risk Management**

Marshmia complies with essential alcohol industry regulations, including product safety and licensing. This reduces legal risk and ensures continuity of operation and also directly contributing to operational performance. Compliance also protects public health, contributing to the People aspect of sustainability.

Nonetheless, the company operates in a policy environment that is complex, costly, and sometimes inconsistent (National Competitiveness Commission, 2022). As such, even though compliance contributes to stability, it is reactive rather than strategic, limiting its long-term viability benefit.

## **Overall Assessment of the Hypothesis**

In summary, the hypothesis that sustainability strategies positively influence operational performance and long-term viability is valid in principle, and partially supported in practice. The strategies used by MarshMia are:

1. Cost-saving (local sourcing, returnable bottles),
2. Risk-reducing (regulatory compliance),
3. Value-generating (community engagement, waste reuse),

## **5.3 Conclusion**

1. **Fragmented Strategy:** MarshMia's sustainability strategies exist but lack formalization, documentation, and measurable goals, which is important especially when it comes to tracking and measuring their performances.
2. **Major Challenges Persist:** Financial limitations, poor equipment and counterfeiting are significant roadblocks. Crucially, there is little to no government support to fill these gaps.
3. **Limited Strategy Effectiveness:** The few existing initiatives do not deliver lasting environmental or social impact due to absence of monitoring, training, and policy backing.

4. **External Support is Essential:** For SMEs like MarshMia to thrive sustainably, government agencies must move beyond regulation to active support and collaborations.

#### **5.4 Implications of the Study**

The findings of this research have several implications for practice, policy, and theory, particularly for SMEs like MarshMia operating in resource-constrained environments like Zimbabwe.

##### **Practical Implications**

The study showed that even small-scale sustainability strategies, such as waste reuse, local sourcing, and basic regulatory compliance can offer tangible operational benefits. However, these practices are currently informal and under-resourced.

SME managers should consider formalizing sustainability practices to better measure their effectiveness and long-term benefits. This could include simple policies on waste management, supplier engagement, and community development. Businesses should also explore low-cost innovations, such as solar lighting for certain operations or basic energy audits, which can reduce operational costs over time and align with environmental goals. Community-based sustainability (e.g., sourcing from local farmers, reusing spent grain) creates social goodwill, which can strengthen brand loyalty and resilience in competitive markets.

These implications suggest that sustainability is not only feasible for SMEs but can also serve as a strategic advantage if managed with intention and clarity.

## **Policy Implications**

The research highlights how financial and regulatory barriers limit the ability of SMEs to adopt and scale sustainability strategies. Policymakers should simplify regulatory frameworks and make licensing and compliance more accessible to small enterprises. Digital platforms for registration and monitoring could reduce costs and delays. Incentive structures such as tax breaks, green grants, or subsidized technology can encourage SMEs like Marshmia to invest in energy efficiency, recycling, and pollution control. Local authorities and environmental agencies should support the creation of recycling infrastructure and public-private partnerships, which could reduce waste across the industry.

In short, the government has a key role in creating an enabling environment where sustainability becomes practical, affordable, and profitable for SMEs.

## **Theoretical Implications (For Academic and Future Research)**

By applying the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework to a small, regional alcohol producer in Zimbabwe, this study contributes to the limited literature on sustainability in African SMEs. The research shows that TBL principles are applicable even in informal, under-resourced contexts, but their full potential depends on external support and internal capacity. It also suggests that sustainability in SMEs often begins informally and may remain unmeasured unless incentivised or supported through education and policy.

## 5.5 Recommendations

**Align Sustainability Strategy with SDGs and National Policies:** One key recommendation for MarshMia is to align its sustainability strategy with both the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Zimbabwe's environmental and ESG policy frameworks. These are 17 global goals adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs are designed to address the world's biggest challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and peace and justice. This would not only help the company stay ahead of regulations but also show its commitment to long-term positive impact, which will attract support and potential aid from NGOs for continuing to push such a positive narrative.

MarshMia is already taking a great step by collecting and recycling its used plastic bottles. This initiative directly supports SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, which encourages reducing waste through recycling and reusing materials, which is one of the practices the company already does. They could push more of this by encouraging their customers to bring back the empty bottles in exchange for a discount on their next orders. By building on this and aligning further with goals like SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 13: Climate Action, the company can create a more well-exposed sustainability strategy.

Also, making sure their practices meet Zimbabwe's environmental standards will reduce the risk of fines or negative press, especially as ESG reporting becomes more important in the country. Overall, linking existing efforts like bottle recycling to a bigger

strategy would help MarshMia stand out as a responsible and forward-thinking alcohol producer in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association. (2022).

**Develop a Structured Sustainability Policy:** MarshMia should create a formal sustainability policy that outlines its clear environmental and social goals, defines roles and responsibilities, and sets up reporting mechanisms. This policy should focus on key areas such as water use, energy consumption, and waste management. A structured approach will help the company stay consistent, measure progress over time, and ensure accountability across departments and also serves as a reminder in case the company goes off the target. According to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), having a written environmental management policy is a foundational step in improving sustainability performance (ISO, 2015). Additionally, regular monitoring and evaluation should be built into the policy to support continuous improvement and compliance with Zimbabwe's environmental regulations.

**Assign a Sustainability Focal Person:** Even if MarshMia cannot afford to hire a full-time sustainability officer, it can still designate a current staff member to serve as a "Sustainability Focal Person." This individual would be trained in basic environmental management practices and tasked with coordinating internal sustainability effort for example tracking water usage, overseeing recycling, and ensuring compliance with waste disposal procedures. Having a dedicated point person helps ensure that sustainability goals are followed through and not overlooked in day-to-day operations (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2020). It also fosters a culture of environmental responsibility across the company.

**Upgrade Packaging to Counter Counterfeiting:** Counterfeit alcohol is a serious public health and brand integrity issue in many African countries, including Zimbabwe. MarshMia should consider upgrading its packaging to include tamper-proof seals, QR codes for product authentication, and other smart packaging solutions. These digitalisations not only protect consumers but also improve traceability and strengthen the brand's reputation for quality and safety (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). Alongside these upgrades, MarshMia can run public awareness campaigns to educate customers on how to identify authentic products and report fakes regularly especially in hotspot areas, with the help of the police. This two-pronged approach can help reduce the circulation of counterfeit products in the market.

**Enhance Community Dialogue:** Sustainability isn't just about the environment but it also includes how companies engage with the communities where they operate. MarshMia should establish quarterly stakeholder meetings that include local community leaders in Mutare, youth representatives, and civil society groups. These meetings would create a platform for dialogue, feedback, and collaboration on social and environmental issues. According to the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA), community engagement is essential for companies to maintain their "social license to operate" and build trust with local stakeholders (ZELA, 2022). These meetings can also help MarshMia identify community needs and co-create solutions that benefit both the company and the people around it. These meetings will help boost the company's image because it benefits from alcoholism after all, in these campaigns they could speak on the dangers of excessive drinking as well as underage drinking, so that they can be received as responsible.

## Recommendations to the Government

### 1. Strengthen Regulatory Frameworks for Post-Consumer Waste

- **Issue:** MarshMia is vulnerable to counterfeit-related risks due to a lack of regulation around post-consumer packaging disposal.
- **Recommendation:** The Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and relevant government bodies should expand current environmental regulations to include post-consumer packaging security, such as mandatory tamper-evident seals or traceability systems for alcohol producers.
- **Rationale:** This would close regulatory gaps and help protect public health and brands from counterfeit alcohol (Nhapi & Dzimbahete, 2020).

### 2. Provide Technical and Financial Support to SMEs for Sustainability Initiatives

- **Issue:** SMEs like MarshMia face significant financial and technological barriers to implementing sustainable practices (e.g., energy-efficient systems, recycling infrastructure) especially in this ever changing economic and technical environment.
- **Recommendation:** Government through Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and SME Development agencies should create grant schemes, low-interest loans, and technical assistance programs specifically targeted at helping manufacturing SMEs transition to greener operations, given that the company is one of the rated tax payers in Mutare.
- **Rationale:** This aligns with national development priorities and global ESG frameworks.

### **3. Incentivize Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for Community Engagement**

- **Issue:** MarshMia’s community engagement efforts are commendable but constrained by limited internal resources.
- **Recommendation:** The Ministry of Local Government and Mutare City Council should initiate structured PPP programs where companies like MarshMia can co-implement urban clean-up, school support, and recycling programs.
- **Rationale:** This shared responsibility model enhances impact and reduces the financial burden on individual companies.

### **4. Enforce and Monitor Informal Market Activities**

- **Issue:** Counterfeit alcohol sold through informal markets using real MarshMia packaging poses public health risks.
- **Recommendation:** The Ministry of Home Affairs and Zimbabwe Republic Police should work closely with EMA to monitor, regulate, and shut down informal distribution channels selling counterfeit alcohol using stolen packaging especially because the social economic environment is at risk.
- **Rationale:** Protecting consumers from harmful products also protects legitimate businesses and reduces healthcare burdens.

### **Recommendations to the Educational Sector**

## 1. Introduce Sustainability and CSR in school curricula

- **Issue:** Factory workers and supervisors at MarshMia demonstrated limited understanding of environmental and CSR best practices.
- **Recommendation:** The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education should revise curricula in technical and vocational institutions (e.g., Mutare Polytechnic) to include modules on:
  - Sustainable manufacturing
  - Environmental compliance
  - Corporate social responsibility
- **Rationale:** Enhancing workforce awareness is essential for implementing sustainable practices at the operational level.

## 2. Promote Industry-Academia Partnerships for Applied Sustainability Research

- **Issue:** SMEs lack access to localized, evidence-based sustainability solutions.
- **Recommendation:** Universities and colleges should partner with companies like MarshMia to conduct collaborative research, student projects, or internships focusing on:
  - Waste reduction methods
  - Renewable energy use in SMEs
  - Community-based recycling models
- **Rationale:** These partnerships provide practical solutions for industry and experiential learning for students.

### 3. Offer Entrepreneurial Education with Focus on Green Innovation

- **Issue:** The study found that innovation in areas like packaging security and recycling was lacking.
- **Recommendation:** Educational institutions should incorporate entrepreneurship training with a sustainability focus, equipping students to:
  - Start green businesses
  - Develop tech-based traceability tools (e.g., QR coding)
  - Innovate in sustainable packaging or logistics
- **Rationale:** Educated innovators can support SMEs and the community in developing resilient, green economies.

#### 5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Given the limitations of this study, several areas are recommended for further investigation:

1. **Comparative Studies:** Future research should compare MarshMia with other SMEs in the same sector to understand how context influences sustainability practices.
2. **Quantitative Analysis:** A detailed statistical study of energy use, waste volume, and carbon emissions would provide measurable insights into environmental impact.

3. **Longitudinal Research:** Observing the company's sustainability journey over time could reveal how strategies evolve and what interventions yield the most significant impact.
4. **Policy Impact Assessment:** Research could evaluate how specific government policies influence SME sustainability adoption, focusing on tax structures, grants, or training programs.



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APPENDIX 1 Approval from supervisor



COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, PEACE, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

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.../2025

Africa University Research Ethics Committee

**Ref: Approval for AUREC Proposal Submission**

.....has worked on the proposal and I can confirm that it is ready for review by your esteemed committee.

Respectfully submitted,

**Dr Farai Chigora**

-----  
Supervisor's Name

-----  
Supervisor's Signature

-----  
H.O.D's Name

-----  
H.O.D's Signature

APPENDIX 2 CONSENT LETTER

My name is Tafadzwa Mudekwa, a Masters student from AU. I am carrying out a study on the evaluation of sustainability strategies for MarshMia a small to medium sized enterprise. I am kindly asking you to participate in this study by answering the questionnaire and a brief interview.

**Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of the study is to explore ways in which the company can minimize its environmental impact, reduce costs, and improve its overall social responsibility. You were selected for the study because you are employed at MarshMia and other employees to create a range in responses.

**Procedures and duration**

If you decide to participate you will fill out a questionnaire and may be interviewed. It is expected that this will take about 10 to 20 minutes of your time.

**Risks and discomforts**

This research may take up some time from work or lunch hours.

**Benefits and/or compensation**

There will not be any benefits or compensation that will come with participation in this research.

**Confidentiality**

Any information that is obtained in the study that can be identified with the participant will not be disclosed without their permission. Names and any other identification will not be asked for in the questionnaires.

**Voluntary participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If a participant decides not to participate in this study, their decision will not affect their future relationship with MarshMia. If they chose to participate, they are free to withdraw their consent and to discontinue participation without penalty.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

**Authorisation**

If you have decided to participate in this study please sign this form in the space provide below as an indication that you have read and understood the information provided above and have agreed to participate.

---

-----  
Name of Research Participant (please print) Date:

-----  
Signature of Research Participant or legally authorised representative

If you have any questions concerning this study or consent form beyond those answered by the researcher including questions about the research, your rights as a research participant, or if you feel that you have been treated unfairly and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, please feel free to contact the Africa University Research Ethics Committee on telephone (020) 60075 or 60026 extension 1156 email [aurec@africau.edu](mailto:aurec@africau.edu)

Name of Researcher -----Tafadzwa Eunice Mudekwa-----|

## APPENDIX 3: AUREC Approval Note



"Investing in Africa's future"

AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (AUREC)

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P.O. Box 1320 Mutare, Zimbabwe, Off Nyanga Road, Old Mutare-Tel (+263-20) 60075/60026/61611 Fax: (+263 20) 61785 Website: [www.africau.edu](http://www.africau.edu)

Ref: AU3422/25

26 August, 2025

**TAFADZWA EUNICE MUDEKWA**

C/O Africa University

Box 1320

**MUTARE**

**RE: AN EVALUATION OF SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES FOR MASHMIA A SMALL TO MEDIUM ENTERPRISE**

Thank you for submitting the above-titled proposal to the Africa University Research Ethics Committee for review. Please be advised that AUREC has reviewed and approved your application to conduct the above research.

The approval is based on the following.

a) Research proposal

- **APPROVAL NUMBER** AUREC 3422/25  
This number should be used on all correspondence, consent forms, and appropriate documents
- **AUREC MEETING DATE** NA
- **APPROVAL DATE** August 26 2025
- **EXPIRATION DATE** August 26, 2026
- **TYPE OF MEETING:** Expedited  
After the expiration date, this research may only continue upon renewal. A progress report on a standard AUREC form should be submitted a month before the expiration date for renewal purposes.
- **SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS** All serious problems concerning subject safety must be reported to AUREC within 3 working days on the standard AUREC form.
- **MODIFICATIONS** Prior AUREC approval is required before implementing any changes in the proposal (including changes in the consent documents)
- **TERMINATION OF STUDY** Upon termination of the study a report has to be submitted to AUREC.



Yours Faithfully

**MARY CHINZOU  
FOR CHAIRPERSON**

**AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

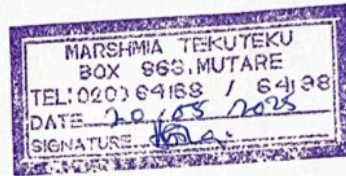
## APPENDIX 4 Approval from Study Company

To: Tafadzwa Mudekwa  
From: MarshMia  
Date: 20/05/25  
Subject: Approval for Research at Our Establishment

Dear Tafadzwa,

I am pleased to inform you that your request to conduct research at MarshMia has been approved. Please ensure you adhere to our company guidelines and protocols during your study. Should you need any other assistance feel free to reach out.

Best of luck!  
Sincerely  
Director



## APPENDIX 5: Research QUESTIONNAIRE

**Are you an employee at MarshMia? (Please tick)**

Yes.....

No (state your relation).....

**Please tick your employment time range (Please tick)**

2-5 years..... N/A..... 6-10 years.....

**Please state your educational background and current position**

.....  
.....  
.....

1. What strategies are currently employed at MarshMia?

.....  
.....

2. How effective are the existing strategies in improving business performance?.....

.....  
.....

3. What are the challenges that come with implementing in the management of the above strategies?

.....  
.....

4. What are the improvements that can be made to enhance sustainability at MarshMia?

.....  
.....