



Regulating Gaming and Balancing the Interests of All: A Review of Gaming Principles in Zimbabwe

^{*1}Chingozha Yeyukai, ²Shumba Bekezelani and ³Dr. Chingozha Misheck Pachipano

^{*1}Director, YEUPA Enterprises (Pvt Ltd), Harare, Zimbabwe.

²Student, Department of Development Studies, National University of Technology, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

³Interim Secretary, Department of Lotteries and Gaming Board, Home Affairs, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Abstract

The gaming sector in Zimbabwe is characterized by significant turbulence, marked by rapidly shifting trends that demand a proactive approach from regulators. Technology introduces constant changes in the gaming industry, which creates both opportunities and challenges. Amid these changes, the need to balance the interests of diverse stakeholders becomes increasingly apparent. The gaming ecosystem comprises punters, operators, regulators, government bodies, and external partners. All stakeholders share an interest in the growth and stability of the industry. This study explores the intricate relationship between establishing a robust regulatory framework and aligning it with the interests of all gaming stakeholders. By addressing the challenges faced today while preparing for those ahead, this research highlights strategies for fostering harmony within Zimbabwe's gaming sector.

Keywords: Regulatory framework, Gaming, Balanced interest principles.

Introduction

Background

The gaming industry is witnessing significant growth over the past decade, driven by both technological advancements and socioeconomic factors. However, this growth has been accompanied by challenges that require a nuanced understanding of the ecosystem and its stakeholders. According to a report published by iHarare (online Publisher) on the 24th of August 2024, the growth of gambling in Zimbabwe is accompanied by challenges and opportunities that have an impact on the economy. The world over, there are numerous complaints that the general citizenry is falling prey to gambling. Many are believed to have slipped into severe addiction. The addiction has led to a series of challenges that include financial, work related and mental challenges. The observation has been that once one starts to gamble, they do not know when to stop. The message from the regulator from those interviewed and documents accessed during this inquiry is that the players should know when to stop and when to walk away. They are also always reminded not to be tempted to chase their losses. In the extent that they lose, the punters should graciously walk away, pick themselves up, return another day. This principle would help them realize and appreciate that gaming in all its forms should not be taken as a way of livelihood but as entertainment. In response to this position many social commentators

weighed in and presented a different dimension altogether. In their view, gambling is no longer a luxury. Those frequenting betting shops are now doing so to avert the poverty they are experiencing. The salaries some of the players are receiving are not sustainable. The need to supplement is therefore paramount. They are gambling out of a need, economic in nature.

Poverty has also clouded the majority of the communities due to high levels of unemployment in many parts of the world particularly Africa. The official unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is currently 21.8% as reported by Zim stat in Q3 2024. The extent of gambling has thus reached astronomical levels. This is the same to the multitude that converge at betting shops on every day of the week including weekends and public holidays.

The motivation among the players is that on a good day, the tables will turn and for them to walk away with a win. During an interview in Harare, a respondent advised that he has benefited several times from sports betting. He acknowledged that while gambling harm was there, he was not a victim though he acknowledged that he was gambling nearly every day, at times during lunch breaks while at work.

As a result, there are growing concerns arising from an increase in gambling activities in Zimbabwe, which are believed to be exposing many people to various forms of gambling harm. Such harm include addiction to gambling that

leads to financial difficulties, disruption to work-life balance, poor family relationships, and mental health challenges to some extent. Gamblers fall prey to the irregularities associated with excessive gambling behavior. The prevalence of individuals who fall prey to gambling harm is linked to the failure to know when to stop and when to walk away, which is a function of individual discipline. A respondent from Harare suggest that the regulator has to intensify campaigns to foster responsible gambling

To ensure that the gaming ecosystem has harmony, the regulators should be committed to upskilling their staff so that they provide players with a service behind beyond They are always seized in all seasons with the thrust to ensure that appropriate technologies are in place. These technologies providers help to avail software's that present best apportionment of gambling outcomes activities. Through international collaboration the regulators are also taken to the level where they will be sufficiently gravitated on gambling trends that are enduring and sustainable. This will also help them to ensure that they can mitigate against cybersecurity, and money laundering, IAGR (2024) [5]. Issues related to data protection and the safety of players are also sensitive. When the players do not feel secure, they may 'vote with their feet'. This would not be good news for the industry. Years of patronage is what all regulators and operators envisage for the industry. In that vein, efforts are pursued or followed through to gravitate data protection. Data needs to be protected hence regulators need to invest towards this so that they protect the industry.

While the registered operators collaborate with regulators to ensure the safety of the players, Xiao *et al* (2024) raises an alarm on the increasing illegal gaming machines. In a study conducted by Xiao *et al* (2024) illegal machines in other countries are increasingly penetrating the gambling industry. The illegal gambling machines provide unregulated games for betting, they increase public health risks which the regulating authorities have a mandate to curb.

Balancing Gaming Legal Framework with Technological Advancement

The rapid evolution of technology and innovation in the gaming industry has raised the concern about regulatory frameworks. A recent study by Axio *et al* (2024) highlights the inconsistencies in regulatory approaches to mitigate risks and harm associated with certain gaming machines. The research reveals significant variations in national laws with some jurisdictions permitting these machines while others prohibiting them. This lack of international consensus and regulator coherence creates an environment where the market for illicit machines can thrive out passing the regulatory framework. Kiraly *et al* (2019) focused on the need to balance between legal framework and other interest to necessary to drive industry forward. The proliferation of online gaming has underscored the need for a delicate balance between technological innovation and regulatory oversight as technology continue to evolve, National laws struggle to keep pace with technology often resulting in inconsistent and fragmented regulatory frameworks. While some jurisdictions have implemented robust measures to mitigate risks associated with online gaming others have been slower to adapt creating opportunities for illicit activities to flourish. Achieving a balance between fostering innovation and protecting vulnerable populations require international cooperation and harmonization of regulatory approaches by sharing best practices and developing common standards of

managing online gaming, Gains bury (2017) [4] pointed out that countries can more effectively address the challenges posed by online gaming though promoting a safe and responsible gaming environment. Moreover, regulators have to remain agile and responsive to emerging trends and technologies ensuring that national laws are adaptable and effective in mitigating risks without stifling innovation, sustainability of the industry,

Balancing the Regulatory Framework and Corporate Social Responsibility

The gaming industry's rapid growth has sparked intense debate about the need for balanced approach to regulation and corporate social responsibility. While CSR is important, on one hand regulators must ensure that the gaming operators adhere to strict standards to protect vulnerable populations and prevent harm, Gains bury (2017) [4]. On the other hand, King and Delfabbro (2013) [6] highlighted that gaming companies have a social responsibility to promote responsible gaming practices, protect customers, and contribute to the well-being of communities they serve. Research has shown that a balanced approach to regulation and CSR can lead to better outcomes for both the industry and society as found by Wood and Williams (2011) [11]. A key challenge in achieving this balance is the complexity of regulating a rapidly evolving industry. Regulators must stay abreast of emerging trends and technologies to ensure that regulatory frameworks remain effective. According to Kuss and Griffiths (2012) [8], gaming companies must prioritize CSR initiatives that address specific social and environmental concerns such as problem gambling, underage gaming, community engagement and supporting socioeconomic cause. By working together, regulators and gaming companies can create a more sustainable and responsible gaming industry. Studies have consistently shown that a balanced approach to regulation and CSR can have numerous benefits that include reduced harm to vulnerable populations increased trust in the industry and improved business outcomes. To achieve this balance regulators and gaming companies must engage in ongoing dialog and collaboration to ensure that regulatory framework and CSR initiatives are effective, efficient and responsive to emerging challenges.

Methodology

The study employed the qualitative approach, which is an approach that aims to secure understanding and then interpret human experiences, behaviors and social phenomena through in-depth non numerical data analysis. The approach addresses the why and how rather than how many and how much, Cresswell (2018). The responses were drawn from players within Harare who were visiting betting shops using the snowballing technique. The technique was used to identify those individuals who have a long history of betting targeting sports betting. The other participants were then identified through references from the few identified ones.

The study also reviewed various documents on gambling these included media reports conference papers and reports to understand the experience of other regulators on how they were balancing the interests of the different stakeholders in the gaming industry. Conference reports reviewed included the International Association of Gaming Regulators that meets annually, iGaming Technology conference and regulating the Game. These are annual conferences that bring together regulators from different jurisdictions to discuss and review the gaming issues and trends.

Findings

The study established amazing findings in that some punters are now pursuing gambling full time and managing to meet their obligation

The study also established that the regulator in Zimbabwe is raising significant revenue through licensing and levies which revenues are then committed to economic projects across the country, Classic 263 radio (December 2025)

The study also revealed that there are some individuals who have fallen to gambling harm. Consequently, they have lost their jobs and marriages. According to the study the regulators should always ensure that the regulatory framework is in line with the obtaining trends. When the regulations lag, this gives a rise to a gap which then makes it difficult for the operators and the enforcement of the laws.

The study highlighted the dual nature of gaming in Zimbabwe's economy. On one hand, it contributes to revenue generation for the government and creates employment opportunities. On the other hand, socioeconomic challenges have driven individuals to view gambling as a potential solution to financial hardships, often leading to negative consequences.

Conflict of interests among stakeholders (punters, operators, regulators, government entities, and external partners) remains a significant issue. The lack of a cohesive regulatory framework intensifies these tensions, resulting in fragmentation within the industry.

Regulators face obstacles such as outdated policies, insufficient technological integration, and the inability to enforce responsible gaming measures effectively. This creates vulnerability to unregulated activities and gambling harm among citizens.

There is a growing reliance on betting among unemployed individuals. This shift from recreational gaming to a livelihood substitute reflects broader socioeconomic pressures in the country.

Conclusion

The gaming sector in Africa stands at a crossroads, where the need for innovation collides with pressing socioeconomic realities. By prioritizing a balanced regulatory approach and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the industry can unlock its potential while minimizing harm. Proactive steps, such as updating regulations, enhancing public awareness, and addressing unemployment, will create a sustainable gaming ecosystem that serves the interests of all parties involved

Recommendations

Regulators to push for the designing and implementation of updated legal framework that incorporates technological advancements and address emerging industry trends. A digital regulatory platform could enhance transparency and efficiency.

In view of balancing gambling and entertainment, regulators to launch nationwide campaigns to educate citizens on the risks of gambling addiction and encourage gaming as a form of entertainment rather than a financial solution.

To balance stakeholders' needs in the gaming ecosystem, there need for the creation of a participatory forum where all stakeholders can voice their concerns and collaborate on crafting mutually beneficial policies. This will ensure balanced representation and harmonious growth in the sector.

Governments to invest in resources and training for regulatory bodies to monitor compliance and address unregulated

practices effectively. Governments to develop alternative livelihood programs to address unemployment and reduce citizens' dependency on gambling for financial security.

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