

Human Resource Development Strategies to Improve The Economic Growth of Small Businesses in The Community District of Manatuto



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KEY WORDS	ABSTRACT
Human resource development, small business, economic growth	The development of human resources (HR) is a critical factor in driving economic growth, particularly in the small business sector. Skilled and competent human resources are essential to enhancing productivity and operational efficiency, ultimately contributing to the acceleration of economic growth. Small businesses play a vital role in local economies by creating jobs, stimulating local economic activity, and improving community well-being. Despite their importance, small businesses often face challenges related to HR development, including limited access to training, inadequate qualifications, and difficulties in retaining talent. These challenges impede productivity, innovation, and competitiveness. This research aims to analyze the HR development strategies that can enhance the economic performance of small businesses in Manatuto District. By examining the impact of professional training, the adoption of digital technologies, and the role of public policies and strategic partnerships, this study proposes practical solutions for improving HR management and fostering the growth of small businesses. The findings offer valuable insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and other stakeholders to strengthen the local business ecosystem and promote sustainable economic development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of human resource development (HRD) in promoting economic growth, especially in the small business sector, cannot be underestimated. Highly skilled and adequately competent human resources have substantial potential to increase productivity and operational efficiency, ultimately accelerating the pace of economic growth. This is a crucial aspect of small business development, as it allows these businesses to compete effectively in the market and contribute to the overall economic growth of the

region.

Small businesses play a vital role in the economies of local communities, contributing through job creation, local economic stimulus and increased community well-being. These businesses are often the backbone of local economies, helping to create economic stability and reduce unemployment rates in the area. The presence of small businesses also reinforces the competitiveness of the local economy through innovation and diversification of products and services offered to consumers.

Studies have shown that small businesses have a significant impact on the local economy,



contributing to job creation, economic growth and community development. For example, a study by Subagja et al. (2022) found that small businesses play a crucial role in creating job opportunities, stimulating local economic growth, and improving community well-being. Another study by Widjajanti et al. (2023) concluded that small businesses contribute to the competitiveness of the local economy through innovation and diversification of products and services.

In conclusion, the importance of the development of small businesses is evident at both micro and macroeconomic levels. Human resource development plays a crucial role in promoting economic growth, and small businesses contribute significantly to the economies of local communities. Therefore, it is essential to support and develop small businesses to increase their productivity, competitiveness, and contribution to the overall economic growth of the region.

The constraints faced by small enterprises in accessing adequate training and development of human resources are a significant concern in community contexts. According to Ausat and Suherlan (2021), these constraints usually arise due to financial limitations, which prevent small businesses from participating in quality training programs or conducting effective in-house training.

This lack of access to training and development opportunities can have far-reaching consequences for small businesses, including reduced productivity, decreased innovation and lower competitiveness. In addition, limited access to relevant and up-to-date information is a significant obstacle for small businesses to continue to grow and adapt to technological and market changes (Ausat & Suherlan, 2021).

Effective HR management not only improves the productivity and competitiveness

of companies but also contributes to local economic growth. Small businesses face significant challenges, such as a lack of workforce qualifications, limited access to training, and difficulties in retaining talent, making it essential to implement effective HR development strategies (Gomes & Silva, 2022). The literature on economic development highlights that small businesses play a crucial role in creating jobs and diversifying the economy. However, the absence of structured policies for the empowerment of workers can limit their growth potential. According to Oliveira et al. (2023), continuous training and investment in human capital are essential factors to boost innovation and operational efficiency of small businesses.

In the context of Manatuto, a predominantly rural district, the challenges related to HR development are even more evident. The lack of access to technical and managerial training programs limits the ability of local entrepreneurs to expand their businesses. In addition, the scarcity of government incentives and the low level of digitalization of companies make it difficult to adopt modern HR management practices (Ferreira & Costa, 2021).

Implementing effective HR development strategies can transform the local economic landscape. Among the most promising approaches are professional training, the creation of business support networks and the encouragement of youth entrepreneurship. Recent studies indicate that mentoring programs and personalized training significantly increase the productivity of small businesses and reduce the bankruptcy rate in the first years of operation (Silva & Almeida, 2020).

Additionally, adopting digital technologies for HR management can improve the operational efficiency of small businesses.

Tools such as e-learning platforms, performance management software, and online recruitment systems allow business owners to optimize their selection and training processes, reducing costs and increasing talent retention (Martins et al., 2023).

Another key aspect for the economic growth of small businesses in Manatuto is the creation of strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors. Collaboration between local governments, universities, and non-governmental organizations can facilitate access to training and financing programs, creating a more favorable environment for business development (Rodrigues & Mendes, 2022).

Organizational culture also plays an essential role in HR development. Companies that promote an inclusive work environment, invest in employee well-being, and encourage innovation tend to have better financial results and greater employee satisfaction (Lima & Barbosa, 2021).

Additionally, talent retention is a critical challenge for small businesses in developing communities. Strategies such as structured career paths, competitive benefits, and recognition programs can help reduce employee turnover and ensure continuity of organizational knowledge (Pereira & Santos, 2023).

Entrepreneurial education is another determining factor for the growth of small businesses. Training programs aimed at developing managerial and financial skills can empower local entrepreneurs to make more strategic and sustainable decisions, promoting business expansion (Carvalho et al., 2024).

Thus, this study seeks to analyze the main human resource development strategies that can be implemented to boost the economic growth of small businesses in the District of Manatuto. The research will be based on a

qualitative and quantitative approach, using primary and secondary data to assess the impact of HR policies and practices on business performance. The aim is to provide practical recommendations for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and other stakeholders, contributing to the strengthening of the local business ecosystem.

Problem Identification

The economic growth of small businesses in the Manatuto District faces significant challenges due to the absence of effective human resource development strategies. The lack of qualification of the workforce, the scarcity of training programs and the difficulty in retaining talent compromise the productivity and competitiveness of these companies. In addition, the limited digitalization of HR management processes and the absence of public policies aimed at strengthening human capital further aggravate the situation (Oliveira & Mendes, 2022).

Given this scenario, it is essential to investigate which human resource development strategies can be implemented to improve the performance of small businesses and, consequently, boost local economic growth. The research seeks to understand how professional training, the adoption of technologies, and the creation of business support networks can contribute to the sustainability and expansion of business in the region (Ferreira et al., 2023).

General Objective and Specific Objective of the Research

The general objective of this research is to analyze and propose effective strategies for the development of human resources that can contribute to the economic growth of small businesses in the District of Manatuto. The survey seeks to identify the main challenges



faced by local entrepreneurs in HR management and suggest solutions based on good practices and success models applied in similar contexts.

Specific Research Objectives

1. Identify the main challenges faced by small businesses in the Manatuto District in relation to human resource management and development.
2. Analyze the impact of professional qualification and continuous training on the productivity and competitiveness of small companies.
3. Investigate the role of digital technologies in optimizing HR management processes and strengthening small businesses.
4. To assess the importance of public policies and strategic partnerships for the development of human resources in the region.
5. Propose practical recommendations for entrepreneurs and policymakers aimed at improving HR management and the economic growth of small businesses.

Research Benefits

The present research offers significant benefits to both local entrepreneurs and policymakers and other stakeholders in the economic development of the region. Among the main benefits, the following stand out:

1. Strengthening the Competitiveness of Small Businesses: Implementing effective HR development strategies can increase productivity, reduce operating costs, and improve the quality of products and services offered by small businesses (Silva & Almeida, 2021).
2. Job Creation and Unemployment Reduction: Investment in professional training and talent retention can contribute to the creation of new

employment opportunities, reducing unemployment and promoting social inclusion in the community of Manatuto (Rodrigues & Costa, 2023).

3. Support for the Formulation of Public Policies: The results of the research can provide subsidies for the creation of public policies aimed at strengthening human capital and the sustainable development of small businesses in the region (Martins et al., 2024).
4. Encouraging Innovation and Digitalization: The adoption of digital technologies in HR management can modernize business processes, making small businesses more efficient and prepared to face the challenges of the globalized market (Pereira & Santos, 2022).
5. Promoting Local Entrepreneurship: Research can encourage the emergence of new entrepreneurs by demonstrating the importance of HR development for business success and providing practical guidelines for effective people management (Carvalho et al., 2024).

Thus, this investigation seeks to contribute to the strengthening of the business ecosystem of the District of Manatuto, promoting sustainable economic growth based on the valorization of human capital.

2. METHOD

Research Subject

The subjects of the research are small business owners, human resource managers and employees of small companies located in the district of Manatuto. These groups were chosen due to their direct relevance in the dynamics of human resource development and in the economic growth of companies. Small business

owners, as decision-makers, have a crucial role in implementing strategies that aim to improve the training and performance of their teams. Human resources managers, on the other hand, are responsible for planning and executing policies that promote professional development and talent retention, which are essential for creating a productive and motivating work environment.

In addition, small business employees represent the workforce that, when empowered and motivated, can drive innovation and operational efficiency. The inclusion of these three groups allows for a holistic approach, where the perspectives and experiences of each are considered. This not only enriches the analysis, but also makes it possible to identify gaps and opportunities in human resource management practices, contributing to the sustainable development of small businesses in the Manatuto community. The research thus seeks to understand how the interactions between these subjects can influence local economic growth and which strategies can be more effective to promote this development.

Type of research

The proposed research can be classified as descriptive, exploratory and qualitative, each one contributing in a unique way to the understanding of human resource development strategies in small companies in the district of Manatuto. The descriptive approach will allow mapping and detailing the practices currently used by these companies, providing a clear view of the methodologies for training, recruitment, and talent retention. This description is essential to identify which strategies are being implemented and how they impact the economic performance of companies, serving as a basis for future analysis and recommendations.

In addition, the research will have an exploratory character, allowing the investigation of new approaches and practices that have not yet been widely adopted in the region. This exploration is essential to discover innovations that can be implemented to improve human resource development, such as training programs, partnerships with educational institutions, and well-being initiatives at work. The inclusion of a qualitative approach, through interviews and focus groups, will enrich the research by providing a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences. This combination of methods will allow not only the collection of quantitative data, but also the capture of narratives and insights that can reveal the nuances of human resource management practices, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the local context.

Research Location

The research site is the district of Manatuto, a region characterized by economic diversity and the presence of small businesses in various sectors, including commerce, services, and agriculture. This choice is strategic, as Manatuto represents a microcosm of business dynamics in rural and semi-urban areas, where small businesses play a crucial role in local economic development. By covering different sectors, the survey will be able to capture a wide range of practices and challenges faced by these ventures, allowing for a richer and more contextualized analysis of human resource development strategies. In addition, the sectoral diversity makes it possible to identify the particularities and specific needs of each segment, contributing to the formulation of recommendations adapted to the local reality.

Type of data

The research will utilize both primary and secondary data to ensure a comprehensive and reasoned analysis of human resource development strategies in the small businesses of the Manatuto district. Primary data will be collected directly through questionnaires, interviews, and observations, allowing researchers to obtain up-to-date and specific information on human resource management practices, the perceptions of business owners and employees, and the challenges faced on a daily basis. This straightforward approach is essential for capturing the reality experienced by the participants, providing valuable insights that may not be available from secondary sources.

On the other hand, secondary data will be used to contextualize the research within a broader framework. This will include analyzing economic development reports, previous studies on human resources, and statistical data on the performance of small businesses in the region. This already existing data will serve to complement the information collected directly, allowing a comparison between observed practices and general industry trends. The combination of primary and secondary data will not only enrich the analysis, but also provide a solid basis for the formulation of practical and policy recommendations aimed at improving human resource development and, consequently, the economic growth of small businesses in Manatuto.

Population and Sample

The survey population is made up of all small businesses located in the Manatuto district, covering a variety of sectors such as trade, services, and agriculture. This population is relevant to the study, as small businesses play a key role in the local economy, contributing to

job creation and community development. By focusing on all small businesses in the region, the survey seeks to capture a comprehensive view of human resource development practices and their implications for economic growth, allowing for a more thorough analysis of local business dynamics.

The sample will consist of a representative selection of small businesses, which can be determined through random or intentional sampling, depending on the specific goals of the survey. The sample size may vary, but it should be sufficient to ensure the validity of the results, with a suggestion from 5 to 10 companies. This sample will allow researchers to obtain meaningful and relevant data, reflecting the experiences and practices of different types of small businesses in the region. Careful sample selection is crucial to ensure that survey results are representative and can be generalized to the larger population, thereby contributing to the formulation of practical and policy recommendations that meet the specific needs of small businesses in Manatuto.

Data Analysis Technique

Qualitative analysis offers a deeper and more contextualized perspective of data, making it ideal for exploring complex and subjective phenomena. Techniques such as content analysis or thematic analysis are employed to interpret data collected through interviews or focus groups. In this process, researchers seek to identify relevant patterns, themes, and insights that emerge from the participants' narratives. This approach allows for a richer understanding of individuals' experiences and perceptions, complementing quantitative findings and contributing to a holistic view of the object of study. Thus, the combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses can provide a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the phenomena investigated.



3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The economic growth of small businesses in the Manatuto District of Timor Leste is intricately linked to the development of human resources, which is widely acknowledged as a fundamental driver of productivity, innovation, and sustainable enterprise growth. The analysis of existing literature and policy documents reveals that while small businesses constitute a vital component of the local economy, their development is significantly constrained by limited access to quality human resource development (HRD) programs tailored to their specific needs. The Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan (2011–2030) underscores the critical importance of human capital development as a cornerstone for achieving sustainable economic growth and poverty alleviation. However, despite national-level commitments, the practical implementation of HRD strategies at the district level, particularly in rural and post-conflict areas like Manatuto, remains underdeveloped.

A key finding from the literature is the persistent mismatch between the skills imparted through existing vocational and technical education programs and the actual demands of small business operations in Manatuto. Reports such as the Timor-Leste Workforce Development Strategic Review highlight that while efforts have been made to establish vocational training centers and competency frameworks, these initiatives often fail to address the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of rural communities. This gap results in an insufficient supply of skilled labor capable of supporting small business growth, thereby limiting the potential for economic diversification and resilience. Furthermore, the reliance on foreign workers for specialized roles

in the private sector, as noted in the reviewed documents, indicates a critical shortage of locally available skills, which further hampers the development of indigenous enterprises.

The demographic structure of Timor Leste, characterized by a significant youth bulge, presents both an opportunity and a challenge. With nearly 60% of the population under the age of 25, there is a pressing need to equip young people with relevant skills and entrepreneurial capabilities. However, the current labor market and education system are not adequately prepared to absorb this influx, resulting in high unemployment and underemployment rates among youth. This situation underscores the urgency of implementing effective HRD strategies that not only provide technical skills but also foster entrepreneurial mindsets and leadership competencies among the district's population.

Moreover, the literature emphasizes the importance of inclusive HRD approaches that address gender disparities and social inequalities. Women entrepreneurs in Timor Leste, including those in Manatuto, face multifaceted barriers such as limited access to finance, cultural norms restricting their economic participation, and inadequate business skills. Initiatives like the WAGE BEST program illustrate the benefits of integrating financial, social, and business support services to empower women micro-entrepreneurs. Such holistic approaches are essential to ensure that HRD strategies contribute to equitable economic growth and social cohesion.

The analysis also highlights the critical role of multi-stakeholder partnerships in enhancing HRD outcomes. Collaboration among government agencies, educational institutions, private sector actors, and civil society

organizations is necessary to design and implement HRD programs that are contextually relevant and sustainable. The establishment of Industry Sub-Commissions and Centers for Employment and Professional Guidance represents progress in this regard but requires further strengthening and localization to effectively respond to Manatuto’s specific challenges. The literature suggests that successful HRD strategies combine formal training with practical, on-the-job learning, mentoring, and continuous professional development, thereby enabling entrepreneurs to adapt to dynamic market conditions and scale their businesses effectively.

by robust institutional mechanisms. Policymakers and development practitioners should prioritize aligning training programs with local market needs, promoting inclusive participation across gender and social groups, and fostering strong partnerships among stakeholders. Such an integrated and context-sensitive approach will not only strengthen the capacity of small businesses in Manatuto but also contribute significantly to Timor Leste’s broader goals of economic diversification, poverty reduction, and sustainable development.

Human Resource Development Challenges in Manatuto District

The analysis reveals that one of the primary obstacles limiting small business growth in Manatuto District is the inadequate development of human resources. Despite the critical role of small enterprises in local economic activities, many entrepreneurs and workers lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively manage and expand their businesses. This deficiency is rooted in limited access to formal education and vocational training programs tailored to the needs of the district’s predominantly rural population. According to reports by the Asian Development Bank and the International Labour Organization, vocational training centers and employment services exist but are insufficiently equipped and underutilized in Manatuto, resulting in a significant skills gap.

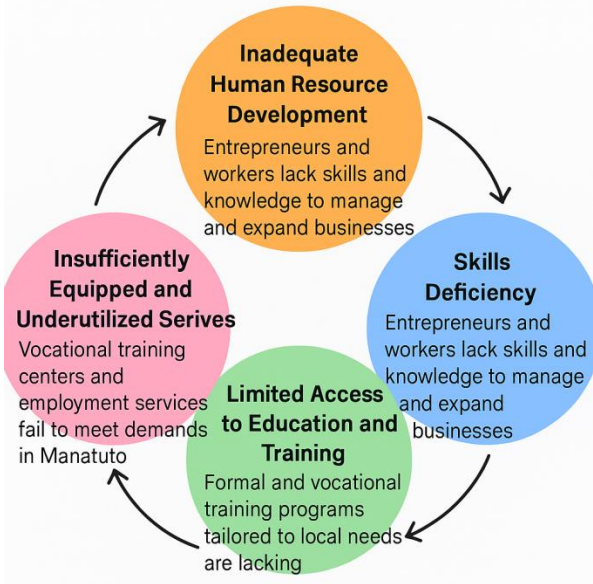


Figure 1, Human Resource Development (HRD) Constraint Cycle

In conclusion, the comprehensive review of literature and policy frameworks affirms that human resource development is indispensable for enhancing small business economic growth in Manatuto District. However, to maximize its impact, HRD strategies must be carefully tailored to the local socio-economic and cultural context, adequately resourced, and supported

Furthermore, the socio-economic context of Manatuto, characterized by poverty, low literacy rates, and limited infrastructure, exacerbates these challenges. Many small business owners operate with traditional knowledge and informal practices, which restricts their ability to innovate or compete in broader markets. The lack of managerial and financial literacy skills

also leads to inefficiencies in business operations, such as poor record-keeping, inadequate marketing, and limited understanding of customer needs. This situation is compounded by a shortage of entrepreneurial mentorship and coaching programs, which are critical for nurturing business acumen and resilience.

The gender dimension further complicates human resource development in Manatuto. Women entrepreneurs, who constitute a significant portion of small business operators, face additional barriers including cultural norms, limited mobility, and restricted access to training opportunities. Studies indicate that women's participation in formal HRD programs is lower compared to men, which limits their economic empowerment and the overall growth potential of the small business sector. Addressing these gender disparities is essential to ensure inclusive economic development.

Moreover, the limited coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and private sector actors hinders the effective delivery of HRD programs. Fragmented efforts lead to duplication of services in some areas while leaving others underserved. This calls for a more integrated and locally adapted approach to HRD that aligns with the specific socio-cultural and economic realities of Manatuto. The literature suggests that localized training content, delivered in local languages and incorporating indigenous knowledge, can improve participation and outcomes.

In summary, the human resource development challenges in Manatuto are multifaceted, involving educational, socio-cultural, gender, and institutional factors. Overcoming these barriers requires a strategic and holistic approach that prioritizes skills development,

entrepreneurship education, and capacity building tailored to the district's context.

Strategic Approaches to Human Resource Development

The literature reviewed identifies several strategic approaches that can enhance human resource development to support small business growth in Manatuto. Central to these is the adoption of competency-based training programs that focus on practical skills directly relevant to small business operations. Such programs should include financial literacy, marketing, customer service, and basic management skills. The Asian Development Bank's profile of Manatuto emphasizes the need for vocational education that is demand-driven and responsive to local market conditions, ensuring that training translates into employable skills and improved business performance.

Another critical strategy is the integration of mentorship and peer learning networks. Mentorship programs provide entrepreneurs with guidance, motivation, and knowledge transfer, which are vital for overcoming challenges and fostering innovation. Peer networks facilitate the sharing of experiences and resources, building social capital that can enhance business sustainability. These approaches have been successfully implemented in similar rural contexts, demonstrating improvements in business confidence and growth.

In addition, the use of technology and digital platforms is emerging as a promising tool for HRD in remote areas like Manatuto. Mobile learning applications and online training modules can overcome geographical barriers and provide flexible learning opportunities. However, the digital divide remains a concern,

with limited internet access and digital literacy among many community members. Therefore, any technological solution must be accompanied by efforts to improve digital infrastructure and skills.

Gender-sensitive HRD strategies are also essential. Programs must be designed to accommodate women's schedules, provide safe learning environments, and address socio-cultural constraints. Empowering women through targeted training and access to finance can significantly boost household incomes and community well-being. The literature underscores the success of integrated approaches that combine skills training with microfinance and social support.

Finally, strengthening institutional capacity and coordination is fundamental to sustaining HRD initiatives. Establishing partnerships between government bodies, educational institutions, NGOs, and the private sector can pool resources, expertise, and networks. Local government involvement is particularly important to ensure alignment with development priorities and community needs. Capacity building for trainers and program managers will enhance the quality and relevance of HRD services.

Impact of Human Resource Development on Small Business Growth

Empirical evidence from comparable developing regions indicates that effective human resource development positively influences small business growth by improving productivity, innovation, and market access. In Manatuto, enhancing entrepreneurial skills enables business owners to diversify products, improve quality, and adopt better marketing strategies. This, in turn, increases competitiveness and profitability. The literature highlights that HRD

contributes not only to individual business success but also to broader economic benefits such as job creation and poverty reduction.

Moreover, HRD fosters an entrepreneurial culture that encourages risk-taking, creativity, and continuous learning. This cultural shift is crucial in transforming subsistence-level businesses into growth-oriented enterprises. The development of leadership and problem-solving skills among entrepreneurs also improves their ability to navigate challenges and leverage opportunities in dynamic markets.

The social impact of HRD is equally significant. By empowering marginalized groups, particularly women and youth, HRD promotes social inclusion and reduces inequalities. This inclusive growth model supports community resilience and sustainable development. The literature stresses that HRD programs that integrate social and economic objectives tend to have more profound and lasting effects.

However, the impact of HRD depends heavily on the quality and relevance of training, the availability of complementary resources such as finance and infrastructure, and the enabling policy environment. Without these supportive factors, HRD alone may not achieve the desired outcomes. Therefore, a holistic approach that addresses multiple dimensions of the business ecosystem is necessary.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this analysis have significant policy implications for Timor Leste's government and development partners. First, there is a need to design and implement HRD programs that are context-specific, addressing the unique challenges and opportunities in Manatuto. This requires conducting local needs

assessments and involving community stakeholders in program development.

Second, policies should promote gender equity by ensuring that women have equal access to training, finance, and business support services. Gender-responsive budgeting and targeted outreach can facilitate this goal. Additionally, integrating HRD with microfinance and market linkage programs can enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

Third, strengthening institutional coordination is critical. Creating multi-sectoral platforms that bring together government agencies, NGOs, private sector, and community representatives can improve planning, implementation, and monitoring of HRD initiatives. Capacity building for local trainers and extension workers will also improve program delivery.

Fourth, investment in digital infrastructure and digital literacy is necessary to expand access to innovative learning modalities. Public-private partnerships can be leveraged to develop affordable and accessible digital solutions tailored to rural communities.

Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation systems should be established to assess the effectiveness of HRD programs and inform policy adjustments. Data collection and impact assessments will help identify best practices and areas for improvement.

Future Research Directions

While this study provides a comprehensive review of HRD strategies relevant to small business growth in Manatuto, several gaps remain that warrant further investigation. Empirical research involving primary data collection from local entrepreneurs, trainers, and policymakers would provide deeper insights

into the contextual factors influencing HRD effectiveness. Longitudinal studies could track the impact of specific HRD interventions over time, capturing changes in business performance and socio-economic outcomes.

Research exploring the role of informal learning, traditional knowledge, and cultural practices in HRD could enrich understanding of how to design culturally sensitive programs. Additionally, studies focusing on the intersection of HRD and access to finance would clarify how these elements interact to support small business development.

Comparative analyses between Manatuto and other districts in Timor Leste or similar post-conflict settings could identify transferable lessons and unique challenges. Finally, exploring innovative approaches such as social entrepreneurship and digital entrepreneurship within HRD frameworks could open new avenues for economic growth.

4. CONCLUSION

Human resource development (HRD) is crucial for enhancing small business economic growth in Manatuto District, Timor Leste, by addressing skill gaps and building entrepreneurial capacity. Current challenges include limited access to relevant training, inadequate institutional support, and gender disparities. Effective HRD strategies should focus on practical, locally tailored training, mentorship, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to empower entrepreneurs and promote inclusive growth. Implementing such context-specific HRD initiatives will strengthen small businesses, contributing significantly to poverty reduction and sustainable economic development in the region.

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