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A Review Of The Factors Affecting The Uptake Of Insurance Services In Lusaka, Zambia

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Abstract:
Background: *Insurance services play a crucial role in building financial resilience by protecting individuals, households, and businesses from adverse effects of unexpected events. Despite this, insurance penetration remains critically low in Zambia, limiting financial inclusion and exposing citizens to economic vulnerabilities. This study aimed to examine and understand the factors affecting the uptake of insurance services in Lusaka, such as cultural and religious beliefs, income levels, financial literacy, pricing structure, and institutional service delivery.*
Materials and Methods: *The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. The study targeted a sample of 384 respondents, who were selected using stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Qualitative data was collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data through structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative data findings underwent thematic analysis.*
Results: *The results revealed that cultural and religious beliefs significantly hinder insurance adoption, with traditional risk-sharing systems and religious interpretations reducing trust in formal insurance. Income levels, affordability challenges and competing financial priorities act as major barriers. Financial literacy also emerged as critical, with limited understanding of insurance products discouraging adoption. Institutional challenges, including limited accessibility and inefficient claims processes, further deter insurance uptake. Weak regulatory enforcement and inadequate public awareness campaigns negatively impact trust and market confidence.*
Conclusion: *A combination of economic, cultural, institutional, and policy-related factors shapes the adoption of insurance services. Addressing barriers related to these factors is likely to increase insurance uptake and consequently lead to better financial resilience and financial inclusion.*
Key Word: *insurance uptake; insurance penetration; financial literacy; financial resilience; financial inclusion.*

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I. Introduction

Insurance services are integral to economic development and social protection, providing individuals, businesses, and governments with the means to mitigate financial risks associated with unforeseen events. Globally, the insurance sector has grown significantly, leveraging technological advancements and evolving consumer needs. In Africa, the insurance sector presents a dual narrative of challenges and opportunities. South Africa leads the continent with an insurance penetration rate of 13.7%, a testament to its well-regulated market, strong financial infrastructure, and a relatively affluent middle class (African Insurance Organization, 2023). However, according to the Finscope survey, in Zambia the uptake of insurance services remains notably low, with only 6.3% of the population utilizing insurance services as of 2020, a marginal improvement from 2.8% in 2015 (Bank of Zambia, 2020). This stark statistic underscores a critical challenge for Zambia's economic stability and financial inclusion efforts. The low uptake of insurance services in Zambia is particularly concerning given the country's vulnerability to economic shocks, natural disasters, and health emergencies. For example, climate-related events such as floods and droughts frequently devastate agricultural livelihoods, leaving uninsured households in financial ruin. While insurance could offer a vital safety net, barriers such as cultural misconceptions, low financial literacy, and affordability issues hinder its adoption. This study aims to investigate the factors influencing the low uptake of insurance services in Zambia, providing actionable insights for stakeholders.

II. Material And Methods

The research was conducted in Lusaka, Zambia. Lusaka is the capital city of Zambia and serves as the economic administrative hub of the country. It is the most densely populated urban city of Zambia and has a diverse demographic profile including employed professionals, informal traders and unemployed persons, including people from different tribes and cultures, as well as age groups. The city also hosts the largest portion of the country’s formal businesses such as banks, insurance companies and other corporate firms.

Study Design: The research employed a descriptive survey design with cross-sectional elements. The design incorporated both structured surveys and semi-structured interviews.

Study Location: The research was conducted in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia.

Study Duration: April 2025 to May 2025.

Sample size: 384 respondents.

Sample size calculation: The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This calculation resulted in a total sample size of 384 respondents.

Subjects & selection method: The sampling procedure employed a combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The population was stratified based on location (urban/rural), income levels, and current insurance status (insured/uninsured). Within each stratum, simple random sampling was applied to select respondents. All respondents were aged above 18.

Procedure methodology

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data collection employed three main instruments: a structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The questionnaire comprised five sections: demographic information, cultural and religious beliefs (5 items), income levels (5 items), financial literacy (5 items), and insurance pricing perceptions (5 items). All scale items used a 5-point Likert format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Written informed consent was first obtained from participants prior to data collection.

Semi-structured interviews with insurance providers and regulatory officials explored industry perspectives on market challenges and solutions. The interview guide, developed from research objectives and literature review, covered key themes including regulatory effectiveness, market barriers, and innovation opportunities. Interviews were also conducted with various Lusaka stakeholders including taxi operators, mobile money agents, and market traders.

Various focus group discussions were organized, featuring small groups of about 7 to 9 people. These discussions were led using a guide, which focused on thematic discussions around the factors affecting insurance uptake including cultural and religious beliefs, income levels, financial literacy and awareness, and insurance pricing structures.

Secondary data was obtained from various existing literature including published research studies relevant to insurance, annual reports by the PIA, textbooks, and reports published on financial inclusion. Information obtained from these sources supplemented the findings from the primary sources of data and provided more context during analysis.

Statistical analysis

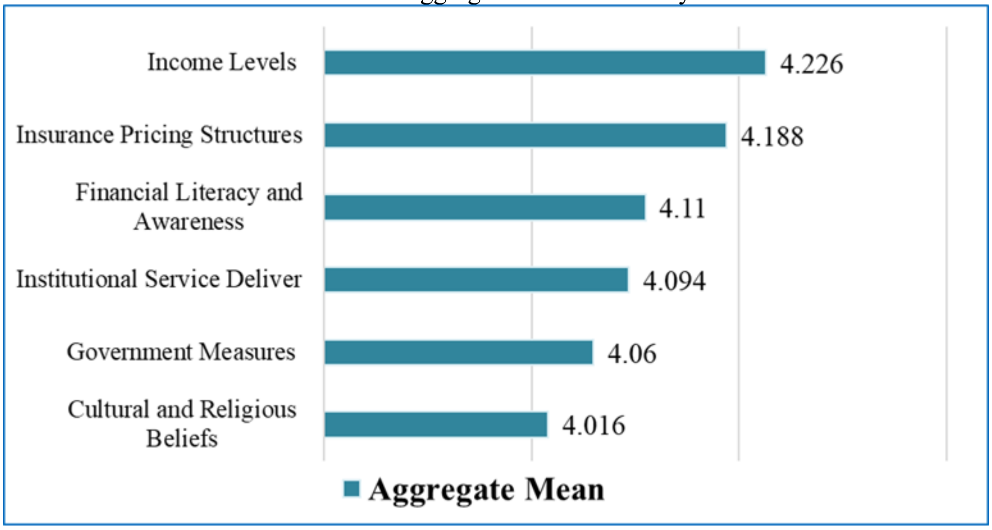
Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. These tools were used for statistical analysis to calculate measures of central tendency (mean), dispersion (standard deviation), frequencies and percentages. The analysis provided a clear picture of how each variable affects insurance uptake. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. The analysis process involved identifying key concepts, development of themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of final themes, integration of themes with quantitative findings. Some of the themes that were considered include cultural barriers, economic factors, trust and credibility, awareness and understanding, and institutional challenges.

III. Result

Six key variables were identified research: cultural and religious beliefs, income levels, financial literacy and awareness, insurance pricing structures, and institutional challenges. The findings were interpreted using the mean score. Each factor was analyzed using descriptive statistics to understand its relative importance and impact on insurance uptake decisions.

Table 1 below shows a summary of the aggregated mean score of each factor based on the questionnaire responses.

Table 1: Aggregate Mean Summary



Income Level

This section investigated various aspects of income's impact, including affordability, income stability, and financial priorities. Table 2 below gives an income level analysis.

Table 2: Income Levels Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Insurance premiums are too high relative to monthly income	4.45	0.834
Income instability makes maintaining insurance coverage difficult	4.31	0.892
Other financial priorities take precedence over insurance	4.27	0.867
Disposable income is insufficient for insurance purchases	4.15	0.912
Saving for emergencies is preferred overpaying insurance premiums	3.95	0.878
Aggregate Mean	**4.226**	

The analysis revealed income-related barriers as fundamental constraints to insurance adoption in Lusaka. Premium affordability relative to monthly income emerged as the most critical challenge. Income instability emerged as the second most significant barrier. This finding reflects the precarious nature of income streams in Lusaka's economy, where many residents experience irregular earnings patterns.

The prioritization of other financial needs indicates strong competition for limited financial resources. This finding reveals how insurance competes with immediate needs such as education, housing, and healthcare in household budget allocation decisions. Insufficient disposable income emerged as a structural barrier to insurance adoption. Furthermore, the preference for emergency savings over insurance premiums reflects both cultural attitudes toward saving and practical considerations about liquidity needs.

Insurance Pricing Structures

The impact of insurance pricing structures revealed critical barriers to adoption, with high upfront premium payments emerging as the most significant deterrent. This finding extended beyond basic affordability concerns to highlight specific challenges with initial payment requirements. Limited payment flexibility emerged as a substantial barrier, reflecting the mismatch between rigid payment structures and irregular income patterns common in Lusaka.

Premium increase concerns revealed significant apprehension about long-term affordability. This finding indicated how uncertainty about future premium adjustments affects current adoption decisions. The unclear value proposition relative to cost indicated challenges in demonstrating insurance benefits against premium costs. Limited premium payment options further reflected structural barriers in payment systems.

Table 3: Insurance Pricing Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
High upfront premium payments discourage adoption	4.31	0.823
Limited payment flexibility affects insurance accessibility	4.25	0.856
Premium increases affect policy retention	4.2	0.878
Unclear value proposition relative to cost	4.13	0.892
Limited premium payment options	4.05	0.912
Aggregate Mean	4.188	

Financial Literacy and Awareness

The below analyses financial literacy and awareness, providing more understanding of how insurance concepts, product knowledge, and general financial acumen influence insurance adoption decisions in Lusaka.

Table 4: Financial Literacy and Awareness Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Limited understanding of insurance benefits affects uptake	4.35	0.845
Complex insurance terms and conditions discourage adoption	4.22	0.867
Lack of awareness about available insurance products	4.15	0.892
Difficulty in evaluating insurance options and choices	3.98	0.912
Limited exposure to insurance information and education	3.85	0.923
Aggregate Mean	4.11	

Financial literacy emerged as a significant determinant of insurance adoption patterns, with the highest mean of 4.35 attributed to limited understanding of insurance benefits. This finding reveals a fundamental knowledge gap that impedes informed decision-making about insurance products.

The complexity of insurance terms and conditions, scoring a mean of 4.22, represents a substantial barrier to adoption. Awareness limitations about available insurance products and difficulty in evaluating insurance options, with means of 4.15 and 3.98 indicate significant market information gaps and challenges in comparative analysis of insurance products. This finding suggests that even when awareness exists, many potential customers struggle to make informed choices between different insurance offerings. Limited exposure to insurance information and education indicates insufficient educational outreach by both insurers and regulatory authorities

Institutional Service Deliver

The analysis of institutional challenges examined organizational and structural barriers affecting insurance service delivery and adoption in Lusaka. The table below highlights how institutional factors, including service accessibility, operational efficiency, and customer service quality, influence insurance uptake.

Table 5: Institutional Service Deliver Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Limited physical access to insurance services	4.21	0.834
Complex claims processing procedures	4.18	0.867
Inadequate customer service and support	4.11	0.892
Limited product customization options	4.02	0.912
Poor communication from insurance providers	3.95	0.923
Aggregate Mean	4.094	

Limited physical access to insurance services emerges as the most significant institutional barrier (mean=4.21), highlighting the geographic constraints in service delivery. Complex claims processing procedures represent the second most significant challenge (mean=4.18). This finding reveals how bureaucratic processes and documentation requirements create barriers to effective service utilization. Inadequate customer service and support (mean=4.11) significantly impacts customer experience and trust in insurance providers.

Limited product customization options (mean=4.02) reflect insufficient adaptation to local needs and preferences. Poor communication from insurance providers (mean=3.95) emerges as a persistent challenge affecting customer relationships.

Government Measures

The analysis of government measures examines the impact of regulatory frameworks, policy initiatives, and government support on insurance market development in Lusaka. This dimension is crucial for understanding how the policy environment influences insurance adoption patterns and market growth.

Table 6: Government Measures Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Weak enforcement of insurance regulations	4.28	0.845
Limited consumer protection mechanisms	4.15	0.878
Inadequate policy framework for inclusion	4.08	0.892
Poor coordination among regulatory bodies	3.95	0.912
Limited government support for awareness	3.85	0.923
Aggregate Mean	4.06	

Weak enforcement of insurance regulations emerges as the primary government-related challenge (mean=4.28). Limited consumer protection mechanisms (mean=4.15) significantly affect market confidence, Inadequate policy framework for inclusion (mean=4.08) reflects gaps in supportive policies for expanding insurance access. This finding emphasizes the need for more comprehensive policy initiatives supporting insurance inclusion.

Poor coordination among regulatory bodies (mean=3.95) creates market inefficiencies, Limited government support for awareness (mean=3.85) indicates insufficient public sector involvement in market development. This finding suggests the need for more active government participation in insurance education and market development initiatives.

Cultural and Religious Beliefs

The analysis of cultural and religious beliefs explored how traditional values, religious perspectives, and community influences shape insurance adoption decisions in Lusaka. This dimension was particularly significant given Zambia's rich cultural heritage from its 72 tribes and strong religious foundations. The table below depicts results on culture and religious beliefs.

Table 7: Cultural and Religious Beliefs Analysis

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Traditional risk-sharing mechanisms are preferred over formal insurance	4.32	0.876
Family consultation is essential for insurance decisions	4.15	0.923
Religious beliefs influence decisions about insurance adoption	3.98	0.891
Cultural practices conflict with insurance principles	3.85	0.945
Community leaders' opinions affect insurance purchasing decisions	3.78	0.912
Aggregate Mean	4.016	

The predominance of traditional risk-sharing mechanisms, evidenced by the highest mean score of 4.32, indicates deeply entrenched cultural practices that compete with formal insurance. Community-based support systems such as chilimba (savings groups), funeral committees (where community members pool resources to support bereaved families), and extended family networks that provide emergency financial assistance remain the first line of defense against risk, while traditional leadership structures continue to influence financial decisions. The high standard deviation of 0.876 suggests notable variation in these preferences, potentially reflecting differences between urban and rural populations or across various ethnic groups within Lusaka.

Family consultation requirements emerge as the second most powerful determinant with a mean of 4.15, while religious beliefs, scored a mean of 3.98 reflecting the significant role of faith in financial decision-making among Lusaka residents. The perceived conflict between cultural practices and insurance principles, with a mean of 3.85, reveals a fundamental challenge for insurance providers. This tension manifests in scepticism about contractual relationships replacing social bonds, mistrust of formal financial institutions, and resistance to individualistic approaches to risk management. The influence of community leaders' opinions, scoring a mean of 3.78, underscores the collective nature of decision-making in Zambian society.

Thematic Analysis

Key themes from the short interviews and discussions included cultural barriers, economic factors, trust and credibility, awareness and understanding, and institutional challenges. Key findings included competing priorities and irregular income patterns hinder consistent premium payments. Other findings included complex language, terms and numerous exclusion clauses in policies confuse potential users and limit understanding, and as a result reduce insurance uptake. This finding suggests that simplifying communication and terms transcribed in the policy could improve customer confidence and comprehension.

Delays and rejections in claims processing erode consumer trust, significantly hindering insurance adoption. Furthermore, some religious interpretations discourage insurance, equating it to a lack of faith and a sign of mistrust in divine protection. The findings align with Beck and Webb's (2003) research, which demonstrated how cultural and religious values significantly shape insurance markets in developing countries. In Zambia, these barriers are compounded by a lack of targeted engagement with community and religious leaders. Other common sentiments implied that limited awareness of insurance products and their benefits largely contributed to the low uptake of insurance products. This highlighted lack of adequate knowledge to make informed decisions about insurance, indicating the need for targeted educational interventions.

These findings demonstrate that the low uptake of insurance in Lusaka is driven by a combination of cultural, economic, institutional, and policy-related factors. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates cultural and religious sensitivity, economic inclusivity, improved financial literacy, and stronger regulatory frameworks.

IV. Discussion

Income levels were identified as the most significant predictor of insurance uptake. Higher income levels significantly increase the likelihood of purchasing insurance. Many respondents highlighted that affordability is a major barrier, particularly for individuals with irregular or unstable income. This finding reflects the economic realities of many Lusaka residents, where a significant portion of the population operates in the informal sector with unpredictable earnings.

Additionally, competing financial priorities exacerbate the affordability challenge. Participants often prioritized essential expenditures such as education, healthcare, and housing over insurance. This aligns with Arena's (2008) findings, which emphasize the relationship between economic stability and insurance penetration. The Expected Utility Theory (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944) further explains this behavior, as individuals with limited disposable income often perceive the immediate costs of insurance as outweighing its future benefits.

The implications for insurers are significant. To enhance accessibility, insurance providers must design affordable products tailored to the financial realities of low-income households. Flexible payment options, such as pay-as-you-go models or seasonal premiums, could address the issue of income irregularity. These payment structures would allow customers to contribute when they have surplus income, reducing the burden of fixed monthly premiums.

High insurance premiums and limited payment flexibility were the second most significant deterrents to adoption. Many respondents expressed that they perceived insurance as expensive and difficult to sustain. This finding aligns with Outreville's (2013) work, which highlights the sensitivity of insurance demand to pricing structures in developing economies. The Protection Motivation Theory offers additional insights, suggesting that when the perceived costs of insurance exceed its perceived benefits, individuals are unlikely to adopt it.

To address these challenges, insurers must adopt innovative pricing models. Tiered premiums, which provide different coverage levels at varying price points, could cater for diverse income groups. Pay-per-use insurance or bundled products, such as combining insurance with utility payments, may also increase affordability. Clear communication about the value proposition of insurance—such as protecting against catastrophic losses—can help shift perceptions and justify the cost.

Financial literacy was another critical determinant of insurance uptake. Financial knowledge and understanding are important in enabling individuals to make informed decisions about insurance. Respondents frequently mentioned that they lacked a clear understanding of how insurance works or the benefits it offers. Moreover, the complexity of insurance terms and conditions was a significant barrier. Policies often contained technical jargon and exclusion clauses that discouraged engagement. These findings align with Lusardi and Mitchell's (2014) assertion that financial literacy is essential for navigating financial products.

Improving financial literacy must be a priority for insurers and policymakers. Community-based financial education programs can demystify insurance concepts, helping individuals appreciate its value and role in financial planning. Simplifying policy language is another critical step insurers should adopt when drafting contracts and marketing materials to ensure that information understandable. Visual aids, storytelling, and digital tools can further enhance understanding, particularly for populations with limited formal education.

Institutional inefficiencies, such as limited access to services, complex claims processes, and inadequate customer service, significantly affected insurance uptake. Additionally, delays in claims processing eroded trust in insurers. These findings highlight systemic barriers within the insurance industry. To address them, insurers must expand their geographic reach by leveraging digital and mobile technologies. Streamlining claims processes through automation and improving customer service through training are essential steps. Establishing partnerships with local agents or financial institutions could also enhance service delivery in underserved areas.

Cultural and religious beliefs were found to be significant deterrents to insurance uptake. The strong adherence to traditional and religious norms reduces the likelihood of adopting formal insurance services. The study revealed that traditional risk-sharing systems, such as familial support and community savings groups, dominate risk management practices in Lusaka. Many respondents expressed a preference for these informal mechanisms, citing their familiarity, accessibility, and trustworthiness.

Religious beliefs further compound the resistance to formal insurance. For many, purchasing insurance was perceived as a lack of faith in divine protection. This sentiment resonates with Beck and Webb's (2003) findings, which underscore the significant role of religious ideologies in shaping financial behaviors in developing markets. Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) provides a framework for understanding these findings, suggesting that subjective norms—shaped by cultural and religious influences play a pivotal role in individuals' intentions and behaviors regarding insurance adoption.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching. First, they suggest that insurers cannot simply transplant global insurance models into culturally distinct contexts without adaptation. Insurance providers must engage with community and religious leaders to build trust and acceptance. For instance, insurers could develop microinsurance products that align with communal practices, such as group policies that complement existing savings groups.

The research also found that weak enforcement of regulations and limited consumer protection mechanisms hinder insurance adoption. These findings align with Feyen et al.'s (2011) research on the importance of regulatory frameworks in fostering market confidence. Policymakers must prioritize strengthening regulations and enforcement mechanisms. Consumer protection measures, such as ombudsman services and grievance redress platforms, should be established to build trust. Public awareness campaigns and subsidies for low-income households can further enhance insurance penetration.

V. Conclusion

The research of the factors affecting insurance uptake in Lusaka revealed that income level is the strongest deterrent of insurance adoption, followed by the pricing of insurance products. Households with low- or irregular-income face affordability challenges and prioritize immediate financial needs over long-term financial planning. Flexible payment models and premium subsidies could help bridge this economic gap.

Financial literacy was found to be essential for informed decision-making. Limited understanding of insurance products and complex policy terms discouraged adoption, emphasizing the need for comprehensive financial education programs. Institutional challenges, such as poor accessibility and inefficient claims processes, further deterred uptake. These issues highlight the need for insurers to improve operational efficiency and service delivery. Developing affordable customer centric products using advanced technological tools would be key in addressing the low uptake of insurance.

Cultural and religious beliefs are key barriers to insurance uptake in Lusaka. Traditional and communal practices dominate risk management, while religious interpretations often discourage formal insurance. These cultural dynamics must be addressed for insurance services to gain wider acceptance.

Finally, the research concluded that weak regulatory enforcement and limited public awareness available to them to report unfair treatment negatively impacted trust in insurance. Strengthening regulatory frameworks and promoting public education are critical steps for fostering market confidence.

The research demonstrated that a combination of cultural, economic, institutional, and policy-related factors shapes the adoption of insurance services. Addressing barriers related to these factors is likely to increase insurance uptake and consequently lead to better financial resilience and financial inclusion. This will holistically require coordinated efforts from insurers, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

VI. Recommendations

These suggestions aim to address the identified barriers to insurance uptake in Lusaka and provide strategies for stakeholders, including policymakers, insurance providers, and regulatory authorities, to enhance the accessibility, affordability, and trust in insurance services. By implementing these recommendations, it is anticipated that insurance uptake can improve, thereby contributing to greater financial resilience and inclusion among the population.

1. Insurance providers should develop affordable culturally sensitive insurance products that align with traditional risk-sharing practices and involve community leaders in awareness campaigns. Insurers must consider designing sector specific insurance products to different community groups such as small-scale farmers, taxi operators, and traders. Offering bundled products at a discounted rate is likely to further increase uptake.
2. Insurers should consider providing flexible payment plans to cater for low-income earners. They should also consider giving incentives to long term customers who have not put in any insurance claims by either offering them a discount in subsequent periods or giving a once off cash back.
3. Government agencies that oversee the insurance sector and other stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), should partner with insurers to conduct targeted community-based financial literacy programs, especially in underserved areas. This would include undertaking increased financial education campaigns on social media, TV and radio to explain how insurance mitigates risks associated with uncertainty and emergencies.
4. Educational financial literacy programs in schools, universities and community groups should include insurance information, as opposed to only focusing on banking and financial markets. Incorporating local language would also improve understandability and relatability. Literacy programs should be used as a platform to dispel myths about insurance.
5. Policymakers need to enforce consumer protection laws to build trust and improve market confidence. They need to sensitive the public on the available channels available to them to report grievances or unfair treatment. Mandatory insurance schemes in some sectors must be considered.
6. Technology providers need to collaborate with insurers to create mobile platforms for insurance services to improve accessibility and convenience for rural and peri-urban populations. Partnering with banks and mobile network providers such as Zamtel, Airtel and MTN would further improve accessibility.

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