



Exploring Midlands' Gweru-brood Music Artists and Music Producers' pursuits of career success in Harare

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Article History

Received: 2025-03-04

Revised: 2025-06-28

Accepted: 2025-07-01

Published: 2025-07-09

Keywords

Artists

Industry

Midlands

Music

Producers

How to cite:

Moyo, K. F., Mutavati, A. & Muranda, R. (2025). Exploring Midlands' Gweru-brood Music Artists and Music Producers' pursuits of career success in Harare. *African Musicology Online*, 14(2), 59-68.

Abstract

The study looked at the quest for career success among music artists and music producers who were groomed in the Midlands Province. The study explored the motivation behind the selected music artists and music producers' departure from Gweru to ply their trade in the Zimbabwe capital city Harare. Purposively selected artists and music producers from the Midlands Province were included in this study. We employed a qualitative research method with semi-structured interviews to solicit data from participants. A total of six participants, two music producers and four music artists tutored in the Midlands Province, and relocated to Harare were sampled purposively. The resource dependence and social capital theories were used to guide analysis of data. The study reveals that in Harare there are more opportunities and chances for music artists and music producers' growth and development. Participants submitted that in the Midlands Province there is a lack of financial support, exposure, resource hubs and a vibrant arts society. Harare proffers an enabling ecosystem to music artists and music producers who work hard. The national televisions, radio stations and print media in Harare provide a positive environment to those in Harare much to the disadvantage of the Midlands Province. The strong networks in both social media and mainstream media mostly benefit Harare dwellers. We thus recommend the establishment of more physical and digital networks across the Midlands Province to promote music artists, foster interaction, collaboration, enhance career success and visibility for the arts community beyond provincial and national boundaries.

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Introduction

In this study, we examine the factors that prompt music artists and producers from Gweru to relocate to Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city. This observation follows the realisation that several Gweru-based music artists and producers appear to struggle in the industry, and some opt to relocate to Harare (Mhizha, 2019). We also examine the dynamics that contribute to career success in Zimbabwe's music industry, with a specific focus on the role of industry networks. In this study, we investigate the influence of industry networks on the career success of music artists and music producers based in Gweru, Zimbabwe, within the country's music industry.



Zimbabwe's music industry boasts diversity, featuring both traditional and modern styles (Nyakudya & Mawere, 2019). However, the sector faces limited resources, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of government support (Mhizha, 2019; Nyakudya & Mawere, 2019). These challenges make it difficult for music artists and music producers to succeed, particularly for those based outside Harare (Mhizha, 2019). Chimbudzi et al. (2022) postulate that prominent recording studios, such as Gramma Records and Zimbabwe Music Corporation, made significant contributions to developing Zimbabwe's music industry from 1980 to the present day. They determined the career success of Zimbabwean music artists. The socio-political influence of music also contributed to the development of the Zimbabwe music industry (Chikowero, 2015). Tekman and Hortaçsu (2002) also state that music plays a role in defining social identity. Considering this, after independence in 1980, music served as a medium to express social identities and a range of other narratives. Music artists addressed religious, socio-political and moral issues through music. Chimbudzi et al. (2021) assert that the Zimbabwean industry faces several challenges, including piracy, which are exacerbated by digital technology. Music artists continue to lose potential revenue due to illicit online access.

We examine prospects for aspiring musicians and music producers in the Midlands, notably Gweru, who have succeeded in the music business but tend to prosper only when they ultimately migrate to Harare, the capital city. The researchers investigate the reasons why music producers choose to work in Harare rather than Gweru, where they originally come from. The research solicits participants' lived experiences in connection with music production resources, the limitations they face, and how they overcome them after relocating to Harare. The study examined the impact of industry networks on the careers of music artists and music producers from the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe.

The researchers examined the factors that prompted the migration of music artists and music producers from Gweru to Harare, the capital city, as well as why music artists experienced greater progress in Harare than in Gweru. Our first research question was how industry networks influence the career success of music artists and music producers in Gweru. Secondly, we examined the challenges that Midlands' music artists and music producers face in building and sustaining industry networks. We also assessed how collaborations within industry networks impact the visibility and marketability of Midlands music artists and music producers.

Informed by resource dependence theory (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009) and social capital theory (Thomas & Gupta, 2021), this study examines how industry networks influence the career paths of artists and producers from Gweru. Through semi-structured interviews with purposively sampled participants, we discuss the circumstances within the Midlands' music scene and opportunities in Harare. We propose interventions to decentralise industry opportunities and foster an equitable creative economy across Zimbabwe's provinces.

The Zimbabwe Music Industry

Globally, digital technology has brought significant changes to the recording industry (Chimbudzi et al., 2021). This caused a decline in the traditional modus operandi of analogue recording. Historically, most music was recorded by the Harare-based giant labels, Gramma Records, Records and Tapes Promotions (RTP), Shed Studios, and Zimbabwe Music Corporation (ZMC), according to Vhori, as cited in Chimbudzi (2022). During that time, musicians earned revenue from the sales and royalties of their recorded music. Due to the decline of music labels, performing live music has become a lucrative alternative for generating revenue. At the same time, numerous home studios emerged in



Zimbabwe's towns and cities, with music producers often serving as performers in these studios, remarkably revolutionising the music production industry (Chimbudzi et al., 2021). Harare continued to dominate with more home studios than any other city in Zimbabwe. Harare became a convergence point for music artists and producers from various parts of Zimbabwe, thereby establishing it as a hub for the music industry.

A Look at some Gweru music artists and music producers

Gweru boasts a diverse range of music artists, from young to old, representing recording studios and labels. Award-winning music producers Oskid Tapfumaneyi and DJ Tamuka are among the music producers who emerged with music production studios in Gweru. Zimdancehall, Hip-hop, and Reggae artists, among others, flooded their recording studios; however, their impact failed to reach the national entertainment market, and they remained largely obscured. We have had the opportunity to interact with the aforementioned music producers, which necessitated the current study.

At the inception of his career, Mathias Mhere recorded with True Vine and Mo Sounds Recording in Gweru, but his music did not get the desired publicity. However, the above music producers and artists, after leaving Gweru for Harare, began to excel. As Gweru-based academics, we have witnessed some individuals, such as Tamuka Makuluni (DJ Tamuka), Mathias Mhere, Mai Patai, and Nigel Nyangombe, develop into popular figures in Zimbabwe. According to Zimbabwe's UCAZ (2025), in 2022, the urban area of Gweru was estimated to have around 171,000 residents. The population is large enough to support the emerging music artists and music producers. Our interest was in uncovering the factors that prompted music artists and music producers to leave Gweru, despite its lucrative population. Chaya (2022) reports that some Gweru musicians blamed Harare promoters for sabotaging their efforts, citing that they performed without commensurate payment at the recent Midlands exhibition show.

In contrast, some Harare music artists were allegedly paid \$1500 each. It appears that music artists in Harare have strict standards to adhere to, and the Gweru situation is quite different. The alluded remuneration issue could be a cause for concern, especially among musicians based in Gweru. It may also prompt them to try their luck in Harare.

Industry networks

According to research, networks are crucial to succeed in the music industry (Cohen & Perlmutter, 2018; Wikström & DeFillippi, 2016). Music is vital in Zimbabwean culture, and the music industry is a significant contributor to the country's economy (Nyakudya & Mawere, 2019). Industry networks refer to the connections and relationships between individuals and organisations in an industry (Cohen & Perlmutter, 2018). Such networks provide opportunities for career advancement, in facilitating access to resources, information, and industry professionals (Cohen & Perlmutter, 2018). Wikström and DeFillippi (2016) found that the most successful music artists have extensive industry networks, which enable them to access resources and opportunities that contribute to their career success. This academic exploration is worthwhile since many Midlands artists often leave for Harare if they want to succeed in the music industry. The research is valuable because a significant amount of talent in Gweru remains unseen. The research offers lessons to researchers, music artists, and producers. Findings can help bring solutions to the situation, affect the growth of the Midlands Province and the national music industry, and decongest Harare's artists.



Gassmann et al. (2010) inform us that industry networks offer several benefits in terms of knowledge exchange and innovation. This process facilitates the dissemination of knowledge and expertise among artists, leading to increased innovation and artistic growth. The above provides support to music artists and music producers in accessing external ideas and technologies to combine with their own. According to Ritter and Gemunden (2003), industry networks enable cross-industry collaborations. As music artists collaborate with others outside their traditional industry boundaries, they explore new sounds, develop innovative albums, and produce outstanding works. Wikström and DeFillippi (2016) aver that industry networks lead to competence. In the music industry, music artists and music producers manage their relationships through networks. It was noted that effective management of relationships results in robust success for artists. Kohtamäki et al. (2023) mention strategic alliances and learning as benefits of industry networks. Such networks proffer a conduit through which music artists and music producers share ideas, combine resources, share risks and learn from each other. Overall, this improves competence and quality of production.

Ng et al. (2005) suggest that career success should encompass a wide range of factors, including personal traits, skills, organisational support, and networking. They further indicate that career success is multifaceted and influenced by individual attributes, managerial support, social networks and expansive cultural factors. If music artists understand these points, they can derive effective strategies for career development and success.

Theoretical frameworks

This research is premised on the resource dependence theory (Hillman, Withers & Collins 2009), which assumes that organisations or individuals depend on resources to exist and fulfil their goals. In Zimbabwe's music business, the above theory is applied to study the resources that musicians and music producers in networks depend on. According to Walzer (2017), music artists significantly rely on external resources, such as recording studios, music producers, distributors, and promoters, to develop, distribute, and market their music. The availability and accessibility of these resources impact an artist's ability to produce and promote their work successfully (Psomadaki et al., 2022). The above may include finances, access to distribution channels, ties with prominent industry leaders, and access to specialist skills. In identifying the resources critical for success, the theory inspires tactics for creating and leveraging industry networks to obtain the necessary resources. We utilised Thomas and Gupta's (2021) social capital theory to understand how connections in industry networks affect career advancement. Kell et al. (2018) presented essential elements to career success, one of which is the human capital theory. The theory assumes that critical determinants of career success are training, education, and experience, implying that music artists with higher-level resources realise significant success due to enhanced expertise and knowledge. Adler & Kwon (2002) refer to the social capital theory and mention that individuals gain resources from social networks. This portends that artists gain opportunities, support and access to information through social networks. Van Vianen et al. (2018) state that mentoring relationships foster career development.

Furthermore, they claim that mentors provide essential services, including guidance, access to professional networks, and support. In return, those services impact artists' career success. Eagly and Carli (2004) argue that gender impacts career success, as they found out that women suffer from the glass ceiling and succumb to family conflicts. They advocate for assistance in structural changes and supportive organisational cultures to promote gender equality in career success.



Methodology

To explore the problem, a mixed-methods research design was used (Taheri & Okumus, 2024). Data was collected from a sample of Gweru-brood artists and music producers using semi-structured interviews (Taherdoost, 2022; Belina, 2023). The surveys were used to gather quantitative data on the size and scope of industry networks, while the interviews provided qualitative data on the nature and quality of these networks. The sample population consisted of 5 former Gweru-based artists and music producers who had been active in the industry for at least two years. We employed qualitative data analysis techniques in the study to gain deeper insights into how industry networks impact career paths. Data analysis was thematic, according to Byrne (2022), to extract insights from the interviews. We acknowledge the limitations of this study and the potential biases associated with participant selection. The findings are skewed to the Midlands Province; thus, we cannot generalise them to the broader population.

Perceptions of participants

The participants in Harare think the music industry is lively and offers more opportunities to expose music talent to the public. One music producer, DJ Tamuka, who originally hails from Gweru, expressed that he got exposed to prominent artists, such as Winky D, Jah Prayzah, and Killer T, among others, in Zimbabwe. About relocating to Harare, he said, *"My decision to relocate to Harare worked as a miracle since I was connected to Kenako studio in Harare by a certain Gweru music artist who had relocated to Harare earlier than me."* He informed that in the Midlands Province, he focused mainly on upcoming artists, and he alleges that this delayed his entry into the limelight. However, in Harare, it took about six months to gain recognition in Zimbabwe.

In Gweru, he struggled to gain recognition as a music producer for over a decade. On the benefits of his relocation, he stated that, *"Since then, I have grown to become a big music producer after working with many artists across Africa, such as Davido and Ammi Allade."* His views suggest that Harare has opportunities to connect with international music artists. We also observed that music producers earned more in Harare than in Gweru. DJ Tamuka informed that in Harare, charges to produce can be as high as US\$100 per track, compared to US\$30 per track in Gweru. Today, he stands among the great names that have graced the music production industry in the 21st century.

Mathias Mhere mentioned that he worked with a gospel band in Gweru and recorded two albums, but the projects never materialised. He said, *"Gweru music industry was very hard to penetrate and I decided to relocate to Harare because I was seeking exposure and more opportunities, just by chance"*. He claimed that in Harare, he was exposed to big music producers, and upon arrival, a breakthrough came quickly. Regarding live shows, he said that Harare attracted larger audiences compared to those he had in the Midlands Province. Gweru, a smaller city than Harare, is likely to exhibit such exponential differences, which also translate into business and revenue collection for music artists and music producers. This suggests that a broad audience base exists in Harare as compared to Gweru. He also intimated that, *"In Harare I socialise with many experienced and outstanding instrumentalists whereas in Midlands Province I was working with a few and in most cases average ones"*. With this, he implied that in Gweru, he worked with instrumentalists who had limited skill in playing different instruments, compared to those he found in Harare. He also noted that more strategic individuals, such as music promoters, national radio personnel, managers, and corporate companies, are based in Harare, which tend to propel him to the top of his career.



In contrast, he mentioned that, *"it was difficult for me to find influential people in the Midlands Province"*. The stories told about success in the music business in Harare also influence several aspiring music artists and producers to travel to the capital in search of opportunities. Mhere admits that success stories spurred him to take chances and relocate to Harare. We think that being in Harare is not wholly sufficient without hard work. Mhere submitted that one needs to work hard to thrive as a musician. Indeed, as we observed his work rate, we noticed that he works hard.

Mai Patai, a gospel music artist from Gweru, emphasised that she had suffered greatly in the Midlands Province. She described some limitations before relocating to Harare. As we talked, she said, *"Upon arrival in Harare, I got more connections with fellow popular music artists and made collaborations"*. She further informed that, *"while I was in Gweru, I nearly opted to quit the music industry as things got difficult to make ends meet"*. This implies that she could not fend for her family with the income from her music business. Mai Patai mentioned that collaborations in Harare revived her name, which was slowly getting into oblivion. Mai Patai believes that Harare offers more performance opportunities than Gweru, which has limited entertainment venues. Her stint in Harare has presented gigs that pay more than what Midlands Province offered. Although playing trade in Harare is viewed as lucrative, Mai Patai thinks the decision to go to Harare was worthwhile. To date, Mai Patai is based in Harare, joining a cohort of music artists from small towns and cities in Zimbabwe. In Harare, Mai Patai lauded the use of social media networks, where people share essential business information to her benefit. She regarded Gweru as laid-back compared to Harare. Gweru is smaller than Harare in terms of population, but skill and luck remain fundamental to success.

Cymplex, a renowned music producer from the Midlands Province, felt happy relocating to Harare as he is established and doing well in the music industry. In comparing Harare to Gweru, he said, *"Mudhara kuGweru maartists acho havabudisi mari wena"* (My elder in Gweru, the music artists do not part with their money). He was saying that music artists in Gweru generally did not have the economy to finance their music production projects, hence his low level of visibility. We asked if he had plans to return to Gweru, and he said, *"KuGweru handichadzoki imi ndimi mungatotevera kuno"* (I will not return to Gweru, you can come join me in the capital). In simple terms, he meant that he had no intention of establishing a studio in the Midlands Province. Cymplex informed that it was easier to grow as a music artist in Harare than in Gweru, where he claims people ignored his efforts and hard work. Cymplex referred to the merits of social media networks to music artists and music producers, which helped secure business opportunities. In Gweru, he alleged that people did not fully utilise the available digital media, and that was a shortfall. Cymplex has established networks and clientele which he cannot afford to leave. Such networks matter in business, hence the vow to never return to Gweru.

Nigel Nyangombe, who grew up in Gweru, said, *"I believe Harare has the highest population of artists in the country. It's where you find most of the talent concentrated, largely because of the resources and opportunities available."* Since Harare offers more opportunities for music artists and music producers than Gweru, he had to move there. Reasons to relocate to Harare were that it provides artists with easy access to the media. He believes that with many radio stations based in Harare, being close to their headquarters makes it easier to secure interviews and promote one's music. Accordingly, this exposure is critical in building the artist's brand. He pointed out, *"I agree that most artists are relocating to Harare. The city offers a wider platform and better chances to network and grow artistically."* Nyangombe indicated that upon arrival in Harare, he became involved with numerous artists because the



networking opportunities are unmatched, allowing for easy collaboration to gain recognition. He also indicated that Harare has more live shows, venues, and a larger music-supporting audience than in the Midlands Province, hence artists perform regularly to build fan bases.

About networking and financial opportunities, he said, *"In terms of networking, there are many social functions that require live performances in Harare. These provide an opportunity for you to be seen and heard. For example, backing vocalists here can make up to US\$400 per week, which is a lucrative economic opportunity readily available."* He noted that being in Harare opened doors for international collaborations. He said, *"I've been able to do online productions with artists from Korea, China, Australia, and other countries, and this has expanded my territory in the music business."*

Nyangombe advocated for investing in the Midlands Province by establishing more recording studios to promote local talent. He believes that without such infrastructure, artists in the Midlands often feel compelled to leave their hometowns to pursue opportunities. He also suggested establishing arts centres in Gweru and institutions such as Pakare Paye, the Zimbabwe College of Music, and Music Crossroads in Harare to nurture artists. Music artists in the Midlands can benefit significantly from the initiatives mentioned earlier. He said, *"The Midlands Province needs more musical facilities to enable music artists to rehearse, perform, and develop. Without these, it's hard to sustain a music career there."* Lastly, he also recommended hosting workshops in the Midlands to educate and enlighten musicians on how to navigate the industry and share knowledge to empower music artists.

Efforts to engage DJ Oskid, one of the celebrated music producers who began his career in Gweru, to share his views on the issues under discussion were unsuccessful. He was unavailable to contribute to this article, so his ideas and thoughts could not be included. Despite our futile efforts to interview him, DJ Oskid remains one of the most skilled music producers in Zimbabwe. Many Zimbabwean music artists have benefited from his expertise in their projects.

Discussion

From the sampled participants, we establish that small towns in the Midlands Province suffer from a lack of exposure and opportunities to showcase their talents. We realise that a lack of support from corporate companies hinders the growth of music artists in the Midlands Province. The musicians experienced being sidelined during strategic events in the Midlands Province, such as the Gweru Annual Midlands Agricultural Show, as well as national events, including the Defence Forces, Heroes, and Independence commemoration galas. Most of the functions for which they were hired in the Midlands were essentially unpaid, and little money was remitted for their services. The difference is that music artists in Harare are paid attractively, whereas in Gweru they earn less. The participants reported that Gweru lacks strategic facilities, including influential national music promoters, access to national radio and television broadcasting stations. Gweru has two local community radio stations, 98.4 FM and 95.8 FM, which are not accessible to the broad national listenership base. The above conditions hinder the chances of gaining visibility nationally, except for those in Harare. While the success of music artists is influenced by a variety of factors, such as talent, networking, and access to opportunities, many musicians in Harare and Gweru have not fully utilised available digital resources, including online marketing, music streaming platforms, and digital production tools, to enhance visibility and career growth.

The study reveals that Gweru music artists and music producers who relocated to Harare regard their stance as a means to grow and develop their careers. The observable trend among the participants in



this study is that they were doing well. Their move to the capital city of Zimbabwe to harness greener pastures and lucrative opportunities was a timely decision. For outsider music artists and music producers, new business prospects in Harare include a broad-based market, numerous performing opportunities and meeting international music promoters. The data reveals notable inadequacies and a narrow market in the Midlands Province. Gweru is a limited place in providing opportunities for the aforementioned openings for talented and ambitious music artists. Most of the networks in Gweru were informal, as individuals often linked through personal but limited social connections.

The Gweru market was observed to have few adventurous music artists and music producers. This could be attributed to the fact that there are few entertainment spots, coupled with a smaller population, compared to Harare. Harare, the economic hub of Zimbabwe, offers numerous opportunities for people to access various entertainment venues where music artists perform throughout the week. Most visiting performing music artists from abroad stage their acts in Harare at big crowd-puller gigs, which offer more opportunities for local music artists to work. Harare provides mentorship for emerging music artists, collaboration opportunities, and exposure to large audiences and prominent media platforms. Musicians are often perceived as beneficiaries of publicity in the print media, as well as on radio and television broadcasting stations headquartered in Harare. The sampled participants, originally from Gweru, believe that Harare offers considerable limelight and intriguing success stories, warranting migration. In Gweru, talent is celebrated on a significantly lower level, unlike in Harare, where thousands of fans give their support to music artists. Hare (2019) states that Slimaz Productions, a music promoter, said that if Macheso holds a show in the Aquatic Complex in Chitungwiza, the hall will be filled. In contrast, at the Midlands Hotel in Gweru, a quarter of the total number of people is what they receive.

Conclusion

In the study, it was discovered that the Midlands Province is a hub of great talent. However, Gweru was too small to provide resources to host such talent. Consequently, most emerging talent opts to relocate to Harare in search of greener pastures and more satisfying opportunities. Most music artists in the Midlands Province lack financial resources; hence, they often fail before they can establish a music business. There is a lack of support through local platforms, both physical and digital, where artists and music producers can meet, collaborate, and share opportunities. Music artists and music producers who make it in Harare do so because they are worthy of the cut; being in Harare alone cannot, without hard work, be sufficient. Harare provides ample working space for the music artists and music producers. The population in Harare warrants more entertainment spots, hence more performances from music artists. The population also implies that money exchanges hands among many people, which helps revenue flow and business appeal to a broader audience. Harare hosts influential companies in industry and commerce; hence, its entertainment needs are very high, and the music business thrives. The mainstream media, including national radio and television broadcasting stations, are based in Harare, resulting in high interaction among music artists, music producers, and broadcast personnel. Notably, music creatives in Gweru lack access to structured networking events with regular meet-ups, such as music and arts festivals, which are held frequently to build the community and promote exposure. No organised mentorship initiatives are connecting emerging artists with established professionals from both the Midlands Province and big hubs like Harare. These initiatives can bridge the gaps and provide access to valuable contacts, career guidance and opportunities. We therefore recommend increasing the use of digital networks and platforms to



enhance digital visibility. We envision that music artists and music producers be trained using online platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, SoundCloud and YouTube, among others. The above point will help with effective self-promotion, networking and visibility. Digital presence can enhance visibility beyond the Midlands Province to the global stage, particularly in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

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