

From Mbare's Hustle to Digital Horizons: Embracing Zimbabwe's Second Curve with Stoic Heart

Introduction

The sun beat down on my back as I stood in Mbare Musika, Harare's frenetic heartbeat, behind a shaky table covered in second-hand goods—frayed tees, colorful chitenge dresses, a denim jacket that brought a customer's smile on its face. It was late 2023, and I was 24, giving every bit of myself to this stall, my modest stake in Zimbabwe's informal economy, which drives more than 60% of our GDP¹. The market was abuzz with energy: vendors calling prices, kombis blaring, air thickening from roasted maize and hope. I'd haggle with them like Mai Tino, a teacher who adored my \$3 skirts, exchanging jibes in Shona while balancing USD and ZWL in an economic tango of survival. My stall was home, constructed from a \$200 loan and an obstinate vision. But something was different. I spotted Mai Tino and others—younger, in particular—scrolling on their phones, eyes fixed on Instagram shops rather than mine.

What was I lacking? Why were they pulling away? That's when I stumbled upon Charles Handy's *Second Curve*, that book that hit me like one of Harare's surprise rain storms². It told me life and business don't go in straight lines; you've got to jump to a new path before it runs dry. For me, it meant leaving Mbare dust for an online marketplace, marketing Zimbabwean eco-friendly fashion where 90% of the population has a mobile and the internet is fizzing like an electric wire³. Stoicism, that quiet power, was my anchor in turbulence. This is my story—a messy, optimistic leap from market stall to online platform, combining Handy's *Second Curve* and Zimbabwe's 2025 digital boom, and the Stoic toughness that kept me grounded. It's about discovering not just a new enterprise, but a new way of living, in a world that's moving faster than a minibus down Harare's streets.

¹ International Labour Organization, "Informal Economy in Zimbabwe," 2023

² Charles Handy, *The Second Curve: Thoughts on Reinventing Society* (2015).

³ DataReportal, "Digital 2024: Zimbabwe," reporting 90.1% mobile penetration.

The First Curve: A Stall in Mbare's Madness

Let's head back to 2021. I was 22, just out of school, no job in sight, just burning inside and Aunt Rudo's voice echoing in my head: "Tinashe, make your own way." Mom and Dad died when I was little, and I grew up with Aunt Rudo, who was a seamstress, whose hands were like magic and whose tongue cut doubt as smoothly as it cut words. She advanced me \$200, what she'd saved from sewing funeral dresses, and I used it to purchase a bale of second-hand clothes from someone from Bulawayo. Mbare Musika was where I landed—a sprawling, hot market where dreams and desperation mix. My spot was an oasis of color under a worn tarpaulin, shirts and blouses stacked high, each one of them having a story I'd invent for customers.

"The shirt's been to London," I'd quip, pulling up an old Nike sleeve worn down to its white threads. They'd chuckle, and haggle, and settle on \$2 or an instant Ecocash transfer. The early days were raw—to sort clothes by candle flame, to withstand rain which transformed the market into an oozing maze, to read customers' attitudes. But I adored it. By 2022, I was earning enough to lease a one-room flat in Highfield and send Aunt Rudo \$50 every month. It was like reaching mountainous heights even though my shoes were still coated in Mbare's dust.

Success was sweet, like hot sadza straight from the pot, but it tasted bittersweet. Success came with thorns. The economy of Zimbabwe was a monster—hyperinflation reached 240% in 2022, reducing cash to confetti overnight⁴. I learned to manage multiple currencies, taking USD, ZWL, even barter transactions when money ran dry. Ecocash was my lifeline, enabling me to accept payment when banks crashed. Customers were my girls and boys—Mai Tino, purchasing skirts for her girls; Blessing, a student on the hunt for vintage tees; even Baba James, a pastor who claimed that my ties were lucky charms. But by 2023, the terrain was shifting. Mbare was overcrowded, new vendors emerging with cheaper goods from China. I couldn't compete on price. Worse, I watched as customers disappeared—not to other stalls, but into their mobiles.

⁴ World Bank, "Zimbabwe Economic Update," 2022

Blessing introduced me to an Instagram store with nicer clothes, cheaper as well. “It’s quick,” she shrugged.

Quick? My heart plummeted like a rock. My stall, my hustle, was stalling—what I came to refer to as “market stall saturation,” a quagmire where vendors like me reached a ceiling in Zimbabwe’s 75% informal economy⁵. Power cuts made it worse; I’d close shop on some evenings, torch drained, losing customers to the dark. I might’ve continued, scrounging, but Handy’s warning haunted me: the new curve starts before the old one ends⁶. My inaugural curve was tipping downward. I needed another one. But where? And what in heaven’s name was I supposed to do it?

Recognizing the Second Curve: The Spark of Change

I remember the night it hit me. October 2023, hot and agitated, and I was reclining on a mat outside my apartment, that cracked phone screen pulsing like an ember. A customer, Tapiwa, took notice of an online store that made bags in Zimbabwe, and I dived in, scrolling on platforms like Zindiq and Vaka, even glancing at Jumia. My belly rolled—one part panic, one part hope. This stuff was smooth, reaching clients I’d never get to in Mbare. But it fueled something in me. The internet was expanding in Zimbabwe—34% penetration by 2024, as Starlink extended faster links to areas like Mutare and Chiweshe (DataReportal,). Mobile money filled every corner; Ecocash and InnBucks were what we used to pay for airtime to school fees⁷. Our youth—you know, more than 60% of us under 25 years old—lived online, shopping, selling, dreaming in pixels⁸. Why could I not join them? Why could not my clothes, my hustle, become digital?

That question was my Second Curve moment. But leaping was no grand epiphany—it was wrestling with doubt, slow and messy. I’d stay awake, my head spinning. Was I crazy to walk away from a stall that paid my rent? In Zimbabwe, you’re taught to stick to what works. Aunt Rudo was blunt: “You’re chasing shadows, Tinashe.” And as a

⁵ Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, “Labour Force Survey,” 2023

⁶ Handy, *The Second Curve*, p. 30.

⁷ Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, “Mobile Money Transactions Report,” 2024

⁸ Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, “Demographic Profile,” 2024

woman, the weight of expectation was heavier: people did not want us to build websites, sell at markets, grow beyond what's safe. Cultural expectations screamed caution, but the writing was on the wall: my sales were plateauing, customers were going online, and Zimbabwe's economy was shifting to tech. Starlink's 2024 rollout was revolutionary, and it promised internet even to rural markets⁹. If I stayed put, I'd be stuck, just another vendor among hundreds of stalls.

Stoicism was my anchor. I'd stumbled upon a well-worn copy of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* at one of these book stalls, and his words resonated: Keep your eyes on what you can control, let go of the rest¹⁰. I couldn't control Zimbabwe's power cuts or Aunt Rudo's scowls, but I could control what was next. I began where I refer to as "micro-pivots"—small experiments to dip into the digital waters. I created a WhatsApp group, sharing pictures of me in clothes. Sales dribbled, then cascaded in. I used an adjacent neighbor's internet to learn about digital marketing online for free, up into the wee hours of the morning despite dodgy lights. I learned Instagram algorithms, mobile payment APIs, even something about blockchain for secure transactions—a nod to 2025's tech wave. Every movement was a struggle. When a customer received an incorrect size and blasted me on WhatsApp, I wished to disappear. But Stoicism intervened: accept, correct, move on. I sent a replacement, included a complimentary scarf, and learned to double-check orders.

This was not about business—it was about becoming someone else. I was no longer just a vendor, I was a learner, a strategist, a dreamer. The Second Curve was not just a new journey—it was a new me, ready to ride Zimbabwe's digital wave.

⁹ TechZim, "Starlink's Impact on Zimbabwe's Digital Economy," 2024

¹⁰ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book 7.

The Second Curve: Building Tsvete Threads

By July of 2024, I was ready to leap! I created Tsvete Threads, an online shop selling eco-friendly Zimbabwean fashion: dresses made from locally cultivated cotton, bags crafted by rural women, jackets re-cycled from Mbare's scraps. Why eco-friendly? Because 2025 is not about getting rich—the year is about making an impact. Zimbabwe has real issues: textile waste fills up our rubbish tips, and drought affects our cotton fields severely¹¹. Everyone else is eager for ethical fashion, and I spotted an opportunity to position Zimbabwe on that map. Tsvete Threads was not just a store—it was a narrative—a notion of what I refer to as "digital ubuntu," marrying our communal culture to tech to raise everyone up. Ubuntu is not just jargon, it's how we get by in Zimbabwe, sharing what little we have, and I needed that same energy to infuse into my brand

Constructing it was no small accomplishment. I scraped together \$500—half from funds saved, half from a microloan from a women's cooperative in Harare. I partnered up with Kuda, fellow church choir member and coder, to create a basic website. We made Ecocash and Paynow work for accepting payment, but logistics? A complete headache. Roads in Zimbabwe are potholes more than pavement, and shortages of fuel made deliveries a risk. I discovered Vaya, a local ride-hailing service turned makeshift courier, and cobbled together a system. Marketing was where I was most skillful—at Instagram and WhatsApp, that is. I showed viewers of videos of artisans weaving, told stories of customers wearing my dresses, and ran diaspora-targeted advertising: "Wear Zimbabwe's soul." Sales started slow—10 orders a week, then 50, then 100. In early 2025, I was shipping to Johannesburg, London, even Toronto, into a \$2 billion diaspora market¹².

The ripples of its impact reached beyond me. I employed five women from Chiweshe to weave bags, paying them in cash for school fees for their kids. I trained two teens, Blessing and Tapiwa, to assist me on the website, igniting their own tech aspirations. My platform wasn't merely selling clothing—it was putting people to work, safeguarding our heritage, reducing waste. Stoic principles kept me centered. When a shipment was

¹¹ Environmental Management Agency, "Textile Waste in Zimbabwe," 2024

¹² African Union, "Diaspora Economic Contributions," 2024

stranded or the site crashed, I heard Marcus Aurelius: You have power over your mind, not outside events¹³. I resolved the problem, learned, moved on. That mentality transformed me from a vendor who scarcely used a smartphone to an entrepreneur balancing SEO, supply chains, and artisan partnerships.

These were the key learnings: The Second Curve is not merely about survival, but growth. Table 1 below charts the framework that informed my pivot, synthesizing Stoic philosophy with applied skills:

Table 1: Second Curve Framework for Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Element	Description	Stoic Principle	Impact on Tsvete Threads
Purposeful Vision	Aligning business with social good (e.g., sustainability, community)	Wisdom in purpose	Focused on eco-friendly fashion, cultural pride
Adaptive Strategy	Iterating based on market feedback (e.g., customer preferences)	Acceptance of change	Adjusted designs for diaspora demand
Digital Mastery	Learning tech tools (e.g., social media, payment APIs)	Discipline of learning	Built website, used Instagram for marketing
Community Impact	Creating jobs, empowering others	Justice in relationships	Employed artisans, trained youth in tech
Resilient Mindset	Overcoming setbacks (e.g., logistics, tech failures)	Courage to face adversity	Stayed calm during delays, focused on solutions

This was a “sustainable Second Curve,” balancing profit with planet and people, aligned with 2025’s global ESG push. It showed me I could be more than a vendor—I could be a changemaker.

¹³ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book 5.

Broader Implications: A Roadmap for Zimbabwe and Beyond

So, what is my story about? Not about me—it's about what's possible in such a country as Zimbabwe, where each day is a hustle. The Second Curve is a lifeline in a country where economic uncertainty is as prevalent as dew every morning. Beginning a new curve before one collapses isn't just wise—it's about survival. My stall might've made it to the next day, but I'd have missed out on Zimbabwe's digital boom, which is set to reach \$1 billion in e-commerce by 2026¹⁴. Jumping in early allowed me to catch that wave, not be washed under it.

But it's not just about timing—it's about mindset and skills. Table 2 below breaks down the barriers I faced and how I tackled them, offering a roadmap for others:

Table 2: Overcoming Barriers to the Second Curve

Barrier	Description	Solution	Stoic Principle
Economic Instability	Hyperinflation, currency fluctuations	Used mobile money, diversified revenue	Acceptance of external chaos
Cultural Norms	Resistance to risk, gender biases	Ignored skepticism, built community trust	Courage to defy expectations
Infrastructure Challenges	Power outages, poor roads	Partnered with Vaya, used solar chargers	Focus on what's controllable
Limited Funding	Lack of access to loans for women	Secured microloan, bootstrapped	Discipline in resourcefulness
Tech Skill Gaps	Limited digital literacy	Took free online courses, collaborated	Wisdom through learning

¹⁴ Statista, "Zimbabwe E-Commerce Forecast," 2025

These hurdles aren't just Zimbabwe's—they're universal. Entrepreneurs everywhere experience their own "market stall saturation," where old models grind to a halt. In 2025, as AI, blockchain, and sustainability redefine industries, the Second Curve is an universal summons to change. But in Zimbabwe, there's an added catch: women entrepreneurs, who constitute 52% of the sector, receive fewer funds than men¹⁵. Energy cuts hit us particularly hard, and cultural norms persuade us to stick to what we know best. I beat that statistic by relying on community—craftsmen, developers, even Aunt Rudo, who came round eventually—and tools like Ecocash that were suited to our reality.

My secret sauce was Stoicism. Faced with a failed microloan or lost delivery, I'd read Epictetus: It's not what happens to you, but how you react¹⁶. That mentality converted letdowns into learnings, disorder into opportunity. It's something any entrepreneur, from Hong Kong to Harare, needs to know: resilience is what brings about reinvention.

What's coming next for Zimbabwe? I envision a "Second Curve Ecosystem"—a platform where government, tech companies like Econet, and civil society organizations collaborate to enfranchise micro-entrepreneurs. Imagine training centres where vendors learn to code, Starlink internet in rural marketplaces, platforms that connect us to international consumers. It's not science fiction—the mobile money revolution has already transformed us into traders, and our youth, 60% of us, yearn for it. Such an ecosystem could position Zimbabwe as an example to Africa's digital future, combining our ubuntu ethos and 2025's technological revolution.

¹⁵ Zimbabwe Gender Commission, "Women in Entrepreneurship," 2024

¹⁶ Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, Chapter 5.

Conclusion: The Baobab's New Reach

My path from Mbare market stall to founder of Tsvete Threads isn't one of clothes or money—it's one of becoming another person altogether. The Second Curve taught me that change isn't something to be feared, but something to be caught. Stoicism provided me with the courage to set sail, even when waves were choppy. In 2025, as Zimbabwe surfs a digital renaissance, our story's just one of many sparks in an even larger blaze. Our nation's like that of a baobab tree—roots working deep into markets, community, hustle, but branches reaching for higher skies: tech, sustainability, global aspirations.

I'm not yet done pivoting. Perhaps that next curve is a blockchain platform for transparent artisan payments or an e-learning hub training rural vendors to be digital. Who knows? Regardless, I know this: the Second Curve isn't an act of impulse, it's a lifestyle—one of constant looking, constant readiness to grow. To every entrepreneur, from Mbare's market stalls to London's office towers: don't wait for your curve to implode. Discover your next one today. Embrace uncertainty, doubt, excitement. Become the baobab—rooted, yet reaching for the sky.

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