

## Community empowerment through social entrepreneurship: A qualitative study in waai village

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### Abstract

Community empowerment has become a strategic approach to achieving sustainable rural development by strengthening local capacities, promoting community participation, and optimizing local resources through collaborative governance. Nevertheless, community empowerment programs implemented in Waai Village have not yet succeeded in fostering a sustainable social entrepreneurship ecosystem. This study aims to analyze the strategic issues influencing community empowerment in advancing social entrepreneurship and to identify appropriate empowerment strategies based on local contexts. A qualitative case study design was employed using in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), field observations, and document analysis. Participants were purposively selected and included the village head, village officials, customary leaders, community leaders, local entrepreneurs, community members, and other relevant stakeholders. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis involving transcription, coding, theme development, interpretation, and validation through triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that the development of social entrepreneurship is constrained by limited community understanding of social entrepreneurship, inadequate entrepreneurial capacity, weak institutional support, fragmented empowerment programs, and insufficient collaborative governance among stakeholders. The study further reveals that existing empowerment initiatives remain predominantly activity-oriented rather than transformative, limiting their capacity to generate social innovation and community-based enterprises. The FGDs identified four strategic priorities for strengthening community empowerment: enhancing social entrepreneurship literacy among government and community members, improving entrepreneurial motivation and capacity through continuous training and mentoring, strengthening local institutional capacity, and promoting collaborative governance in designing innovative, community-based empowerment programs. The study concludes that sustainable community empowerment requires an integrated empowerment ecosystem that combines institutional strengthening, entrepreneurial capacity building, social capital development, and cross-sector collaboration to transform local resources into sustainable social and economic value. These findings provide empirical evidence for developing community empowerment policies that support inclusive and sustainable rural development through social entrepreneurship.

**Keywords:** Community Empowerment; Social Entrepreneurship; Community Capacity; Collaborative Governance; Rural Development

### 1. Introduction

The term "empowerment" originated from the verb "to empower," which first emerged in England during the mid-seventeenth century to describe the formal delegation of authority or power by a higher authority. As scholarly thought evolved, the meaning of empowerment expanded during the nineteenth century from merely granting authority to encompassing a process and condition that legitimizes individuals or groups to acquire and exercise power (Soler et al., 2014). Since then, the concept of empowerment has been closely associated with issues of power distribution and power

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relations. During the 1960s, empowerment gained broader recognition through various civil society movements, including the civil rights movement, feminist movement, and other social movements, all of which emphasized the participation of marginalized groups in decision-making processes (Rappaport, 1981; Calvès, 2009). Consequently, the concept has been adopted across multiple disciplines, including education, psychology, sociology, economics, and other fields, with different interpretations depending on their respective theoretical perspectives (Kminiak et al., 2024). Furthermore, Weidenstedt (2016) argues that empowerment aims to improve people's quality of life by strengthening their capacities and expanding access to resources that enable individuals and communities to exercise greater control over their lives. This process can be achieved through structural changes, including improved access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare services, and adequate housing. Beyond structural transformation, empowerment also involves strengthening social and psychological dimensions by fostering a sense of belonging, expanding social support through community networks, creating supportive and motivating environments, and recognizing individuals' identities, capabilities, achievements, and contributions. Across the world, numerous initiatives have been developed to address social challenges, improve community well-being, and protect as well as restore ecosystems through sustainability-oriented and resilience-based development approaches. Nevertheless, these initiatives continue to be largely driven by governments, the private sector, and funding agencies, resulting in limited involvement of local communities in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programs.

This situation indicates that community empowerment has not yet been fully integrated as a core component of program implementation. Consequently, a deeper understanding is needed of how empowerment programs can be designed to strengthen community capacity and develop effective empowerment mechanisms that support long-term sustainability transformations. Within this context, the present study examines community empowerment programs as a strategic component of the governance and implementation of sustainable development (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). Community empowerment has become one of the principal strategies for achieving sustainable development by strengthening community capacity, promoting active participation, and expanding access to social, economic, and institutional resources. Contemporary development paradigms no longer regard communities as passive beneficiaries of development initiatives; instead, they recognize them as key actors capable of identifying local challenges, mobilizing available resources, and generating innovative solutions to improve their own well-being (Kruahong et al., 2023). In this context, social entrepreneurship has emerged as an increasingly important approach because it integrates entrepreneurial innovation with a social mission to address societal challenges while simultaneously creating sustainable economic value (Iqbal, 2018). A growing body of evidence demonstrates that social entrepreneurship contributes not only to employment creation and income generation but also to social inclusion, community resilience, institutional capacity building, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Quaye et al., 2024; Raman et al., 2025). For example, community-based ecotourism in developing countries has increasingly been recognized as an effective mechanism for rural community development, and its contribution has been formally acknowledged by the Malaysian government (Kunjuraman, 2022). Consequently, many countries have begun integrating social entrepreneurship into community empowerment policies as a strategic approach to promoting inclusive and sustainable rural development.

In rural areas, social entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as an effective mechanism for transforming local resources into sustainable economic opportunities. Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, which primarily focuses on profit maximization, social entrepreneurship prioritizes the creation of social value through community participation, collaborative governance, innovation, and long-term sustainability (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Santos, 2012). Previous studies have demonstrated that rural social enterprises contribute to local economic diversification, strengthen social capital, promote collective action, and reduce multidimensional poverty by leveraging local knowledge and community assets (Mair & Marti, 2006; Richter, 2019). Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives, entrepreneurship training, institutional collaboration, and continuous mentoring have been identified as critical factors for the successful development of social entrepreneurship in rural communities (Littlewood & Holt, 2015; Steiner & Teasdale, 2019). These findings suggest that community empowerment is more effective when entrepreneurial initiatives are designed in accordance with the social and cultural characteristics of local communities rather than being implemented merely as economic assistance programs. At the global level, substantial efforts have been undertaken to address social challenges, improve community well-being, and restore ecosystems through sustainability and resilience initiatives. However, these programs have largely been driven by governments, the private sector, and financial institutions, often lacking meaningful empowerment processes that enable local communities to actively participate in their design and implementation. Consequently, greater understanding is needed regarding how such programs can be developed and how empowerment processes can be structured to support long-term sustainability transformations (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024).

Community empowerment through the development of village-based enterprises has become an important strategy for strengthening local economic capacity while promoting community well-being. This approach has been implemented not only in Indonesia but also in several other countries, including Malaysia, Pakistan, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, China, and Eastern Ethiopia. Across these contexts, village enterprises are widely recognized as important instruments for rural development and poverty reduction. The relevance of this strategy has become increasingly significant as rural communities are required to adapt to rapid socioeconomic changes and intensifying competition in an era of disruption (Aneta, 2016; Bigliardi et al., 2020; Annamalah et al., 2022; Effendi et al., 2023). The evolution of the community empowerment concept has been driven by critical evaluations of earlier development approaches that were considered insufficiently effective. The neoclassical economic paradigm, which emphasized industrialization and relied on the trickle-down effect, proved inadequate in ensuring an equitable distribution of development benefits (Kakwani & Pernia, 2000). This limitation gave rise to the community empowerment paradigm as an alternative development approach that positions communities as the primary actors in the development process while strengthening their capacity to manage local resources and improve their well-being independently. At the same time, innovation has become an increasingly critical determinant of organizational success and community development in the contemporary era (Elkington & Booyesen, 2015). Innovation-driven transformation extends beyond the creation of new technologies to encompass the emergence of novel platforms, business models, and competitive dynamics. Consequently, governments, businesses, and communities must develop adaptive and responsive capabilities to effectively navigate change, maintain competitiveness, and ensure the long-term sustainability of development initiatives (Harinurdin et al., 2025).

Community well-being is widely recognized as a key indicator of successful development. Community empowerment represents a fundamental strategy for improving well-being by strengthening community capacity and leveraging various forms of capital available within communities, including psychological, social, and financial capital, particularly in rural areas. Previous research has demonstrated that these forms of capital play a significant role in enhancing community well-being through empowerment processes (Sarjiyanto et al., 2026). In Indonesia, the government has consistently promoted balanced rural development by implementing a range of community empowerment programs aimed at improving the overall well-being of rural populations (van Leeuwen & Földvári, 2016). These challenges are also evident in Waai Village, where existing community empowerment programs have not been sufficiently effective in fostering the development of social entrepreneurship. Findings from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed that both the village government and community members have only a limited understanding of the concept and practical implementation of social entrepreneurship. Existing empowerment initiatives have generally not been designed to stimulate innovation, strengthen entrepreneurial capacity, or promote community-based enterprises capable of addressing local socioeconomic challenges. Participants consistently emphasized the need for systematic entrepreneurship training, stronger collaboration between the village government and community members, enhanced institutional commitment, and the development of more innovative empowerment programs that reflect local needs and resource potential. These findings indicate that although Waai Village possesses considerable local resources with strong development potential, the absence of an integrated community empowerment strategy remains a major barrier to the advancement of social entrepreneurship within the community.

Previous studies have consistently reported that social entrepreneurship contributes positively to rural development and community well-being. Nevertheless, several important research gaps remain. First, the existing literature has predominantly focused on the economic impacts of social entrepreneurship, whereas studies examining how village governments and local communities collaboratively develop community empowerment strategies within specific local contexts remain relatively limited. Second, most research has emphasized the success of social entrepreneurship models, while relatively little attention has been devoted to institutional barriers, governance challenges, and community perceptions that influence the development of social entrepreneurship at the village level. Third, empirical evidence on the implementation of social entrepreneurship in Eastern Indonesia, particularly within island communities characterized by distinctive socio-cultural traditions and local governance systems, remains scarce. These gaps highlight the need for research that explains how community empowerment strategies can be designed in accordance with local characteristics to strengthen the sustainable development of social entrepreneurship. In response to this need, the present study proposes an integrated community empowerment perspective that emphasizes strengthening local institutional capacity, promoting participatory governance, enhancing entrepreneurial capabilities, and fostering collaborative planning as the fundamental pillars of sustainable social entrepreneurship development at the village level. This perspective is expected to provide new empirical evidence on how the concept of social entrepreneurship can be effectively integrated into village governance systems in Indonesia. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the strategic issues influencing community empowerment in promoting social entrepreneurship in Waai Village.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategic issues influencing community empowerment in the development of social entrepreneurship in Waai Village. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to explore the meanings, experiences, perceptions, and social interactions among stakeholders within their real-life context. Rather than focusing solely on program outcomes, this approach emphasizes the processes, dynamics, and contextual factors that shape both the success and the challenges of community empowerment initiatives. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena holistically by considering the social, cultural, institutional, and environmental contexts in which they occur (Tracy, 2010; Levitt et al., 2017). A case study design was adopted because the research focused on a single setting, Waai Village, which possesses distinctive social, cultural, institutional, and local economic characteristics that influence the implementation of community empowerment programs. This design enabled an in-depth examination of the interrelationships among community capacity, institutional support, community participation, and social entrepreneurship development as interconnected components of a broader community empowerment system. Furthermore, the case study approach facilitated the use of multiple sources of evidence, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), field observations, and document analysis, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The integration of multiple data sources also strengthened methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

### **2.2. Participants**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, whereby informants were intentionally recruited based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in community empowerment programs and the development of social entrepreneurship in Waai Village. This sampling strategy was chosen because qualitative research emphasizes the selection of information-rich participants who can provide in-depth insights relevant to the research objectives rather than achieving statistical representation of a population. According to Bouncken et al. (2025), purposive sampling is one of the most appropriate approaches in qualitative research because it enables researchers to obtain rich, contextual, and relevant data that facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The participants included the village head, village government officials, customary leaders, community leaders, local entrepreneurs, community members actively involved in empowerment programs, and other stakeholders with experience in planning and implementing community empowerment initiatives. The diversity of participant characteristics was intended to capture multiple perspectives on community empowerment practices, challenges in developing social entrepreneurship, community capacity, institutional support, and collaborative relationships among stakeholders. As noted by Dahal et al. (2019), involving participants from diverse backgrounds enables researchers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena because each group contributes unique experiences and perspectives. Participant recruitment was conducted progressively throughout the study in response to the evolving findings emerging from the field. The number of participants was not predetermined but was guided by the principle of data saturation, which was reached when additional interviews and discussions no longer generated meaningful new information, categories, or themes. Ahmed (2025) emphasized that sample adequacy in qualitative research is determined not by the number of participants but by the depth and richness of the information collected until data saturation is achieved. Accordingly, data collection was concluded once the emerging findings demonstrated consistent patterns and adequately addressed the research objectives. This approach enhanced the credibility of the findings by ensuring that each identified theme was supported by complementary evidence obtained from multiple sources and confirmed through data saturation (Moore et al., 2026).

### **2.3. Research Instruments**

In this study, the researcher served as the primary research instrument (human instrument), assuming direct responsibility for defining the research focus, selecting participants, collecting and analyzing data, interpreting the findings, and drawing conclusions based on the evidence gathered in the field. In qualitative research, the researcher functions as the principal instrument because of the ability to understand the social context, interpret participants' lived experiences, and adapt the data collection process to the evolving dynamics of the study. Braun & Clarke (2023) further emphasized that the researcher's role is fundamental to the quality of qualitative research, as data interpretation is inherently reflective and shaped through interactions with participants. To support the data collection process, several complementary research instruments were employed, including a semi-structured interview guide, a focus group discussion (FGD) protocol, observation checklists, and document analysis. The interview guide was developed based on the main focus of the study, encompassing community empowerment, entrepreneurial capacity, community participation, institutional support, and social entrepreneurship development. Semi-structured interviews were

selected because they provide sufficient flexibility to explore participants' perspectives in greater depth while ensuring that the discussion remains aligned with the research objectives (Kallio et al., 2016). In addition, field observations and document analysis were used to complement the interview and FGD findings, thereby facilitating both data source and methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility, trustworthiness, and overall rigor of the research findings.

#### **2.4. Research Procedure**

The study was conducted in three sequential stages: preparation, data collection, and data analysis with report preparation. During the preparation stage, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken to establish the theoretical foundation for community empowerment and social entrepreneurship. The researcher also developed the research instruments, including a semi-structured interview guide, a focus group discussion (FGD) protocol, and observation checklists, while identifying and recruiting participants according to the predetermined inclusion criteria. The data collection stage involved in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), field observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the village head, community leaders, community members, and other stakeholders directly involved in community empowerment programs. Subsequently, FGDs were organized to obtain collective perspectives on strategic issues and alternative approaches for strengthening social entrepreneurship. Field observations and document analysis were undertaken to complement and verify the information obtained from the interviews and FGDs, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research context. The final stage consisted of data analysis and report preparation. All interview and FGD recordings were transcribed verbatim and subsequently analyzed through coding, category development, theme identification, and interpretation using reflexive thematic analysis. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking with key participants were conducted throughout the analytical process. Finally, the findings were systematically organized and presented in the research report, including the results, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations, in accordance with the objectives of the study.

#### **2.5. Data Analysis**

The research data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis because this method enables researchers to identify, organize, and interpret meaningful patterns emerging from data collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), field observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was selected for its flexibility in exploring complex social phenomena while providing a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives regarding community empowerment through social entrepreneurship. Braun & Clarke (2023) emphasized that thematic analysis is one of the most widely adopted approaches in qualitative research because it facilitates systematic, reflective, and context-sensitive interpretation of qualitative data. The analysis was conducted through a series of iterative stages. First, all interview and FGD recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the information obtained. Subsequently, meaningful data segments were systematically coded, after which similar codes were grouped into broader categories and further refined into overarching themes representing the strategic issues related to community empowerment and social entrepreneurship development in Waai Village. According to Byrne (2022), the processes of coding and theme development are fundamental components of thematic analysis because they enable researchers to identify relationships among concepts and construct interpretations grounded in empirical evidence. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking were conducted by confirming the researchers' interpretations with several key participants. In addition, peer debriefing was undertaken to obtain constructive feedback on the analytical process and interpretation of the findings. The final results were presented as a series of interconnected themes supported by representative quotations from participants, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation while systematically addressing the objectives of the study.

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### **3. Results and Discussion**

One of the critical issues identified in this study concerns community empowerment from the perspective of entrepreneurship. Community empowerment refers to a process that actively engages community members in improving their quality of life by leveraging their existing strengths and optimizing local resources to foster self-reliance and sustainable development. In this context, entrepreneurial empowerment is closely associated with social entrepreneurship, which emphasizes social innovation capable of transforming existing social systems through the involvement of individuals who possess a strong vision, creativity, entrepreneurial motivation, and ethical commitment. Accordingly, examining community empowerment in relation to the development of social entrepreneurship is particularly important, given the persistent challenges associated with the community's limited entrepreneurial

motivation, willingness, and capacity, as well as the village government's inability to provide adequate support for the establishment of social entrepreneurship initiatives. As one participant explained:

"The community still lacks a clear understanding of social entrepreneurship, and the community empowerment programs and activities implemented by the village government have not been directed toward developing social entrepreneurship that can generate benefits and improve the economic conditions of disadvantaged and low-income community members."

Similarly, the findings indicate that the village government has not yet been able to design empowerment programs that effectively promote the establishment of social entrepreneurship capable of improving the community's socioeconomic well-being. One participant stated:

"The village government needs to develop a deeper understanding of community empowerment for social entrepreneurship and identify how innovative empowerment programs can be designed to reflect the principles of social entrepreneurship within the community. Such programs should ultimately generate practical initiatives capable of addressing the socioeconomic needs of local residents."

The findings indicate that the efforts of the village government to empower the community through social entrepreneurship remain suboptimal. Existing empowerment programs have yet to make a substantial contribution to encouraging the development of social entrepreneurial practices. Their limited impact is reflected in the inability of current initiatives to strengthen community capacity for developing enterprises that create not only economic value but also meaningful social benefits, including support for disadvantaged groups, improved access to resources, education, healthcare services, and employment opportunities. Consequently, the existing empowerment programs have not fully addressed the long-term socioeconomic needs of the community. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) identified four strategic priorities for strengthening community empowerment through social entrepreneurship in Waai Village. First, both the village government and community members need to develop a deeper understanding of the concept, objectives, and significance of community empowerment oriented toward social entrepreneurship. Second, initiatives should focus on strengthening community members' entrepreneurial knowledge, motivation, and willingness to actively participate in social entrepreneurship development. Third, continuous empowerment programs should be implemented through entrepreneurship training, mentoring, and sustained capacity-building activities. Finally, stronger collaboration between the village government and the community is required to design and implement innovative, participatory empowerment programs that promote social entrepreneurship based on the unique potentials and needs of Waai Village.

The findings indicate that community empowerment initiatives in Waai Village have not yet succeeded in establishing a sustainable social entrepreneurship ecosystem. This suggests that existing empowerment programs have remained largely activity-oriented rather than functioning as transformative processes capable of strengthening community capacity to identify local challenges, utilize local resources, and generate community-based innovations. The limited public understanding of social entrepreneurship further indicates that local development continues to be dominated by conventional economic approaches that prioritize financial gains, while the creation of social value has yet to become an integral component of community empowerment practices. As a result, entrepreneurship is not widely perceived as a mechanism for addressing social problems through enterprises that simultaneously generate economic benefits and improve community well-being. Contemporary perspectives on community empowerment, however, emphasize that successful community development should no longer be assessed solely by the amount of assistance provided but by the extent to which communities become self-reliant, strengthen their adaptive capacities, and develop innovative solutions capable of addressing local challenges in a sustainable manner. Over the past several decades, the concept of empowerment has evolved from a narrow focus on the transfer of authority toward a broader process of strengthening the capacities of individuals and communities to control resources, expand participation, and make autonomous decisions. This perspective highlights that community empowerment should be understood as a long-term process of social transformation, in which program success is measured not merely by the number of activities implemented but by the extent to which communities enhance their capacity to manage and sustain their own development (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Laverack, 2006).

The findings further reveal that the village government has not yet been able to effectively perform its role as a development facilitator capable of fostering community-based social innovation. Existing community empowerment programs remain fragmented and sector-specific, with limited integration into broader village development strategies aimed at promoting social entrepreneurship. Consequently, various training initiatives and economic assistance programs have not produced substantial improvements in the community's capacity to establish and sustain community-based enterprises. These findings suggest that the primary challenge lies not in the limited availability of

local resources but rather in the absence of an effective institutional governance framework capable of connecting communities with essential resources, including knowledge, technology, technical assistance, financial support, and market networks. Dushkova & Ivlieva (2024) argue that community empowerment programs can achieve sustainable outcomes only when local communities are actively engaged throughout the entire development cycle, from problem identification and planning to implementation and program evaluation. Such participation fosters a sense of ownership, enabling communities to become active agents of development rather than passive beneficiaries of external interventions. The evidence from Waai Village indicates that these participatory governance mechanisms have not yet been fully established. As a result, existing empowerment initiatives have been unable to create a sustainable social entrepreneurship ecosystem capable of generating long-term social and economic transformation within the community.

The findings further indicate that the community's limited entrepreneurial capacity is not solely attributable to deficiencies in technical skills but is also influenced by the underdeveloped culture of innovation within the community. Most community members continue to perceive economic activities primarily as a means of meeting short-term household needs, with limited orientation toward developing entrepreneurial initiatives that address broader social challenges. In contrast, the defining characteristic of social entrepreneurship lies in its ability to integrate economic objectives with a social mission, enabling entrepreneurial activities not only to generate financial returns but also to strengthen social cohesion, create employment opportunities, reduce multidimensional poverty, and improve community well-being. Saebi et al. (2019) argue that the success of social entrepreneurship depends on the capacity to generate social innovation, establish strategic partnerships, and develop business models capable of creating sustainable social impact. Likewise, van Tulder et al. (2016) emphasize that cross-sector collaboration among governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, and local communities is essential for addressing complex development challenges. Accordingly, the successful development of social entrepreneurship cannot be achieved solely through improving entrepreneurial or business competencies. It also requires a fundamental shift in community mindsets, enabling individuals to perceive social problems as opportunities for innovation that generate shared value and contribute to the broader public good. Therefore, the limited development of social entrepreneurship in Waai Village suggests that the community empowerment process still requires substantial strengthening in several key areas, including social entrepreneurship literacy, creativity, leadership capacity, and the ability to establish and sustain collaborative social networks. Strengthening these dimensions is essential for creating an enabling environment in which social entrepreneurship can flourish and contribute to sustainable community development.

In addition to the community's limited entrepreneurial capacity, this study found that institutional support provided by the village government remains insufficient to create an enabling environment for the development of social entrepreneurship. Existing community empowerment programs have not been designed based on systematic assessments of local resource potential or the actual needs of the community, resulting in implementation that is largely administrative rather than strategically oriented. Consequently, the initiatives implemented thus far have failed to establish a coherent continuum linking entrepreneurship training, mentoring, enterprise development, and market access. Harinurudin et al. (2025) argue that community empowerment based on open innovation has become an increasingly important approach to rural development because it facilitates collaboration among governments, local communities, higher education institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations in generating collective innovation. Such an approach enables communities to gain access to knowledge, technology, expertise, financial resources, and other forms of support that were previously beyond their reach, thereby accelerating the development of entrepreneurial capacity. Accordingly, the findings of this study suggest that institutional strengthening in Waai Village should be directed toward establishing a collaborative governance framework that extends beyond the implementation of government-led programs. Instead, it should promote strategic partnerships among multiple stakeholders to expand access to knowledge, technology, investment opportunities, and markets for locally produced goods and services. Such an integrated governance approach is essential for fostering a sustainable social entrepreneurship ecosystem and strengthening the long-term resilience of the local community.

The findings also demonstrate that Waai Village possesses substantial social and cultural capital that can serve as a strong foundation for the development of social entrepreneurship. Values such as solidarity, mutual cooperation, kinship, and interpersonal trust constitute valuable social assets that can support the success of community-based enterprises. However, these assets have not been fully utilized because no community empowerment model has yet effectively integrated social capital with local economic development. Phillips et al. (2015) argue that social innovation and cross-sector collaboration are fundamental mechanisms through which social enterprises address complex social problems in a sustainable manner. Therefore, the development of social entrepreneurship in Waai Village should not rely solely on the provision of economic assistance but should instead prioritize strengthening social capital as the foundation for creating enterprises that are driven by collective interests and shared social value. Granovetter (2021) further emphasizes that economic activities are embedded within social relationships, where trust, social networks, and

shared norms facilitate economic cooperation and coordination among multiple actors. These perspectives reinforce the importance of strengthening social relationships as a prerequisite for building a sustainable social entrepreneurship ecosystem. Furthermore, the findings from the focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed that community members expressed the need for greater understanding of social entrepreneurship, continuous entrepreneurship training, stronger entrepreneurial motivation, and closer collaboration between the village government and the community. These aspirations suggest that local communities recognize capacity development as a prerequisite for achieving long-term economic self-reliance. Sarjiyanto et al. (2026) explain that community empowerment functions as a mediating mechanism linking psychological, social, and financial capital to improvements in rural community well-being. In other words, the success of community empowerment depends not only on the availability of economic resources but also on community self-confidence, the strength of social networks, and the institutional capacity to mobilize and manage resources effectively. These findings imply that community empowerment programs in Waai Village should be designed more comprehensively by integrating social entrepreneurship education, business mentoring, community organization strengthening, and partnership network development. Such an integrated approach would enhance community capacity to generate sustainable social and economic transformation while reinforcing the resilience of the local development system.

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#### 4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that community empowerment through social entrepreneurship represents a strategic approach to advancing sustainable community development by strengthening community capacity, promoting active participation, and optimizing local resources. However, its implementation continues to face several challenges, including limited understanding of the concept of social entrepreneurship among both community members and the village government, insufficient entrepreneurial capacity within the community, and the absence of well-designed, innovative empowerment programs specifically oriented toward addressing local socioeconomic challenges. Consequently, existing community empowerment initiatives have not yet effectively integrated social entrepreneurship into broader community development strategies, thereby limiting their contribution to improving community well-being. The findings further indicate that strengthening community capacity through social entrepreneurship education and training, enhancing entrepreneurial motivation, reinforcing local institutional capacity, and fostering stronger collaboration among government, communities, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders are critical factors in developing a sustainable social entrepreneurship ecosystem. Moreover, empowerment programs should be planned based on local potential, community needs, and socio-cultural characteristics to ensure that they generate both social innovation and sustainable economic value for local communities. Overall, this study emphasizes that the success of community empowerment depends not only on the availability of resources or government assistance but also on the ability to establish participatory governance, strengthen institutional capacity, and foster effective collaboration among multiple stakeholders. Therefore, social entrepreneurship should be incorporated as an integral component of community empowerment policies to enhance economic self-reliance, strengthen social resilience, and promote inclusive and sustainable development.

Local and village governments should integrate the concept of social entrepreneurship into community empowerment policies and programs by developing strategies that are more targeted, innovative, and sustainable. Community empowerment initiatives should be complemented by entrepreneurship training, business mentoring, institutional capacity building, and the development of partnership networks involving higher education institutions, the private sector, financial institutions, and civil society organizations. In addition, mapping local economic potential should become a priority to ensure that community-based enterprises are developed in accordance with the needs, resources, and socio-cultural characteristics of local communities. Future research is encouraged to employ mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to examine the relationships among community empowerment, entrepreneurial capacity, social capital, collaborative governance, and community well-being. Comparative studies across different geographical and socio-cultural settings are also needed to develop a more comprehensive and transferable model of community empowerment through social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, future research should design and evaluate intervention models using experimental or action research approaches to assess the effectiveness of social entrepreneurship-based empowerment programs in strengthening economic self-reliance, promoting social innovation, and advancing sustainable development. Compared with previous studies, this research offers a distinct empirical contribution by demonstrating that the principal barriers to developing social entrepreneurship in island communities are not primarily associated with limited economic resources but rather with weak institutional capacity, inadequate social entrepreneurship literacy, and underdeveloped collaborative governance mechanisms. While previous studies have largely emphasized the economic outcomes of social entrepreneurship, such as income generation, employment creation, and contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study demonstrates that the successful development of social entrepreneurship must begin with the establishment of an integrated community empowerment ecosystem that strengthens community capacity, reinforces local institutions, and promotes cross-sector collaboration.

Accordingly, this study extends the existing body of knowledge on community empowerment through social entrepreneurship by emphasizing that sustainable rural development requires a context-sensitive, adaptive, and culturally grounded approach. Such an approach enables local resources to generate not only sustainable economic value but also enduring social value, thereby strengthening community resilience in responding to evolving development challenges.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

### *Statement of ethical approval*

All ethical considerations were observed and strictly adhered to throughout the conduct of this study.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all data were reported anonymously and in aggregate form to protect the participants' confidentiality.

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