



Empowering Rural Communities through Participatory Capacity Building: Improving Entrepreneurial Skills, Social Innovation, and Sustainable Local Economic Development

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Abstract

Rural communities continue to encounter persistent challenges in achieving sustainable local economic development due to limited entrepreneurial competencies, insufficient innovation capacity, and inadequate community participation in development initiatives. Although numerous empowerment programs have been implemented, many remain fragmented and emphasize short-term technical training rather than participatory capacity-building processes capable of generating sustainable socioeconomic transformation. This community service project therefore aimed to empower rural communities through an integrated participatory capacity-building model designed to enhance entrepreneurial skills, stimulate social innovation, and strengthen sustainable local economic development. The program employed a Participatory Capacity Building (PCB) approach integrated with Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) involving 45 rural micro-entrepreneurs. The implementation consisted of sequential stages including needs assessment, participatory planning, entrepreneurship and digital marketing training, social innovation workshops, business mentoring, and comprehensive evaluation using pre-test, post-test, observation, and participant satisfaction assessments. The findings demonstrate that the program substantially improved entrepreneurial competencies across all evaluated dimensions, with digital marketing competency exhibiting the highest increase (51.5%), followed by social innovation (41.1%), financial literacy (38.9%), and entrepreneurial skills (37.1%). Entrepreneurial knowledge also increased significantly, as participants classified within the high knowledge category rose from 17.7% before the intervention to 86.7% after program completion. Furthermore, participants successfully developed several community-based social innovation initiatives, experienced measurable improvements in business performance, maintained consistently high participation throughout program implementation, and reported very high satisfaction regarding training quality, mentoring, and overall program delivery. These findings indicate that participatory capacity building represents an effective community empowerment strategy capable of integrating entrepreneurial learning, collaborative innovation, and community participation to generate sustainable local economic development. The study contributes a practical community-based empowerment model that can be adapted to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems and socioeconomic resilience in rural communities.

Keywords: *Participatory Capacity Building; Rural Community Empowerment; Entrepreneurial Skills; Social Innovation; Sustainable Local Economic Development.*



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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary discourse on sustainable rural development has increasingly shifted from infrastructure-centered interventions toward community-driven empowerment frameworks that emphasize participatory capacity building as the principal mechanism for fostering resilient local economies, particularly in regions experiencing structural disparities in entrepreneurial opportunities, institutional support, and innovation ecosystems (Dhewanto et al., 2020; Loganathan, 2026). This paradigm reflects the growing recognition that rural communities possess endogenous resources and social capital capable of generating sustainable economic transformation when supported through inclusive learning processes, collaborative governance, and context-sensitive entrepreneurial development strategies (Loganathan, 2026). International development agendas have consequently

positioned entrepreneurial competencies, social innovation, and community participation as mutually reinforcing dimensions that strengthen local adaptive capacity while enhancing socioeconomic resilience in the face of globalization, technological disruption, and environmental uncertainty (Dhewanto et al., 2020). Such developments signify an important epistemological transition in community empowerment research, where sustainable development is increasingly interpreted as a product of collective capability formation rather than merely the outcome of financial assistance or infrastructure expansion.

Recent empirical investigations consistently demonstrate that community empowerment initiatives integrating entrepreneurship development with participatory approaches contribute significantly to improving household income, strengthening local institutions, and expanding opportunities for sustainable socioeconomic advancement across rural settings (Hasmawati et al., 2024; Pawitan et al., 2025). Research concerning village-owned enterprises further indicates that collaborative governance and institutional strengthening create favorable conditions for local business diversification, resource mobilization, and inclusive economic participation, although the magnitude of these impacts remains contingent upon the quality of community engagement throughout the implementation process (Pawitan et al., 2025; Harinurdin et al., 2025). Parallel studies examining social entrepreneurship similarly argue that entrepreneurial initiatives become substantially more sustainable when they simultaneously generate economic value and address social challenges through community participation and collective ownership mechanisms (Yani & Ausat, 2024; Septiani & Aeni, 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that participatory empowerment functions not merely as an implementation strategy but as a foundational process through which entrepreneurial ecosystems capable of sustaining long-term rural development are gradually constructed.

Despite these advances, the existing body of literature continues to exhibit considerable conceptual fragmentation because entrepreneurial capacity building, social innovation, and sustainable local economic development are frequently examined as separate analytical domains rather than interconnected components within a comprehensive empowerment framework (Subrahmanyam, 2025; Harinurdin et al., 2025). Studies emphasizing entrepreneurship development often prioritize technical skill acquisition while underestimating the importance of collaborative learning processes and community agency in shaping entrepreneurial sustainability (Subrahmanyam, 2025). Conversely, investigations focusing on social entrepreneurship tend to privilege social value creation without adequately explaining how entrepreneurial competencies evolve through participatory educational mechanisms capable of generating measurable economic transformation (Septiani & Aeni, 2025; Pertiwi, 2025). This conceptual separation limits the explanatory power of current scholarship because sustainable rural development emerges through dynamic interactions among human capability enhancement, institutional collaboration, and locally embedded innovation systems rather than through isolated intervention dimensions.

Methodological inconsistencies further complicate the accumulation of robust evidence because many community empowerment studies rely predominantly on descriptive evaluations or isolated case analyses that provide limited insight into the causal relationships connecting participatory capacity building, entrepreneurial competency enhancement, and sustainable economic outcomes (Jauhari & Taufiqurrohman, 2024; Hasmawati et al., 2024). Systematic reviews have likewise highlighted the scarcity of integrative analytical frameworks capable of capturing the multidimensional processes through which community participation stimulates innovation diffusion, institutional learning, and long-term entrepreneurial resilience within rural contexts (Harinurdin et al., 2025). Existing investigations frequently emphasize short-term program achievements while paying comparatively little attention to the mechanisms that enable communities to independently sustain innovation beyond externally funded interventions (Subrahmanyam, 2025). Such empirical limitations reduce opportunities to formulate transferable models of community empowerment that are simultaneously theoretically grounded, methodologically rigorous, and practically adaptable across diverse rural environments.

These unresolved issues possess significant scientific and practical implications because rural communities increasingly confront complex socioeconomic transitions requiring adaptive entrepreneurial capabilities rather than dependence upon conventional development assistance models (Loganathan, 2026; Pertiwi, 2025). Strengthening entrepreneurial skills alone cannot guarantee sustainable local economic development unless accompanied by participatory governance structures

that cultivate social innovation, collective problem-solving capacities, and institutional legitimacy within community organizations (Yani & Ausat, 2024; Pawitan et al., 2025). Likewise, social innovation initiatives risk remaining episodic and externally dependent when community members are not systematically equipped with entrepreneurial competencies capable of transforming innovative ideas into economically sustainable ventures (Septiani & Aeni, 2025; Hasmawati et al., 2024). Addressing these intertwined challenges requires an integrated empowerment perspective capable of simultaneously explaining how participatory learning processes influence entrepreneurial behavior, collaborative innovation, and local economic resilience.

Positioning this community service research within the broader international scholarship necessitates moving beyond fragmented intervention models toward a holistic framework that conceptualizes participatory capacity building as the strategic nexus connecting entrepreneurial capability formation, social innovation development, and sustainable local economic transformation (Dhewanto et al., 2020; Loganathan, 2026). Rather than treating entrepreneurship training as an isolated educational activity, this perspective recognizes capacity building as an iterative social process through which communities co-create knowledge, strengthen institutional relationships, and collectively construct locally relevant development pathways (Jauhari & Taufiqurrohman, 2024; Harinurdin et al., 2025). Such positioning responds directly to contemporary scholarly calls for empowerment models emphasizing endogenous development, collaborative governance, and community ownership as essential prerequisites for sustainable rural prosperity (Pawitan et al., 2025; Pertiwi, 2025). The resulting analytical orientation consequently expands prevailing discussions by integrating entrepreneurial learning, participatory engagement, and social innovation within a unified conceptual architecture suitable for community-based intervention programs.

Equally important, the proposed empowerment initiative adopts a participatory implementation strategy that systematically involves community members throughout the processes of needs assessment, entrepreneurial capacity enhancement, collaborative innovation development, and evaluation of local economic outcomes, thereby reducing the implementation gaps frequently identified in previous empowerment programs (Hasmawati et al., 2024; Yani & Ausat, 2024). This methodological orientation acknowledges that sustainable behavioral change is more likely to emerge when communities function as active co-producers of knowledge instead of passive beneficiaries of externally designed development interventions (Dhewanto et al., 2020; Jauhari & Taufiqurrohman, 2024). Integrating entrepreneurial training with participatory facilitation and locally embedded innovation activities simultaneously strengthens practical problem-solving capabilities while reinforcing social cohesion, institutional trust, and collective responsibility for sustaining development achievements (Subrahmanyam, 2025; Septiani & Aeni, 2025). Such an approach provides a more comprehensive operational model through which empowerment activities may generate enduring socioeconomic benefits beyond the immediate duration of community service programs.

This community service study aims to develop and implement a participatory capacity-building model that strengthens entrepreneurial skills, promotes social innovation, and supports sustainable local economic development within rural communities through an integrated empowerment framework. The initiative seeks to demonstrate that participatory learning processes constitute the critical mechanism through which entrepreneurial competence, collaborative innovation, and community resilience can be simultaneously cultivated to produce sustainable socioeconomic transformation. The expected theoretical contribution lies in advancing an integrated conceptual understanding of the interdependence among participatory capacity building, entrepreneurship, and social innovation within rural empowerment studies. Its methodological contribution resides in presenting a comprehensive community-based intervention model that combines participatory assessment, collaborative learning, entrepreneurial mentoring, and outcome-oriented evaluation into a coherent framework for sustainable rural development practice.

METHOD

Community Service Design

This program employs a Participatory Capacity Building (PCB) approach combined with Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). All participants are not merely recipients of training but are also actively involved in identifying problems, developing solutions, implementing them, and evaluating the results.

Table 1. Stages of Community Service Implementation

Stage	Activities	Duration	Expected Output
Needs Assessment	Observation, interviews, FGD	Week 1	Identification of entrepreneurial problems
Program Planning	Module preparation and scheduling	Week 2	Training curriculum
Capacity Building	Entrepreneurship and digital marketing training	Week 3–5	Improved knowledge and skills
Social Innovation Workshop	Group-based innovation projects	Week 6	Community business ideas
Mentoring	Business coaching and consultation	Week 7–10	Business improvement
Evaluation	Post-test, satisfaction survey, reflection	Week 11	Program evaluation

Table 1 demonstrates that the community service program was implemented through sequential and participatory stages beginning with needs assessment and ending with evaluation. Each stage was designed to ensure continuous community involvement while progressively strengthening entrepreneurial competencies and collaborative innovation. The structured implementation process also facilitated systematic monitoring of participant progress throughout the program.

Participants Characteristics

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	18	40.0
	Female	27	60.0
Age	20–35 years	15	33.3
	36–50 years	20	44.4
	>50 years	10	22.3
Business Experience	<2 years	13	28.9
	2–5 years	19	42.2
	>5 years	13	28.9

Table 2 shows that female participants represented the majority of program beneficiaries, indicating substantial involvement of women in local economic activities. Most participants had operated microenterprises for two to five years, suggesting that they possessed practical business experience while still requiring structured capacity development. The demographic composition also reflects the diversity of entrepreneurial backgrounds addressed by the intervention.

Training Modules

Table 3. Capacity Building Modules

Module	Main Topics	Duration
Entrepreneurial Mindset	Opportunity recognition, business model development, entrepreneurial motivation	6 hours

Module	Main Topics	Duration
Financial Literacy	Bookkeeping, budgeting, pricing strategy, cash flow management	6 hours
Digital Marketing	Social media marketing, content creation, online marketplace utilization	8 hours
Product Innovation	Product differentiation, value proposition, packaging improvement	6 hours
Social Innovation	Collaborative problem-solving, community networking, sustainable business initiatives	6 hours

Table 3 illustrates the structured learning modules developed to strengthen participants' entrepreneurial competencies through a balanced combination of technical knowledge and practical application. The training curriculum integrates entrepreneurial mindset development, financial literacy, digital marketing, product innovation, and social innovation to ensure that participants acquire complementary competencies required for sustainable rural business development. The allocation of instructional hours reflects the relative complexity of each module, with digital marketing receiving the longest duration because of its strategic importance in expanding market access and improving business competitiveness.

Evaluation Instruments

Table 4. Evaluation Indicators

Variable	Indicators	Number of Items
Entrepreneurial Skills	Opportunity recognition, business planning, problem solving	6
Financial Management	Budget preparation, bookkeeping, financial analysis	5
Digital Marketing	Social media utilization, branding, online promotion	5
Social Innovation	Collaboration, creativity, community participation	6
Program Satisfaction	Training materials, facilitators, implementation process	5

Table 4 presents the evaluation framework used to assess the effectiveness of the community empowerment program across multiple competency domains. The indicators were selected to comprehensively measure improvements in entrepreneurial capacity, financial management, digital marketing proficiency, collaborative innovation, and participant satisfaction following the intervention. This multidimensional evaluation approach enables a more comprehensive assessment of program outcomes by capturing both competency development and participants' perceptions of the training quality.

Program Implementation Flow



Figure 1. Participatory Capacity Building Framework

Figure 1 depicts the sequential implementation process of the participatory capacity-building program from the initial assessment to the final evaluation stage. Each activity is interconnected through continuous community participation, ensuring that knowledge acquisition is immediately translated into practical entrepreneurial activities and collaborative innovation initiatives. The framework also emphasizes an iterative learning process in which mentoring and evaluation reinforce the sustainability of community empowerment outcomes beyond the completion of the formal training sessions.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Table 5. Participants' Competency Improvement

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Increase (%)
Entrepreneurial Skills	61.8	84.7	37.1
Financial Literacy	59.4	82.5	38.9
Digital Marketing	56.9	86.2	51.5
Social Innovation	60.3	85.1	41.1

Table 5 demonstrates substantial improvements across all measured competency dimensions following the implementation of the participatory capacity-building program. Digital marketing competency exhibited the highest percentage increase, indicating that participants responded particularly well to technology-oriented training and practical learning activities. The consistent improvement observed across entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and social innovation suggests that the integrated training model effectively enhanced participants' readiness to develop sustainable community-based enterprises.

Participant Satisfaction

Table 6. Satisfaction Survey Results

Indicator	Mean Score	Category
Training Materials	4.67	Very High
Facilitator Competence	4.81	Very High
Learning Methods	4.73	Very High
Mentoring Process	4.70	Very High
Overall Satisfaction	4.74	Very High

Table 6 indicates that participants expressed a consistently high level of satisfaction across all aspects of the community empowerment program. Facilitator competence received the highest evaluation, suggesting that the expertise and instructional quality of the training team contributed significantly to participants' learning experiences. The uniformly positive satisfaction scores also provide supporting evidence that the participatory training design was well accepted by the community and effectively addressed local capacity development needs.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Improvement in Entrepreneurial Competencies

The primary objective of the community service program was to enhance participants' entrepreneurial competencies through participatory learning activities emphasizing experiential practice, collaborative discussion, and continuous mentoring. Competency assessment was conducted before and after the implementation of the training modules using standardized evaluation instruments covering entrepreneurial knowledge, financial literacy, digital marketing, and social innovation. The comparative results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Comparison of Participants' Competency Scores Before and After the Program

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Increase (%)	Category
Entrepreneurial Skills	61.8	84.7	37.1	High
Financial Literacy	59.4	82.5	38.9	High
Digital Marketing	56.9	86.2	51.5	Very High
Social Innovation	60.3	85.1	41.1	High

Table 7 demonstrates that all evaluated competency dimensions experienced substantial improvement following the implementation of the participatory capacity-building program. Digital marketing achieved the highest percentage increase (51.5%), indicating that participants rapidly adopted practical digital promotion techniques introduced during the training sessions. Social innovation and entrepreneurial competencies also improved considerably, reflecting the effectiveness of collaborative learning activities in strengthening participants' ability to identify business opportunities and develop community-based solutions. These findings suggest that integrating entrepreneurship education with participatory approaches creates a supportive learning environment capable of accelerating competency development among rural entrepreneurs.

Changes in Entrepreneurial Knowledge Levels

To obtain a more detailed understanding of learning outcomes, participants' knowledge levels were classified into three categories before and after the intervention. The classification was based on the total scores obtained from the entrepreneurial competency assessment.

Table 8. Distribution of Entrepreneurial Knowledge Levels

Knowledge Category	Pre-test (n)	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (n)	Post-test (%)
Low	12	26.7	0	0.0
Moderate	25	55.6	6	13.3
High	8	17.7	39	86.7
Total	45	100	45	100

Table 8 indicates a remarkable shift in entrepreneurial knowledge following the implementation of the community empowerment program. Prior to the intervention, most participants were categorized within the moderate knowledge level, whereas only a limited proportion demonstrated high entrepreneurial understanding. After completing the training, the majority of participants (86.7%) reached the high knowledge category, while no participant remained in the low category. The observed distribution confirms that structured capacity-building activities effectively enhanced participants' conceptual understanding of entrepreneurship and business development principles.

Development of Community-Based Social Innovation

One of the expected outputs of the program was the emergence of practical social innovation initiatives developed collaboratively by participants during workshop activities. These initiatives were evaluated according to innovation feasibility, community participation, and sustainability potential.

Table 9. Community Social Innovation Projects Produced During the Program

Innovation Project	Number Groups	of Feasibility (%)	Score Sustainability Potential
Digital Marketplace for Local Products	3	92.4	Very High
Processed Agricultural Products	2	88.7	High
Community Handicraft Collaboration	2	86.5	High
Village Culinary Promotion	1	84.3	High
Organic Farming Partnership	1	82.6	Moderate–High

Table 9 illustrates that participants successfully generated several community-based innovation initiatives capable of supporting sustainable local economic development. The digital marketplace initiative received the highest feasibility score because it integrated digital technology with existing local business potential while requiring relatively limited financial resources. Product diversification and collaborative handicraft initiatives also demonstrated strong sustainability potential through active community participation and resource sharing. These outcomes indicate that participatory learning not only strengthened individual competencies but also stimulated collective innovation capable of generating long-term socioeconomic benefits.

Business Performance After Mentoring

Business mentoring was conducted for four consecutive weeks to assist participants in implementing entrepreneurial knowledge within their respective enterprises. Business performance indicators were measured before and after the mentoring period.

Table 10. Business Performance Improvement Following Mentoring

Indicator	Before Program	After Program	Improvement (%)
Average Monthly Sales (USD)	182	248	36.3
Number of Active Customers	34	49	44.1
Digital Marketing Utilization (%)	31.1	84.4	171.4
Product Variants	2.3	3.8	65.2

Table 10 reveals meaningful improvements across all business performance indicators following the mentoring activities. The most substantial increase occurred in digital marketing utilization, demonstrating that participants effectively applied newly acquired digital promotion strategies within their businesses. Growth in customer numbers and monthly sales further indicates that improved entrepreneurial competencies translated into measurable economic outcomes. The increase in product diversification likewise reflects participants' enhanced ability to respond creatively to market demand through innovation-oriented business development.

Participant Engagement During Program Activities

Participant engagement was continuously monitored to evaluate the effectiveness of participatory learning strategies implemented throughout the community service program. Attendance, participation, and collaborative involvement were recorded during every activity.

Table 11. Participant Engagement Across Program Activities

Activity	Attendance (%)	Active Participation (%)	Completion Rate (%)
Needs Assessment	95.6	91.1	100
Capacity Building Training	97.8	94.4	100
Social Innovation Workshop	95.6	93.3	97.8
Business Mentoring	93.3	91.1	95.6
Program Evaluation	100	100	100

Table 11 demonstrates consistently high levels of participant engagement throughout every stage of the community empowerment program. Attendance rates exceeding 93% indicate strong commitment among community members to complete the entire learning process despite the extended duration of program implementation. Active participation remained similarly high because the participatory learning model encouraged discussion, collaborative problem solving, and practical business application rather than passive knowledge transfer. The excellent completion rates further confirm that the program design successfully maintained participant motivation while fostering sustained involvement in entrepreneurial capacity-building activities.

Participant Satisfaction Toward the Community Service Program

Participant satisfaction was evaluated at the conclusion of the program to assess perceptions regarding training quality, facilitator performance, mentoring effectiveness, and overall program implementation.

Table 12. Participant Satisfaction Evaluation

Evaluation Aspect	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Category
Training Materials	4.67	0.39	Very High
Facilitator Competence	4.81	0.28	Very High
Learning Methods	4.73	0.34	Very High

Evaluation Aspect	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Category
Business Mentoring	4.70	0.36	Very High
Program Organization	4.76	0.31	Very High
Overall Satisfaction	4.74	0.30	Very High

Table 12 demonstrates that participants expressed highly positive perceptions regarding every component of the community empowerment program. Facilitator competence achieved the highest evaluation, suggesting that effective knowledge delivery and practical guidance substantially enhanced participants' learning experiences. High satisfaction with mentoring activities also indicates that continuous post-training assistance contributed meaningfully to participants' confidence in implementing newly acquired entrepreneurial competencies. Overall, these findings provide additional evidence that participatory capacity building represents an effective community empowerment strategy capable of generating both educational and practical benefits for sustainable rural economic development.

Discussion of Entrepreneurial Competency Improvement

The findings presented in Table 7 demonstrate that the participatory capacity-building program substantially improved participants' entrepreneurial competencies across all measured dimensions, with digital marketing recording the highest percentage increase (51.5%), followed by social innovation (41.1%), financial literacy (38.9%), and entrepreneurial skills (37.1%). These improvements indicate that the intervention successfully transformed participants' knowledge into practical competencies through an integrated learning process combining classroom instruction, collaborative discussions, business simulations, mentoring, and experiential practice. Rather than functioning merely as recipients of information, participants became active contributors in identifying business challenges and collectively formulating context-specific solutions, thereby strengthening their capacity to internalize entrepreneurial concepts within real-world business settings. This finding supports the proposition that participatory learning environments generate stronger competency development than conventional top-down training because knowledge acquisition is continuously reinforced through practical application and social interaction (Franco & Tracey, 2019).

The remarkable improvement in digital marketing competency deserves particular attention because rural entrepreneurs increasingly operate within highly competitive markets where digital platforms have become indispensable for expanding market access, strengthening customer engagement, and improving business resilience. The training modules encouraged participants to create promotional content, utilize social media strategically, and explore online marketplaces, allowing technological adoption to occur through direct experimentation rather than theoretical instruction alone. This experiential process explains why digital marketing achieved the greatest improvement among all evaluated competencies, reflecting participants' ability to rapidly integrate newly acquired digital skills into their existing business activities. Similar observations have been reported by Ande (2024), who argued that digital empowerment initiatives significantly increase rural communities' economic opportunities by reducing geographical limitations and facilitating broader market integration, while Mahapatra and Singh (2025) further emphasized that digitalization represents one of the principal drivers of sustainable rural entrepreneurship within contemporary local economic development.

The observed enhancement of entrepreneurial competencies also reflects the theoretical principles of community capacity building, which conceptualize empowerment as a cumulative process through which individuals develop knowledge, confidence, adaptive capability, and collaborative decision-making capacity simultaneously rather than sequentially. The substantial gains in entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy suggest that participants were not only able to understand business management concepts but also demonstrated increased readiness to implement them in daily entrepreneurial activities, as evidenced by the improvements in business performance presented in the previous section. This relationship illustrates that competency development should not be interpreted as an isolated educational outcome but as an enabling mechanism that strengthens communities' capability to respond independently to economic challenges through locally generated initiatives. Such an interpretation is consistent with the perspectives advanced by Loganathan (2026) and Owede (2025),

both of whom argue that sustainable rural development depends fundamentally upon continuous capacity-building processes that integrate technical skill enhancement with creativity, innovation, and adaptive problem-solving abilities within community development practice.

From a broader perspective, the results reinforce collaborative and participatory entrepreneurship theories asserting that sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems emerge when competency development is embedded within collective learning environments characterized by mutual trust, knowledge sharing, and community engagement rather than individualistic training models. Dhewanto et al. (2020) emphasized that collaborative participative entrepreneurship enables rural communities to mobilize local resources more effectively while strengthening institutional resilience through shared responsibility and collective action. Comparable conclusions have also been drawn by Hasmawati et al. (2024), Ramos Farroñán et al. (2024), and Khiawnoi et al. (2025), who demonstrated that entrepreneurship development programs become substantially more effective when capacity-building activities encourage active participation, experiential learning, and continuous mentoring instead of relying exclusively on one-time technical training. The present community service program therefore provides empirical evidence that participatory capacity building constitutes a strategic intervention capable of simultaneously strengthening entrepreneurial competencies, increasing adaptive capacity, and establishing a sustainable foundation for long-term rural economic development.

Transformation of Entrepreneurial Knowledge through Participatory Capacity Building

The findings presented in Table 8 reveal a substantial transformation in participants' entrepreneurial knowledge following the implementation of the participatory capacity-building program. Prior to the intervention, the majority of participants were classified within the moderate knowledge category (55.6%), while only 17.7% demonstrated high entrepreneurial knowledge, indicating that most rural entrepreneurs possessed practical business experience but lacked comprehensive conceptual understanding of business planning, financial management, innovation, and strategic decision-making. Following the completion of the training program, 86.7% of participants achieved the high knowledge category, and no participant remained within the low category, demonstrating that the learning intervention effectively strengthened both theoretical understanding and practical entrepreneurial awareness. This significant shift confirms that participatory educational approaches facilitate deeper knowledge acquisition because participants actively construct understanding through collaborative problem-solving, experiential reflection, and continuous interaction rather than passively receiving information from facilitators.

The transformation observed in this study is consistent with the theoretical perspective of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), which emphasizes that knowledge becomes meaningful when individuals are directly involved in identifying local problems, evaluating available resources, and developing solutions that correspond to their socioeconomic context. Throughout the implementation process, participants were encouraged to analyze their own business challenges, exchange experiences with fellow entrepreneurs, and formulate improvement strategies collectively, thereby creating an interactive learning environment capable of accelerating cognitive development and practical understanding. Such a learning process allows entrepreneurial knowledge to evolve from abstract concepts into operational competencies that can be immediately implemented within local enterprises. Similar conclusions were reported by Jauhari and Taufiqurrohman (2024), who found that participatory action approaches significantly improve community learning outcomes because they position local communities as active knowledge producers rather than passive beneficiaries, while Ishak (2024) likewise emphasized that community empowerment grounded in local wisdom generates stronger learning sustainability through continuous collective engagement.

The remarkable increase in participants classified within the high knowledge category also supports contemporary theories of community capacity building, which interpret knowledge enhancement as a multidimensional process involving cognitive development, confidence building, institutional learning, and social interaction. Entrepreneurial knowledge acquired through participatory activities does not merely increase individual competence but also strengthens collective capability by encouraging information exchange, peer learning, and collaborative decision-making among community members. Such collaborative learning environments create conditions where knowledge circulates beyond formal training sessions and gradually becomes embedded within community practices, thereby increasing the long-term sustainability of empowerment initiatives. This

interpretation aligns with the arguments advanced by Ansari et al. (2012), who explained that social capital significantly mediates capability development within community empowerment processes, and by Franco and Tracey (2019), who argued that sustainable community development depends upon strengthening local capacities through continuous knowledge creation rather than temporary knowledge transfer alone.

From a practical standpoint, the substantial transformation in entrepreneurial knowledge provides important implications for designing future community empowerment programs targeting rural economic development. The findings suggest that entrepreneurship education should move beyond conventional lecture-based delivery by integrating collaborative discussions, mentoring, experiential learning, and problem-based activities that encourage participants to continuously apply newly acquired knowledge within authentic business contexts. This integrated learning model simultaneously enhances analytical thinking, entrepreneurial confidence, and adaptive decision-making, thereby strengthening participants' readiness to respond to rapidly changing economic environments. Comparable evidence has been documented by Subrahmanyam (2025), Ibrahim et al. (2025), and Imanuella et al. (2025), who concluded that sustainable entrepreneurial development in rural communities depends not only on improving technical knowledge but also on establishing continuous learning ecosystems that integrate institutional support, community participation, and practical business experience into a coherent capacity-building framework.

Social Innovation as a Driver of Sustainable Rural Development

The community service program generated not only measurable improvements in individual entrepreneurial competencies but also a series of community-based social innovation initiatives, as presented in Table 9. The emergence of collaborative projects, including digital marketplaces for local products, processed agricultural businesses, handicraft collaborations, and community culinary promotion, demonstrates that the empowerment process successfully transformed entrepreneurial learning into collective socioeconomic action. Rather than producing isolated business ideas, participants collectively identified local resources, evaluated market opportunities, and designed innovations capable of creating both economic and social value. This finding reinforces the argument that social innovation should be understood as a collaborative process through which communities reorganize local resources and social relationships to address shared development challenges while simultaneously improving long-term resilience (Castro-Arce & Vanclay, 2020).

The predominance of the digital marketplace initiative, which achieved the highest feasibility score (92.4%), reflects the increasing importance of integrating technological innovation with community participation in rural development strategies. Participants demonstrated their ability to utilize digital platforms not only as marketing instruments but also as mechanisms for strengthening cooperation among local entrepreneurs, expanding market networks, and promoting collective branding for village products. Such outcomes indicate that digital innovation becomes substantially more sustainable when it emerges through participatory decision-making rather than externally imposed technological interventions. Comparable findings were reported by Kandel et al. (2025), who identified social innovation as a strategic design approach capable of strengthening agricultural extension systems through collaborative learning, while Sulaiman et al. (2024) likewise concluded that community engagement significantly enhances business innovation and contributes directly to achieving sustainable rural development objectives.



Figure 2. Participatory Community Workshop for Collaborative Business Planning

Figure 2 illustrates the participatory learning atmosphere typically implemented during collaborative capacity-building activities, where community members jointly discuss business opportunities, map local resources, and formulate innovation strategies without emphasizing individual leadership. The absence of hierarchical communication encourages equal participation among community members and facilitates collective ownership of the innovation process. Such collaborative interaction represents one of the essential characteristics of participatory empowerment because sustainable innovation emerges through continuous dialogue, knowledge exchange, and shared decision-making rather than through individual entrepreneurial performance alone. This observation is consistent with Haugh and O'Carroll (2019), who argued that empowerment and social innovation are fundamentally collective processes that generate broader social change, while Christmann et al. (2024) further demonstrated that socially innovative community initiatives significantly strengthen empowerment and institutional capacity in disadvantaged rural areas.

Beyond the immediate production of innovative business ideas, the findings indicate that participatory capacity building contributes to the establishment of a sustainable local innovation ecosystem capable of supporting long-term economic development. Continuous interaction among participants throughout workshops and mentoring sessions strengthened social capital, increased mutual trust, and encouraged collaborative experimentation, thereby creating favorable conditions for sustained entrepreneurial growth beyond the duration of the community service program. This dynamic corresponds closely with the capability development perspective proposed by Ansari et al. (2012), which emphasizes that social capital functions as a critical mechanism linking community empowerment to sustainable socioeconomic transformation through enhanced collective capabilities. Similar conclusions have been reported by Osei and Zhuang (2020), Mohd Yusof et al. (2025), Nurhayati et al. (2024), Baburao et al. (2026), and Santoso et al. (2025), all of whom demonstrated that social entrepreneurship and innovation significantly strengthen community resilience, stimulate inclusive economic growth, and create sustainable development pathways by integrating collaborative action with locally embedded entrepreneurial initiatives.

Business Performance and Community Economic Outcomes

The results presented in Table 10 demonstrate that the participatory capacity-building program generated measurable improvements in participants' business performance, indicating that competency enhancement was successfully translated into tangible economic outcomes. Average monthly sales increased by 36.3%, while the number of active customers grew by 44.1%, reflecting participants' improved ability to expand market reach and strengthen customer relationships following the training and mentoring activities. Equally significant, digital marketing utilization increased by 171.4%, representing the most substantial improvement among all business performance indicators and highlighting the effectiveness of practical digital entrepreneurship training in accelerating business transformation. These findings suggest that sustainable community empowerment extends beyond

improving entrepreneurial knowledge and instead creates measurable economic value through the practical application of newly acquired competencies within participants' business operations.

The substantial increase in business performance can be interpreted through the perspective of entrepreneurship-based community development, which argues that local economic growth depends upon the capacity of community members to mobilize endogenous resources, identify emerging market opportunities, and continuously adapt to changing business environments. Throughout the mentoring process, participants received continuous guidance in financial management, digital promotion, product diversification, and customer engagement, enabling them to implement strategic improvements based on the specific characteristics of their respective enterprises. Such individualized assistance reduced barriers commonly experienced by rural entrepreneurs, particularly those related to limited managerial capability and restricted market access. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Pawitan et al. (2025), who emphasized that strengthening local economic institutions and entrepreneurial management significantly improves rural socioeconomic development, while Ibrahim et al. (2025) likewise demonstrated that innovative management practices and continuous capacity building enhance the performance of village-based enterprises and contribute directly to community welfare.

The increase in product variants from an average of 2.3 to 3.8 products further illustrates that participants became more responsive to consumer preferences and increasingly capable of creating value-added products based on local resources. Product diversification represents an important indicator of entrepreneurial maturity because it reflects the ability of business owners to transform existing resources into competitive products that address changing market demands while maintaining local identity and sustainability. The integration of entrepreneurial creativity with community collaboration also strengthened participants' confidence in experimenting with new business ideas, thereby reducing dependence on a single source of income and increasing business resilience against market uncertainty. Similar observations were reported by Septiani and Aeni (2025), who concluded that social entrepreneurship stimulates sustainable community development by encouraging innovation-oriented business practices, whereas Pertiwi (2025) found that entrepreneurial empowerment programs significantly improve economic inclusion by enabling marginalized communities to create diversified and socially valuable economic opportunities.

Beyond individual business improvement, the economic outcomes generated through this program possess broader implications for sustainable rural development because increased entrepreneurial performance contributes directly to strengthening local economic ecosystems. Higher sales, expanded customer networks, improved digital market access, and diversified products collectively increase local economic circulation, create opportunities for inter-business collaboration, and encourage knowledge diffusion among community members participating in the empowerment process. This pattern reflects the principles of collaborative rural entrepreneurship, where economic progress emerges through interconnected community initiatives rather than isolated business success, thereby reinforcing collective resilience and long-term sustainability. These findings corroborate the arguments advanced by Dhewanto et al. (2020), Khiawnoi et al. (2025), and Harinurdin et al. (2025), who asserted that sustainable rural economic development depends upon integrated entrepreneurial ecosystems characterized by community participation, institutional collaboration, open innovation, and continuous capacity enhancement capable of generating enduring socioeconomic transformation.

Community Participation, Satisfaction, and Sustainability Implications

The findings presented in Tables 11 and 12 indicate that the success of the community service program cannot be attributed solely to improvements in entrepreneurial competencies or business performance but also to the exceptionally high levels of community participation and participant satisfaction achieved throughout the intervention. Attendance consistently exceeded 93% across all program activities, while active participation remained above 91%, demonstrating that participants were highly committed to engaging in every stage of the participatory learning process. Likewise, the satisfaction evaluation revealed that all assessed aspects including training materials, facilitator competence, learning methods, mentoring quality, and overall program organization received mean scores above 4.67 on a five-point Likert scale, all categorized as Very High. These outcomes suggest that the program successfully created an inclusive learning environment in which participants perceived the intervention as relevant, practical, and responsive to their local entrepreneurial needs.

High levels of participation represent one of the most critical determinants of sustainable community empowerment because meaningful social transformation depends upon active community ownership rather than external intervention alone. Throughout the implementation process, participants were encouraged to contribute ideas, identify local challenges, evaluate alternative solutions, and collaborate in developing business innovations, allowing empowerment to evolve into a shared social process rather than a facilitator-driven activity. Such an approach strengthened participants' sense of responsibility toward program outcomes while simultaneously fostering trust, reciprocity, and collective commitment among community members. This interpretation aligns with the Participatory Rural Development perspective advanced by Jauhari and Taufiqurrohman (2024), who emphasized that active community engagement significantly improves the effectiveness and sustainability of empowerment initiatives, and is further supported by Ishak (2024), who argued that community participation rooted in local wisdom strengthens institutional resilience and long-term development capacity.

Participant satisfaction also provides important evidence regarding the quality and acceptability of the participatory capacity-building model implemented in this study. The highest evaluation was assigned to facilitator competence (mean = 4.81), indicating that participants valued facilitators not merely as knowledge providers but as mentors who encouraged collaborative learning, practical experimentation, and continuous problem-solving throughout the training process. Positive perceptions of mentoring activities further demonstrate that sustained post-training assistance increased participants' confidence in implementing entrepreneurial innovations while reducing uncertainty during business development. Similar findings were reported by Ramos Farroñán et al. (2024), who observed that continuous mentoring significantly enhances entrepreneurial confidence and innovation capability among rural women entrepreneurs, while Hasmawati et al. (2024) likewise concluded that community-based entrepreneurship programs achieve greater socioeconomic impact when accompanied by intensive mentoring and participatory facilitation rather than one-time training activities.

From a sustainability perspective, the combination of strong community participation, high participant satisfaction, and measurable improvements in entrepreneurial performance indicates that the program has established favorable conditions for maintaining long-term community empowerment beyond the formal completion of the intervention. The participatory model encouraged the formation of collaborative learning networks through which knowledge sharing, peer mentoring, and collective innovation are expected to continue independently, thereby reducing dependence on external facilitators and strengthening local institutional capacity. Such continuity is particularly important because sustainable rural development requires adaptive communities capable of responding autonomously to future economic challenges through innovation, cooperation, and continuous learning. These findings are consistent with the sustainable empowerment framework proposed by Loganathan (2026), which emphasizes lifelong capacity building as the foundation of resilient rural communities, and with the broader perspectives of Christmann et al. (2024), Osei and Zhuang (2020), and Franco and Tracey (2019), all of whom argue that enduring community development is achieved when empowerment initiatives simultaneously strengthen social capital, institutional collaboration, community ownership, and local adaptive capacity.

CONCLUSION

This community service study demonstrates that participatory capacity building constitutes a comprehensive empowerment approach capable of strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems by integrating competency development, collaborative learning, and social innovation within rural communities. Rather than functioning as an isolated training intervention, the program established an interactive learning environment in which community members actively co-created knowledge, identified local opportunities, and developed context-specific entrepreneurial solutions that supported sustainable local economic development. The study confirms that sustainable empowerment is fundamentally a social process in which entrepreneurial capability, innovation, institutional collaboration, and community participation reinforce one another to create resilient local development pathways.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on community empowerment by extending participatory capacity-building frameworks beyond conventional skills training toward an integrated model that simultaneously links entrepreneurial

competency development, social innovation, and community-based economic sustainability. Methodologically, the study illustrates the practical application of a participatory implementation model that combines needs assessment, collaborative training, mentoring, innovation workshops, and continuous evaluation into a coherent empowerment framework that can be adapted to similar rural contexts. These contributions provide practical guidance for policymakers, local governments, universities, non-governmental organizations, and community development practitioners seeking to design evidence-based empowerment programs that generate sustainable socioeconomic impacts rather than short-term intervention outcomes.

Despite these contributions, the present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The implementation was conducted within a single rural community with a relatively limited number of participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings across different socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional settings. Furthermore, the evaluation primarily focused on short-term changes observed immediately after program implementation and therefore did not capture the long-term sustainability of entrepreneurial behavior, business growth, institutional strengthening, or community innovation over extended periods. Future investigations should employ longitudinal designs, involve multiple rural regions with diverse community characteristics, and integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate more comprehensive evidence regarding the mechanisms through which participatory empowerment influences sustainable local development.

Future community service initiatives and subsequent research should further investigate the integration of digital entrepreneurship, social innovation ecosystems, institutional governance, and collaborative partnerships among universities, government agencies, private sectors, and local communities to strengthen rural resilience within increasingly dynamic economic environments. Comparative studies across different geographical regions and socioeconomic contexts would also contribute to identifying contextual factors that influence the effectiveness and scalability of participatory capacity-building models. For the broader public, this study provides empirical evidence that sustainable rural development is more likely to be achieved when communities are positioned as active agents of change rather than passive recipients of development assistance, thereby reinforcing the importance of participatory empowerment as a strategic foundation for inclusive economic growth, social resilience, and long-term community well-being.

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