

The Role of Community Empowerment and Social Innovation in Enhancing Village Economic Self-Reliance through Community Service Programs

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Abstract

Sustainable rural development requires an approach that is not only oriented toward economic growth but also toward strengthening community capacity and self-reliance. This study aims to expand and enrich the body of scholarly references on community service by examining the role of community empowerment and social innovation in enhancing village economic self-reliance. The study employs a literature review method with a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis. Data were collected from scholarly articles sourced from Google Scholar and credible websites published between 1997 and 2025. Of the 50 articles identified in the initial stage, a rigorous selection process resulted in 27 relevant articles for analysis. The findings indicate that community empowerment based on active community participation, supported by contextual social innovation, contributes significantly to improving village economic self-reliance. Community service programs implemented in a collaborative and sustainable manner have been shown to strengthen local economic capacity, increase community income, and reinforce village institutions. This study concludes that the integration of community empowerment and social innovation constitutes a key strategy in community service efforts to achieve sustainable village economic self-reliance.

Keywords: Community Empowerment, Social Innovation, Community Service, Village Economic Self-Reliance, Rural Development

Peran Pemberdayaan Komunitas dan Inovasi Sosial dalam Meningkatkan Kemandirian Ekonomi Desa melalui Program Pengabdian Masyarakat

Abstrak

Pembangunan desa yang berkelanjutan menuntut pendekatan yang tidak hanya berorientasi pada pertumbuhan ekonomi, tetapi juga pada penguatan kapasitas dan kemandirian masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menambah dan memperkaya referensi ilmiah terkait pengabdian masyarakat dengan mengkaji peran pemberdayaan komunitas dan inovasi sosial dalam meningkatkan kemandirian ekonomi desa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode tinjauan pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis deskriptif. Data diperoleh dari artikel ilmiah yang bersumber dari Google Scholar dan website kredibel dalam rentang tahun 1997–2025. Dari 50 artikel yang teridentifikasi pada tahap awal, dilakukan seleksi ketat sehingga diperoleh 27 artikel yang relevan untuk dianalisis. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pemberdayaan komunitas yang berbasis partisipasi aktif masyarakat, didukung oleh inovasi sosial yang kontekstual, berkontribusi signifikan terhadap peningkatan kemandirian ekonomi desa. Program pengabdian masyarakat yang dilaksanakan secara kolaboratif dan berkelanjutan terbukti mampu memperkuat kapasitas ekonomi lokal, meningkatkan pendapatan masyarakat, serta memperkuat kelembagaan desa. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi pemberdayaan komunitas dan inovasi sosial merupakan strategi kunci dalam pengabdian masyarakat untuk mewujudkan kemandirian ekonomi desa yang berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Pemberdayaan Komunitas, Inovasi Sosial, Pengabdian Masyarakat, Kemandirian Ekonomi Desa, Pembangunan Desa

INTRODUCTION

Rural development is a strategic component of the national development agenda, as villages constitute the primary foundation of social, economic, and cultural life within society. Nevertheless, many villages continue to face complex structural challenges, such as limited access to productive capital, low quality and skill levels of human resources, and economic dependence on primary sectors with low value added. These conditions result in relatively weak village economic self-reliance and render rural communities vulnerable to various economic shocks, both local and global. Therefore, rural development approaches that are not merely oriented toward short-term material assistance but also toward strengthening capacity, knowledge, and the sustainable utilization of local potential have become increasingly urgent.

Within this context, community empowerment is viewed as a development approach that positions rural communities as the main agents of change rather than as passive recipients of programs. Community empowerment emphasizes processes that enhance the capacities of individuals and groups, encourage active participation in decision-making, and strengthen community control over available resources. Studies on community participation in village development planning demonstrate that community involvement from the initial planning stage through evaluation is a key determinant of effective development that aligns with community needs (Handayani et al., 2023). Community empowerment plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of ownership, collective responsibility, and the long-term sustainability of village economic development programs.

In addition to community empowerment, social innovation represents a key element in addressing the increasingly complex and dynamic challenges of rural development. Social innovation refers to the creation of new ideas, practices, or models that are able to meet social and economic needs more effectively and sustainably than conventional approaches. In rural contexts, social innovation can be realized through the development of enterprises based on local potential, the establishment of collaborative models among village stakeholders, or the application of appropriate technologies tailored to local social, cultural, and economic conditions. Through social innovation, villages have the opportunity to break away from stagnant development patterns and to create contextual and adaptive development solutions (Castro-Arce & Vanclay, 2020; Kusumastuti et al., 2023).

Village economic self-reliance is not measured solely by increases in community income but also by the village's capacity to manage economic resources independently, efficiently, and sustainably. Economic self-reliance encompasses aspects such as business diversification, strengthening local economic institutions such as village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as well as enhancing entrepreneurial capacity among rural communities. In this regard, community empowerment and social innovation complement each other in promoting village economic self-reliance. Empowerment contributes to the development of human capacity and social capital, while social innovation provides mechanisms, strategies, and new

models for creating sustainable economic value for rural communities (Harinurdin et al., 2025; Sarjiyanto, 2022).

Community service programs, particularly those implemented by higher education institutions, play a strategic role as catalysts in the process of community empowerment and the development of social innovation in rural areas. These programs function as mechanisms for transferring knowledge and technology from academics to local communities, while also serving as mentoring platforms that encourage gradual social and economic transformation. Community service programs are able to bridge the gap between academic theory and development practice at the local level through collaborative approaches that involve academics, community members, and village governments. As such, community service constitutes an important instrument for integrating scientific knowledge with local wisdom in order to promote contextual and sustainable rural development (Rodríguez-Zurita et al., 2025).

Numerous previous studies indicate that community service programs grounded in community empowerment tend to generate more sustainable impacts than top-down programs. Participatory approaches enable rural communities to independently identify their needs, challenges, and potentials, resulting in solutions that are more relevant to local social and economic conditions (Chambers, 1994; Croppenstedt et al., 2013). Furthermore, the integration of social innovation into community service programs has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of interventions through the creation of new business models, diversification of local products, and strengthening of community economic networks (Castro-Arce & Vanclay, 2020; Olmedo et al., 2023). These findings underscore that the success of community service initiatives largely depends on the program's ability to synergistically combine empowerment and innovation.

Nevertheless, the implementation of community empowerment and social innovation within community service programs continues to face various structural and cultural challenges. These challenges include low initial community capacity, limited supporting resources, and weak synergy and coordination among stakeholders, both at the village level and within supporting institutions. Without careful planning and sustained facilitation, community service programs risk becoming ceremonial activities that produce only short-term outputs without generating transformative impacts. Therefore, more in-depth studies are required to understand the key factors influencing the success of community service programs in sustainably enhancing village economic self-reliance.

Based on the above discussion, research on the role of community empowerment and social innovation in enhancing village economic self-reliance through community service programs is highly relevant. This study is expected to make a theoretical contribution by enriching the literature on community empowerment and social innovation in the context of rural development. In addition, it is anticipated to provide practical contributions for policymakers, higher education institutions, and community service practitioners in designing more effective and sustainable interventions. Ultimately, the findings of this study may serve as a strategic reference for efforts to achieve participatory, inclusive, and long-term economically self-reliant rural development.

Community Empowerment

Community empowerment is a systematic process aimed at enhancing the capacity of individuals and groups within society to recognize, manage, and independently develop their own potential (Rahmadani et al., 2021). Empowerment focuses on improving technical skills, strengthening critical awareness, encouraging active participation, and enhancing the community's ability to make decisions that affect their social and economic lives. In the context of community service, community empowerment serves as a primary approach to creating sustainable change, as it positions the community as the subject rather than the object of development.

Social Innovation

Social innovation refers to the creation and implementation of new ideas, practices, or models designed to address social problems in more effective and sustainable ways (Wu et al., 2023). Social innovation is not necessarily based on advanced technology; it may also take the form of new working methods, cross-actor collaboration, or the creative utilization of local resources. In rural development, social innovation plays a crucial role in generating contextual economic solutions, increasing the value added of local products, and strengthening the social and economic resilience of rural communities.

Community Service

Community service is one of the core components of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, aimed at applying scientific knowledge, technology, and academic expertise to address community needs and problems (Fatari et al., 2022). Community service involves processes of facilitation, empowerment, and collaboration with local communities. In the context of rural development, community service functions as a catalyst for social and economic change through the strengthening of local capacity and the development of community needs-based innovations.

Village Economic Self-Reliance

Village economic self-reliance reflects the ability of a village and its community to manage economic resources independently, sustainably, and competitively (Harinurdin et al., 2025). This self-reliance is characterized by economic diversification, the strengthening of local institutions such as village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) and village-based micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as well as reduced dependence on external assistance. Village economic self-reliance is measured by the village's capacity to create employment opportunities, improve community welfare, and maintain the sustainability of the local economy.

Rural Development

Rural development is a planned process of change aimed at improving the overall quality of life and well-being of rural communities, encompassing economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions (Syamsiyah et al., 2025). Contemporary rural development approaches emphasize participatory, inclusive, and sustainable principles by leveraging

local potential as a primary strength. Within the framework of this study, rural development is viewed as a long-term process that requires synergy among community empowerment, social innovation, and community service to achieve economically self-reliant and competitive villages.

METHOD

This study employs a literature review method with a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the study does not aim to test hypotheses or measure quantitative relationships among variables, but rather to compile, map, and enrich scholarly references related to the implementation of community service, particularly those emphasizing the roles of community empowerment and social innovation in enhancing village economic self-reliance. The study focuses on developing an in-depth understanding of concepts, approaches, and empirical findings reported in previous research. The type of research conducted is a systematic literature study that examines scholarly articles, research reports, and relevant academic documents. The research data consist of secondary data obtained from Google Scholar and several credible websites, such as academic journal portals, research institutions, and official organizations with established academic reputations. The literature search was limited to publications issued between 1994 and 2025 to ensure that the references used are current and relevant to recent developments in community service practices and studies.

The data collection process involved several stages, beginning with a literature search using relevant keywords, including community empowerment, social innovation, village economic self-reliance, and community service programs. From the initial search process, 50 articles were identified as having relevance to the research topic. All identified articles were then compiled and documented for further screening. Subsequently, a rigorous screening process was conducted using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were: (1) articles discussing community service or community-based development, (2) inclusion of elements of community empowerment and/or social innovation, (3) relevance to the village economic context, and (4) publication in credible sources. The exclusion criteria included duplicate articles, studies that did not focus on community service, or those that failed to provide adequate discussion of the topic. As a result of this screening process, 27 articles were deemed the most relevant and suitable for further analysis. Data analysis was carried out using qualitative descriptive analysis. At this stage, each article was examined in depth to identify the focus of community service activities, the empowerment approaches employed, the forms of social innovation developed, and their contributions to enhancing village economic self-reliance. The analytical results were then grouped into major themes to obtain a comprehensive overview of patterns, trends, and best practices in community service implementation.



Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Community empowerment constitutes the primary foundation for enhancing village economic self-reliance through community service programs, as it positions the community as the central actor in the development process. Based on empowerment theory, effective development is oriented toward strengthening individual and collective capacities to enable communities to manage resources independently and sustainably (Habib, 2021). In rural contexts, empowerment is manifested through the improvement of technical skills, managerial knowledge, and the strengthening of community self-confidence in managing economic activities based on local potential. This process enables rural communities to transform from groups that depend on external assistance into communities capable of independently planning, implementing, and evaluating economic activities.

This empowerment-oriented approach aligns with participatory development theory, which emphasizes the importance of active community involvement at all stages of programs, from planning to evaluation. This theory views participation as a key mechanism for fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for development initiatives (Margayaningsih, 2024). Numerous previous studies indicate that

participatory community service programs tend to be more sustainable than top-down approaches, as communities feel a sense of ownership and have a clear understanding of program objectives (Khafsoh & Riani, 2024). Active participation encourages communities to become the main actors in decision-making processes and village economic development.

In addition to community empowerment, social innovation plays a crucial role in addressing various structural constraints faced by rural areas, such as limited access to markets, technology, and capital. According to social innovation theory, social and economic change can occur through the creation of new, contextual, adaptive, and collaborative solutions among multiple actors (Azmir et al., 2025). In community service practices, social innovation is often realized through the diversification of local products, the development of community-based business models, and the application of simple digital technologies that are aligned with the social and cultural conditions of rural communities. Such innovations enable villages to increase economic value added without relying on complex technologies or large-scale investments that are difficult to access.

A growing body of previous research demonstrates that the integration of community empowerment and social innovation can significantly enhance village economic self-reliance. Community service studies report that programs combining entrepreneurship training, the strengthening of village economic institutions, and continuous mentoring contribute substantially to income growth and business sustainability among rural communities (Hairunisya et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the view that community service should not be limited to short-term educational or training activities, but must instead be oriented toward long-term economic transformation (Sutrisno et al., 2025). Through an integrated approach, community service programs are capable of creating structural changes in village economic patterns and fostering sustainable economic self-reliance.

A concrete case study can be observed in Ponggok Village, Klaten Regency, Central Java, through community service programs focusing on the processing of local fisheries and agricultural products and the strengthening of village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) as the driving force of the village economy (Endah et al., 2020; Priharjanto & Andriana, 2021). These programs include business management training, product innovation based on local potential, and digital marketing strategies aimed at expanding market access. This approach demonstrates that community service plays a role not only in enhancing technical skills but also in strengthening village economic institutions. As a result, Ponggok Village has been able to collectively increase community income and create independently managed economic resources, thereby reinforcing economic self-reliance and the sustainability of village enterprises.

Another example can be found in Pujon Kidul Village, Malang Regency, through community service programs based on the mentoring of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and the development of a tourism village (Nasyah, 2022; Pambudi et al., 2021). Higher education institutions play an active role in providing entrepreneurship training, basic financial management, and digital media-based

marketing strategies tailored to the characteristics of rural communities. These programs encourage communities to process local agricultural and livestock resources into value-added products with market competitiveness. The impact of these initiatives is evident in increased community income and the formation of a supportive local economic ecosystem linking agriculture, MSMEs, and village tourism.

In the context of tourism villages, Nglanggeran Village, Gunungkidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, represents a successful example of community service based on social innovation and a community-based tourism (CBT) approach (Jamalina & Wardani, 2017). The community service programs focus on strengthening community capacity in destination management, reinforcing local institutions, and developing digital-based marketing and partnership networks. Social innovation is realized through participatory tourism management that involves all elements of the village community. This approach enables the creation of sustainable economic opportunities without neglecting environmental conservation and local cultural values as the primary capital of village development.

Another case study can be found in Pentingsari Village, Sleman Regency, which has developed a culture-based creative economy through structured and participatory community service programs (Putra et al., 2025). These programs emphasize the division of roles among residents, family-based homestay management, and the development of educational tourism packages that utilize cultural potential and local wisdom. The success of Pentingsari Village demonstrates that community service programs integrating community empowerment and social innovation are capable of equitably improving community economic welfare. Beyond economic impacts, these programs also strengthen social cohesion, community solidarity, and the socio-cultural sustainability of the village.

The success of these various community service case studies can be explained through social capital theory, which emphasizes the role of trust, social networks, and collective norms as the foundation of community-based economic development (Rezki & Anggara, 2023). Strong social capital enables rural communities to build solid cooperation, reduce internal conflicts, and enhance coordination effectiveness in carrying out economic activities. Community service programs that consciously strengthen social interactions, build trust among residents, and encourage cross-actor collaboration have proven to be more capable of creating a conducive business environment. Social capital thus functions as a catalyst that accelerates the achievement of sustainable village economic self-reliance.

Nevertheless, findings from previous studies also reveal that not all community service programs are implemented optimally or generate significant impacts. Common challenges include limited mentoring duration, low initial community capacity in business management, and weak synergy among higher education institutions, village governments, and local business actors (Auliah et al., 2022). These conditions often result in community service initiatives being temporary and failing to continue after formal program activities end. These findings highlight that community service programs must be designed contextually, based on the real needs of the community, and implemented in a sustainable manner to generate tangible and long-term economic change.

As a response to these challenges, it is necessary to strengthen the design and implementation of community service programs that are sustainable, collaborative, and adaptive to local village contexts. Higher education institutions need to develop medium- and long-term community service models with continuous mentoring schemes, rather than short-term, project-based interventions. In addition, improving initial community capacity can be achieved through pre-service stages that emphasize participatory mapping of village potential and needs. Synergy among stakeholders—higher education institutions, village governments, village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), and local business actors—must be reinforced through clear role distribution and structured coordination mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of program impacts.

Overall, this discussion confirms that community empowerment and social innovation are key factors in enhancing village economic self-reliance through community service programs. The integration of empowerment theory, social capital theory, social innovation, as well as findings from previous studies and empirical case studies, demonstrates that participatory, innovative, and sustainable community service initiatives are capable of driving systemic economic transformation in rural areas. Therefore, community service should continue to be developed as a strategic instrument for achieving self-reliant and competitive rural development, while simultaneously strengthening the role of higher education institutions in sustainable development.

Table 1. Key Findings on Community Empowerment, Social Innovation, and Village Economic Self-Reliance through Community Service Programs

No.	Key Aspect	Main Findings	Supporting References / Evidence
1	Community Empowerment as Core Foundation	Community empowerment positions villagers as central development actors, enhancing individual and collective capacity to manage local economic resources independently and sustainably.	Empowerment theory (Habib, 2021)
2	Participatory Development Approach	Active community participation from planning to evaluation fosters ownership, collective responsibility, and program sustainability compared to top-down approaches.	Participatory development theory (Margayaningsih, 2024; Khafsoh & Riani, 2024)
3	Role of Social Innovation	Social innovation addresses structural constraints (market, technology, capital) through contextual, adaptive, and collaborative solutions such as product diversification and simple digital technologies.	Social innovation theory (Azmir et al., 2025)
4	Integration of Empowerment and Innovation	Combining community empowerment with social innovation significantly enhances village economic self-reliance, income growth, and business sustainability.	Hairunisya et al. (2023); Sutrisno et al. (2025)
5	Strengthening Village Economic Institutions	Community service strengthens local institutions (e.g., BUMDes, MSMEs),	Ponggok Village case (Endah et al., 2020;

		contributing to collective income growth and sustainable village enterprises.	Priharjanto & Andriana, 2021)
6	MSME Mentoring and Tourism Development	Mentoring MSMEs and developing tourism villages increase value-added products, community income, and local economic ecosystems.	Pujon Kidul case (Nasyah, 2022; Pambudi et al., 2021)
7	Community-Based Tourism (CBT)	CBT-based community service creates sustainable economic opportunities while preserving environmental and cultural values.	Nglanggeran Village case (Jamalina & Wardani, 2017)
8	Culture-Based Creative Economy	Structured, participatory programs leveraging cultural assets improve equitable welfare, social cohesion, and socio-cultural sustainability.	Pentingsari Village case (Putra et al., 2025)
9	Importance of Social Capital	Trust, social networks, and collective norms strengthen cooperation, reduce conflict, and accelerate sustainable village economic self-reliance.	Social capital theory (Rezki & Anggara, 2023)
10	Key Challenges	Common challenges include limited mentoring duration, low initial community capacity, and weak stakeholder synergy, leading to temporary impacts.	Auliah et al. (2022)
11	Strategic Recommendations	Sustainable impact requires long-term, collaborative, and adaptive community service designs, continuous mentoring, participatory needs mapping, and strong stakeholder coordination.	Synthesis of reviewed studies
12	Overall Conclusion	Participatory, innovative, and sustainable community service programs integrating empowerment, social innovation, and social capital drive systemic rural economic transformation.	Integrated theoretical and empirical findings

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review and discussion, it can be concluded that community empowerment and social innovation play a strategic role in enhancing village economic self-reliance through community service programs. Empowerment approaches that position communities as the primary subjects of development have been shown to increase capacity, participation, and independence in managing local economic potential. Social innovation serves as a mechanism that enables rural communities to create contextual, adaptive, and sustainable economic solutions. Furthermore, the findings indicate that community service programs that are participatory, collaborative, and sustainable tend to generate more significant economic and social impacts than top-down and short-term approaches. Various empirical case studies demonstrate that program success is largely determined by the strength of social capital, synergy among stakeholders, and the consistency of mentoring. Thus, this study contributes to enriching both

conceptual and empirical references related to community service practices in the context of rural economic development.

Theoretically, this study contributes to strengthening the field of community service research by integrating empowerment theory, social innovation, participatory development, and social capital within a single analytical framework. The findings expand the understanding that community service is not merely an implementative activity but an integral component of sustainable social and economic transformation processes. Practically, this study offers implications for higher education institutions, village governments, and community service practitioners in designing more effective programs. The findings may serve as a reference for developing community service models based on community empowerment and social innovation that are aligned with local village potential. In addition, this study may inform the formulation of rural development policies that emphasize economic self-reliance and community participation.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a literature review, the study does not involve the collection of primary field data. Consequently, the findings are highly dependent on the quality and depth of the secondary data analyzed. Second, data sources were limited to publications available through Google Scholar and credible websites within the 1994–2025 period, meaning that other relevant studies may not have been captured. Third, variations in the social, cultural, and economic contexts of villages across the analyzed studies may affect the generalizability of the findings.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several recommendations can be proposed. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct empirical, field-based studies to test and deepen the insights derived from this literature review, either through in-depth case studies or mixed-methods approaches. Subsequent research may also expand the geographical scope and village economic sectors examined to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. For practitioners and policymakers, it is recommended that community service programs be designed using long-term, collaborative approaches grounded in the actual needs of rural communities. Strengthening synergy among higher education institutions, village governments, village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), and local business actors should be a top priority. In this way, community service can function as a strategic instrument for achieving sustainable village economic self-reliance.

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