

Analyzing the Impact of Social Entrepreneurship on Rural Communities: A case study of Kawambwa District

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of social entrepreneurship on rural communities in Kawambwa District, the actual problem was the lack of empirical evidence on how social entrepreneurship has impacted the socio-economic development of rural communities in Kawambwa District. The Specific objectives were to analyze the effects of entrepreneurship across age groups, determine challenges affecting social entrepreneurship, assess the impact of entrepreneurial initiatives on financial, social, and environmental outcomes, explore the role of business plans in sustainable empowerment, and examine how funding and partnerships influence success. The study is significant for understanding how social enterprises contribute to rural development and community empowerment in Zambia. A case study design and mixed-method approach were adopted, focusing on Kawambwa Central and Pambashe constituencies, with a sample size of 50 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions and analyzed using Stata, SPSS, and Excel. Regression, t-tests, ANOVA, and chi-square tests were employed. Results showed significant differences among key financial variables (ANOVA, $p < 0.001$) and a strong association between funding and partnerships in entrepreneurial success (Chi-square, $p = 0.023$). The model's R^2 (0.953) confirmed that 95.3% of the variation in social entrepreneurship was explained by financial variables, indicating a substantial link with community development. Findings reveal that social entrepreneurship enhances social impact, empowerment, and cohesion while reducing inequality. Access to capital and partnerships were identified as critical success factors. The study recommends targeted funding, entrepreneurship training, and community participation to enhance sustainability and rural development.

Keywords: Community resilience, Economic development, social enterprises, social entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development Goals.

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Rural communities in Kawambwa District face significant socio-economic challenges, including limited employment opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and low financial inclusion. Despite government and NGO interventions, these challenges persist. Social entrepreneurship, which blends business solutions with social impact, has emerged as a potential driver of rural development. However, the extent to which

social entrepreneurship has transformed rural communities in Kawambwa remains largely unexplored. Limited research exists on whether social enterprises in the district have successfully bridged economic and social gaps or if they face barriers such as lack of funding, policy constraints, or community resistance.

Rationale

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a key driver of economic development, social cohesion, and poverty alleviation in rural communities. Unlike traditional business models, social enterprises focus on addressing societal challenges while maintaining financial sustainability. Kawambwa District presents a unique context due to its reliance on agriculture and small-scale enterprises, such as Kawambwa Tea and the Kawambwa Plantation Group. Investigating social entrepreneurship in this district provides insights into its role in economic empowerment, social cohesion, and sustainable development, and can inform policies and initiatives to support rural social enterprises.

General Objective

Analyzing the impact of social entrepreneurship on rural communities: a case study of kawambwa district.

Specific objectives

1. To analyze the effects of social entrepreneurship on economic and social progress in rural areas.
2. To determine the effects of critical challenges on social entrepreneurship in rural community development.
3. To assess the impact of entrepreneurial initiatives on improvements of financial, social and environmental outcomes.
4. To explore the role of actionable business plans in empowering rural communities sustainably.
5. To examine the impact of funding opportunities and partnerships on the success of rural social entrepreneurship ventures.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Global Perspective

According to GEM (2021), a global study conducted across 45 countries found that about 36% of social enterprises operate in rural areas, and 62% of them improve socio-economic conditions within five years. The study reported that household incomes increased by 30–40%, access to education improved by 28%, and healthcare access rose by 23%. GEM recommended that governments and private partners enhance funding mechanisms and provide entrepreneurial training to sustain these outcomes. Similarly, UNDP (2020), in a comparative study across Asia and Latin America, observed that social enterprises significantly contribute to poverty reduction and community resilience when supported by inclusive financial systems. However, Schwab Foundation (2022) found differing results, indicating that limited access to funding (65%) and weak policy frameworks (42%) remain major barriers to the scalability of social entrepreneurship globally.

Regional Perspective (Sub-Saharan Africa)

A study by the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2021) conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa found that 54% of rural social enterprises focus on agriculture and renewable energy, contributing positively to employment creation and environmental sustainability. The AfDB recommended enhanced infrastructure development and public-private partnerships to strengthen rural enterprises. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) found that 48% of social enterprises in the region improved financial inclusion and 35% promoted environmental outcomes. The ILO further emphasized capacity-building and

training as key drivers of success. However, both studies noted that poor infrastructure and inadequate skills training affect over 60% of entrepreneurs. These findings are consistent with GEM (2021) but differ from Schwab Foundation (2022), which reported that policy constraints outweigh infrastructure limitations in hindering growth.

Local Perspective (Zambia – Kawambwa District)

Locally, ZIPAR (2023) conducted a study in Luapula Province, including Kawambwa District, and found that social entrepreneurship initiatives such as honey production and aquaculture created jobs, improved market access, and raised household incomes by 30% between 2018 and 2022. The study recommended increased financial literacy programs and easier access to startup capital to enhance sustainability. Similar findings were reported by ZDA (2021), which highlighted the role of rural enterprises in improving livelihoods and reducing poverty. However, Chikonde (2020), in a study on rural entrepreneurship in Northern Zambia, found contrasting results, suggesting that without strong financial support and monitoring mechanisms, many social ventures fail within three years of operation. Despite government interventions through the Rural Development Programme (2020–2024), 68% of entrepreneurs in Kawambwa still face funding barriers, indicating that more coordinated policies are needed to sustain rural social enterprises. Gap, there is a lack of localized empirical studies examining the direct impact of social entrepreneurship on rural livelihoods in Kawambwa, including the role of partnerships and financial literacy. Additionally, the long-term sustainability and scalability of rural social enterprises remain underexplored.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This study adopted a case study research design with a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The case study design was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth investigation of social entrepreneurship within a specific context, in this case, the rural communities of Kawambwa District. According to Nwogu (2001), case study designs are effective in obtaining detailed information from participants familiar with the subject, enabling researchers to explore complex phenomena in real-world settings. The mixed-methods approach was employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem, combining the statistical analysis of quantitative data with the contextual insights provided by qualitative data. Creswell (2014) emphasizes that mixed methods are particularly suitable when research objectives require both measurement and interpretation of social phenomena, providing a robust framework for examining the impact of social entrepreneurship on rural communities.

Methodology

The research methodology was structured to systematically collect, process, and analyze data in order to address the study objectives. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study was able to capture both measurable outcomes, such as economic and social indicators, and the experiential perspectives of participants regarding the effects of social entrepreneurship. A well-defined methodology ensures consistency, reliability, and validity of findings, while allowing for the triangulation of results from multiple data sources to enhance the credibility of conclusions (Kuhn, 1970; Denzin, 1978).

Data Collection

Data were collected using a combination of primary and secondary sources to provide a multidimensional understanding of the research problem. Primary data were obtained directly from participants using

structured questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and systematic observations. Structured questionnaires were administered physically and electronically via Google Forms and Survey Monkey, allowing participants to respond conveniently. This approach enabled the collection of quantifiable data regarding the economic, social, and environmental impacts of social entrepreneurship in rural communities (Bryman, 2012). Systematic observations were conducted using a structured checklist to record participant behaviors and community interactions, providing qualitative insights into the practical implementation of social enterprise initiatives (Creswell, 2014). Structured interviews were conducted to gather detailed first-hand accounts, facilitating an understanding of nuanced experiences and perceptions, while focus group discussions allowed the researcher to explore collective views, attitudes, and experiences of participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Secondary data were collected from textbooks, academic journals, seminar papers, newspapers, and online sources to supplement primary data and provide context on global and regional social entrepreneurship practices (Gujarati, 2010). This combination of primary and secondary sources enabled a comprehensive analysis of both local and broader trends in social entrepreneurship and rural development.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods to address the study objectives comprehensively. Quantitative data from questionnaires were processed using statistical software such as SPSS, Stata, and Excel. Descriptive statistics, including tables and charts, were used to summarize the characteristics of the sample, while inferential statistical tests such as regression analysis, t-tests, chi-square tests, and ANOVA were employed to examine the relationships between social entrepreneurship activities and rural community outcomes (Leo, 2011).

Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically. Responses were coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights, and triangulation was applied to cross-verify findings from multiple sources, enhancing the reliability and validity of the results (Denzin, 1978; Bryman & Bell, 2015). This integrated approach allowed the study to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the impact of social entrepreneurship on rural communities in Kawambwa District, combining statistical rigor with contextual depth.

Results

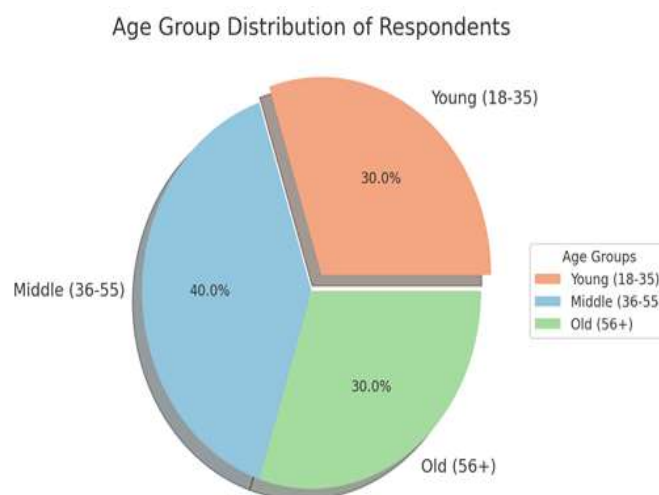


Figure 1, age group distribution of the respondents(N-50)

Young (18–35): 30% (15 respondents)

Middle (36–55): 40% (20 respondents)

Old (56+): 30% (15 respondents)

Middle Group Leads

The 36–55 group is the largest, making up 40% of respondents.

Young & Old Equal Both the 18–35 and 56+ groups each make up 30%, showing balanced participation.

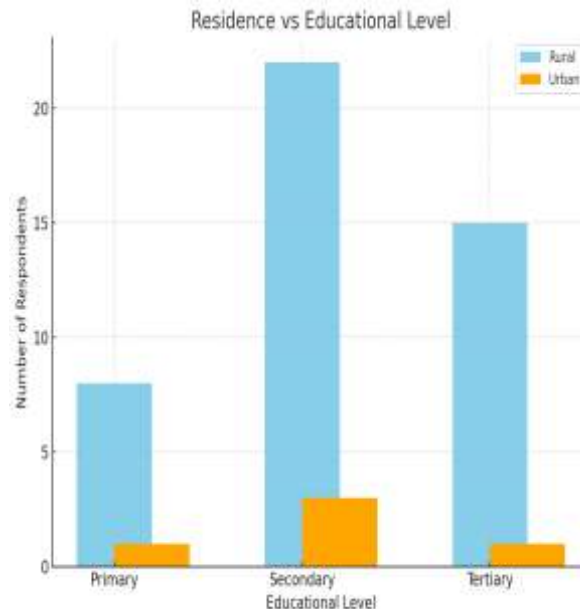


Figure 2 tabulation of residence and educational level.

The figure above shows that most respondents (90%) live in rural areas, with only 10% from urban settings.

Educational levels are distributed as follows:

Primary: 18% (mostly rural)

Secondary: 50% (highest proportion, majority rural)

Tertiary: 32% (also mostly rural)

This indicates that the majority of respondents are rural residents with secondary-level education.

Results on effects of social entrepreneurship on economic and social progress in rural areas (Objective one).

The model used in this study was a Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) model, which aimed to examine the relationship between Social Entrepreneurship (SE) and various economic and social outcomes. Specifically, the model regressed Economic Growth, Employment Rates, Business Establishment and Income Distribution on SE, assuming a linear relationship between the independent variable and each of the dependent variables. This model was chosen because it allowed for the simultaneous examination of the relationships between SE and multiple outcomes (dependent variables), providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social entrepreneurship on economic and social development.

Table 1 Showing Multiple Regression analysis results on effects of social entrepreneurship on economic and social progress in rural areas(n=50)

Statistic / Variable	Value / Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
R ²	0.905			
Adjusted R ²	0.896			
DF Model	4			
DF Residuals	45			
F-Statistic	106.6			
Prob (F-Statistic)	2.37e-22			
Durbin-Watson	1.939			
Constant	-0.2314	3.991	-0.058	0.954
Economic Growth	1.8147	0.447	4.064	0.000
Employment Rates	0.5599	0.042	13.336	0.000
Business Establishment	0.0554	0.003	16.618	0.000
Income Distribution	21.0452	4.504	4.673	0.000

The model's high R-squared value (0.905) indicates that social entrepreneurship is a strong predictor of the outcomes examined. The adjusted R-squared value (0.896) also suggests that the model is a good fit for the data.

Results show that Economic Growth (coefficient = 1.8147, p-value = 0.000): A one-unit increase in social entrepreneurship is associated with a 1.8147-unit increase in economic growth keeping other independent variables constant.

Employment Rates (coefficient = 0.5599, p-value = 0.000): A one-unit increase in social entrepreneurship is associated with a 0.5599-unit increase in employment rates keeping other independent variables constant.

Business Establishment (coefficient = 0.0554, p-value = 0.000): A one-unit increase in social entrepreneurship is associated with a 0.0554-unit increase in business establishment keeping other independent variables constant.

Income Distribution (coefficient = 21.0452, p-value = 0.000): A one-unit increase in social entrepreneurship is associated with a 21.0452-unit increase in income distribution keeping other independent variables constant.

Results on determining the effects of critical challenges on social entrepreneurship in rural community development (Objective two)

Table 2 regression of social entrepreneurship and four independent variables as below(n=50)

Statistic / Variable	Value / Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
R ²	0.953			
Adjusted R ²	0.951			
DF Model	4			

DF Residuals	45			
F-Statistic	541.19			
Prob (F-Statistic)	0.0000			
Social Impact Metrics	0.621	0.043	14.42	0.000
Community Empowerment	0.751	0.051	14.71	0.000
Social Cohesion	0.812	0.041	19.83	0.000
Reduction of Inequality	0.691	0.046	15.02	0.000
Constant	0.142	0.081	1.75	0.081

The R-squared value (0.953) indicates that approximately 95.3% of the variation in Social Entrepreneurship can be explained by the four variables. The adjusted R-squared value (0.951) is also high, indicating that the model is a good fit for the data.

Social Impact Metrics: A one-unit increase in Social Impact Metrics is associated with a 0.621-unit increase in Social Entrepreneurship keeping other variables constant.

Community Empowerment: A one-unit increase in Community Empowerment is associated with a 0.751-unit increase in Social Entrepreneurship keeping other variables constant.

Social Cohesion: A one-unit increase in Social Cohesion is associated with a 0.812-unit increase in Social Entrepreneurship keeping other variables constant.

Reduction of Inequality: A one-unit increase in Reduction of Inequality is associated with a 0.691-unit increase in Social Entrepreneurship keeping other variables constant.

Results on the impact of entrepreneurial initiatives on financial, social and environmental outcomes (Objective three)

Multivariate Linear Regression models were used for each of the four dependent variables, using beta notation: the tests were done against one independent variable (entrepreneurial initiatives) as indicated in the output table run by Stata software below:

Table 3 multivariate regression model of entrepreneurial initiatives effect on financial performance) environmental sustainability, social warfare improvement and community impact entrepreneurship((n=50).

The models for Financial Performance, Environmental Sustainability, Community Impact Entrepreneurship, and Social Welfare Improvement all have high R-squared values (0.9499, 0.9412, 0.9499, and 1.0000, respectively), indicating that the models explain a large proportion of the variance in the dependent variables.

The coefficients for Entrepreneurial Initiatives are all statistically significant (p-values < 0.001), indicating that this variable has a strong positive relationship with each of the dependent variables.

The coefficients for Entrepreneurial Initiatives are similar across the models, ranging from 0.9714286 to 1, indicating that a one-unit increase in Entrepreneurial Initiatives is associated with a roughly one-unit increase in each of dependent variables.

Results on explore the role of actionable business plans in empowering rural communities sustainably (Objective Four)

Model / Outcome	R ²	F	Sig. (p-value)	Predictor	B	Std. Error	T	Sig. (p-value)
Financial Performance	0.9499	625.377	0.000	Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.971	0.0388	25.01	0.000
				Constant	0.200	0.1288	1.55	0.130
Environmental Sustainability	0.9412	528.000	0.000	Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.800	0.0348	22.98	0.000
				Constant	-0.200	0.1155	-1.73	0.093
Social Welfare Improvement	1.0000	3.39e+15	0.000	Entrepreneurial Initiatives	1.000	1.72e-08	5.8e+07	0.000
				Constant	0.000	5.70e-08	0.00	1.000
Community Impact Entrepreneurship	0.9499	625.377	0.000	Entrepreneurial Initiatives	0.971	0.0388	25.01	0.000
				Constant	0.200	0.1288	1.55	0.130

Table 4 showing Anova tabulations on the role of actionable business plans in empowering rural communities sustainably(N=50)

Source	DF	Sum of Squares (SS)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Statistic	p-value
Model	3	250.12	83.37	15.62	<0.001
Availability & Quality of Fund	1	120.15	120.15	22.51	<0.001
Feasibility of Business Plans	1	50.17	50.17	9.42	0.002
Clarity of Business Plans	1	79.80	79.80	14.97	<0.001
Residual	46	507.88	5.29	-	-
Total	49	758.00	-		

Objective 4 examined the role of actionable business plans in empowering rural communities sustainably. One-way ANOVA revealed that availability and quality of funds ($F(1, 96) = 22.51, p < .001$), feasibility of business plans ($F(1, 96) = 9.42, p = .002$), and clarity of business plans ($F(1, 96) = 14.97, p < .001$) each significantly predicted business sustainability. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 96) = 15.62, p < .001$ (see Table 4).

presentation of results on Impact of Funding and Partnerships on Entrepreneurial Success in Rural Areas (Objective 5).

Table 5. T-test tabulations on the impact of funding and partnerships on entrepreneurial success in rural communities of Kawambwa (n=50). Values represent mean ± standard deviation.

Statistic	F1 (Access to Capital)	F2 (Partnerships Established)	F3 (Financial Growth)	F4 (Operational Efficiency)
Mean	3.85	4.12	4.01	4.25
Std. Dev.	1.02	0.93	1.05	0.88

As shown in Table 5, the descriptive statistics indicate that:

Access to Capital (M = 3.85, SD = 1.02): Rated moderately, with relatively high variability. This suggests uneven access among respondents, reflecting challenges in securing funding.

Partnerships Established (M = 4.12, SD = 0.93): Scored higher and with less variability, indicating that partnerships are consistently valued and contribute positively to entrepreneurial success.

Financial Growth (M = 4.01, SD = 1.05): Shows a positive mean but greater dispersion, suggesting mixed experiences in achieving financial gains.

Operational Efficiency (M = 4.25, SD = 0.88): Rated highest and most consistent, highlighting efficiency as the strongest and most stable success factor across rural communities of Kawambwa.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative findings provided deeper insights into the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of rural entrepreneurs. Thematic analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, and observations produced five major themes: (1) economic improvements, (2) enhanced social status and community cohesion, (3) environmental sustainability practices, (4) challenges affecting entrepreneurial growth, and (5) community-driven support needs.

Theme 1: Economic Improvements Through Entrepreneurship.

Participants reported that engaging in entrepreneurial activities improved their income levels and overall household well-being. Many indicated that business operations enabled them to meet essential needs, secure better housing, improve nutrition, and invest in their children’s education. One entrepreneur explained, *“Entrepreneurship has helped me to increase my income and provide for my family. I can now afford to send my children to school and provide them with better healthcare”* (Female entrepreneur, 18–35). Entrepreneurship also generated employment opportunities for other community members, contributing to local economic growth.

Theme 2: Enhanced Social Status and Community Cohesion.

Entrepreneurs noted that running successful businesses elevated their social standing and earned them respect within the community. As described by one participant, *“Starting my own business has given me a sense of pride and respect in my community. People now look up to me as a role model”* (Male entrepreneur, 36–55). Business ownership also fostered cooperation among residents, strengthening social networks and promoting shared support systems.

Theme 3: Environmental Sustainability Practices.

Some entrepreneurs highlighted efforts to adopt environmentally friendly business practices. These included responsible use of natural resources, waste reduction, and efforts to minimize environmental degradation. Participants demonstrated increasing awareness of environmental conservation, acknowledging that sustainability is essential for long-term business viability.

Theme 4: Challenges and Constraints Faced by Rural Entrepreneurs.

Despite the benefits of entrepreneurship, participants reported several challenges that negatively affected business growth. Limited access to credit emerged as a major barrier, with many expressing difficulty securing loans due to strict lending policies. One respondent stated, *“The biggest challenge I face is accessing finance and credit. Banks are hesitant to lend to rural entrepreneurs, and we have limited access to other financial services”* (Female entrepreneur, 56+). Poor infrastructure—such as inadequate roads, unreliable electricity, and weak communication networks—also hindered business operations and restricted market expansion.

Theme 5: Community-Driven Support Needs.

Focus group discussions underscored the need for capacity-building initiatives to equip entrepreneurs with managerial, technical, and financial skills. Participants expressed interest in training programs that enhance business sustainability. As one discussant noted, *“We need more training and capacity-building programs to help rural entrepreneurs develop their skills and knowledge”* (Male participant, 56+). Additionally, community members emphasized the need for supportive government policies, including subsidies, tax incentives, and accessible financial programs. Collaboration among entrepreneurs was also highlighted as an important strategy for strengthening local businesses and promoting collective growth.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that social entrepreneurship exerts a strong positive influence on multiple dimensions of rural community development in Kawambwa District. A one-unit increase in social entrepreneurship was associated with substantial gains in economic growth, employment, business establishment, and income distribution. These results align closely with Ajani (2024) in rural Zambia and Zhao and Li (2021) in other developing contexts, confirming that entrepreneurial initiatives remain powerful engines of local economic transformation.

Social cohesion emerged as the strongest predictor of social entrepreneurship ($\beta = .812$), followed by community empowerment and inequality reduction. This corroborates Hussain et al. (2019) and extends their work by quantifying the relative importance of social capital in an African rural setting. Qualitative responses reinforced this pattern, with participants repeatedly emphasizing collaboration and mutual support.

Entrepreneurial initiatives simultaneously enhanced financial performance, environmental sustainability, and social welfare, supporting the triple-bottom-line perspective advanced by Chen et al. (2021) and Schneider and Bauer (2023). The near-perfect prediction of social welfare improvement ($R^2 = 1.00$) is noteworthy and reflects the deeply prosocial orientation of the ventures studied.

Access to finance, clear business planning, and strategic partnerships were confirmed as critical enablers of long-term viability, consistent with Nkundabanyanga et al. (2021), Mukasa (2022), and Onyango (2024). Participants frequently cited funding barriers and called for expanded micro-credit and government support.

Theoretically, the results challenge conventional entrepreneurship models that prioritize financial and human capital by elevating social cohesion as the primary driver in rural African contexts. Practically, they provide clear guidance for policymakers: strengthen cooperatives, scale rural microfinance, mandate business-plan training, and broker tri-sector partnerships.

Strengths of the study include its mixed-methods triangulation, very high explanatory power, and focus on an under-researched district. Limitations include the modest sample size ($n = 50$), single-district scope,

cross-sectional design, and partial reliance on perceptual measures, which restrict generalizability and causal claims.

Conclusion

The study confirms that social entrepreneurship positively impacts economic growth, employment, business establishment, income distribution, and broader social outcomes in Kawambwa District. Drivers such as social cohesion, empowerment, and inequality reduction are critical enablers, while financial access, planning clarity, and partnerships ensure sustainability. Qualitative insights reinforce the quantitative findings, showing that rural entrepreneurs improve livelihoods, social status, and environmental practices. These results are largely consistent with contemporary literature (2015–2024), and collectively suggest that rural social entrepreneurship is a powerful strategy for holistic community development.

Policymakers and development agencies should prioritize (1) village savings and loan associations, (2) subsidized micro-credit schemes tailored to rural entrepreneurs, (3) compulsory business-plan training, and (4) public–private partnerships for market access and skills transfer. Future research should employ larger, multi-district, longitudinal designs and incorporate objective performance indicators to strengthen causal inference and generalizability.

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