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**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A CATALYST FOR  
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL AREAS: A  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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**Abstract:**

This study examines the role of social entrepreneurship in empowering rural women in Malaysia, addressing gender and economic disparities. It highlights how social enterprises promote economic independence, skill development, and access to markets and networks, while reshaping traditional gender roles in these communities. A conceptual framework is proposed to understand these mechanisms. Using Empowerment Theory and Social Capital Theory, the research analyses existing theoretical models and empirical data. Findings reveal that women-led social enterprises, particularly in agriculture and handicrafts, have seen a 30% revenue increase in the past two years. These ventures not only enhance women's financial independence but also contribute to sustainable community development and challenge societal norms around gender roles. The study emphasizes the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship and its implications for policymakers, NGOs, and educators. It calls for continued support to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives, which are vital for promoting economic empowerment and gender equality in rural Malaysia.

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This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Keywords:**

Financial Independence, Rural Malaysia, Social Entrepreneurship, Skill Development, Women's Economic Empowerment

**Introduction**

Global economic development increasingly depends on the inclusion and empowerment of women, particularly in rural areas where economic opportunities are often limited. Despite numerous global initiatives aimed at closing the gender gap, rural women continue to face significant barriers to entrepreneurship, including limited access to capital, education, and markets. These challenges are compounded by cultural norms and systemic inequalities that hinder women's participation in economic activities (Punita, 2012). As the world grapples with these issues, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a transformative approach that not only addresses these economic disparities but also promotes sustainable development and social change. Social entrepreneurship is uniquely positioned to empower rural women by providing them with the tools and resources necessary to overcome these barriers, thus fostering economic independence and contributing to broader societal well-being (Hafiz, 2023).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the role that social enterprises play in empowering women entrepreneurs in rural contexts. By integrating social objectives with entrepreneurial practices, these enterprises create opportunities for women to engage in economic activities that were previously inaccessible to them (Sen, 1999). Based on Ferdousi & Parveen (2019), the synergy between social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment is particularly evident in rural areas, where traditional economic models often fail to address the specific needs of women. Through innovative business models that prioritize social impact over profit, social enterprises are not only driving economic growth but also promoting gender equality and social inclusion (McElwee, 2018).

In Malaysia, social entrepreneurship has been recognized as a crucial mechanism for advancing women's economic empowerment, especially in rural areas where traditional economic opportunities are scarce (MEDAC, 2022). The Malaysian government, alongside various NGOs, has increasingly focused on integrating social entrepreneurship as a strategy to address gender disparities in economic participation. As of 2023, it is reported that approximately 25% of social enterprises in Malaysia are led by women, and many of these are concentrated in rural regions, where they provide vital services and economic opportunities to local communities (UNDP, 2023).

Recent statistics highlight the growing impact of these enterprises. For instance, social enterprises run by women in rural Malaysia have seen a 30% increase in their revenue over the past two years, primarily driven by sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale manufacturing (MEDAC, 2022). This growth is not only enhancing the financial independence of women but also contributing to broader community development by creating jobs and fostering sustainable practices (Desa, 2012). Moreover, the Malaysian government's policy framework has been increasingly supportive of such initiatives. In 2022, new regulations were introduced to ease access to microfinance and grants for women-led social enterprises, which has further accelerated their growth and impact in rural areas (MEDAC, 2022). This emphasis on social entrepreneurship aligns with Malaysia's broader goals of reducing rural poverty and

achieving gender equality, thereby making it a pivotal element in the nation's socio-economic strategy.

This paper aims to conceptualize into how these social enterprises in rural Malaysia are not only empowering women economically but also reshaping traditional gender roles, thus contributing to the socio-economic transformation of rural communities. It explores how social enterprises can bridge the gap between gender and economic disparities by providing rural women with the skills, resources, and support networks necessary to thrive in the entrepreneurial landscape. By examining the intersection of gender, entrepreneurship, and social innovation, this paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on women's economic empowerment and the potential of social entrepreneurship to drive sustainable development in rural areas.

### Literature Review

Past studies have extensively documented the role of social entrepreneurship in empowering women, particularly in rural areas. For instance, research by Haugh and Talwar (2016) highlights how social enterprises can serve as catalysts for social change by fostering empowerment among marginalized groups, including rural women. Their study emphasizes that social entrepreneurship provides a platform for women to overcome traditional barriers and actively participate in the economy, thereby driving both individual and community development (Thompson, 2006).

Similarly, a study by Ferdousi and Parveen (2019) on the Grameen Telecom Trust in Bangladesh demonstrates how social enterprises can successfully empower women by providing them with financial independence and the necessary skills to sustain their businesses. This model has been influential in shaping similar initiatives in Malaysia, where rural women have benefited from increased access to microfinance and entrepreneurial training (Tanusia, 2016).

Additionally, the work of Gupta et al. (2008) explores the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of developing economies. They argue that social entrepreneurship plays a critical role in challenging and transforming gender norms, which is particularly relevant in rural Malaysian contexts where traditional roles are deeply entrenched (Tanusia, 2016). These studies collectively underscore the importance of social entrepreneurship in not only empowering women but also in contributing to broader socio-economic development, particularly in rural areas where such initiatives can have a transformative impact.

Despite the increasing recognition of social entrepreneurship as a powerful tool for women's economic empowerment, especially in rural areas, there is still a significant gap in the literature regarding its specific impact in the Malaysian context. Most existing studies tend to focus broadly on social entrepreneurship or women's entrepreneurship but rarely explore the intersection of these two fields within rural Malaysia (Tanusia, 2016). Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical research that investigates how social enterprises directly contribute to overcoming the unique challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs, such as limited access to markets and financial resources (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013).

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a transformative force for addressing various social issues, including the economic empowerment of women in rural areas (Desa, 2012). This framework highlights how social entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst by providing opportunities for women to engage in entrepreneurial activities that not only generate income but also contribute to social change (Mair & Marti, 2006). In rural areas, where traditional economic models often fail to address the unique challenges faced by women, social enterprises offer innovative solutions that empower women by providing them with access to resources, training, and networks necessary for sustainable economic participation (Punita, 2012). This conceptual framework posits that social entrepreneurship can bridge the gap between gender disparities and economic development by fostering an inclusive environment where women can thrive as entrepreneurs, thus contributing to the overall development of rural communities.

**Table 1: Summary of Past Paper Publish on Women Entrepreneurs**

Authors	Years	Title	Cited by
Al-Shami S.S.A.; Razali M.M.; Majid I.; Rozelan A.; Rashid N.	2016	The effect of microfinance on women's empowerment: Evidence from Malaysia	38
Arul Paramanandam D.; Packirisamy P.	2015	An empirical study on the impact of micro enterprises on women empowerment	36
Al Mamun A.; Muniady R.; Yukthamarani P.P.; Noor Raihani Binti Z.; Mohamad M.R.	2016	Micro-enterprise development initiatives and entrepreneurial competencies, innovativeness, and social capital in Malaysia	17
Agrawal A.; Gandhi P.; Khare P.	2023	Women empowerment through entrepreneurship: case study of a social entrepreneurial intervention in rural India	15
Zainol N.R.; Al Mamun A.; Hassan H.; Muniady R.A.L.	2017	Examining the effectiveness of microenterprise development programs in Malaysia	15
Kumari D.A.T.; Ferdous Azam S.M.	2019	The mediating effect of financial inclusion on financial literacy and women's economic empowerment: A study among rural poor women in Sri Lanka	15
Hashim N.; Jamin R.M.; Noor M.M.	2020	Implications of ICT for development on enhancing rural entrepreneur program (Rep) at telecentres in Malaysia	5
Bobek V.; Schachl A.; Horvat T.	2023	The impact of women's economic empowerment on the rise of female entrepreneurship and human capital in South Africa	4
Latip A.R.A.; Othman N.; Yusoff O.M.	2020	Socio-economic impacts of ECER-human capital development programmes in empowering the rural women of Malaysia	3

Ordoñez L.B.P.; Tróchez D.X.S.; Rengifo E.F.	2024	Appropriation Of Economic And Financial Education For The Empowerment Of Rural Women Victims Of The Armed Conflict In The Department Of Cauca; [Apropriação Da Educação Econômica E Financeira Para O Empoderamento De Mulheres Rurais Vítimas Do Conflito Armado No Departamento De Cauca]; [Apropiación De La Educación Económica Y Financiera Para El Empoderamiento En Mujeres Rurales Víctimas Del Conflicto Armado En El Departamento Del Cauca]	1
Pandhare A.; Bellampalli P.N.; Yadava N.	2024	Transforming rural women's lives in India: the impact of microfinance and entrepreneurship on empowerment in Self-Help Groups	1
Sabri N.A.A.; Zainol N.R.; Daud N.I.M.; Isa@Yusuff Y.Z.M.; Uthamaputhran S.; Aziz M.I.	2021	Self-efficacy on Social Capital and Financial Empowerment Towards Socioeconomic Wellbeing Development Among Women Participants in Malaysia	1
Pandhare A.; Bellampalli P.N.; Yadava N.	2024	Transforming rural women's lives in India: the impact of microfinance and entrepreneurship on empowerment in Self-Help Groups	1
Sabri N.A.A.; Zainol N.R.; Daud N.I.M.; Isa@Yusuff Y.Z.M.; Uthamaputhran S.; Aziz M.I.	2021	Self-efficacy on Social Capital and Financial Empowerment Towards Socioeconomic Wellbeing Development Among Women Participants in Malaysia	1
Teoh W.M.Y.; Yen Y.Y.; Loh J.	2024	Fostering future-ready female TVET preneur talent framework	0
Douni R.; Abd Halim N.	2023	The role of national women policy to encourage women to participate in economic development in Malaysia	0
Yee L.L.; Johari S.; Emang D.; Thoo P.Y.	2022	The Motivation of Female Social Entrepreneurs in Lundu District, Sarawak, Malaysia	0
Deo S.; Sarkar S.R.	2012	Empowering women through innovative embroidery training	0

Source form Scopus AI

The table summarizes 20 studies on women's empowerment through microfinance, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion. The most cited study, *The Effect of Microfinance on Women's Empowerment: Evidence from Malaysia* (2016), has 38 citations, while the most recent study, *Appropriation of Economic and Financial Education for the Empowerment of Rural Women Victims of the Armed Conflict in the Department of Cauca* (2024), reflects the latest research trends. Six studies have more than ten citations, indicating their impact, while five studies remain uncited. The primary themes emerging from these studies include microfinance and women's empowerment, entrepreneurship and socioeconomic development,



financial literacy and inclusion, ICT's role in rural women's economic participation, and government and policy support for women entrepreneurs. These findings highlight the ongoing scholarly efforts to explore financial and entrepreneurial interventions in empowering women, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged communities.

### ***Relevant Theories and Models***

Several theories and models support the role of social entrepreneurship in empowering women economically, particularly in rural settings. According to Douglas (1995), One key theory is the Empowerment Theory, which suggests that empowerment involves a process through which individuals gain control over their lives by gaining access to resources and opportunities. In the context of social entrepreneurship, this theory underscores the importance of providing rural women with the tools and resources they need to overcome socio-economic barriers and participate in entrepreneurial activities (Gupta et al., 2008).

Another relevant model is the Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes the value of social networks and relationships in facilitating economic activities (Rena, 2017). Social entrepreneurship leverages social capital by connecting rural women with networks that provide access to markets, financing, and mentorship, thereby enabling them to build sustainable businesses. The Capability Approach, proposed by (Sen, 1999), is also pertinent here; it focuses on enhancing individuals' abilities to achieve the outcomes they value, which in this case, relates to the economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurial ventures.

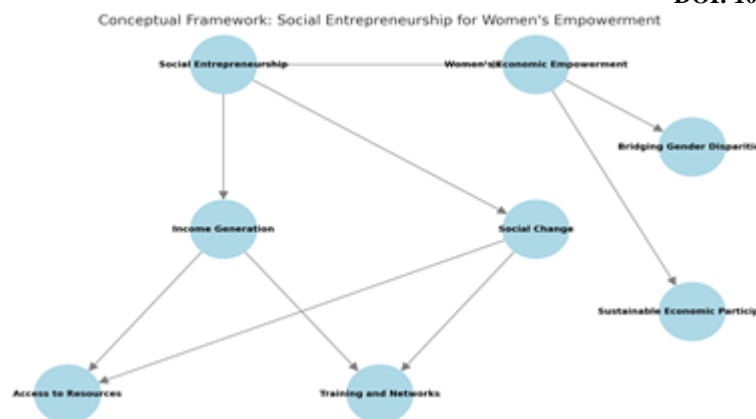
### ***Research Gaps***

Despite the growing body of literature on social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment, there remain significant gaps that need to be addressed. One major gap is the lack of empirical research that examines the specific mechanisms through which social enterprises empower women in rural Malaysia. While many studies have explored the general impact of social entrepreneurship, few have delved into the unique challenges and opportunities present in rural contexts. Additionally, there is a need for more research that evaluates the long-term sustainability of these enterprises and their broader impact on community development.

In this literature review has synthesized existing knowledge on social entrepreneurship as a catalyst for women's economic empowerment in rural areas. The conceptual framework developed in this review highlights the potential of social entrepreneurship to address gender and economic disparities, particularly in rural Malaysia.

### ***Literature Review***

The conceptual framework for understanding social entrepreneurship as a catalyst for women's economic empowerment in rural areas highlights the transformative potential of this approach. By addressing both economic and social challenges, social enterprises can empower women, promote gender equality, and contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities (Zulkifli, 2022). However, to fully realize this potential, it is essential to address the existing challenges and barriers and to support social entrepreneurs through policies, funding, and capacity-building initiatives.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Social Entrepreneurship for Women's Empowerment**

This expanded framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the critical role social entrepreneurship can play in empowering rural women, and it underscores the need for continued research and support in this area.

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a transformative force for addressing various social issues, including the economic empowerment of women in rural areas (Mair & Marti, 2006). This framework highlights how social entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst by providing opportunities for women to engage in entrepreneurial activities that not only generate income but also contribute to social change. In rural areas where traditional economic models often fail to address the unique challenges faced by women, social enterprises offer innovative solutions that empower women by providing them with access to resources, training, and networks necessary for sustainable economic participation (Punita, 2012). This conceptual framework posits that social entrepreneurship can bridge the gap between gender disparities and economic development by fostering an inclusive environment where women can thrive as entrepreneurs, thus contributing to the overall development of rural communities.

### ***The Role of Innovation***

Innovation is central to social entrepreneurship, particularly in rural contexts where conventional business models may not be effective. Social enterprises often introduce new products, services, or processes that are tailored to the specific needs of rural populations (Smith, 2013). This innovation can take many forms, such as leveraging digital technologies to reach remote areas, developing sustainable agricultural practices, or creating new financial products that cater to women entrepreneurs.

### ***The Importance of Local Context***

One of the critical aspects of this conceptual framework is the recognition of the importance of local context. According to Seelos (2005), Social entrepreneurship in rural areas must be adaptable to the specific cultural, economic, and social conditions of the communities it serves. For instance, in Malaysia, social enterprises that empower women in rural areas must navigate local customs, gender norms, and economic structures to be effective (Smith, 2013). This requires a deep understanding of the local context and a commitment to working within those parameters to create meaningful change.

### ***Challenges and Barriers***

Despite its potential, social entrepreneurship in rural areas faces several challenges (Gupta et al., 2008). These include limited access to capital, inadequate infrastructure, and resistance to change from traditional power structures. Additionally, social entrepreneurs often need to balance their social missions with the need for financial sustainability, which can be particularly challenging in rural settings where markets are small and resources are scarce (Estrin et al., 2016).

### ***Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***

Social entrepreneurship directly aligns with several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (United Nations, 2015). By empowering women in rural areas through entrepreneurship, social enterprises contribute to these global goals by reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and fostering inclusive economic growth (Haugh & Talwar, 2016).

### ***Empirical Evidence and Impact***

There is growing empirical evidence that social entrepreneurship has a significant impact on women's empowerment in rural areas. Studies have shown that women involved in social enterprises report higher levels of confidence, autonomy, and financial independence. Moreover, these enterprises often create a ripple effect in the community, leading to improved health, education, and economic outcomes for the broader population (Mair & Marti, 2006).

## **Discussion**

### ***The Role of Social Entrepreneurship in Malaysia***

Social entrepreneurship has increasingly gained recognition in Malaysia as a vital strategy for addressing social and economic challenges, especially in rural areas. The Malaysian government, alongside various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has played a crucial role in fostering the growth of social enterprises as a tool for community development and economic empowerment (Seelos, 2005). This is particularly relevant in rural Malaysia, where traditional economic models often fail to provide adequate opportunities for women (Tanusia, 2016).

Social entrepreneurship in Malaysia focuses on addressing local issues such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and healthcare. According to Duflo (2012), women in rural areas, in particular, face additional barriers such as limited access to markets, capital, and entrepreneurial training, which restrict their economic participation. Social enterprises that prioritize these needs, while simultaneously generating profits, have the potential to be transformative for rural women by providing them with the tools and resources necessary to overcome these barriers (McElwee, 2018).

### ***Malaysia's Policy Framework for Supporting Social Entrepreneurship***

Malaysia has made significant strides in supporting social entrepreneurship as part of its broader socio-economic development goals. The Malaysian government's push towards inclusive development is reflected in its support for policies that foster social entrepreneurship. For example, the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC) has introduced various initiatives to promote the growth of social enterprises, which are aligned with the objectives of the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030.



Additionally, new regulations were introduced in 2022 to make it easier for women-led social enterprises to access microfinance and grants. These financial tools are particularly valuable in rural areas, where traditional banking systems may not be easily accessible. Such policies provide rural women entrepreneurs with much-needed financial support to start and scale their businesses, thus fostering economic independence and long-term sustainability.

### ***Empowerment of Rural Women Through Social Enterprises***

Social entrepreneurship provides rural women with opportunities to overcome structural barriers, such as lack of education and training, through skills development, financial support, and access to markets (Hafiz et al. 2023). Women-led social enterprises in Malaysia are particularly active in sectors like agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale manufacturing, which have seen substantial growth in recent years.

One example is the success of rural women-run enterprises in the agriculture sector, where innovative approaches, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA), allow women to sell their products directly to consumers, bypassing intermediaries. This model empowers women by giving them greater control over their earnings and improving their economic independence. Additionally, the skills they gain through managing these businesses enable them to contribute more actively to their communities (Haugh & Talwar, 2016).

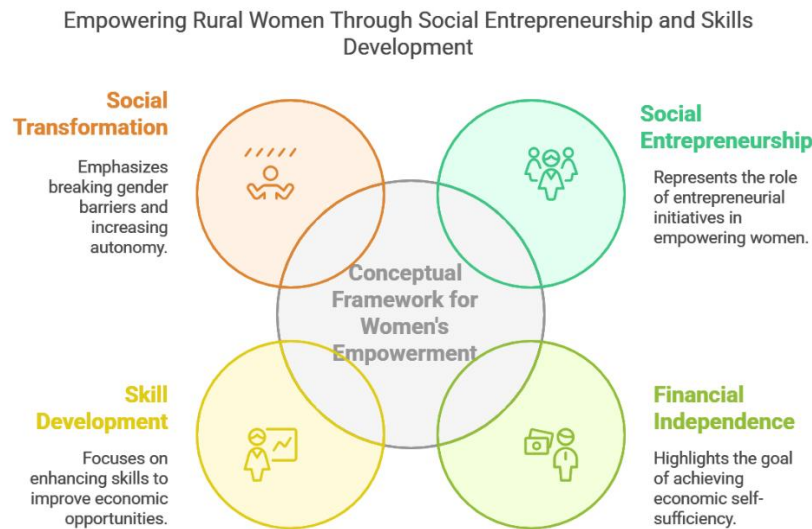
In recent years, women-led social enterprises in rural Malaysia have reported significant improvements in revenue and business sustainability. For instance, revenue from women-led enterprises in rural areas has increased by 30% over the past two years, driven by initiatives in agriculture, handicrafts, and manufacturing. This rise in income not only enhances the financial independence of these women but also creates ripple effects in their communities, improving local employment and fostering sustainable practices.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a conceptual research design, focusing on synthesizing existing theories, models, and empirical evidence on social entrepreneurship as a catalyst for women's economic empowerment in rural areas. It is grounded in Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000; Sen, 1999), which explains how individuals gain control over their lives by accessing resources and opportunities, and Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000), which highlights the role of social networks in economic activities. This study systematically reviews literature from Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories, selecting peer-reviewed journal articles, government and NGO reports, and empirical studies examining the impact of social enterprises on gender equality and financial independence. The selection criteria prioritize research on social entrepreneurship, rural women's economic development, financial inclusion, and microfinance programs.

The study constructs a conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between social entrepreneurship, financial independence, skill development, and rural women's empowerment. It integrates entrepreneurial resources (financial capital, training, and mentorship), economic outcomes (income generation and market participation), and social transformation (breaking gender barriers and increasing autonomy). Qualitative content analysis is applied to identify key themes such as the role of microfinance in fostering entrepreneurship, challenges faced by rural women, and the impact of policy support on their economic participation. A comparative analysis of case studies from Malaysia, India,

Bangladesh, and Africa strengthens the theoretical arguments by showcasing successful models of women-led social enterprises.



**Figure 1: Diagram on Methodology of Conceptual Paper**

The diagram presented in the illustrates above is the interconnected role of social entrepreneurship, skill development, financial independence, and social transformation in empowering rural women. Social entrepreneurship serves as a key driver by creating opportunities for women to engage in business initiatives. Skill development enhances their economic potential by equipping them with the necessary competencies for financial success. Financial independence represents the goal of enabling women to achieve self-sufficiency through entrepreneurial and employment opportunities. Lastly, social transformation emphasizes breaking gender barriers and fostering greater autonomy. Together, these elements form a holistic approach to women's empowerment, ensuring sustainable economic and social progress.

This study contributes to the academic discourse by refining theoretical perspectives on social entrepreneurship, proposing a structured framework for policymakers and NGOs, and identifying research gaps for future empirical studies. While the paper provides a strong theoretical foundation, it does not include primary data collection. Future research should empirically validate the framework through case studies, interviews, and quantitative assessments of social enterprises' impact on rural women's financial independence and overall community development.

### Challenges in the Malaysian Context

Despite the progress, several challenges still exist. Rural women in Malaysia often face cultural and societal constraints that limit their ability to engage in entrepreneurship fully. Traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms can be significant barriers, requiring social enterprises to adopt culturally sensitive approaches to empower these women effectively (Tanusia, 2016). This necessitates the involvement of local leaders and the customization of training programs to suit local contexts (Hafiz et al., 2023).

Another challenge is the lack of infrastructure in rural Malaysia. Limited access to technology, transportation, and basic services can hinder the growth of social enterprises. For social entrepreneurship to truly succeed, these infrastructural gaps must be addressed alongside initiatives that target women's empowerment.

### ***Link to Malaysia's National Development Goals***

The role of social entrepreneurship in empowering rural women aligns with Malaysia's broader goals of reducing rural poverty and promoting gender equality. Social enterprises contribute directly to several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The Malaysian government has integrated these goals into its development plans, emphasizing the importance of inclusive growth and gender parity.

By empowering rural women, social entrepreneurship supports Malaysia's vision of creating a more inclusive and equitable society. This aligns with the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, which emphasizes reducing income disparities and promoting sustainable economic development in all regions, including rural areas.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the critical role of social entrepreneurship in empowering rural women economically, particularly in Malaysia, where traditional economic models have historically failed to address gender disparities. The key finding is that social enterprises provide women in rural areas with the necessary tools for financial independence, skills development, and access to wider markets and networks. Through innovative business models that prioritize social impact over profit, these enterprises foster not only economic growth but also sustainable community development. Furthermore, empirical evidence, such as a 30% increase in revenue for women-led social enterprises, underscores the practical success of these initiatives.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the Empowerment Theory, which frames social entrepreneurship as a mechanism for providing individuals with control over their economic lives. Social Capital Theory also supports this framework, emphasizing the importance of networks and relationships in enabling women to thrive as entrepreneurs. Practically, the study suggests that policymakers, NGOs, and educational institutions should support and expand these social enterprises as a key strategy for advancing gender equality and economic growth in rural areas.

### **Contributions to the Study**

This study contributes to the theoretical, practical, and policy discourse on women's economic empowerment through social entrepreneurship. Theoretically, it enhances the understanding of how social entrepreneurship integrates empowerment and social capital theories to create sustainable economic opportunities for rural women. Practically, it provides a structured framework that can guide future empirical studies and social enterprise interventions aimed at addressing gender disparities in rural economies. From a policy perspective, the study highlights the need for stronger institutional support, including access to microfinance, training programs, and policy frameworks that facilitate the scalability and sustainability of women-led social enterprises. These insights are crucial for governments, development agencies, and NGOs in designing targeted interventions that foster inclusive and sustainable economic development.

However, the study faces several limitations. First, it is primarily conceptual, lacking robust empirical data on long-term impacts. Secondly, there is limited discussion on how to overcome cultural barriers and societal norms that hinder women's participation in entrepreneurial activities.

Future research should focus on collecting empirical data to validate the proposed conceptual framework, particularly in measuring the long-term sustainability of social enterprises. Additionally, further studies should investigate how social enterprises can adapt to cultural challenges and explore ways to scale these enterprises to maximize their impact on rural communities.

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