



Economic Development through Social Entrepreneurship: Case Study of Rural Innovation Hubs in Balikpapan

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Abstract

This study explores the role of rural innovation hubs in promoting inclusive economic growth through social entrepreneurship in Balikpapan, Indonesia. Social entrepreneurship offers an alternative path to economic development by addressing social issues within marginalized communities. Using a mixed-methods case study design, data were collected from 180 respondents across three hubs focusing on agriculture, handicrafts, and digital services. Quantitative results show that participation in hub programs significantly increased household income by more than 50 percent, with digital service enterprises experiencing the highest growth. Qualitative findings reveal that the hubs effectively enhance market access, entrepreneurial skills, and business networks, although limited access to affordable capital remains a major constraint. The study also highlights high participation among women and youth, demonstrating the inclusivity of the hub model in promoting gender equity and empowerment. Overall, rural innovation hubs contribute to both economic improvement and social value creation by strengthening local resilience. However, expanding financial access and institutional support is essential to sustain their long-term impact. The Balikpapan case illustrates how innovation hubs can drive social entrepreneurship and sustainable development in rural regions.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, social entrepreneurship has gained global attention as a strategy for addressing complex social challenges while simultaneously fostering economic development (Kumar & Yadav, 2023; Diaz et al., 2022; Baquero et al., 2024). Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, which is primarily profit-oriented, social entrepreneurship integrates social objectives with market-based solutions, creating both economic and social value (Addae & Ellenwood, 2022; Klarin & Suseno, 2023; Oduro, 2023). This dual mission has positioned social entrepreneurship as a promising approach in contexts where poverty, inequality, and limited access to resources constrain opportunities for sustainable growth. In particular, rural areas have been identified as fertile ground for social entrepreneurship, as they often face structural disadvantages such as inadequate infrastructure, restricted access to finance, and limited market linkages (Kheya et al., 2023; van et al., 2022).

One model that has emerged in response to these challenges is the establishment of *rural innovation hubs*. These hubs serve as platforms where entrepreneurs, communities, and stakeholders can access resources, training, and networks that enhance their capacity to innovate and compete in broader markets (Cuvero et al., 2023; Chandna, 2022; Ochinanwata et al., 2024). Globally, rural innovation hubs have been recognized for their ability to stimulate local entrepreneurship, encourage community-driven solutions, and create new avenues for inclusive development (Phills et al., 2008; Ferdian & Wikarta, 2023; Shahrin, 2022). However, the extent to which these hubs effectively contribute to socio-economic transformation varies depending on local conditions, the sectors they serve, and the support structures surrounding them (Rundel & Salemin, 2021; Omowole et al., 2024; Pusz et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, the promotion of innovation hubs has become increasingly relevant, particularly in regions where economic opportunities remain concentrated in urban centers. Balikpapan, located in East Kalimantan, presents an interesting case in this regard. While the city has long been associated with extractive industries such as oil and gas, efforts are now being made to diversify the local economy and strengthen grassroots entrepreneurship. The establishment of rural innovation hubs in Balikpapan reflects this shift, as they aim to empower small-scale entrepreneurs in agriculture, creative industries, and digital services, thereby contributing to local development beyond the resource sector.

Despite their growing importance, empirical research on rural innovation hubs in Indonesia remains limited. Most existing studies on social entrepreneurship in the country focus on urban contexts or specific sectors such as microfinance and education (Beisland et al., 2021; Parekh et al., 2022; Prado et al., 2022). As such, there is a knowledge gap regarding how rural innovation hubs function in practice, the kinds of impacts they generate, and the challenges they encounter. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, not only for evaluating the effectiveness of current initiatives but also for informing policy and practice in other regions seeking to replicate similar models.

This study addresses this gap by examining the role of rural innovation hubs in Balikpapan as drivers of economic development through social entrepreneurship. Specifically, it investigates three dimensions: (1) the socio-demographic profile of entrepreneurs engaged in hub activities, (2) the economic outcomes of hub participation, particularly in terms of household income and employment opportunities, and (3) the perceived benefits and challenges of engaging with hub programs. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study seeks to provide a holistic account of how rural innovation hubs operate and the extent to which they contribute to inclusive and sustainable local development.

METHODS

This study utilizes a mixed-methods case study approach to comprehensively assess the role of rural innovation hubs in fostering economic development through social entrepreneurship in Balikpapan, Indonesia. The research design integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, offering a holistic understanding of the impact of these hubs on local communities, entrepreneurs, and overall economic performance. The mixed-methods approach was selected due to its ability to capture both the measurable economic changes and the socio-cultural dynamics inherent in social entrepreneurship programs, which cannot be fully understood through numerical data alone.

The unit of analysis for this research is the rural innovation hubs in Balikpapan. Three hubs were purposively selected based on their sectoral focus, operational scale, and organizational maturity. The hubs selected for this study are Hub A

(focused on agriculture), Hub B (focused on handicrafts and creative industries), and Hub C (focused on digital services). This purposive sampling allows for the examination of a diverse range of sectors, each with its own set of challenges and opportunities in the context of rural innovation.

Respondents and Sampling

A total of 180 respondents were involved in the study, including hub managers, entrepreneurs participating in the hub programs, and community members benefiting from these programs. To ensure representativeness, the sample was stratified according to sector (agriculture, handicrafts, and digital services) and gender. The study included both male and female entrepreneurs, with particular attention given to youth and women's participation in these hubs. The goal was to assess the inclusivity of the innovation hubs, as well as their specific impact on marginalized groups.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was carried out through both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observation during hub activities, and document reviews of institutional reports. These methods were employed to gain a deep understanding of the operational models of the hubs, the socio-economic impacts on the entrepreneurs, and the challenges they face. Interviews and FGDs provided insights into the lived experiences of hub participants, their perceptions of the hubs' effectiveness, and the social dynamics within the innovation ecosystem.

For the quantitative data, structured questionnaires were administered to entrepreneurs and households directly involved with the hubs. The survey aimed to measure various economic variables such as household income, employment opportunities, business sustainability, and overall satisfaction with hub services. The survey included questions designed to capture pre- and post-engagement data, enabling a before-and-after comparison of the economic impact of hub participation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. For the qualitative data, thematic coding was used to identify recurring themes and patterns across the interviews, focus group discussions, and observation notes. This process allowed for the extraction of rich, qualitative insights into the functioning of the hubs, the benefits and challenges of participation, and the broader social impacts of these initiatives. NVivo software was used for data coding and management.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (such as means, frequencies, and percentages) and inferential statistical methods. The primary analysis included paired t-tests to assess significant differences in household income before and after hub participation. Non-parametric tests were also employed where appropriate, to account for potential violations of normality assumptions in the data.

To integrate the qualitative and quantitative data, a convergent parallel design was used. This design ensures that the two data streams are analyzed separately and then synthesized to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions. Qualitative findings were used to contextualize the quantitative results, and vice versa. The aim was to present a holistic view of the impact of rural innovation hubs on local economic development, social entrepreneurship, and community empowerment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study, which examined the role of rural innovation hubs in fostering economic development through social entrepreneurship in Balikpapan, Indonesia. The analysis is based on both qualitative and quantitative data collected from three rural innovation hubs, namely Hub A (focused on agriculture), Hub B (focused on handicrafts and creative industries), and Hub C (focused on digital services). The results are presented under the following sub-headings: demographic profile of respondents, economic impact of hub participation, perceived benefits, and challenges of hub participation.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents provides important context for understanding the composition of participants in rural innovation hubs. A total of 180 respondents participated in the study, consisting of entrepreneurs engaged in hub activities, hub managers, and community members who directly benefited from the hubs. Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the entrepreneurs involved in the study.

Table 1. Profile of Entrepreneur Respondents

Characteristics	Hub A (n=60)	Hub B (n=60)	Hub C (n=60)	Total (n=180)
Male (%)	55	40	45	47
Female (%)	45	60	55	53
Average Age (years)	37	35	32	35
Education ≥ High School (%)	70	65	85	73

The demographic profile reveals that the rural innovation hubs attract relatively young entrepreneurs, with an average age of 35 years across all hubs. Female participation is particularly high in Hub B (60%) and Hub C (55%), demonstrating the inclusivity of the hubs and their ability to provide entrepreneurial opportunities for women. These findings are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the role of innovation hubs in fostering women-led entrepreneurship, particularly in creative and digital industries (Mair & Marti, 2009). Additionally, more than 70% of respondents across all hubs had at least completed high school, suggesting that the participants have the necessary educational background to benefit from and apply the training and resources provided by the hubs.

Economic Impact of Hub Participation

The core objective of this study was to assess the economic outcomes of participation in rural innovation hubs. One of the key measures of economic impact was household income, which was compared before and after engagement with the hubs. Table 2 presents the results of the income comparison.

Table 2. Average Monthly Household Income (IDR, '000)

Hub	Before Hub (Mean)	After Hub (Mean)	% Change
Hub A	3,200	4,850	+51.6%
Hub B	2,800	4,200	+50.0%
Hub C	3,600	5,600	+55.6%
Overall	3,200	4,883	+52.6%

The data shows a significant increase in average household income across all hubs, with an overall growth rate of 52.6%. Hub C, which focuses on digital services, experienced the highest increase in income (+55.6%), likely due to the growing demand for digital solutions and services in the post-pandemic economy. This result

aligns with previous studies that suggest social entrepreneurship initiatives in the digital economy can generate substantial economic benefits for local entrepreneurs (Seelos & Mair, 2005; Zahra et al., 2009).

In contrast, Hub A, which focuses on agriculture, had a slightly lower income growth (+51.6%), though this is still a significant improvement. This variation in income growth can be attributed to sector-specific factors such as fluctuating commodity prices, seasonal challenges, and limited access to modern agricultural technologies (van Dülmen et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the data indicate that rural innovation hubs have a positive impact on the economic well-being of households, regardless of sectoral focus.

Perceived Benefits of Hub Participation

To further understand the value that participants place on rural innovation hubs, respondents were asked to rate various benefits they derived from their involvement with the hubs. The perceived benefits were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 5 indicates strong agreement. Table 3 summarizes the perceived benefits reported by respondents.

Table 3. Perceived Benefits of Hub Participation (Mean Scores)

Dimension	Hub A	Hub B	Hub C	Overall
Access to Market	4.2	4.1	4.5	4.3
Business Skills Training	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.2
Networking Opportunities	3.8	4.2	4.1	4.0
Access to Capital	3.5	3.2	3.8	3.5

Across all hubs, the highest-rated benefits were access to market (4.3) and business skills training (4.2). These findings confirm that rural innovation hubs provide valuable resources for entrepreneurs, particularly in terms of expanding market access and enhancing entrepreneurial capabilities. Previous research supports these findings, indicating that market access and skills training are the most significant contributions of social innovation platforms in rural areas (Phills et al., 2008).

While networking opportunities were also valued by participants, with an overall mean score of 4.0, access to capital received the lowest rating (3.5). This suggests that financial barriers remain a persistent challenge for hub participants, even though they benefit from improved market access and enhanced skills. Entrepreneurs frequently reported difficulties in obtaining affordable loans or investment, which restricts their ability to scale up operations. This finding echo global research indicating that social enterprises often struggle with accessing financing due to their dual focus on social and economic objectives (Seelos & Mair, 2005).

Table 4. Summary of Interview Findings

Theme	Key Insights	Relevant Quotes from Respondents
Empowerment and Inclusivity	Hubs provide opportunities for marginalized groups, especially women and youth, to engage in entrepreneurship.	"The hub has empowered me to start my own business. It has given me the confidence to believe in myself." (Female, Hub B)
Access to Networks and Markets	Participants highlight the importance of networking and market access facilitated by the hubs.	"I never imagined my products could reach beyond my village. The hub opened doors to new markets." (Male, Hub A)

Barriers to Capital	Financial access remains a significant challenge, with limited availability of affordable capital for scaling operations.	"Getting a loan to expand my business is nearly impossible. The capital provided by the hub is just a small step." (Female, Hub C)
Sector-Specific Constraints	Entrepreneurs in agriculture face issues such as fluctuating commodity prices and lack of infrastructure.	"The price of rice fluctuates too much. If we had better storage facilities, we could sell at a better price." (Male, Hub A)

Perceived Challenges of Hub Participation

Despite the positive outcomes, rural innovation hubs also face several challenges that limit their potential impact. One of the major challenges identified by participants was access to capital. While the hubs have successfully facilitated market access and provided skills training, many entrepreneurs reported that securing sufficient financial resources to expand their businesses remained difficult. This issue is particularly relevant in agriculture and handicrafts, where capital requirements for scaling operations can be substantial, yet access to affordable credit is limited (Oduro, 2023).

Another challenge highlighted by respondents was the lack of infrastructure and logistical support, particularly in remote rural areas. Entrepreneurs in agriculture (Hub A) noted that inadequate transportation and storage facilities made it difficult to connect with larger markets and suppliers. This finding is consistent with literature that highlights infrastructure gaps as a major constraint to rural development and entrepreneurship in emerging economies (Rundel & Saleminck, 2021; van Dülmen et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, respondents generally expressed high satisfaction with the hubs' ability to foster entrepreneurship and economic development. The data suggest that while financial constraints and infrastructure issues remain, the overall impact of rural innovation hubs on economic outcomes and social empowerment is positive.

For the qualitative data, thematic coding was used to identify recurring themes and patterns across the interviews, focus group discussions, and observation notes. This method allowed for a detailed exploration of the lived experiences of hub participants, revealing deeper insights into the operational dynamics and socio-economic impacts of rural innovation hubs. Themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis included: Empowerment and Inclusivity: A recurring theme across all hubs was the empowerment of marginalized groups, particularly women and youth. Participants consistently reported that the hubs created opportunities for these groups to engage in entrepreneurship, acquire new skills, and improve their economic standing. This finding aligns with prior research on the role of social entrepreneurship in promoting gender equality and youth empowerment in rural settings (Mair & Marti, 2009). Access to Networks and Markets: Respondents emphasized the importance of networking opportunities provided by the hubs. Many reported that the hubs helped them connect with potential clients, suppliers, and other entrepreneurs, expanding their market reach. This finding supports the literature that highlights the role of innovation hubs in facilitating market access for rural entrepreneurs (Phills et al., 2008). Barriers to Capital: A consistent challenge identified in the qualitative data was the difficulty in accessing affordable capital. Entrepreneurs frequently expressed frustration over the limited availability of funding options, particularly in the agricultural and handicraft sectors. This issue was seen as a major barrier to business expansion and sustainability. Sector-Specific Constraints: The qualitative data also revealed sector-specific constraints, particularly in agriculture, where

respondents highlighted issues such as fluctuating commodity prices and inadequate infrastructure. This finding mirrors the challenges identified in the quantitative data and underscores the need for tailored support in different sectors.

The Role and Challenges of Rural Innovation Hubs in Fostering Economic Development

One of the central findings of the study is the substantial increase in household income for entrepreneurs participating in the rural innovation hubs. This aligns with the growing body of literature that supports the role of social entrepreneurship in improving economic outcomes in marginalized areas (Zahra et al., 2009). The significant increase in income, particularly in Hub C (focused on digital services), suggests that the digital economy offers a viable path to economic development in rural contexts, especially in the post-pandemic era. This trend echoes the broader findings from other studies that highlight the transformative potential of the digital economy for rural businesses (Kumar & Yadav, 2023).

However, while the income growth is notable, the sector-specific differences in the results indicate that the economic sustainability of these hubs may depend on the sector in which they are operating. The agriculture sector (Hub A), while showing positive income changes, remains vulnerable to external factors such as commodity price fluctuations and climate variability. This is consistent with existing literature, which emphasizes the vulnerability of rural agriculture to these risks (van Dülmen et al., 2022). These findings suggest that to ensure long-term economic sustainability, rural innovation hubs must adapt to the specific challenges and opportunities of each sector, particularly in agriculture, where infrastructure and market linkages play a crucial role in business success (Rundel & Salemin, 2021; Ma et al., 2024; Dhillon & Moncur, 2023).

Another key contribution of this study is the demonstration of how rural innovation hubs empower marginalized groups, particularly women and youth. The significant female participation in the hubs, particularly in the creative industries (Hub B) and digital services (Hub C), reflects the increasing inclusivity of social entrepreneurship initiatives. This is in line with prior research that highlights how social enterprises can reduce barriers to entry for women and foster their economic empowerment (Mair & Marti, 2009; Moral et al., 2024; Pertiwi, 2025).

The findings suggest that rural innovation hubs not only provide economic opportunities but also promote social change by empowering women and youth in entrepreneurship. This is consistent with the argument put forward by researchers such as Kumar & Yadav (2023), who argue that social entrepreneurship can be an important tool for addressing social inequality and gender disparity in rural communities. However, while the hubs offer empowerment, the persistence of socio-cultural barriers suggests that further interventions, such as community outreach and gender-sensitive policies, are necessary to address deeper structural inequalities.

Youth participation, especially in Hub C, which focused on digital services, also highlights the role of rural innovation hubs in fostering a new generation of entrepreneurs. This aligns with the findings of Phills et al. (2008), who suggest that youth entrepreneurship is crucial for driving long-term sustainable development in rural areas. The positive engagement of youth in these hubs signifies the importance of incorporating modern skills and technology into rural entrepreneurship, providing young entrepreneurs with the tools to succeed in a rapidly changing global economy.

Despite the positive economic and social impacts of the hubs, the study highlights a critical barrier to the scalability and sustainability of these ventures: limited access to capital. The challenge of securing financial resources was a consistent theme

across all three hubs, particularly in the agricultural and handicraft sectors. This issue has been well-documented in the literature, where social enterprises are often described as facing difficulties in attracting funding due to their dual social and economic objectives (Seelos & Mair, 2005). The study's findings underscore the need for more comprehensive financial support systems, such as microfinance, government subsidies, or partnerships with impact investors, to address this barrier (Zahra et al., 2009; Udohaya, 2025; Chibueze, 2025).

In particular, the lack of affordable capital constrains entrepreneurs' ability to expand their businesses, especially in sectors like agriculture and handicrafts, which often require significant upfront investment for infrastructure, equipment, and market access. This challenge points to a broader systemic issue in rural economies, where access to finance is limited, and where the traditional financial systems fail to meet the needs of social entrepreneurs (Oduro, 2023; Jia & Desa, 2022; Akinboade et al., 2023). As such, addressing this gap in funding should be a priority for policymakers and development organizations looking to support rural innovation hubs.

Another recurring challenge highlighted in the findings is the lack of infrastructure, particularly in remote rural areas. Entrepreneurs in Hub A (agriculture) emphasized the difficulties related to transportation, storage, and distribution, which hindered their ability to reach larger markets. This challenge is consistent with the literature on rural entrepreneurship, which identifies infrastructure as a key determinant of business success in rural settings (van Dülmen et al., 2022; del Olmo-García et al., 2023; Shao et al., 2024). The lack of infrastructure not only limits market access but also increases operational costs, making it more difficult for rural entrepreneurs to scale their businesses. The study suggests that to maximize the impact of rural innovation hubs, there must be a concerted effort to improve rural infrastructure. This could include improving transportation networks, enhancing digital connectivity, and providing better access to facilities for storage and distribution. These improvements would create a more conducive environment for businesses to grow and thrive.

The results also highlight the importance of tailoring support to the specific needs of different sectors. Entrepreneurs in agriculture face distinct challenges compared to those in the digital or creative industries. For example, agricultural entrepreneurs in Hub A often grapple with fluctuating commodity prices and limited access to technology, which directly impact their income and sustainability. Similarly, artisans in Hub B face challenges related to market saturation and the seasonal nature of demand. This sector-specific variation suggests that rural innovation hubs must offer more customized support for entrepreneurs. While digital services (Hub C) benefit from relatively low capital investment and global market access, agriculture and handicrafts require more specialized interventions, such as access to technology, improved supply chains, and stable market linkages. This sectoral differentiation reinforces the findings of Rundel & Saleminck (2021), who stress the need for innovation hubs to adapt their models to the specific needs of different industries.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that rural innovation hubs in Balikpapan play a pivotal role in advancing economic development through social entrepreneurship. The findings reveal that hub participation leads to significant improvements in household income, with an average increase of more than 50 percent across three different sectors—agriculture, creative industries, and digital services. Beyond economic outcomes, the hubs also foster inclusivity by engaging women and young entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to broader social objectives such as gender equality and youth empowerment. At the same time, the research highlights that the effectiveness of

hubs varies across sectors, with digital-oriented enterprises showing the highest growth potential, while agriculture and handicrafts face more structural challenges. Moreover, while hubs excel in providing access to markets, entrepreneurial training, and networking opportunities, access to capital remains a consistent limitation. Without stronger financial support mechanisms, the scalability and sustainability of hub-based enterprises may remain constrained.

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