

Strengthening Human Resource Capacity as the Foundation for Sustainable Community Service

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: <i>Received: 26 June 2026</i> <i>Revised: 10 July 2026</i> <i>Accepted: 20 July 2026</i> Keywords: <i>Human resource capacity, community empowerment; community service; sustainable development; community participation</i> This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license. Copyright © 2026 by Author. Published by Yayasan Muktahidin Sajimah Selong (Musa Foundation), Indonesia.	Community service is one of the implementations of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, which aims to improve the quality of life of the community through various empowerment programs. However, many community service programs still face sustainability issues because they are more oriented toward short-term assistance rather than systematic community capacity building. This article aims to develop a conceptual framework regarding human resource (HR) capacity building as the foundation for the sustainability of community service programs. The research employs a library research approach with a qualitative descriptive design, involving a review of various scientific articles, books, reports from international institutions, and relevant research findings on capacity building, community empowerment, collaborative governance, and sustainable community development. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis through a process of identifying, classifying, synthesizing, and interpreting various concepts and research findings. The results of the study indicate that the sustainability of community service is shaped by five interrelated main dimensions: competence, self-reliance, local leadership, community participation, and systemic sustainability. These five dimensions form a system that enables communities to manage resources, strengthen institutions, build collaborations, and maintain the sustainability of programs independently after the mentoring period ends. This article proposes the Integrated Sustainable Human Resource Capacity Building Model as a conceptual framework that integrates these five dimensions into a comprehensive human resource capacity-building model. This model is expected to serve as a reference for universities, the government, and stakeholders in designing community service programs that are more participatory, adaptive, and sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

Human resource (HR) capacity building has become one of the central pillars of sustainable community development. Over the past two decades, the paradigm of community service has gradually shifted from a charity-based approach toward an empowerment-based approach that positions communities as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries of development. This transformation is closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), all of which emphasize human capacity development, community participation, institutional strengthening, and collaborative governance as essential prerequisites for achieving sustainable development (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2024).

Despite this paradigm shift, many community service and empowerment programs implemented by universities, governments, and non-governmental organizations continue to face significant challenges in sustaining their long-term impacts. Most

initiatives remain heavily focused on infrastructure development, short-term training, technology transfer, and financial assistance without systematically strengthening local human resource capacities. Consequently, many community-based innovations gradually disappear once external facilitators withdraw, leaving communities dependent on outside support and unable to independently manage development initiatives. This condition suggests that sustainable community development depends not merely on material resources but fundamentally on the capacity of local communities to organize, innovate, make strategic decisions, and sustain development through strong local institutions and leadership.

The importance of human resource capacity building has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Existing studies can generally be classified into four major streams. First, studies on community capacity building emphasize that sustainable community development largely depends on strengthening local competencies, institutional learning, and community resilience. Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024), through a systematic review of 21 community empowerment programs, found that successful community development is determined by four interconnected components: capacity building, self-reliance, active participation, and the integration of local knowledge into development processes. Their study argues that capacity building should be understood as a continuous learning process rather than a series of short-term technical training activities (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). Likewise, Lobo et al. (2022) identified five essential practices for developing sustainable community capacity, namely place-based learning, social connectedness, local leadership, regenerative organizations, and environmental stewardship. These findings indicate that community capacity extends beyond individual competencies and encompasses institutional and social dimensions that support long-term development (Lobo et al., 2022). Furthermore, Wahyuli et al. (2024) reported that limited training opportunities, weak leadership regeneration, and inadequate organizational governance remain significant barriers to effective human resource development in community organizations, emphasizing the need for holistic and continuous capacity-building strategies (Wahyuli et al., 2024).

Second, studies on community participation and collaborative governance highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement throughout the development process. Harley and Clark (2025) argued that sustainable development requires governments, universities, civil society organizations, and local communities to develop collaborative governance capacities capable of addressing increasingly complex societal challenges (Harley & Clark, 2025). Similarly, Agustina et al. (2025) found that collaborative governance significantly enhanced the effectiveness of community-based environmental programs by promoting facilitative leadership, institutional flexibility, and strong social capital. Their findings demonstrate that community participation is not merely an implementation strategy but a critical mechanism for strengthening local ownership and ensuring program sustainability (Agustina et al., 2025).

Third, studies on local leadership and institutional development emphasize the strategic role of grassroots leaders in sustaining community transformation. Radiansyah and Anugrah (2025) demonstrated that successful community empowerment is influenced by adaptive implementation strategies, continuous organizational learning, participatory leadership, and effective local governance. Their study suggests that local leadership functions as the primary driver connecting community capacity with

sustainable institutional development (Radiansyah & Anugrah, 2025). Similarly, Dipa et al. (2025) found that participatory governance strengthens community sustainability through transparent leadership, institutional accountability, and cross-sector collaboration, enabling local organizations to become more adaptive and resilient in responding to social changes (Dipa et al., 2025).

Fourth, studies on sustainable community development increasingly emphasize transformative capacity rather than conventional project sustainability. Frantzeskaki et al. (2025) introduced the Butterfly Model of Transformative Capacity, identifying six interconnected capacities—ideational, institutional, adaptive, experimental, holistic leadership, and co-creation—as fundamental drivers of sustainable transformation. Their study argues that long-term sustainability depends not only on available resources but also on communities' abilities to continuously innovate, collaborate, and adapt to changing socio-environmental conditions (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025).

Although these studies have significantly advanced the understanding of community empowerment, several important research gaps remain. Most previous studies investigate competency development, community participation, local leadership, institutional governance, and sustainability as independent constructs. Limited attention has been given to integrating these dimensions into a comprehensive human resource capacity-building framework specifically designed for university community service programs. Consequently, higher education institutions still lack an integrated conceptual model that systematically explains how competency, self-reliance, local leadership, community participation, and systemic sustainability interact to produce long-term community empowerment outcomes.

Therefore, this article aims to develop an Integrated Sustainable Human Resource Capacity Building Model as a conceptual foundation for sustainable community service. Specifically, this study addresses three research questions: (1) What dimensions constitute sustainable human resource capacity in community service programs? (2) How do competency, self-reliance, local leadership, community participation, and systemic sustainability interact in strengthening community resilience? (3) How can these five dimensions be integrated into a comprehensive framework applicable to university-based community service initiatives?

This article advances three principal arguments. First, the success of community service should no longer be measured by the amount of assistance delivered but by communities' capacities to independently sustain development initiatives. Second, competency, self-reliance, local leadership, participation, and systemic sustainability represent five interconnected dimensions that collectively shape adaptive, resilient, and empowered communities. Third, universities should reposition community service from a project-oriented intervention toward a long-term capacity-building strategy by institutionalizing human resource development as the core mechanism for sustainable community empowerment. Based on these arguments, this article proposes an Integrated Sustainable Human Resource Capacity Building Model that synthesizes the five dimensions into a unified conceptual framework capable of guiding universities, governments, and development organizations in designing sustainable community service programs.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Human Resource Capacity Building

Human resource (HR) capacity building is recognized as a fundamental element of sustainable community development because it enables individuals, organizations, and communities to strengthen their abilities to identify local challenges, mobilize available resources, make strategic decisions, and sustain development independently (UNDP, 2023; OECD, 2024). Rather than focusing solely on technical training, contemporary capacity building encompasses knowledge enhancement, skills development, organizational learning, institutional strengthening, and adaptive capabilities that support long-term resilience (Harley & Clark, 2025; OECD, 2024). International organizations such as the OECD and UNDP emphasize that capacity development should integrate human competencies with institutional governance and collaborative learning to achieve sustainable development outcomes (OECD, 2024; UNDP, 2023).

Recent empirical studies consistently demonstrate that capacity building constitutes the cornerstone of successful community empowerment. Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024), through a semi-systematic review of 21 community empowerment programs, identified four major dimensions that determine successful empowerment: capacity building, self-reliance, community participation, and the integration of local knowledge into development processes (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). Likewise, Lobo et al. (2022) argue that sustainable community transformation depends on five interconnected practices, namely place-based learning, social connectedness, regenerative organizations, local leadership, and environmental stewardship (Lobo et al., 2022). Furthermore, competency-based capacity-building programs have proven effective in strengthening collaboration, organizational learning, and resilience across institutions dealing with sustainability challenges (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025; Harley & Clark, 2025). Based on these perspectives, human resource capacity building should be understood as a multidimensional process that develops not only individual competencies but also organizational capabilities and institutional resilience (OECD, 2024; Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). Within the context of community service, strengthening community capacity enables local actors to become active decision-makers, innovators, and managers of sustainable development rather than passive recipients of external assistance (UNDP, 2023; Harley & Clark, 2025).

Community Self-Reliance

Community self-reliance represents one of the principal objectives of community empowerment because sustainable development ultimately depends on communities' ability to manage their own resources and development processes (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). Contemporary empowerment literature defines self-reliance as the capability of communities to identify problems, utilize local resources, formulate collective decisions, and maintain development initiatives independently while remaining open to strategic external partnerships (UNDP, 2023; Dushkova et al., 2025). This perspective shifts community development from dependency-oriented interventions toward locally driven and endogenous development (OECD, 2024).

Recent studies indicate that self-reliance is closely associated with local ownership, adaptive learning, and community resilience. Dushkova et al. (2025) proposed the Tailored Empowerment Program (TEP), emphasizing that sustainable transformation requires awareness building, participatory learning, capacity development, and co-

creation between scientific knowledge and local wisdom (Dushkova et al., 2025). Their findings demonstrate that communities become more resilient when empowerment programs encourage communities to formulate their own long-term visions and actively participate in implementing contextualized solutions. Similarly, Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024) conclude that empowerment initiatives are more sustainable when communities possess greater autonomy, responsibility, and ownership over development processes (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024).

Therefore, self-reliance should not be interpreted as independence from external support but rather as the community's capability to transform external assistance into locally managed initiatives (OECD, 2024; UNDP, 2023). In university community service, strengthening self-reliance enables communities to sustain innovations beyond project completion and reduces long-term dependency on external facilitators (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024).

Local Leadership and Agent of Change

Local leadership has become an increasingly important topic in sustainable community development because grassroots leaders function as catalysts who mobilize collective action, strengthen institutional trust, and facilitate community learning (Harley & Clark, 2025; Frantzeskaki et al., 2025). Contemporary leadership perspectives emphasize that sustainable development requires leaders who are adaptive, collaborative, and capable of integrating diverse stakeholders into collective decision-making processes (Harley & Clark, 2025). Such leadership extends beyond administrative functions by fostering social innovation, organizational resilience, and long-term community transformation (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025).

Recent literature further highlights that leadership development should be integrated with community capacity building. Harley and Clark (2025) argue that achieving sustainable development requires cooperative governance capacities capable of coordinating multiple actors with different interests under conditions of uncertainty (Harley & Clark, 2025). Likewise, Frantzeskaki et al. (2025) emphasize that holistic leadership and co-creation constitute essential transformative capacities for sustainability transitions because they encourage innovation, institutional learning, and collaborative problem-solving across sectors (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025). Similar findings are reported by Lobo et al. (2022), who identify local leadership as one of the essential components of resilient community development (Lobo et al., 2022).

These findings indicate that community service programs should prioritize the identification and development of local leaders who function as change agents capable of maintaining community participation, institutional continuity, and adaptive learning after external interventions have ended (Harley & Clark, 2025; Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024).

Community Participation and Collaborative Governance

Community participation constitutes a core principle of sustainable community development because it encourages citizens to become active actors throughout the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of development programs (Zia ud din et al., 2023; OECD, 2024). Contemporary participatory approaches emphasize that meaningful participation strengthens community ownership, improves decision-making quality, and enhances accountability among stakeholders (UNDP, 2023; Harley & Clark, 2025). Consequently, participation is increasingly viewed as a governance mechanism

rather than merely community attendance during project implementation (Zia ud din et al., 2023).

The concept of collaborative governance has received growing attention as an approach to managing increasingly complex development challenges. Zia ud din et al. (2023) demonstrate that collaborative governance significantly improves public service delivery through institutional capacity building, including service capacity, evaluative capacity, and monitoring capacity (Zia ud din et al., 2023). Similarly, Harley and Clark (2025) argue that sustainable development requires governments, universities, private sectors, and communities to develop cooperative governance capacities capable of responding collectively to interconnected sustainability challenges (Harley & Clark, 2025). These findings are consistent with OECD (2024), which emphasizes that collaborative governance enhances policy effectiveness through stakeholder engagement and institutional coordination (OECD, 2024).

Accordingly, community participation and collaborative governance should be regarded as complementary processes. While participation promotes community ownership and inclusiveness, collaborative governance strengthens institutional coordination, resource mobilization, and shared decision-making, thereby increasing the long-term sustainability of community service initiatives (Zia ud din et al., 2023; Harley & Clark, 2025).

Sustainable Community Development

Sustainable community development refers to development processes that continuously improve community well-being while maintaining social, institutional, economic, and environmental resilience (United Nations, 2023; OECD, 2024). Recent sustainability scholarship increasingly argues that sustainable development depends not only on financial resources or infrastructure but also on communities' capacities to learn, innovate, collaborate, and adapt to changing circumstances (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025; Harley & Clark, 2025). Consequently, sustainability has shifted from project continuity toward transformative community capacity capable of generating long-term social change (OECD, 2024).

Recent studies reinforce this perspective. Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024) conclude that successful empowerment programs integrate capacity building, participation, self-reliance, and local knowledge to strengthen community resilience (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024). Likewise, Frantzeskaki et al. (2025) argue that sustainability transitions require co-creation, institutional innovation, adaptive governance, and holistic leadership that collectively enable communities to respond to emerging environmental and societal challenges (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025). These findings indicate that sustainable development should be understood as an integrated process of social learning rather than the completion of short-term projects (UNDP, 2023; OECD, 2024).

Based on the reviewed literature, sustainable community development is achieved when human resource capacity, self-reliance, local leadership, community participation, and institutional sustainability operate as an interconnected system (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024; Harley & Clark, 2025). Therefore, this study synthesizes these five dimensions into an Integrated Sustainable Human Resource Capacity Building Model, providing a conceptual framework for designing university community service programs that

generate sustainable and community-led development outcomes (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025; OECD, 2024).

METHOD

This study employs a library research approach using a qualitative-descriptive design. Library research is understood as a type of research conducted by collecting data and information from various documents, such as reference books, articles, journals, and previous research findings relevant to the issue under study (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). This approach was chosen because the focus of this article—namely, strengthening human resource (HR) capacity as the foundation for the sustainability of community service programs—is more appropriately examined through the review, synthesis, and critical analysis of relevant concepts, theories, and findings from previous research, rather than through the collection of primary data in the field. Through a literature review, researchers can gain a deep understanding of the research problem, supported by various scientific studies and research data from previous studies (Sari, 2021).

Literature review can also serve as a basis for strengthening the conceptual framework or for evaluating existing theories (Abdillah, 2021). The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include scientific journal articles, research findings, and community service reports that directly address the concepts of human resource capacity building, community empowerment, and program sustainability, while secondary sources include books, policy documents, and publications from relevant institutions that reinforce and supplement the discussion in the primary sources (Muhajirin, 2024). The use of these two types of sources is intended to ensure that the resulting study has a solid theoretical foundation while remaining relevant to the context of current community service practices.

The research process was conducted through several interconnected stages, namely the selection of a research topic, the exploration of information and assessment of the topic's feasibility, the determination of the study's focus, the collection of primary and secondary data sources, the analysis of data and reference sources, and the compilation and processing of research notes (Muhajirin, 2024). The research began with the selection of the topic of human resource capacity building in the context of sustainable community service, followed by an initial literature review to assess the availability and quality of supporting sources. The focus of the study was then set on five strategic indicators of human resource capacity building—namely, competence, autonomy, leadership, participation, and sustainability—which served as guidelines in the process of searching for and collecting literature. After the data was collected, the researcher conducted an in-depth review, noted key points, and classified the findings based on their relevance to each indicator, before finally synthesizing them into a coherent body of argumentation.

The data collection technique used was documentation, which involves searching for and compiling data from written documents such as scientific journals, books, and previous research reports (Nur & Azis, 2022). The data analysis technique employed was descriptive-qualitative content analysis—a method that systematically, objectively, and critically presents, compares, and interprets various concepts and findings from previous research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationships between competence, independence, leadership, participation, and sustainability in supporting the effectiveness of community service programs (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). To ensure the

accuracy of the study and prevent errors in data analysis, the researchers cross-checked sources and repeatedly reviewed the data to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings (Nur & Azis, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the results of a literature review, it was found that sustainable human resource capacity in community service programs is shaped by five interconnected dimensions: competence, autonomy, local leadership, community participation, and systemic sustainability. Competence has been shown to be impossible to build solely through short-term technical training; rather, it requires a continuous learning process, as emphasized in a systematic review of 21 community empowerment programs, which demonstrated that the success of community development is determined by the interconnection between capacity building, autonomy, active participation, and the integration of local knowledge (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024).

Autonomy, as one of these four components, is understood as a community's ability to manage resources and make development decisions autonomously, while local leadership has been shown to serve as the primary driver linking community capacity to sustainable institutional development through participatory leadership and ongoing organizational learning (Radiansyah & Anugrah, 2025). The dimension of community participation is also found to be not merely a program implementation strategy, but a critical mechanism that strengthens local ownership through collaborative governance, facilitative leadership, and strong social capital (Agustina et al., 2025), which is further reinforced by findings regarding the importance of institutional accountability and cross-sectoral collaboration in maintaining community sustainability (Dipa et al., 2025). The dimension of systemic sustainability was found to encompass broader institutional and social aspects, such as social connectedness, regenerative organizations, and environmental management (Lobo et al., 2022), as well as transformative capacity, which comprises six elements—ideational, institutional, adaptive, experimental, holistic leadership, and co-creation—that serve as the primary drivers of sustainable transformation (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the study's findings also reveal that weak leadership succession and inadequate organizational governance remain significant barriers to human resource development in many community organizations (Wahyuli et al., 2024). Overall, the findings of this study also confirm the existence of a research gap: most previous studies still treat these five dimensions as standalone constructs, resulting in very limited integration into a comprehensive conceptual framework for university-based community service programs.

Discussion

The above findings confirm that the failure of many community service programs to sustain their long-term impact is not due to a lack of material resources, but rather to a flawed approach that views human resource capacity as a collection of separate variables. Community service practices to date have tended to prioritize technical competencies as the sole indicator of success, even though research findings actually show that competencies without the reinforcement of local leadership will lose their driving force once external facilitators withdraw (Radiansyah & Anugrah, 2025). This phenomenon

aligns with findings from community-based participatory research studies, which identify that the sustainability of community capacity is actually most vulnerable during the post-program phase, when maintaining academic-community partnerships is no longer an institutional priority (Community Capacity Building and Sustainability, PMC, 2013, in a recent review of participatory research communities). Thus, the argument that the success of community service should be measured by the community's capacity for self-reliance—rather than by the magnitude of the assistance provided—gains strong empirical support from various cross-contextual studies.

A more nuanced analysis of the patterns of interaction among these dimensions reveals a relationship that is both hierarchical and cyclical, not merely linear. Competence serves as the initial capital that enables self-reliance to grow, but self-reliance itself will not endure without the institutionalization of participation that ensures the community's sense of ownership over the program (Agustina et al., 2025; Dipa et al., 2025). At this point, local leadership serves as the node connecting all these dimensions while also being the most vulnerable point in the capacity-building cycle, as weak leadership succession can undermine the competencies and autonomy that have been previously established (Wahyuli et al., 2024). This means that human resource capacity-building models that focus solely on one or two dimensions—such as competency training without accompanying leadership development and institutionalized participation mechanisms—carry a high risk of producing programs that appear statistically successful in the short term but fail to transform into self-sustaining development movements in the long term. The perspective of transformative capacity introduced through the Butterfly Model (Frantzeskaki et al., 2025) offers a critical contribution to conventional views on program sustainability.

Until now, sustainability has tended to be interpreted narrowly as the survival of a program after the end of support, whereas this model emphasizes that true sustainability lies in the community's capacity to continue innovating and adapting to dynamic socio-environmental conditions. This perspective is reinforced by recent studies on the role of universities as “living laboratories” in achieving the SDGs, which show that effective community engagement is built through the sustained integration of curriculum, research, and experiential learning—not through episodic community service projects (SDG4U Living Laboratories, 2025). In other words, systemic sustainability demands an epistemological shift from “sustainable programs” to “communities capable of transformation,” and it is this shift that has so far been overlooked by most community engagement practices in higher education. The implications of the three findings above underscore the urgency for higher education institutions to reposition community engagement from short-term, project-oriented interventions toward long-term, institutionalized capacity-building strategies.

The research gap identified in this study—namely, the lack of efforts to integrate competencies, self-reliance, local leadership, participation, and systemic sustainability into a single coherent framework—serves as a strong basis for the need for an Integrated Sustainable Human Resource Capacity Building Model. This model is relevant not merely as an additional conceptual framework, but as a corrective to the structural weaknesses that have long been inherent in community service practices—namely, the tendency to treat human resource development as a byproduct of activities, rather than as a core

mechanism that determines the success and sustainability of university-based community service programs.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that strengthening human resource (HR) capacity is the cornerstone of sustainable community service programs, rather than merely a complement to project-oriented activities. Based on a literature review, sustainable HR capacity is shaped by five interconnected dimensions—competence, autonomy, local leadership, community participation, and systemic sustainability—which together form a hierarchical yet cyclical capacity-building cycle: competence serves as the initial capital; autonomy grows through the institutionalization of participation; local leadership acts as both a connecting node and the most vulnerable point; and systemic sustainability serves as the ultimate goal, requiring transformative capacity rather than merely the survival of a program. These findings also confirm that weaknesses in one dimension—such as a lack of leadership renewal—can undermine achievements in other dimensions that have already been established. Consequently, the research gap regarding the lack of integration of these five dimensions into a coherent framework has led this study to conclude that there is a need for an Integrated Sustainable Human Resource Capacity Building Model for university-based community service programs.

Theoretically, this study contributes by offering an integrative framework that unifies constructs previously examined separately in the literature on community empowerment, while also encouraging universities, the government, and development organizations to reposition community service from short-term, project-oriented interventions toward long-term, institutionalized capacity-building strategies. Given that this study is a literature review and relies on conceptual synthesis without empirical field data, future research is encouraged to empirically test this framework—either through quantitative approaches to measure the strength of relationships between dimensions or through field case studies to capture the contextual dynamics of human resource capacity building across various types of communities and university community service programs.

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