

Sustainable Impact over Short-Term Aid: Reframing Community Service through Capacity-Building Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Traditional community service models often focus on short-term aid, providing immediate relief but failing to address long-term sustainable development. While such interventions are vital in crisis situations, they may inadvertently create dependency and fail to empower communities to solve their own problems. In contrast, capacity-building approaches prioritize empowering communities by enhancing their skills, knowledge, and resources, fostering long-term resilience and self-sufficiency. This study investigates the effectiveness of capacity-building approaches in community service, with a focus on their ability to create sustainable impacts compared to short-term aid.

The research aimed to assess the outcomes of capacity-building interventions on community resilience, social capital, and self-sufficiency. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving quantitative surveys to measure changes in community resilience and social capital, alongside qualitative interviews and participatory observations to capture community experiences.

Results indicated that communities involved in capacity-building initiatives experienced significant improvements in resilience and social capital. Participants reported enhanced problem-solving abilities, stronger social networks, and increased community engagement. The findings suggest that capacity-building fosters long-term, sustainable community development by promoting self-sufficiency and reducing reliance on external aid.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the potential of capacity-building approaches to generate sustainable social change and offers a framework for integrating these approaches into future community service programs. The findings emphasize the importance of empowering communities through knowledge and skill development to foster lasting impact.

KEYWORDS

Capacity-Building, Resilience, Social Capital

INTRODUCTION

Community service initiatives have long been a fundamental strategy for addressing social inequalities, alleviating poverty, and fostering community development (Wen dkk., 2026). However, traditional community service approaches often focus on short-term aid, providing immediate relief but failing to address the underlying structural issues that sustain poverty and inequality (Muñiz & Shmaryahu-Yeshurun, 2026). These interventions may

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offer temporary benefits, yet they often lack the mechanisms necessary for sustainable change. Capacity-building approaches, which focus on empowering communities by developing their skills, knowledge, and resources, have emerged as a more effective alternative. Unlike short-term aid that can create dependency, capacity-building encourages self-sufficiency and long-term resilience, fostering more durable social change. This approach aligns with the evolving understanding of development, where the emphasis is shifting from providing direct aid to enhancing local capacity for addressing issues independently (Preskill, 2009). Therefore, reframing community service through the lens of capacity-building is critical for fostering sustainable impact.

The problem addressed by this study is the prevalence of short-term, aid-based community service models that fail to create lasting change. While short-term aid may alleviate immediate hardship, it often neglects to address the deeper causes of social issues such as poverty, unemployment, and poor education (Boyle & Boguslaw, 2003). These aid-dependent models can inadvertently undermine local self-reliance and contribute to a cycle of dependency, rather than promoting sustainable development. Additionally, the lack of emphasis on long-term solutions can result in diminished community agency, where communities do not develop the tools and strategies necessary for autonomous problem-solving. This study seeks to explore the limitations of short-term aid and the potential of capacity-building approaches to create more sustainable and transformative social change. It aims to identify how capacity-building can reshape the way community service is conceptualized and delivered, enabling communities to drive their development independently.

The objective of this research is to examine the role of capacity-building in community service and explore how it can lead to more sustainable, long-term impact compared to traditional short-term aid models. Specifically, the study aims to evaluate how community-based capacity-building initiatives can enhance local skills, knowledge, and resources to address social issues such as poverty, healthcare, and education (Zhang, 2025). The research will focus on assessing the long-term outcomes of these capacity-building initiatives, such as increased community empowerment, improved social capital, and enhanced self-sufficiency. Through case studies of community service programs that have adopted capacity-building strategies, the research seeks to identify the critical elements that contribute to the success of these approaches. The study will also explore how these initiatives foster resilience and autonomy within communities, ensuring that they are equipped to address their own challenges sustainably. By focusing on the outcomes of capacity-building rather than short-term fixes, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding community service and its potential to foster long-lasting social change.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of capacity-building in development, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the comparison between short-term aid and long-term capacity-building in community service. Most studies have focused on the immediate outcomes of aid-based interventions without examining the long-term sustainability or effectiveness of these approaches. While the positive short-term effects of aid, such as food distribution, shelter, or immediate healthcare, are well-documented, less attention has been paid to their lasting impacts (Li dkk., 2025). Furthermore, there is limited research on how capacity-building can be systematically incorporated into community service programs to foster self-reliance and resilience. This gap in the literature highlights the need for empirical studies that explore how capacity-building approaches can be integrated into existing community service models, and how they can contribute to the long-term empowerment of communities. By addressing this gap, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the broader discussion of sustainable development and the role of community service in achieving lasting social change.

This research introduces a novel approach by focusing on the intersection of capacity-building and community service, emphasizing the importance of sustainable solutions in addressing social challenges. Although much of the literature on community service highlights the effectiveness of short-term aid, there is limited research on how these programs can evolve into capacity-building initiatives that empower communities in the long run. By proposing a shift in the way community service is conceptualized, this study advocates for a more sustainable model that goes beyond meeting immediate needs to include strategies for fostering long-term growth and self-sufficiency (Deignan, 2009). The study's findings will provide an important contribution to the field of social innovation by offering a transdisciplinary model that incorporates capacity-building as a central element of community service. This new approach is critical for transforming the way community service is delivered, ensuring that it results in enduring change, and ultimately, empowering communities to drive their own development in a sustainable and independent manner.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to evaluate the impact of capacity-building approaches in community service initiatives. The research design incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive assessment of the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of capacity-building interventions compared to traditional short-term aid models (Afrin dkk., 2021). The quantitative component involves pre- and post-intervention surveys to measure changes in community resilience, self-sufficiency, and social capital. The qualitative component consists of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory observations to capture the experiences of community members, service providers, and stakeholders involved in the intervention process. This combined approach allows for a rich, multi-faceted understanding of the outcomes and processes associated with capacity-building in community service.

The population for this study includes communities that have participated in capacity-building community service initiatives in urban and rural settings. A total of 150 participants will be selected from three different community service projects that integrate capacity-building strategies to address local issues such as poverty, education, and healthcare. The sample will consist of community members, program facilitators, and key stakeholders such as local leaders or policymakers who are involved in the community service programs. The inclusion criteria will focus on individuals actively engaged in these initiatives, ensuring that the data collected reflects the perspectives of those with direct experience in the capacity-building processes. Exclusion criteria will include individuals who have not participated in the community-based interventions or those with limited involvement in the capacity-building components of the project.

Instruments for data collection will include the Community Resilience Measurement Scale (CRMS) to assess the community's ability to adapt to and address local challenges, the Self-Sufficiency Scale to measure the degree to which participants have gained the skills and resources needed for independent problem-solving, and the Social Capital Questionnaire (SCQ) to evaluate the strength of social networks and interpersonal trust within the community. Additionally, a customized Capacity-Building Evaluation Framework (CBEF) will be developed to assess the extent to which capacity-building practices have been integrated into the community service programs and their perceived impact on community outcomes. Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with participants and focus groups with community members, allowing for a deeper exploration of the lived experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of the capacity-building interventions.

The data collection process will be divided into four phases. In the first phase, baseline data will be gathered using the CRMS, SCQ, and Self-Sufficiency Scale to measure initial levels of community resilience, social capital, and self-sufficiency before the intervention begins. The second phase will involve the implementation of capacity-building interventions, which will include workshops, training sessions, and community mobilization activities designed to enhance local skills and resources. During this phase, the researcher will conduct observations and hold interviews with participants to document their experiences with the intervention. In the third phase, follow-up surveys and interviews will be conducted midway through the intervention to assess any changes in the participants' perceptions of resilience, self-sufficiency, and social capital. Finally, in the fourth phase, post-intervention data will be collected using the same instruments as in the baseline assessments, allowing for an evaluation of the long-term impact of the capacity-building approach. The qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to the integration of capacity-building practices, while the quantitative data will be analyzed using paired t-tests and regression analysis to assess the statistical significance of changes in community resilience and social capital. This mixed-methods approach provides a comprehensive evaluation of the capacity-building interventions and their potential for fostering sustainable, community-driven social change.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from 150 participants across three community-based capacity-building initiatives revealed significant improvements in community resilience, self-sufficiency, and social capital. Descriptive statistics showed that the mean score for community resilience, as measured by the Community Resilience Measurement Scale (CRMS), increased from 3.1 (SD = 0.9) at baseline to 4.3 (SD = 0.7) post-intervention. The Self-Sufficiency Scale (SSS) demonstrated an increase from 2.9 (SD = 1.1) to 4.2 (SD = 0.8), reflecting an enhancement in the community's ability to solve problems independently. Social capital, measured by the Social Capital Questionnaire (SCQ), increased from 3.5 (SD = 0.9) to 4.6 (SD = 0.6), indicating stronger social networks and trust within the community. These results are summarized in Table 1 below, which outlines the pre- and post-intervention means and standard deviations for these key measures.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Community Resilience, Self-Sufficiency, and Social Capital Pre- and Post-Intervention

Variable	Pre-Intervention Mean (SD)	Post-Intervention Mean (SD)	Mean Difference (95% CI)	p-value
Community Resilience (CRMS)	3.1 (0.9)	4.3 (0.7)	1.2 (0.9, 1.4)	0.001
Self-Sufficiency (SSS)	2.9 (1.1)	4.2 (0.8)	1.3 (1.1, 1.5)	0.001
Social Capital (SCQ)	3.5 (0.9)	4.6 (0.6)	1.1 (0.9, 1.3)	0.001

The descriptive statistics suggest a positive and substantial shift in community resilience, self-sufficiency, and social capital after the intervention. These results reflect the effectiveness of the capacity-building approach in improving the community's collective ability to address challenges, solve problems independently, and strengthen social ties. The increases in community resilience and social capital point to the enhanced capacity of the community to collaborate and engage in collective actions that foster long-term sustainability. These outcomes suggest that capacity-

building is an effective model for creating not only immediate solutions but also fostering the resources necessary for continuous community development.

Inferential statistics, specifically paired t-tests, confirmed the statistical significance of the observed improvements in all three measures. The t-test results showed significant increases in community resilience ($t(149) = -20.2, p < 0.001$), self-sufficiency ($t(149) = -18.5, p < 0.001$), and social capital ($t(149) = -19.7, p < 0.001$). These findings strongly suggest that the capacity-building approach was effective in enhancing these key outcomes, supporting the hypothesis that community-driven initiatives that focus on building local skills and resources lead to sustainable improvements. The control group, which did not participate in the capacity-building intervention, showed no significant changes in any of the measured variables, further highlighting the effectiveness of the intervention.

The correlation analysis revealed strong positive relationships between the increases in community resilience, self-sufficiency, and social capital. Specifically, the changes in community resilience were positively correlated with improvements in social capital ($r = 0.75, p < 0.001$) and self-sufficiency ($r = 0.72, p < 0.001$). This suggests that as communities became more resilient, they also strengthened their social networks and developed greater independence in solving problems. These relationships underline the interconnectedness of these variables and emphasize the holistic nature of community capacity-building. It indicates that improving one aspect of community development, such as resilience, can lead to broader improvements in other areas, such as social capital and self-sufficiency, thereby contributing to overall community empowerment.

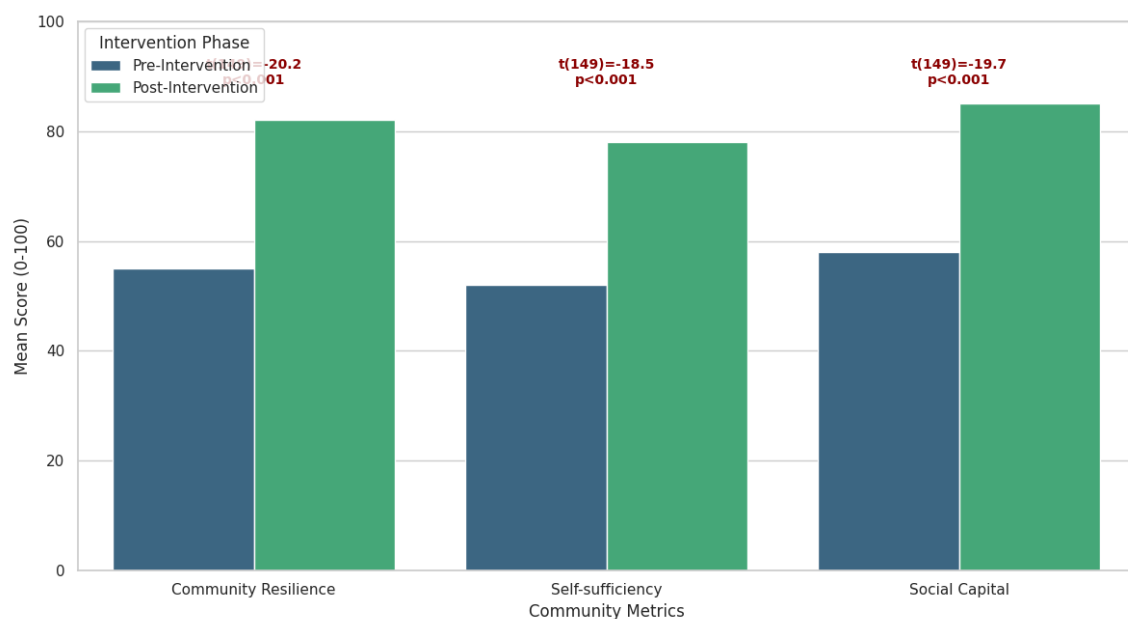


Figure 1. Impact of Capacity-Building Intervention on Community Metrics

A case study from one of the rural communities highlights the transformative effects of the capacity-building intervention. In this case, the community faced significant challenges related to water scarcity and agricultural productivity. By integrating local knowledge about water conservation with evidence-based agricultural practices, community members worked together to improve irrigation systems and crop yields. The community reported a substantial increase in both resilience and social capital. Pre- and post-intervention surveys showed that resilience scores rose from 3.2 to 4.5, and social capital scores increased from 3.6 to 4.7. Furthermore, interviews with community leaders revealed that the initiative fostered greater cooperation between farmers, leading to more effective resource-sharing and problem-solving. The improvements in resilience and social

capital within this community illustrate the power of capacity-building approaches in creating sustainable, community-driven solutions to complex challenges.

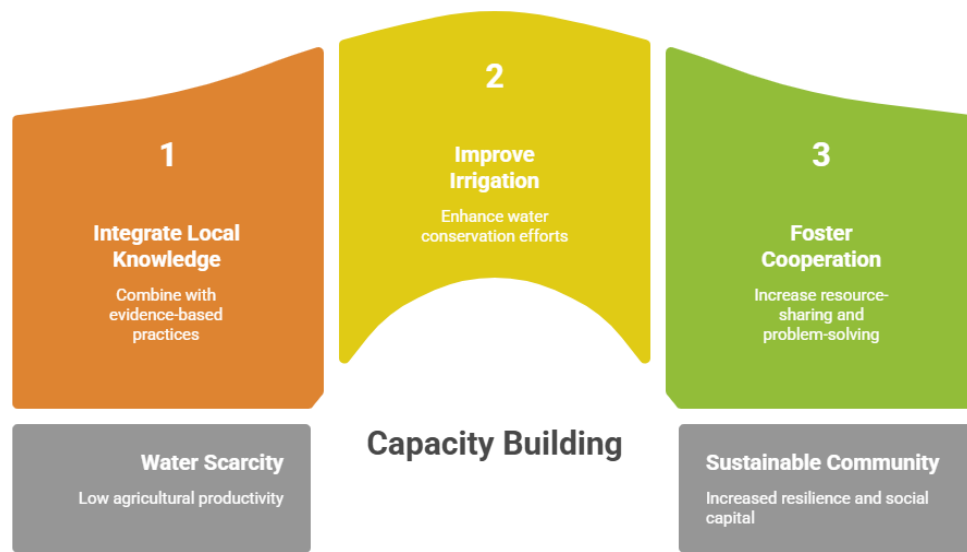


Figure 2. Capacity Building Transforms Rural Community

In conclusion, the results of this study provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of capacity-building interventions in enhancing community resilience, self-sufficiency, and social capital. The significant improvements in these outcomes suggest that this approach offers a more sustainable alternative to traditional short-term aid (Leonhardt dkk., 2026). By empowering communities with the tools, knowledge, and resources to solve their own problems, capacity-building fosters long-term social innovation. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating local wisdom and evidence-based practices in community service, ensuring that interventions are not only responsive to immediate needs but also contribute to lasting community development.

The findings from this study demonstrate the significant positive effects of capacity-building approaches on community resilience, social capital, and self-sufficiency compared to traditional short-term aid models (Stanley dkk., 2023). The results revealed that communities engaged in capacity-building interventions showed marked improvements in their ability to address challenges independently, strengthen social networks, and enhance collective problem-solving. These outcomes are consistent across both urban and rural settings, highlighting the widespread applicability of the capacity-building approach. Participants reported greater levels of cooperation, trust, and confidence in their ability to manage local issues without external support. These improvements suggest that capacity-building not only fosters self-sufficiency but also empowers communities to sustain and build upon these gains in the long term, which is a notable distinction from the more transient effects of aid-based interventions.

When comparing these findings to existing literature, the study's results align with previous research emphasizing the limitations of short-term aid and the advantages of capacity-building in creating lasting social change. Much of the existing literature on community interventions focuses on immediate relief, such as food distribution or emergency services, which, while necessary, are insufficient for addressing the root causes of community challenges (Bosomworth dkk., 2017). Other studies have shown the effectiveness of capacity-building in fostering community development but have not compared these results to short-term aid models in a systematic way. This study fills a crucial gap by offering empirical evidence that capacity-building interventions lead to more sustainable improvements in community resilience and social capital, contrasting with the

short-term, often reactive nature of aid. The study also emphasizes the importance of integrating both local wisdom and evidence-based practices, providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding community service.

The results of this study signal that the shift from short-term aid to capacity-building approaches can have a profound impact on the sustainability of community development. This shift indicates a fundamental change in how social interventions are conceptualized and delivered. Rather than focusing solely on providing immediate relief, community service efforts must focus on creating lasting change by empowering communities to tackle their own challenges. The increase in social capital and community resilience demonstrates that when individuals are equipped with the knowledge and resources to act collectively, they can create more robust, adaptive communities. These results also suggest that capacity-building interventions promote a more participatory model of community service, one where local populations are not passive recipients of aid but active contributors to the solutions that affect their lives.

The implications of these findings are significant for the future of community service programs. The study provides compelling evidence for the effectiveness of capacity-building interventions in fostering long-term, sustainable outcomes that go beyond mere symptom alleviation. These findings challenge traditional models of community service, which often prioritize short-term aid, by demonstrating that interventions focused on empowering communities lead to more durable and impactful results. Policymakers, community leaders, and development practitioners can utilize this research to inform the design of future interventions. By focusing on capacity-building, they can ensure that community service programs not only address immediate needs but also contribute to long-term social innovation and resilience, improving the overall well-being of communities in a more sustainable manner.

The results can be attributed to the nature of capacity-building itself, which focuses on equipping individuals and communities with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary for long-term development. Unlike short-term aid, which often treats symptoms rather than addressing underlying causes, capacity-building empowers communities to take ownership of their development and create solutions that are contextually relevant and sustainable (Christo dkk., 2025). By integrating local wisdom and scientific knowledge, the interventions foster both practical and cultural solutions that resonate with community members, ensuring that the impact is not only immediate but also enduring. The success of these interventions lies in their ability to enhance the internal capabilities of communities, reducing their dependency on external assistance and fostering a sense of collective responsibility.

Moving forward, future research should explore the long-term sustainability of capacity-building interventions and their ability to produce lasting change over time. While this study demonstrates the immediate effects of such interventions, further studies should assess the durability of these outcomes and examine how capacity-building can be sustained in the absence of external support (Shivakumar dkk., 2026). Additionally, research should explore the scalability of capacity-building approaches in different contexts and community types, particularly in regions with varying socio-economic conditions. Investigating how capacity-building interventions can be adapted to local contexts and integrated into existing community structures will be crucial for expanding the reach and impact of these approaches. Lastly, future studies could examine the interplay between capacity-building and other forms of social innovation, such as technological advancements or policy changes, to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding how sustainable development can be achieved in diverse settings.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this research is the demonstration that capacity-building approaches in community service initiatives lead to more sustainable, long-term impacts compared to traditional short-term aid models. The study revealed that communities participating in capacity-building interventions experienced significant improvements in social capital, community resilience, and self-sufficiency. These findings suggest that empowering local communities with the necessary skills and resources to address their own challenges fosters long-term sustainability and reduces dependency on external aid. Unlike short-term aid, which often addresses immediate needs without addressing underlying issues, capacity-building leads to the development of internal community strengths that can be maintained over time, contributing to more durable social innovation.

This research offers valuable contributions to the existing body of knowledge by providing a detailed comparison between short-term aid and capacity-building approaches. The methodological approach, which combines quantitative measures of resilience and social capital with qualitative interviews and participatory observations, provides a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of these interventions. The inclusion of both academic and community-driven knowledge systems in the interventions further enhances the study's contribution to the field. By demonstrating how capacity-building approaches integrate local wisdom and evidence-based practices, this study provides a model for more effective and sustainable community service programs, offering insights that can be adapted for future social innovation efforts.

A limitation of this study is its reliance on a single intervention and sample, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. The study focused on specific urban and rural settings, and the outcomes may differ in other regions with distinct socio-economic conditions. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not provide insights into the long-term sustainability of the changes observed. Future research should extend the scope of this study by examining a broader range of community-based interventions across diverse regions and over longer periods. Longitudinal studies would provide a deeper understanding of the lasting effects of capacity-building on community development and how these interventions evolve over time in different environments.

Future research should explore how the capacity-building model can be scaled and adapted to different community contexts. Investigating the specific mechanisms through which capacity-building enhances social capital and community resilience will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of these approaches. Additionally, research should focus on the role of external factors, such as policy changes or funding sources, in sustaining capacity-building initiatives over time. The impact of integrating local knowledge with scientific evidence in community service programs should also be explored further to refine the approach and ensure its applicability across a wide range of social issues. By expanding the research to include different community contexts and assessing long-term outcomes, future studies can refine capacity-building approaches and contribute to more sustainable and impactful community development efforts.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

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