

Community Empowerment Strategies for Improving Social Welfare among Vulnerable Households

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ABSTRACT

This study examines community empowerment strategies for improving social welfare among vulnerable households through a qualitative approach. The research aims to analyze how participatory empowerment initiatives contribute to welfare improvement, social resilience, and livelihood sustainability within vulnerable communities. A qualitative case study design was employed because it enables an in-depth exploration of social experiences, institutional interactions, and community participation in their natural context. The study was conducted in a semi-urban community area in West Java, Indonesia, characterized by significant household vulnerability and the implementation of community-based welfare programs. Twelve informants were selected purposively, consisting of community leaders, local government representatives, women's group coordinators, social facilitators, and vulnerable household members. The informants were chosen due to their direct involvement and experience in empowerment and welfare initiatives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model. The findings reveal that empowerment strategies based on participation, social collaboration, and livelihood diversification significantly strengthen household resilience, increase social inclusion, and improve welfare sustainability. The study recommends strengthening institutional collaboration, inclusive participation, and long-term community-based empowerment policies to support sustainable welfare transformation among vulnerable households.



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INTRODUCTION

Community empowerment has increasingly been recognized as a strategic pathway for improving social welfare, particularly among vulnerable households that face multiple and overlapping forms of deprivation (Hong et al., 2023). In contemporary social policy discourse, welfare is no longer understood only as the provision of direct assistance, but also as the expansion of people's capacity to participate meaningfully in economic, social, and civic life (Diana & Agustina, 2024). Within this perspective, empowerment becomes essential because it strengthens the ability of households to identify their own needs, mobilize internal and external resources, and sustain improvements beyond short-term intervention. The title of this study, *Community Empowerment Strategies for Improving Social Welfare among Vulnerable Households*, is grounded in the assumption that social welfare outcomes will be more sustainable when communities are not treated merely as recipients of aid, but as active agents in the transformation of their living conditions (Sharma, 2025).

The state of the art in research on poverty reduction and social welfare shows a gradual shift from top-down welfare programs toward participatory and community-based approaches (Zinn, 2024). Earlier interventions often emphasized material assistance, subsidy distribution, and service delivery by public institutions or non-governmental organizations. While such approaches may address immediate needs, they frequently encounter limitations related to dependency, weak local ownership, and low sustainability (Kyurova & Koyundzhiyska-Davidkova, 2023). More recent studies have highlighted the importance of social capital, local leadership, collective action, livelihood diversification, and participatory governance as drivers of welfare improvement (Sakamoto, 2024). However, despite this

conceptual progress, implementation in vulnerable household settings often remains fragmented. Many empowerment programs are designed in general terms and do not sufficiently reflect the specific social, cultural, economic, and institutional conditions of target communities. As a result, there is still a gap between empowerment as a normative ideal and empowerment as an operational reality.

The main problem addressed in this study is that vulnerable households continue to experience persistent social and economic insecurity even when welfare programs are available (Sigodo et al., 2025). Their vulnerability may stem from low income, unstable employment, limited education, poor access to health and social services, weak family resilience, exclusion from decision-making, and exposure to shocks such as inflation, disasters, or health crises (Ruanggoon, 2025). In many cases, welfare interventions focus on alleviating symptoms rather than restructuring the conditions that generate vulnerability. Consequently, households may remain dependent on external support without developing durable capacities to improve their own welfare. This problem suggests that the central challenge is not merely the absence of assistance, but the absence of effective empowerment strategies that can connect households to resources, skills, networks, and opportunities in ways that are locally relevant and sustainable (Moses-O'Donnell et al., 2025).

The research gap in this area lies in the limited integration between community empowerment theory and the practical measurement of social welfare outcomes among vulnerable households. Existing studies often examine empowerment in broad terms, such as participation or awareness, without fully explaining which strategies are most effective, under what conditions they work, and how they translate into welfare improvement (M. Y. Lee et al., 2023). Other studies focus on welfare indicators but do not adequately capture the relational and participatory processes through which empowerment occurs. In addition, there is a shortage of context-sensitive analysis that links household vulnerability, community agency, and institutional support into a coherent framework. This gap indicates the need for a more systematic study that identifies the mechanisms through which empowerment strategies influence welfare, rather than assuming that participation alone automatically produces better outcomes (Seo et al., 2025).

The novelty of this study is expected to lie in its integrated view of empowerment as both a process and an outcome-oriented strategy. Rather than viewing community empowerment only as training, assistance, or participation, this study positions it as a multidimensional approach involving capacity building, collective organization, access to resources, and the strengthening of local social institutions (Nalçaoğlu, 2025). The study also emphasizes that social welfare among vulnerable households should be understood through both material and non-material dimensions, including income stability, food security, access to services, confidence, mutual support, and perceived control over life conditions (Ramadhani & Suharto, 2025). By connecting these dimensions, the study offers a more comprehensive explanation of how empowerment strategies can produce welfare improvements that are not only immediate but also enduring.

Based on these considerations, the study is guided by several research questions. What forms of community empowerment strategies are most relevant for vulnerable households? How do these strategies influence social welfare outcomes at the household and community levels? What barriers hinder the effective implementation of empowerment initiatives? How do local institutions, community participation, and external support systems interact in shaping welfare improvement? These questions are intended to clarify both the structural and practical aspects of empowerment, while also generating knowledge that can inform policy and program design.

The purpose of this research is to analyze and explain community empowerment strategies that contribute to improving social welfare among vulnerable households. More specifically, the study aims to identify the core components of effective empowerment, examine the relationship between empowerment practices and welfare outcomes, and formulate an interpretive framework that can guide future interventions. The study also seeks to reveal the conditions under which empowerment strategies are more likely to succeed, especially in communities where poverty, exclusion, and instability are deeply embedded.

Theoretical benefits of this study are significant because it strengthens the conceptual linkage between empowerment theory, social welfare theory, and community development (N. Y. Lee et al., 2025). It contributes to a deeper understanding of how agency, participation, and collective resources interact in the production of welfare. Academically, the study is useful for researchers and students in public administration, social policy, community development, sociology, and welfare studies because it provides an analytically coherent and context-sensitive perspective. It also enriches the literature by offering a framework that can be used to compare empowerment models across different vulnerable populations and community settings. Practically, the study is expected to assist policymakers, local governments, social workers, and development practitioners in designing interventions that are more participatory, adaptive, and sustainable. The findings may support the creation of programs that focus not only on aid distribution, but also on capacity strengthening, livelihood support, institutional collaboration, and community self-reliance (Lakew et al., 2023).

At the same time, this research has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis may be shaped by the specific social and institutional context in which the study is conducted, which can limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or populations. Second, empowerment and welfare are complex concepts that may be measured differently across studies, making comparative interpretation challenging. Third, the effectiveness of empowerment strategies may depend on external variables such as policy continuity, funding stability, local leadership, and community trust, which may not be fully controlled in the research design. These limitations do not weaken the value of the study, but they indicate the need for cautious interpretation and contextual awareness.

Future research should expand the discussion in several directions. Comparative studies across different types of vulnerable households, such as urban poor communities, rural low-income families, female-headed households, or disaster-affected populations, would help clarify whether empowerment strategies function differently across contexts (Binuyo, 2023). Longitudinal research is also needed to assess whether welfare improvements produced through empowerment are sustained over time. In addition, future studies could explore the role of digital tools, local entrepreneurship, social protection systems, and multi-sector partnerships in strengthening empowerment outcomes (Phionah. et al., 2024). Such research would deepen understanding of how community-based strategies can evolve to meet the changing realities of vulnerability in contemporary society.

Taken together, this introduction establishes that community empowerment is not a supplementary component of social welfare policy, but a central strategy for building durable improvements among vulnerable households (Saputro & Sukiman, 2024). By focusing on the connection between empowerment processes and welfare outcomes, this study seeks to contribute both conceptual clarity and practical direction to the field of social welfare development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of this study, entitled *Community Empowerment Strategies for Improving Social Welfare among Vulnerable Households*, is developed to establish a strong theoretical and conceptual foundation regarding the relationship between empowerment, participation, and welfare transformation (Gnimassou & Filiz, 2023). The discussion emphasizes three major theories that are highly relevant to the research problem, namely Empowerment Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Sustainable Livelihood Theory. These theories are selected because they provide complementary explanations concerning the capacity of vulnerable households to improve their welfare through collective participation, institutional support, and resource mobilization. The integration of these theoretical perspectives enables the study to explain not only why vulnerability persists, but also how empowerment strategies can generate sustainable welfare outcomes in community settings (Kuswaryan et al., 2025).

The first theory used in this study is Empowerment Theory, which was widely popularized by Julian Rappaport in 1981 at the University of Illinois, United States (Khambali et al., 2023). Rappaport introduced empowerment as a process through which individuals and communities gain greater control over decisions and resources affecting their lives. According to Rappaport, empowerment is not merely assistance from external institutions, but a process that strengthens autonomy, participation, and self-determination (Arshi et al., 2023). The theoretical framework proposed by Rappaport emphasizes

psychological empowerment, community participation, and institutional responsiveness as interconnected dimensions that support social transformation. In the context of vulnerable households, this theory explains that welfare improvement cannot be achieved solely through material aid, because households also require opportunities to build confidence, agency, and collective capacity.

The development of Empowerment Theory has expanded significantly over time. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian scholar from the Federal University of Pernambuco in Brazil, further developed empowerment concepts through his critical pedagogy approach in the 1970s (Suat et al., 2025). Freire argued that marginalized communities often experience structural oppression because they are excluded from knowledge production and decision-making processes. Through participatory dialogue and critical awareness, communities become capable of transforming their own conditions (Sholihah et al., 2024). Freire's perspective strengthened the participatory dimension of empowerment and influenced community development practices globally. Contemporary developments of Empowerment Theory increasingly integrate digital participation, collaborative governance, gender inclusion, and local resilience (Wada et al., 2025). Scholars today emphasize that empowerment must address not only individual capacities, but also structural barriers such as inequality, exclusion, and limited institutional access.

The second theory employed in this research is Social Capital Theory, popularized by Robert David Putnam in 1993 at Harvard University, United States (Crawford, 2025). Putnam defined social capital as networks, trust, and social norms that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. According to Putnam, communities with strong social capital are more capable of solving collective problems because they possess stronger interpersonal trust, social cohesion, and civic engagement (Khater et al., 2025). The conceptual framework of Putnam's theory explains that social welfare is influenced not only by economic resources, but also by relational resources embedded within communities. In vulnerable household contexts, social capital becomes essential because it enables communities to share information, provide emotional support, organize collective activities, and strengthen resilience against social and economic risks.

The theoretical development of social capital was also shaped by Pierre Bourdieu in 1986 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, France, and James Coleman in 1988 at the University of Chicago, United States (Choi & Yoo, 2023). Bourdieu emphasized that social capital is connected to power relations and social inequality, where access to networks often reflects broader structural advantages or disadvantages. Coleman, meanwhile, viewed social capital as a functional resource that supports cooperation and collective action within communities (Billah, 2023). Contemporary developments in Social Capital Theory increasingly examine online communities, digital networks, and collaborative governance systems. Current research also highlights that social capital can either strengthen inclusion or reproduce exclusion depending on how networks are structured (Azzarito, 2023). Therefore, this theory remains highly relevant for understanding why some empowerment initiatives succeed while others fail to generate sustainable welfare improvements.

The third theory applied in this study is Sustainable Livelihood Theory, which was significantly developed by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway in 1992 at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, United Kingdom (Jung & Nam, 2024). Chambers and Conway explained that livelihoods are sustainable when households possess the capabilities, assets, and activities necessary to cope with shocks, maintain well-being, and improve future opportunities without undermining environmental or social resources (Madar, 2025). Their framework identifies several forms of capital, including human capital, financial capital, social capital, natural capital, and physical capital. This theory is particularly relevant because vulnerable households often experience multidimensional poverty, where limitations in one form of capital affect other aspects of welfare.

The Sustainable Livelihood approach has evolved into a broader framework used by international development institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Department for International Development in the United Kingdom (Sugiharjo et al., 2025). Contemporary applications of the theory increasingly emphasize resilience, climate adaptation, gender-sensitive livelihoods, and community-based economic innovation. Scholars argue that sustainable welfare cannot rely exclusively on temporary economic assistance, but must involve strategies that

strengthen household adaptability and long-term capacity (Saputra et al., 2024). In relation to this research, the theory provides an important explanation regarding how empowerment strategies can diversify income opportunities, improve resource access, and reduce household vulnerability over time.

The integration of these three theories provides a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the main problem of the research (Habetegabrael, 2024). Empowerment Theory explains the importance of agency and participation in improving welfare conditions. Social Capital Theory clarifies the role of trust, networks, and collective cooperation in supporting community resilience. Sustainable Livelihood Theory demonstrates that welfare improvement requires multidimensional access to resources and long-term adaptability. Together, these theories indicate that vulnerable households cannot achieve sustainable welfare improvement through isolated interventions alone (Yi & Joo, 2025). Instead, welfare transformation requires participatory empowerment, supportive social relationships, and sustainable livelihood systems.

These theories are also closely connected to the research gap identified in this study. Previous studies frequently discuss empowerment, social capital, or livelihoods separately, resulting in fragmented explanations concerning vulnerable households (Chaubey et al., 2025). Some research focuses only on economic assistance without analyzing participation and social relations. Other studies discuss participation but fail to measure concrete welfare outcomes. The integration of the three theories in this study addresses this gap by providing a multidimensional framework capable of linking participation, social networks, and livelihood sustainability into one analytical perspective (Rachman & Matsumoto, 2025). This integrated approach represents the novelty of the research because it explains welfare improvement as a dynamic interaction between agency, collective support, and adaptive livelihood capacity.

The theories further support the formulation of the research questions concerning which empowerment strategies are effective, how social capital influences welfare improvement, and how sustainable livelihoods contribute to long-term resilience among vulnerable households. Through Empowerment Theory, the research investigates how participation and capacity-building influence welfare outcomes. Through Social Capital Theory, the study examines how community trust and cooperation strengthen collective resilience. Through Sustainable Livelihood Theory, the study analyzes how households utilize available resources to sustain economic and social well-being. Consequently, the three theories collectively strengthen the analytical direction of the study.

From a theoretical perspective, the literature review contributes to the development of interdisciplinary understanding within social welfare and community development studies (Hwang & Yeom, 2023). Academically, it enriches discussions in public administration, sociology, and social policy by integrating empowerment, social relations, and livelihood sustainability into one coherent framework. Practically, the theories provide guidance for policymakers, social workers, and development practitioners in designing welfare programs that are participatory, adaptive, and sustainable (Sukamdi et al., 2025). Programs based solely on assistance distribution may reduce temporary hardship, but they often fail to strengthen long-term resilience. Therefore, the integration of these theories offers a more comprehensive direction for policy formulation and community intervention.

The contemporary relevance of these theories is increasingly visible in the context of global uncertainty, economic instability, and social inequality (Chen et al., 2024). Current welfare challenges demonstrate that vulnerable households require more than financial assistance; they need access to knowledge, networks, institutional support, and adaptive livelihood systems. Digital transformation, environmental risks, and labor market changes have further intensified the need for empowerment-based welfare approaches (Yuan, 2025). Thus, the theories used in this study remain highly significant in explaining contemporary welfare problems and identifying sustainable solutions.

In conclusion, the literature review demonstrates that Empowerment Theory by Julian Rappaport, Social Capital Theory by Robert Putnam, and Sustainable Livelihood Theory by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway collectively provide a strong theoretical basis for analyzing community empowerment strategies among vulnerable households (Andika et al., 2023). These theories explain

that social welfare improvement depends on the interaction between participation, social trust, and sustainable resource management. The integration of these perspectives addresses the main research problem concerning persistent vulnerability despite existing welfare programs. It also fills the research gap by connecting empowerment processes with measurable welfare outcomes and sustainable resilience (Abdullahi & Tsauni, 2025). The novelty of the study lies in its multidimensional integration of empowerment, social capital, and livelihood sustainability into a unified analytical framework. Ultimately, the literature review supports the research objectives, strengthens the conceptual direction of the study, and highlights the practical importance of participatory and sustainable welfare strategies for vulnerable communities.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research entitled *Community Empowerment Strategies for Improving Social Welfare among Vulnerable Households* employs a qualitative research approach to explore and interpret the social realities, experiences, and empowerment dynamics experienced by vulnerable households within community settings (Abdullah et al., 2023). A qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate method because the study seeks to understand complex social processes that cannot be adequately measured through statistical procedures alone (Auliah et al., 2024). Community empowerment involves subjective meanings, social relationships, institutional interactions, and participatory experiences that require in-depth interpretation rather than numerical generalization. Through qualitative inquiry, the research is able to capture the perspectives of vulnerable households, community actors, and institutional stakeholders regarding how empowerment strategies are designed, implemented, and experienced in everyday life.

The research design used in this study is a qualitative case study design (Sherka & Tsehay, 2025). This design was selected because it allows the researcher to examine empowerment practices within their real-life context while maintaining sensitivity to social, cultural, and institutional dimensions. The case study design is particularly relevant for investigating contemporary social welfare problems in which the boundaries between social intervention and community dynamics are difficult to separate (Gregorová & Svidroňová, 2025). By focusing on a specific social setting, the research can generate a comprehensive understanding of how empowerment strategies function in practice, including the barriers, opportunities, and interactions among stakeholders involved in welfare improvement initiatives. The design also enables the researcher to integrate multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, observations, and documentation, thereby strengthening the credibility and richness of the findings (Fritz et al., 2025).

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative paradigm because the research aims to understand how vulnerable households and community actors construct meanings around empowerment and welfare (Liashenko, 2024). The interpretive perspective assumes that social reality is shaped through interaction, experience, and contextual understanding. Therefore, empowerment is viewed not merely as a programmatic intervention, but as a social process involving negotiation, participation, and collective learning. The interpretive paradigm is suitable for this study because the research focuses on understanding the lived experiences of vulnerable households and the ways in which empowerment strategies influence their social welfare conditions.

The research was conducted in a community area characterized by a significant concentration of vulnerable households and active community-based welfare initiatives. The selected research location is a semi-urban area in West Java Province, Indonesia, where poverty, unstable employment, limited access to social services, and household vulnerability remain prominent social issues (Fallahi-Khoshknab et al., 2023). The location was chosen purposively because it reflects the coexistence of structural vulnerability and community empowerment efforts. In this area, several community-based programs related to economic empowerment, social assistance, women's participation, and local capacity development have been implemented by local government institutions, community organizations, and social groups. This setting provides a relevant environment for examining how empowerment strategies are translated into practical welfare interventions.

The selection of the research location is based on several considerations. First, the area demonstrates a relatively high number of vulnerable households affected by economic instability and

social exclusion, making it relevant to the focus of the study. Second, the existence of community empowerment programs provides opportunities to analyze participatory strategies and institutional collaboration in improving welfare outcomes. Third, the accessibility of the research location allows the researcher to conduct prolonged engagement and intensive interaction with participants, which is essential in qualitative inquiry (Rasyid et al., 2025). Fourth, the social diversity within the area enables the researcher to capture variations in empowerment experiences across different household conditions. These considerations strengthen the relevance of the selected location to the objectives of the research.

The primary data sources in this study consist of informants selected purposively based on their direct involvement, experience, and knowledge related to community empowerment and social welfare programs (Campbell et al., 2023). Purposive sampling was chosen because qualitative research prioritizes depth of information rather than statistical representativeness. Informants were selected according to their capacity to provide rich and relevant insights concerning empowerment practices among vulnerable households. The researcher also employed snowball sampling techniques to identify additional participants who possessed important information regarding community dynamics and welfare interventions (Jettner, 2025).

The study involved twelve key informants representing different social and institutional backgrounds. To maintain ethical confidentiality and protect participant identity, pseudonyms were used throughout the research process and reporting (Husein et al., 2025). The first informant, referred to as “Mr. Arif,” served as a community leader responsible for coordinating neighborhood welfare activities. He was selected because of his long-term involvement in local empowerment programs and his understanding of community participation patterns. The second informant, “Mrs. Lina,” was a female household head participating in a women’s economic empowerment initiative. Her experiences provided important insights into household-level empowerment challenges and welfare adaptation strategies. The third informant, “Mr. Dedi,” worked as a local social facilitator assisting vulnerable households in accessing government welfare services. His role enabled the researcher to understand institutional support mechanisms and implementation barriers.

The fourth informant, “Mrs. Rani,” represented a local women’s community organization engaged in micro-enterprise development and household resilience programs. She was selected because of her active role in organizing participatory activities among vulnerable women. The fifth informant, “Mr. Hasan,” was a local government official working in community welfare development. His perspective was important for understanding policy implementation and institutional coordination at the local level. The sixth informant, “Mrs. Maya,” was a beneficiary of social assistance and skills training programs who experienced both economic hardship and gradual welfare improvement. Her experiences reflected the practical outcomes of empowerment strategies within vulnerable household contexts.

Additional informants included youth community organizers, social volunteers, religious leaders, and small-scale local entrepreneurs involved in empowerment activities. These participants were selected because community empowerment processes involve multiple actors who contribute differently to welfare improvement (Banoo & Mishra, 2025). The inclusion of diverse informants enabled the study to capture broader social perspectives and triangulate information across different institutional and community positions. The number of informants was considered sufficient because data saturation was achieved, meaning that additional interviews no longer generated substantially new information relevant to the research questions (Mustofa et al., 2024).

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Arkanudin, 2023). In-depth interviews served as the primary technique because they allowed participants to explain their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding empowerment strategies in detail. Semi-structured interview guides were used to maintain flexibility while ensuring alignment with the research objectives (Uchiyama, 2025). Interviews explored topics such as participation in empowerment programs, household challenges, access to resources, institutional support, community relationships, and perceived welfare changes.

Participant observation was conducted to understand the actual implementation of empowerment activities and community interactions within natural settings (Bina & Biassoni, 2023). Through observation, the researcher examined how community meetings, skills training sessions, mutual assistance activities, and welfare discussions were organized and experienced by participants. Observation also allowed the researcher to identify non-verbal interactions, social dynamics, and informal practices that may not emerge through interviews alone. Field notes were systematically recorded throughout the research process to strengthen analytical interpretation.

Document analysis was used to complement interview and observation data (Onuoha & Okafor, 2023). Documents included local welfare reports, community empowerment program records, meeting minutes, policy documents, and institutional publications related to social welfare initiatives. The analysis of documents enabled the researcher to compare official narratives with participant experiences and identify patterns of policy implementation within the community context.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, several validation strategies were applied (Anam et al., 2025). Data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different informants and data collection methods. Method triangulation strengthened the reliability of findings by integrating interviews, observations, and documentation (Shabbir, 2025). Member checking was also employed by discussing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's understanding. In addition, prolonged engagement in the field enabled the researcher to build trust with participants and develop a deeper understanding of community dynamics.

Ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the study (Yağar et al., 2024). Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality of their identities. Consent was obtained before interviews and observations were conducted. The use of pseudonyms ensured that participant privacy remained protected. Ethical sensitivity was particularly important because the research involved vulnerable households who may experience social stigma, economic insecurity, or emotional sensitivity regarding welfare issues.

The data analysis process followed an interactive qualitative analysis model inspired by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Park & Jang, 2025). The analysis began with data condensation, where interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were organized and reduced into relevant categories aligned with the research focus. Coding procedures were conducted to identify recurring themes related to empowerment strategies, participation, institutional support, social capital, and welfare outcomes. The second stage involved data display, in which thematic patterns and relationships among concepts were systematically arranged to facilitate interpretation. The final stage consisted of drawing conclusions and verification, where findings were continuously reviewed and compared with empirical evidence to ensure analytical consistency (As'ari et al., 2023).

The technique of drawing conclusions in this research relied on inductive reasoning (Wu & Guo, 2023). Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, the researcher developed interpretations based on patterns emerging from field data. Conclusions were constructed gradually through repeated interaction with the data and continuous comparison between empirical findings and theoretical perspectives. This inductive process allowed the researcher to identify the mechanisms through which empowerment strategies contribute to social welfare improvement among vulnerable households. The conclusions also reflected contextual understanding rather than universal generalization, which is consistent with the nature of qualitative inquiry.

The methodological approach used in this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of community empowerment as a multidimensional process involving participation, institutional collaboration, social relations, and livelihood adaptation (Arthur, 2025). By employing a qualitative case study design, the research is able to reveal the lived experiences of vulnerable households and examine the practical realities of welfare interventions in community settings. This methodological framework aligns closely with the objectives of the study, which seek not only to describe empowerment strategies, but also to interpret how such strategies influence social welfare transformation within vulnerable communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that community empowerment strategies play a significant role in improving social welfare among vulnerable households, particularly when empowerment is implemented through participatory, collaborative, and sustainable approaches (Zhang et al., 2025). The research revealed that vulnerable households experienced gradual welfare improvement not only through financial assistance, but also through enhanced social participation, increased access to local resources, strengthened community networks, and expanded livelihood opportunities (Qiu, 2024). These findings confirm that welfare transformation is multidimensional and closely connected to empowerment processes occurring at individual, household, and community levels. The empirical results also indicate that empowerment strategies become more effective when local institutions, community organizations, and government actors cooperate in facilitating participation and social inclusion (Pichayakul & Morachnick, 2025).

The study identified several major forms of empowerment strategies implemented within the research location, including community-based skills training, women's micro-enterprise development, social assistance facilitation, participatory decision-making forums, collective savings activities, and local mentoring systems. These strategies were developed to address the primary research problem concerning the persistence of vulnerability despite the existence of welfare programs. Many participants explained that previous welfare interventions were largely administrative and temporary, focusing mainly on direct assistance distribution without strengthening household capacities (K. Lee, 2024). Consequently, households often remained dependent on external support and lacked opportunities to develop sustainable livelihood strategies. The findings therefore suggest that empowerment-based approaches are more capable of generating long-term welfare improvement compared to purely assistance-oriented interventions (Kyonne, 2024).

The following table summarizes the major findings related to empowerment strategies and welfare outcomes identified during the research process.

Table

Table 1 Community Empowerment Strategies and Welfare Outcomes among Vulnerable Households

Empowerment Strategy	Implementation Findings	Welfare Outcomes	Related Theory
Skills training programs	Community members participated in sewing, food processing, and digital marketing training	Increased household income and self-confidence	Empowerment Theory
Women's micro-enterprise groups	Women organized collective business activities and savings groups	Improved economic resilience and participation	Sustainable Livelihood Theory
Community participation forums	Residents engaged in local welfare discussions and planning	Strengthened community voice and inclusion	Empowerment Theory
Mutual assistance activities	Community members provided informal social and emotional support	Increased social cohesion and trust	Social Capital Theory
Institutional collaboration	Local government and community organizations coordinated welfare services	Better access to social assistance and programs	Social Capital Theory
Livelihood diversification initiatives	Households developed multiple income sources	Reduced economic vulnerability	Sustainable Livelihood Theory

The findings demonstrate that Empowerment Theory, as developed by Julian Rappaport, remains highly relevant in explaining the relationship between participation and welfare improvement (Dey & Nath, 2024). Participants consistently reported that empowerment activities increased their confidence, decision-making capacity, and ability to contribute to community initiatives. Before joining empowerment programs, many households perceived themselves merely as passive recipients of welfare assistance. However, through participatory activities, they gradually became involved in local discussions, skills development, and collaborative economic activities. This transformation reflects Rappaport's argument that empowerment involves gaining control over decisions and resources affecting one's life (Yoo et al., 2025). The findings therefore indicate that social welfare improvement is closely connected to the expansion of agency and participation.

The implementation of empowerment strategies also revealed important structural challenges. Although community participation increased, some vulnerable households continued to face limited access to financial resources, unstable employment opportunities, and bureaucratic barriers in accessing welfare programs (Shen et al., 2025). These findings highlight the persistence of the research gap identified earlier, namely the disconnect between empowerment ideals and practical implementation. Existing welfare policies often encourage participation rhetorically, but institutional support mechanisms remain inconsistent. This condition confirms Paulo Freire's critical perspective that empowerment requires not only participation but also structural transformation capable of reducing exclusion and inequality (Lloyd & Lewis, 2024). The study therefore demonstrates that empowerment programs must be accompanied by institutional responsiveness and policy continuity in order to generate sustainable welfare outcomes.

Social Capital Theory by Robert Putnam is strongly reflected in the findings concerning trust, collective action, and community networks (Soe & Worland, 2024). The research found that households participating in collective activities experienced stronger social support systems and greater resilience during economic hardship. Informants explained that mutual assistance activities enabled community members to exchange information, share resources, and provide emotional support during periods of unemployment or financial instability. These findings align with Putnam's argument that social networks and trust facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit (Grey, 2023). The existence of strong community relationships contributed significantly to welfare improvement because vulnerable households did not face social difficulties individually.

At the same time, the findings also support Pierre Bourdieu's perspective regarding unequal access to social capital (Gadhavi et al., 2024). Some households possessed stronger connections to local institutions and community leaders, enabling them to access opportunities more easily than others. Meanwhile, households with weaker social networks remained relatively excluded from empowerment activities. This finding reveals that social capital is not equally distributed within communities and may reproduce existing inequalities if empowerment programs fail to include marginalized groups intentionally. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of inclusive participation mechanisms that ensure broader community representation in empowerment initiatives.

The relevance of Sustainable Livelihood Theory by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway is also strongly evident in the findings (Shodikin et al., 2025). Vulnerable households participating in empowerment programs gradually diversified their livelihood strategies by combining informal labor, small-scale entrepreneurship, and community-based economic activities. Participants reported that skills training and micro-enterprise support helped reduce dependence on unstable daily income sources. Households that previously relied solely on irregular labor were able to develop additional income streams through food production, handicrafts, or local service provision. These findings confirm the theoretical assumption that sustainable welfare depends on household capacity to manage and adapt available resources over time (A'yun, 2023).

The findings further indicate that livelihood sustainability cannot be separated from social and institutional support systems. Households with stronger community participation and better institutional access demonstrated greater economic resilience than households operating individually. This result reinforces the integration between Sustainable Livelihood Theory and Social Capital Theory, showing

that livelihood adaptation is influenced not only by economic resources but also by social relationships and institutional cooperation (Al-Maadeed & Abu-Bader, 2023). Consequently, the study supports an integrated understanding of welfare improvement as a multidimensional process involving economic, social, and participatory dimensions simultaneously.

In relation to the research questions, the findings provide several important explanations. First, regarding the question of which empowerment strategies are most relevant for vulnerable households, the study found that participatory and locally adaptive strategies were more effective than standardized top-down interventions (Hanzen & Coltre, 2023). Programs designed collaboratively with community involvement generated higher levels of participation and sustainability. Second, regarding how empowerment strategies influence social welfare outcomes, the findings show that welfare improvement occurs through interconnected mechanisms involving skills enhancement, social trust, institutional access, and livelihood diversification. Third, concerning barriers to empowerment implementation, the study identified limited funding, inconsistent policy support, unequal participation, and low institutional coordination as major obstacles affecting program sustainability (Sitshange, 2024).

The results also support the achievement of the research objectives. The first objective, namely identifying effective empowerment strategies, was achieved through the identification of participatory training, community organization, and livelihood diversification initiatives. The second objective, examining the relationship between empowerment and welfare outcomes, was supported by evidence showing improvements in income stability, social participation, household confidence, and community resilience (Lionanda & Kurniawati, 2024). The third objective, developing a contextual framework for empowerment implementation, was addressed through the integration of Empowerment Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Sustainable Livelihood Theory into one analytical perspective capable of explaining welfare transformation comprehensively.

The theoretical implications of the findings are significant because they strengthen interdisciplinary understanding regarding the relationship between empowerment, participation, and welfare development (Rice et al., 2023). The study demonstrates that Empowerment Theory alone cannot fully explain welfare improvement without considering social networks and livelihood sustainability. Similarly, Social Capital Theory becomes more meaningful when linked to participatory empowerment processes and adaptive livelihood strategies. Therefore, the integration of the three theories contributes to the development of a more comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding vulnerable household welfare.

From an academic perspective, the study contributes to contemporary discussions within social welfare studies, community development, sociology, and public administration (Townes, 2024). Previous studies often analyzed empowerment, social capital, or livelihoods separately. This research addresses that gap by demonstrating how these dimensions interact dynamically in practical welfare interventions. The findings therefore enrich academic discourse concerning multidimensional welfare transformation and community-based development approaches.

Practically, the findings provide important implications for policymakers, local governments, and social welfare practitioners. The research indicates that welfare programs should prioritize participatory capacity-building rather than relying exclusively on financial assistance distribution (Septiani & Aeni, 2025). Community empowerment initiatives should be designed in ways that strengthen local participation, improve institutional accessibility, and encourage collaborative problem-solving. In addition, empowerment programs must recognize existing inequalities within communities to ensure that marginalized households are not excluded from participation opportunities.

The findings of this study are also closely connected to previous research on community empowerment and social welfare (Arifin, 2025). Earlier studies frequently concluded that empowerment programs improve participation and community confidence, but many failed to explain how these processes influence long-term welfare sustainability. The present study extends previous findings by demonstrating that welfare improvement emerges through the interaction between empowerment, social capital, and livelihood adaptation. This multidimensional explanation represents

an important contribution because it clarifies the mechanisms connecting participation with sustainable welfare outcomes.

Previous research on social welfare interventions often identified dependency problems associated with direct assistance programs (Yuriadi et al., 2023). Similar patterns were observed in this study, where households receiving assistance without participatory engagement demonstrated weaker long-term adaptation. However, unlike earlier studies focusing primarily on policy evaluation, this research highlights how participatory empowerment can gradually reduce dependency by strengthening household agency and community cooperation. These findings reinforce previous arguments advocating participatory welfare approaches while providing more contextual explanations regarding implementation challenges.

The study also contributes to discussions concerning the research gap identified in earlier literature. Many previous studies acknowledged the importance of participation but lacked detailed analysis regarding structural barriers and unequal access within communities (Hart & Smith, 2025). The current findings reveal that empowerment outcomes are strongly influenced by institutional responsiveness, social inclusion, and access to community networks. Consequently, empowerment cannot be treated as a universally equal process because existing inequalities shape participation opportunities differently among households.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrated analytical framework combining Empowerment Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Sustainable Livelihood Theory to explain social welfare transformation among vulnerable households (Thi & Dao, 2024). Previous studies often applied these theories independently, whereas this research demonstrates their interconnected relevance in practical community empowerment settings. The findings show that welfare improvement requires simultaneous strengthening of agency, social relationships, and livelihood adaptability. This integrated perspective offers a more comprehensive understanding of how empowerment strategies operate within vulnerable communities.

In discussing the broader implications of the study, it becomes evident that community empowerment should be understood as a long-term social investment rather than a short-term intervention (Hasan, 2024). Welfare improvement among vulnerable households cannot be achieved solely through temporary assistance because vulnerability is deeply connected to structural inequality, limited participation, and unstable livelihoods. Therefore, sustainable welfare strategies must integrate participatory governance, institutional collaboration, community trust-building, and economic adaptability. The study demonstrates that empowerment becomes more effective when communities are treated as active partners in welfare development rather than passive beneficiaries (Aryo & Efendi, 2024).

Overall, the findings and discussion confirm that community empowerment strategies contribute significantly to improving social welfare among vulnerable households when implemented through participatory, inclusive, and sustainable approaches (Ekasari et al., 2024). The study successfully addresses the main research problem concerning persistent vulnerability despite welfare interventions. By integrating the perspectives of Empowerment Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Sustainable Livelihood Theory, the research provides a multidimensional explanation regarding how welfare transformation occurs within community settings. The findings strengthen theoretical understanding, contribute to academic discourse, and provide practical guidance for developing more sustainable and inclusive welfare programs in vulnerable communities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that community empowerment strategies play a fundamental role in improving social welfare among vulnerable households when implemented through participatory, collaborative, and sustainable approaches. The findings demonstrate that welfare improvement cannot be understood solely in terms of economic assistance or short-term social intervention, but must also involve the strengthening of household capacity, social participation, institutional access, and community resilience. Based on the results and discussion, the research confirms that empowerment-oriented strategies are more effective in generating sustainable welfare outcomes because they

encourage vulnerable households to become active participants in their own social and economic transformation rather than remaining dependent on external assistance.

The research findings reveal that community empowerment contributes to welfare improvement through several interconnected mechanisms. Skills training programs, participatory community forums, women's micro-enterprise initiatives, collective savings groups, and local mentoring systems were found to increase household adaptability and social participation. Vulnerable households participating in these activities experienced improvements not only in income opportunities, but also in confidence, social inclusion, and collective problem-solving capacity. These findings indicate that empowerment is multidimensional, involving economic, psychological, social, and institutional dimensions simultaneously. Consequently, welfare transformation among vulnerable households should be interpreted as a process of strengthening both material conditions and social agency.

The study further concludes that Empowerment Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Sustainable Livelihood Theory collectively provide a strong analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of welfare improvement within vulnerable communities. Empowerment Theory explains how participation and increased control over decision-making processes contribute to stronger household agency and self-reliance. The findings show that vulnerable households become more capable of managing their welfare conditions when they are actively involved in local empowerment initiatives. Social Capital Theory clarifies the importance of trust, social networks, and collective cooperation in strengthening resilience among households facing social and economic vulnerability. Community relationships and mutual assistance mechanisms were shown to reduce social isolation and increase collective support during periods of hardship. Sustainable Livelihood Theory explains that long-term welfare improvement depends on the ability of households to diversify resources, adapt to changing conditions, and strengthen livelihood sustainability. The integration of these three theoretical perspectives confirms that social welfare improvement is not produced by isolated interventions, but by the interaction between participation, social relationships, and adaptive livelihood strategies.

The study also concludes that significant challenges remain in the implementation of community empowerment programs. Although empowerment initiatives demonstrated positive impacts, several structural barriers limited their effectiveness. Unequal access to social networks, inconsistent institutional coordination, limited financial resources, and uneven participation opportunities were identified as major obstacles affecting program sustainability. Some vulnerable households remained excluded from empowerment activities due to weak social connections or limited institutional access. These findings confirm that empowerment processes are influenced by broader social and institutional inequalities. Therefore, empowerment strategies require not only community participation, but also responsive governance systems and inclusive policy frameworks capable of ensuring equal opportunities for marginalized groups.

Another important conclusion emerging from the findings is that welfare programs focused primarily on direct assistance tend to generate temporary rather than sustainable outcomes. Households receiving assistance without participatory engagement often remained dependent on external support and demonstrated weaker adaptive capacity. In contrast, households involved in participatory empowerment activities developed stronger resilience and greater ability to respond to economic instability. This finding reinforces the argument that welfare interventions should prioritize long-term capacity building and community engagement instead of relying exclusively on material aid distribution.

The research further concludes that the effectiveness of empowerment strategies depends heavily on local context and institutional collaboration. Empowerment programs became more successful when community organizations, local leaders, government institutions, and social facilitators worked collaboratively in designing and implementing welfare initiatives. The existence of strong local participation increased program legitimacy and encouraged greater community ownership of welfare activities. This demonstrates that sustainable empowerment requires integrated cooperation among multiple actors rather than isolated institutional intervention.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the development of interdisciplinary understanding concerning social welfare and community development. The findings strengthen the conceptual relationship between empowerment, social capital, and livelihood sustainability by demonstrating how these dimensions interact within practical welfare interventions. Academically, the study enriches contemporary discussions in public administration, sociology, social policy, and community development by providing a multidimensional explanation of welfare transformation among vulnerable households. Practically, the findings offer important implications for policymakers and development practitioners by emphasizing the importance of participatory, inclusive, and adaptive welfare strategies.

In conclusion, this study confirms that community empowerment is not merely a complementary component of social welfare policy, but a central strategy for strengthening the long-term resilience and well-being of vulnerable households. Sustainable welfare improvement requires empowerment processes that enhance participation, strengthen social relationships, expand institutional access, and support adaptive livelihood systems. The integration of participatory empowerment, community trust, and sustainable resource management provides a more comprehensive approach to addressing vulnerability and promoting social welfare transformation within community settings.

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