

The Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies to Strengthen the Social Enterprise Resilience during Covid-19 Pandemic (A Case Study of Three Social Enterprise Organizations towards Community Empowerment in Indonesia)

Getar Hati

Department of Social Welfare, Ewha Womans University, 03760 Seoul, South Korea
getarhati@ewhain.net

Ratih Indraswari

Department of International Relations, Parahyangan Catholic University,
Bandung, Indonesia
ratih.indraswari@unpar.ac.id

Abstract

Social enterprise towards community empowerment are commonly developed as poverty alleviation strategies by combining community, corporates, and government strengths and initiatives. The development of social enterprise in Indonesia has rapidly grown over recent years. In the middle of covid-19 pandemic influences the uncertainty condition to keep the business able to survive. In this disadvantaged situation, many social enterprise organizations face vulnerability situations regarding problems and challenges that occurred. However, some social enterprises can survive by facing the challenges into opportunities. Thus, developing some strategies becomes the best choice for resilience. The study conducts a qualitative method by focusing on in-depth interviews by using interviews, literature studies, and social media documentation. This study aims to describe the challenges, opportunities, and strategies of the best practices from three social enterprise organizations in Indonesia. The finding reveals that multi-stakeholders including government, higher education institutions, media, other companies, and local communities finally able to encourage the social enterprise organizations in formulating and implementing the strategies to strengthen their resilience during the pandemic.

Keywords

Community Empowerment, Covid-19 Pandemic, Organization, Social Enterprise, Social Resilience

1. Introduction

Social enterprise emerged to address the pressing social challenges by targeting primarily the social impact rather than profit maximation. Organization Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) stated that it brings innovation in meeting social needs and operates on the basis of social inclusion and sustainable growth (OECD & European Commission 2013). A similar endorsement is given by the European Union arguing that social enterprise help in achieving wider social, environmental, and community objectives. It also creates jobs and supports democratic participation.

There is yet a single legal form on social enterprise, however, the European Commission refers to social enterprise to cover the following characteristic (European Commission & OECD 2015). First, the aim of commercial activity is to provide common good or societal objectives. Therefore, social innovation is a unique characteristic of this type of enterprise Second, the profit gained is reinvested to achieve the societal objectives. Lastly, the organization of social enterprise adopts a participatory principle that highlights democratic participation that focuses on social justice. These characteristics distinguished social enterprise from the rest and strengthen their valuable contribution toward social inclusion.

In Indonesia, social enterprise has been played as the third sector for strengthening the national economic and social condition. Also, social enterprise has significantly increased since the last decade after political regime reforms in 1999 as a mechanism to create a more significant opportunity for young people and empower rural communities (Pratono et al. 2016). Indonesia still does not have a firm regulation to define what social enterprise is and how to operate it. Commonly, in social enterprise, practices are treated the same (often blurred) with other business operations, including micro small and medium business, civil society organization (CSR) refers to *Yayasan* (foundation) that operates business activity, corporate social responsibility programs that initiate social enterprise in the local community, and cooperative.

Nevertheless, since 2015 the Government of Indonesia has tried to formulate a special regulation concerning social enterprise through Social Entrepreneurship Draft Bill by the People's Representative Council. It defines social enterprise as "a venture that has a vision and mission to solve problems and promote positive changes to the welfare of society and the environment through activities that have a measurable impact, and which reinvest the majority of its profit to support the mission". Even though the regulation has not been settled yet, the social enterprise has been significantly growing from 2012 to 2017. British Council (2018) estimates that Indonesia's number of social enterprises reached 342,025 organizations until 2017.

Moreover, based on the ages, young leaders dominate the social enterprise sector, showing that 46% of social enterprise leaders are aged 25-34 years old. Meanwhile, based on gender classification, the number of men and women-led social enterprises is nearly equal: 40% of the social enterprise organizations are led by women, men lead 41%, and both men and women lead 19%. However, in terms of employment and job creation, it shows 69% of the employment rate for women (British Council 2018). Regarding the support for social enterprise development in Indonesia, the government organization, the state-owned company, private sector, civil society, impact investors, higher education, and other elements have encouraged some strategies to develop the social enterprise by providing funds and program development assistance (Meisari et al. 2015; Pratono et al. 2016).

Social enterprise implementation in Indonesia has contributed to the nation's development, including providing job creation which shows the increasing rate of employment from 2016 to 2017 with data: 42% increase in total full-time employees and 26% increase in total part-time employees (British Council 2018). Also, social enterprise represents the strength of women's leadership and participation, whereas 40% of women held leadership positions British Council (2018). Specifically to community empowerment, the social enterprise also brings the enlightenment to strengthen women and vulnerable groups in the local community. For instance, the village-owned enterprise initiated by the government program has also encouraged women's more substantial roles and position in the social-economic sphere through various activities in village social and business networks and institutions. Through social enterprise programs, women can directly benefit both socially and economically, especially obtaining additional income for the family, leading to increased family welfare (Kushandajani 2019). Additionally, a social enterprise in the community enables the local community to develop the local identity and promote the local culture through product and marketing strategy. British Council (2020) evaluates that developing local cultural preservation and community identity as the means to boost the pride among the community.

In the middle of social enterprise growth in Indonesia, the covid-19 pandemic interrupts the uncertainty in economic and social situations. The pandemic has influenced various problems and challenges for social enterprise, including limited opportunity to run the business due to government restriction policy, unstable cash flow, limited opportunity for the employees to keep working, and limited access and skills to adapt to digital and technology (Weaver 2020; Farhoud et al. 2020). They were reflected in a survey of social enterprise in South-East Asia, South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe responding to the pandemics. It shows that they were more likely to reduce products and services (32%), temporarily closed (10%), and modify to adjust the physical distancing (55%). However, the respondents who are still surviving mention that they were forced to innovate with new products and services (44%); provide more products and services online (57%) (British Council 2018). In Indonesia's context, this challenging situation may influence job loss, poverty, and environmental risks (ILO, 2020). Social enterprises that work in the community also potentially increases the community's quality of life during the covid-19 crisis. As Apostolopoulos, Newbery and Gkartzios (2019) describe the crisis in a community in Greek, social enterprise has roles in performing community resilience, strengthening survival and motives of community, and institutional resistances. Therefore, social enterprise has an essential role in strengthening community resilience.

1.1 Objectives

This study describes the lesson-learned from three social enterprise organizations towards community empowerment in Indonesia that experienced challenges and opportunities during the covid-19 pandemic. Then, they formulated strategies to develop social resiliency. This study also describes the interactions between social enterprise, local communities as suppliers and distributors of business products, society as users, and government. Therefore, this study purposes as follows: (1) to describe the challenges of social enterprise with community empowerment model during the covid-19 pandemic in the case of three social enterprise organizations in Indonesia; and (2) to describe the opportunities and strategies of three social enterprise organizations for enhancing social resiliency.

2. Literature Review: A Resiliency of Social Enterprise Organization in Empowering the Community

Empowering the communities requires an intervention to change the disadvantaged conditions become an ideal or expected condition. Healy in Payne (1997) underlined that empowerment does not see that social workers are powerful parties, while clients are powerless parties because both have strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, various strategies are needed to improve the strength to improve conditions. Community empowerment aims to increase the power of disadvantaged conditions through a comprehensive ongoing process (Ife 2013; Adi 2018). Midgley (2014) also suggested community development as an essential social development practice strategy in encouraging positive impacts to the whole community. Consequently, another issue in community development is to which community members are willing to participate in the process of community development activities and can identify the community assets. Community assets should be considered as a powerful resource in developing the community, including the human capitals (knowledge, awareness, and skills), social capitals (social bonding, social bridging, and linking capitals), physical capitals (infrastructures), financial capitals, environmental capitals (nature resources), political capital (the structure and functions of local governance), cultural capitals (local social values and norms), and spiritual capitals that reflect power and drive of community to pursue the changes (Adi, 2018; Green and Haines 2015).

Social enterprise becomes an alternative approach for meeting the community needs through the empowerment process. Conducting social enterprise towards community empowerment should consider both formal institutions and informal cultural institutions on three-level societies: macro, meso, and micro levels stakeholders including governments, local organizations, corporates, and civil society (Kreating 2013; Mair et al. 2012; Shea 2011 in Kerlin 2017). Moreover, the collaborative strategy within the multi-stakeholders is able to strengthen the social enterprise organizations for delivering the benefit to communities. As the new hope for community, social enterprise organization is expected to be able to identify the problems, create innovative ideas, make adjustments to any situation, and maximize the local resources to emerge the positive outcome and impact of their services (Richter 2019).

Related to the social enterprises' resilience, some previous studies have explored the resources, capabilities, and strategies of organizations for strengthening the resilience. As the organizations in developing the resilience, Chowdhury (2015) noted that there must be considerable effort to anticipate future problems and potential shocks. In the practical setting, Littlewood and Holt (2018) examined the social resilience of social enterprise organization in Sub Saharan Africa in unpredictable conditions. Their study resulted that organizations need to combine the passion and vision with realism, find the meaning of shared values and beliefs in the mission, and improvisation in action. Therefore, the organization should develop the networks, relationships, and products or service variety. In summary, in this covid-19 pandemic that brings the uncertainty conditions dynamic should be responded by the social enterprise organizations as the challenge to maximize the opportunities within the multi-stakeholders. Therefore, learning about the challenge, opportunity, and strategy to enhance the resiliency of social enterprise, especially in the community empowerment model, is essential. A report by British Council attests to social enterprise organization's resilience as their strong point. Also, the innovation and agility performed by social enterprises organization are determinant variables to survive during the pandemic (Darko and Hashi, 2020).

3. Methods

This study aimed to shed light on the best practices of three social enterprise organizations that work in community empowerment to respond to the challenges and opportunities to formulate strategies to enhance resiliency. To fulfill the tasks, this study utilized qualitative research. The qualitative study seeks the subjective meanings to a deep single objective reality (Royse 2011; Yin 2016). Also, this study used a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of events in a specific case. According to Rubin and Babbie (2005), a case study is an idiographic examination of a

specific context. A case study is appropriate since this research attempted to focus on specific criteria of some social enterprise organizations that work with the community empowerment model.

4. Data Collection

Data were collected through interviews and document reviews during August – October 2021 with the consent of the informants and their organizations. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia then the transcript was translated into English. In this research design, the selection of participants was considered through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling selects representative samples from the cases with a specific purpose (Neuman 2014). To gather more comprehensive data, the research involved social enterprise initiated by individuals, groups, and communities and work in the community empowerment model. Participants were recruited through a communication group that facilitates social enterprise development and network in Indonesia. Through this process, there were three social enterprise organizations selected with detailed information as follows in Table 1.

Table 1. Detail of Informants

Informant ID	Name of Social Enterprise	Business Field	Business Area
RK	INAgri (initiated by individual)	Environmental purpose (Agriculture business community)	Prabumulih, South Sumatra
YG	Prabu Agro Wijaya (initiated by group)	Environmental, health, and poverty reduction purposes	Cianjur dan Depok West Java
AN	Brisma (Pesantren Al Muhtadin) (initiated by the community)	Rural youth development and poverty reduction purpose (Agriculture business community)	Sukabumi, West Java

Regarding the information of the first research subject: INAgri, it was initiated in 2017 by the individual to create a better environment by processing the organic waste in Prabumulih, South Sumatra (Sampah Jadi Berkah or SARAH).INAgri also organized some education (knowledge and skill training) for the local community related to organic plantation (vegetables, fruits, seasoning, and seeds) through Kebun Edukasi. Before the covid-19 pandemic, INAgri provided a Sunday Market program for local communities, schools, or children/youth groups from outside Wonosari community. Also, INAgri created job opportunities for the local community and increased the community’s income through organic farm production and partnership with local value chains. Since the pandemic, INAgri terminated all face-to-face activities and initiates to develop the alternative program for home-delivering vegetables, fruits, meats directly to consumers. The second research subject was Prabu Argo Wijaya. A group established this organization as a response to environmental sustainability, health, and poverty problem in communities in some rural areas in West Java. They targeted the environmental sustainability to reduce the soil and water pollutant and support biodiesel energy, health maintenance to prevent the excessive consumption of unhealthy used-cooking oil, and poverty reduction to take advantage of economic potential to household and poor communities. Generally, Prabu Argo Wijaya optimized the profit-sharing for local community through: (1) additional income for suppliers, and (2) philanthropy benefit for poor households. Since the pandemic, the Work from Home (WFH) policy encourages a potential new supplier from households. The third research subject was Brisma (a part of Pesantren Al Muhtadin) which has been initiated since 2010 as a community-driven to empower the local community through *santri* (youth group with religious-based education) empowerment through a faith-based approach. CSR ad Zakat funds also supported this program. The aims of the program were to strengthen the role of *santri* in contributing to the social and economic well-being of the community. Brisma community encouraged the local communities through an integrated farming ecosystem business to maximize profit sharing (for business and partner groups) and benefit-sharing (for poor people or *mustahik* in communities) to rural poverty reduction. Also, Brisma developed some programs: Brisma Tani (agriculture business), Brisma Farm (farming business), Brisma Bahari (fishery business), Brisma Ikra (creative industry: catering and crafting business, ecotourism), and Brisma Berkah (social philanthropy to the local community).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. The Challenges of Social Enterprise Organizations during Covid-19 Pandemic

To prevent the spread of the virus, the Government of Indonesia enforced the social restriction to many sectors, including activities that involved in-person interaction (Berawi 2020; Gandasari and Dwidienawati 2020). Meanwhile,

the organizations commonly used group activities to gather inputs and conduct some programs, such as seminars, group discussions, and training activities. For instance, the INAgri community delivered the waste management program through workshops and training with local communities and schools. However, social distancing forced them to stop the activities.

Our main core is to educate the local community to manage their household waste, but the government strictly forbids us to hold face-to-face activities in groups. It is so hard at the first time because for educating this mission, we must train them practically not only by informing something related to how to manage the household waste. As such, they would learn composting. Also, we have to stop Kebun Edukasi for students group (RK, INAgri)

This limitation in conducting the social interaction also inhibited the INAgri to maintain the Sunday Market program, which was the only program to gather the profit. Besides INAgri, Prabu Argo Wijaya also experienced difficulties in communicating with local suppliers who were limited with technology.

I know it was confusing to keep interacting with them. Once in two weeks, we gather mother groups to promote the program. In some communities, we can keep updated by WhatsApp (*social media platform*), but in some communities, they are not used to using mobile phones. (YG, Prabu Argo Wijaya). During the covid-19 pandemic, all informants stated that the market environment has changed their partnership network system. For example, Brisma's products, such as rice and meat, were usually marketed to restaurants and hotels. However, the decreased sales of the target market also enforced Brisma to change the partnership and networks with some other sources.

Honestly, we were shocked when our products couldn't be sold as usual because we produce non-durable products. But I always convince my team to keep in positive thinking with Allah. For sure, Allah will give us another way to survive (AN, Brisma Community). Besides Brisma, INAgri also experienced a similar thing. By stopping the Sunday Market program, which commonly brings profit from wider communities through product selling, INAgri could not reach the previous target market. Sunday Market is our strategic market for earning profit by selling our fresh organic vegetables and seeds. Also, we usually promote the club activity for children experiencing making compost, planting seeds, and fun crafting. We can obtain the other profit from ticket selling. But now we can't hold these profitable programs. So, we must change the different strategies for maintaining our survival. (RK, INAgri)

So far, the government assistance program only targeted the vulnerable micro small medium enterprise groups through delivering interest and margin subsidies to support the National Economic Recovery Program (Ministry of Finance, Republic of Indonesia 2021). But on the other hand, social enterprise organizations did not receive any special attention from the government. Some informants stated that the government practically delivered webinar programs in some common contents.

I got invitations from some ministries and local government institutions to attend the webinar program. I have ever attended, but it was such a common information like raising motivation and persistence to keep the business survives during pandemic. (YG, Prabu Argo Wijaya). For supporting funds, I think government only focuses on UMKM (*micro-enterprise*). Maybe our government only has a limited budget to covid recovery. But it's ok, we must prioritize the urgent one. And I think we should be a support system for the government to assist community resilience (AN, Brisma Community)

5.2. The Opportunities and Strategies of Social Enterprise Organizations during Covid-19 Pandemic

The existence of social enterprise in the middle of the community becomes an asset for maintaining market sustainability. INAgri mentioned that target market from the external community due to some programs has been terminated, Therefore, they could identify the most potential target market, i.e., the internal or local community surrounding them. INAgri only needed to focus on developing local communities with more variant products and distribution methods by initiating a new other SARAH (Sayuran Antar Ke Rumah) program.

Previously we depended on Sunday Market and Kebun Edukasi for obtaining the profit that targeted wide society from people outside Wonosari. But now, we just realized that the biggest potential source is in our neighborhood. Then, we develop another SARAH program. Previously SARAH meant Sampah Jadi Berkah (*Waste in blessing*), and now SARAH has become Sayuran Antar Ke Rumah (*Home-delivery vegetables*). And fortunately, this program was immediately got a good response from Wonosari and Prabumulih community. (RK, INAgri). Increasing the number

of people staying at home also created new markets. This opportunity is able to reach new customers and suppliers for maintaining the social enterprise business programs.

WFH (*Work from home*) also encourages them to cook their own food. So, they prefer home-delivery shopping, and this strategy fits their needs. (RK, INAgri). The other experience was also shown in the case of building a new partnership network with local suppliers to strengthen the supply chain. Yeah, I got more suppliers for used-cooking oil because WFH makes more people stay at home and cook their food by themselves. (YG, Prabu Argo Wijaya)

SARAH (Sayuran Antar ke Rumah) consumers required more variant products other than vegetables like meat, fish, and eggs. So, they can easily shop for their daily need only in one way. So, I think this is an opportunity to develop a partnership with local suppliers. By now, I have built mutual partnerships with them. (RK, INAgri). Brisma community also had the opportunity to enhance local distributors from the community as the substitute of previous distribution partners.

As I mentioned before, I lost some restaurant and hotel partners to distribute our products, but surprisingly, I got retail distributors from the local community. Many people were fired from their company due to covid. Then they asked me whether there was a job opportunity for them. Honestly, we can't provide more jobs. And they offered to become retail distributors for our products, especially fish. Even though one retail distributor only distribute in small numbers, if we count all retail, it earns more advantages than distributed through restaurants and hotels. (AN, Brisma Community)

Through this opportunity, social enterprise organizations towards community empowerment are able to maintain their program through optimizing the resources from the local community as an asset in the market sustainability. Therefore, expanding new products and creating new target markets, suppliers, and distributors are the key in optimizing the local community's market opportunity. These findings were supported by Jungsber et al. (2020) that claim community members have a critical role in developing the social enterprise in rural communities, including in developing an idea and providing resources to enhance the structure of social enterprise. Moreover, Kajiita and Murote (2020) stated social enterprise organizations should focus on investing in local people's values, capabilities, talents, and cultural richness to generate well-being.

The other significant opportunity is the ability to adapt and integrate with digital technology such as social media and website platforms that create economic and non-economic opportunities (Ghimire 2020; Berawi et al. 2020). Although they have the ability in utilizing social media and website platforms before the pandemic, they develop digital media more intensively to promote their products and program. INAgri has developed their website platform that can be accessed through <https://inagri.id>. Also, Brisma community developed Instagram as the central platform to communicate their updated programs. In practice, Prabu Argo Wijaya and INAgri utilized WhatsApp (a social media platform) group to maintain the local community's engagement. Through this technology adaptation that can be easily accessed by local community, INAgri could develop the online market. They also utilized social media platforms for promoting the products and services. Fortunately, our consumers have already used Whatsapp for their daily communication. At the first time, there were only 10 to 15 members, but now we have more than 70 members joining our groups. So, it makes us easier to sell our products and market our program to keep educating household waste management. (RK, INAgri)

Creating digital marketing also becomes a strategies method to gather feedback from society. As such Brisma community got the input to assist the other social enterprise through best-practice experience sharing, seminars, and training. We are appreciated that our method in empowering rural communities towards santri can be a role model for other businesses. Sometimes, I checked the comment on Instagram, and they said they wanted us to assist them, to share our experiences. Also, they want to replicate our business models. I think that's a big opportunity for us. (AN, Brisma Community).. Multi-stakeholder collaboration in social enterprise involves the collaborative activity and support between the business sector, communities, government, academia, and media in building partnership driven (Forss et al.2021; Littlewood and Holt 2018). As described above, local communities and media have many essential roles in strengthening social enterprise resilience. Also, engaging with other companies which are more settled to empower the human resources and strengthen the market. Brisma engaged with other social entrepreneurs for gaining insightful ideas and innovation to develop the social and business strategy. Furthermore, the finding also shows that three social enterprise organizations develop their strategies to enhance collaboration with higher education and government. Building the partnerships with higher education institutions assists the organization for developing the

program through research, program evaluation, and social service activities. For instance, Brisma community developed the partnership with some universities to conduct the training and program evaluation. INAgri provided the opportunity to a local university (Universitas Sriwijaya) as a laboratory learning for the students, primarily related to agribusiness and community development practice. Meanwhile, Argo Prabu Wijaya built a partnership with one of the private universities, Prasetya Mulya University to collaborate in community engagement programs.

For obtaining the opportunity to build the network with the government, social enterprise organizations tried to convince them as the potential source in social problem solutions. Therefore, they try to promote the business model and its effectiveness through the formal or informal meetings with the government representatives and social media promotion. As a result, Brisma’s business model has been considered as one of the best faith-based social enterprise organizations by the government in integrating the faith-based social enterprise model. Through this opportunity, Brisma also succeeded in encouraging the government to replicate the business model in larger society, especially in faith-based communities that aim to obtain more enormous impacts. As our goal is to encourage our business model to be replicated in the santri community in Indonesia. At least, we are optimistic that Sukabumi, as the second largest santri community in Indonesia, becomes an empowered community through social enterprise. So, we always present our works when we meet the national and local government representatives. Alhamdulillah, Ministry of Religious Affairs chooses Brisma as a role model for business model replication in some santri communities in Indonesia. (AN, Brisma Community)

Multi-stakeholder collaboration drives the activation of each party in strengthening the social enterprise organizations. Through gaining the resources from local community, the organizations are able to expand partnership within the term of being the local suppliers and distributors for the products. Besides, the organizations try to strengthen the partnership with government to promote the effectiveness of the program to have the opportunity in program replication. In this case, the organizations will gain the support from the government. All these three social enterprise organizations also pursue the support from some higher education institutions (university) for engaging in research, social service activities, and management supports. As the organization that runs both business and social purposes, social enterprise organizations develop the collaboration with some settled companies to empower the human resources and market strengthening. For promoting and expanding the product and the organization’s social benefits, media takes this role. These efforts are combined to strengthen the organizations’ existences. However, the direct approach related to users/consumers, organizations modify their methods in delivering the products during covid-19 pandemic. Figure 1 captures the comprehensive collaboration and interaction in this dynamic (Figure 1).

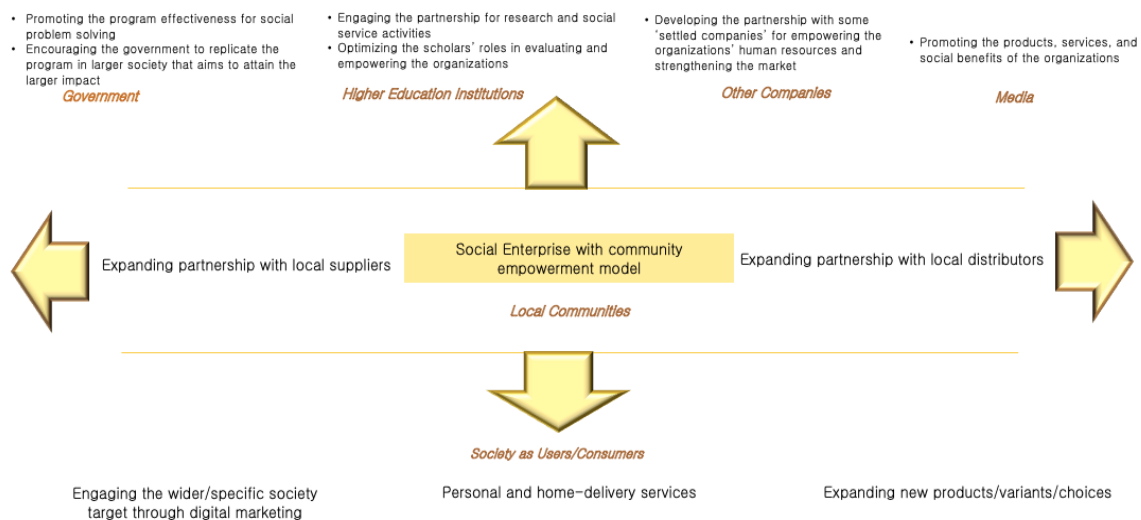


Figure 1. Multi-stakeholder collaboration to strengthen the social enterprise resiliency

6. Conclusion

This study showed challenges that emerged during the covid-19 pandemic. However, these situations were responded as the opportunities to strengthen the resiliency through formulating some strategies. Based on the best practice we learned through these three social enterprise organizations towards community empowerment, their resilience resources include the community-market sustainability, digital technology adaptation, and multi-stakeholders' collaboration involving the local community, government, media, higher education, and partnerships with the other companies. Furthermore, the strategies are modified towards all sectors to create adaptation and innovation in response to the challenges and opportunities during the unpredictable situations or crises.

Also, based on the findings and discussions, it is essential for social enterprise organizations to put in concerns on the resources availability for developing the networks. This paper contributes to the idea that local community becomes the essential source for maintaining the social enterprise organization social benefit during the crises. However, the other significances are related to initiating the adaptive strategies rather than waiting for the assistances or help from other sources. This action would be the best choice to develop the organization resilience in economic and social uncertainty. Also, social enterprise organizations may develop their role for bridging the collaboration between the stakeholders to deliver the wider social benefit for the community. However, a limitation of this study was only based on a small sample of recruited participants from the best practice social enterprise organizations making this research finding difficult to generalize. Therefore, there is necessary to study larger samples recruited as the representative population. Another limitation of this study was only captured in the limited period during covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, to capture the nature of social resilience of the organizations, longitudinal studies are expected to provide deeper and more valuable insights.

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Biographies

Getar Hati is a PhD student at Department of Social Welfare, Ewha Womans University, Seoul – South Korea. She is also an assistant professor at Department of Social Welfare, Universitas Indonesia. She is interested in community development related to poverty alleviation. Also, her ideas have been published in national and international journals.

Ratih Indraswari, a PhD student at Department of Political Science and International Relations, Ewha Womans University, Seoul – South Korea. Currently, she is also an assistant professor at Department of International Relation, Universitas Parahyangan, Indonesia. Her idea related international community and public diplomacy have been disseminated in national and international publications.