

Research Article

Modelling the Challenges Faced by Rural Centres Sustainability: A Closer LookDalila Daud^{a, b*}, ^bEley Suzana Kasim^{a, b}, Jamaliah Said^b, Salwa Muda^a^aFaculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Seremban, 70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia; ^bAccounting Research Institute, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.*Correspondence: ekasim@uitm.edu.my**ABSTRACT:**

This research paper examines the challenges in rural centres. Rural centres play a crucial role in facilitating rural development and empowering local communities. However, despite their significance, there are instances where challenges hinder the effectiveness and impact of these centres. This paper explored some of the key hurdles faced by rural centres in its mission and investigates the root causes of this issue and explores its implications to identify the main concerns.

KEYWORDS: Rural Centers, limited awareness, limited participation, rural development, community empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural centres play a crucial role in promoting inclusive and sustainable rural development (Akgün et al, 2015). In other words, rural centres play a crucial role in addressing the socio-economic gaps between urban and rural areas. These centres aim to provide various services and initiatives to uplift rural communities and foster their development. They serve as key hubs for delivering government services, promoting entrepreneurship, providing training and enhancing access to information and resources in rural areas. However, the successful implementation of rural centres is not without its challenges. This article examines some of the primary hurdles faced by rural centres in their mission to catalyse rural transformation, with references to relevant sources and studies. This article also explores some of the key challenges encountered by rural centres and their impact on the effective implementation of rural transformation initiatives. Thus, this article also aims to shed light on these hurdles drawing from various sources and references.

LITERATURE REVIEW / THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

This literature review aims to explore and analyse the individual and environmental factors that challenges faced by rural centres. The agricultural sector is crucial for rural economies and understanding the factors that shape farmers' decision-making processes is essential for effective agricultural development and policy formulation. This paper identifies challengers based on key individual factors, such as farmer demographics, knowledge, attitudes, awareness and skills, as well as environmental factors including limited Infrastructure, financial constraints, water availability and market conditions, that significantly impact agricultural practices in rural centres. The findings highlight the importance of considering both individual and environmental factors to develop sustainable and resilient rural centres.

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR CHALLENGES OF RURAL CENTRES

This is the first paragraph. In this paper, the challenges of rural centres are divided into two main factors, i.e., environmental factors and individual factors. The proposed framework of rural centres is depicted on Figure 1.

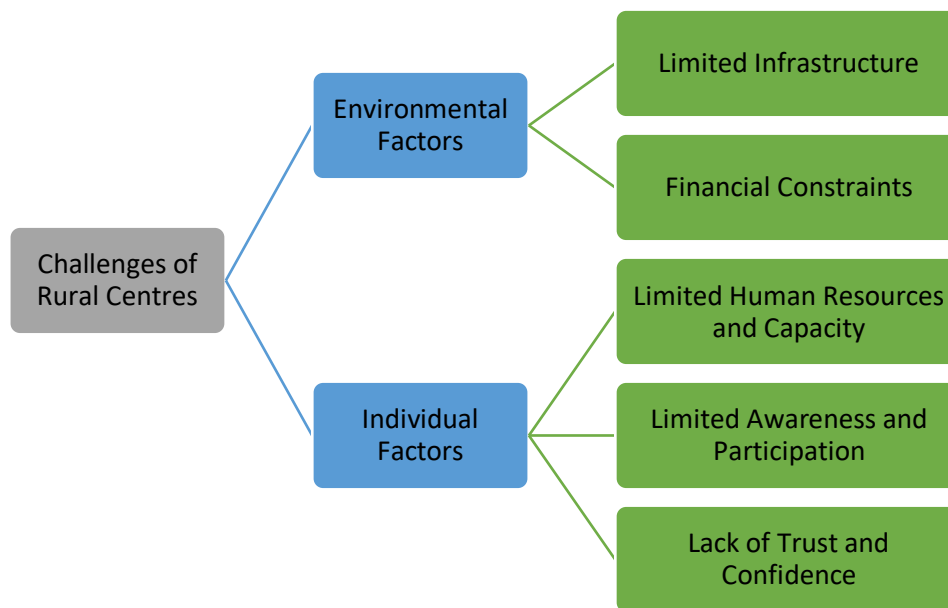


Figure 1: Rural Centres Challenges

The challenges on environmental and individual factors are discussed in the following sections:

Limited Infrastructure

Limited Road Networks

One of the significant challenges faced by rural centres is inadequate infrastructure and connectivity in rural areas. This delays the delivery of essential services and inhibits the effective functioning of the organization. Limited road networks, unreliable power supply, and insufficient access to the internet impede the effective functioning of rural centres (Chandra and Malaya, 2021). These deficiencies hinder communication, hinder the delivery of e-governance services and limit access to information and technology. Many rural regions lack adequate road networks, transportation facilities and reliable power supply, making it difficult for rural centres to operate efficiently. In regions with limited infrastructure, the lack of network coverage affects the availability and reliability of rural centres services (Dlodlo and Kalezhi, 2015). Inadequate network coverage leads to dropped calls, poor call quality, and intermittent connectivity, hindering effective real-time communication in regions with limited infrastructure, unreliable internet connectivity disrupts the continuity of rural centres services.

Limited Power Supply

Limited power supply is another infrastructure challenge faced by rural centres in rural areas (Syiem and Raj, 2015). Frequent power outages and inadequate electricity infrastructure can disrupt the provision of digital services, communication and other activities dependent on reliable power supply, hampering the functioning of rural centres. Limited internet connectivity is a significant barrier in rural areas where rural centres are situated. Low bandwidth, slow internet speeds, and unreliable connections restrict access to online resources, digital platforms and real-time communication tools

(Tayo et al., 2016). This limitation hampers the ability of rural centres to deliver digital services, engage with the community and leverage technology for rural development.

Insufficient Access to The Internet

Connectivity disparities exist in rural areas, with some regions having limited or no access to affordable internet services. Unequal distribution of connectivity further worsens the digital divide, impeding equal access to information, online services, and digital opportunities (Ahmed and Hussain, 2018). Such disparities undermine the inclusivity and effectiveness of rural centres in reaching all segments of the rural population. Limited infrastructure and connectivity hinder access to vital information and digital services in rural centres. This restriction impacts education, healthcare, e-governance, and other critical domains of development (Pretty, 2003). Reduced access to digital resources and services curtails the potential of rural centres to empower rural communities and address socio-economic challenges.

Thus, limited infrastructure and connectivity can delay community engagement and participation in rural centres activities. Without reliable digital platforms and communication channels, community members face barriers in connecting with rural centres initiatives, participating in decision-making processes, and accessing development opportunities (Tacoli, 2003). This impediment limits the effectiveness of rural centres in fostering community empowerment and inclusive development.

Financial Constraints

Another significant challenge faced by rural centres is limited financial resources. Rural development projects often require substantial investments, making it difficult to secure adequate funds for implementation. Furthermore, rural areas may lack the necessary economic activities to generate sufficient revenue for local development initiatives. Rural centres faced financial constraints in its mission to implement transformative projects and programs in rural areas. Limited funding weighs down the scale and impact of initiatives aimed at rural development. Rural centre's ability to implement transformative programs heavily relies on financial resources. Rural centres operation often encounters financial constraints, hindering their ability to provide essential services and support rural development initiatives. Insufficient budget allocations, delayed fund disbursement and limited financial resources pose significant challenges for rural centres (Dlodlo and Kalezhi, 2015; Hubbard and Gorton, 2011). Without adequate funding, it becomes difficult to hire skilled personnel, maintain infrastructure, and implement innovative programs.

Insufficient financial resources restrict the ability of rural centres to hire qualified staff, maintain infrastructure and deliver essential services to rural communities (Reuben et al., 2020; Van et al., 1998). This constraint can impede the provision of education, healthcare, agricultural support and other vital programs offered by rural centres. Rural centres infrastructure development, including the construction or renovation of buildings, provision of basic utilities and establishment of technology infrastructure, requires substantial capital investment. However, limited financial resources often hinder the expansion and improvement of rural centres infrastructure, limiting their capacity to meet the evolving needs of rural communities (Hubbard and Gorton, 2011; Asaba, 2006). Insufficient capital for infrastructure development can hinder the delivery of essential services and hinder the growth of rural centres.

Many rural centres struggle to adopt sustainable funding models, relying heavily on government grants or donor funding, which may not be consistent or reliable in the long term (Wekesah et al., 2020). The absence of diversified and sustainable revenue streams can lead to financial instability and compromise the continuity of rural centres operations and services. Financial constraints hamper the ability of rural centres to deliver comprehensive and impactful services to rural communities. Inadequate funding reduces the scope and quality of programs offered, limiting access to education,

healthcare, skills training and other essential services (Wilson, 1995). This limitation undermines the potential of rural centres to drive rural transformation and impairs community development outcomes. Financial constraints exacerbate existing inequalities in rural areas, as communities with limited resources may struggle to access and benefit from rural centres services and opportunities. Those who are unable to afford transportation costs or pay user fees may face barriers to participation in rural centres activities and miss out on the potential benefits they offer (Obidike, 2011). This exclusion hampers inclusive development and perpetuates socio-economic disparities.

Limited Human Resources and Capacity

The availability of skilled manpower is another challenge faced by rural centres. The availability of skilled personnel in rural areas is a significant challenge for rural centres. Rural communities often face a shortage of qualified professionals, hindering the effective implementation of programs. The shortage of skilled human resources poses a significant challenge to rural centres. Rural areas often experience a brain drain, as qualified professionals tend to migrate to urban centres in search of better opportunities (Vos, 2019). This shortage of skilled personnel in rural centres limits their capacity to deliver quality services, implement development projects and address the specific needs of rural communities effectively. Rural areas often struggle to attract and retain professionals with expertise in diverse fields, such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, healthcare and education. This dearth of skilled personnel limits the ability of rural centres to deliver high-quality services and impairs the sustainability of rural development initiatives (Wanmali and Islam, 1997).

Effective implementation of rural transformation initiatives requires a skilled and dedicated workforce. As rural areas often face challenges in attracting and retaining qualified professionals due to limited employment opportunities and inadequate infrastructure, rural centres has invested in capacity-building programs, providing training and professional development opportunities to individuals working in rural development. Additionally, rural centres have established partnerships with academic institutions and professional organizations to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration. By nurturing human resources and building local capacities, rural centres has strengthened its ability to drive sustainable rural transformation (Kesavan and Swaminathan, 2008). Asaba (2006) study on the mismatch between human resource needs and availability in rural areas. Rural centres recognized the importance of capacity building and invested in training programs to empower rural youth, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. Collaborative efforts with academic institutions and vocational training centres were initiated to develop specialized skills tailored to rural development requirements (Rural Centres Training and Capacity Building Handbook, 2023). Thus, low levels of education and literacy among rural residents can hinder their understanding and engagement with rural centres. Illiteracy or limited educational opportunities may create a knowledge gap that prevents individuals from recognizing the benefits and significance of rural centres.

Limited Awareness and Participation

Promoting awareness and encouraging community participation is essential for the success of rural centres. A lack of awareness and low participation among rural communities pose significant challenges to rural centres. Many rural residents are unaware of the services and opportunities available at rural centres, leading to underutilization of resources (Obidike, 2011). Effective communication and awareness campaigns are crucial to engage and involve the community in the transformation process. However, low levels of awareness and engagement among rural populations can impede the implementation of initiatives. Lack of information dissemination, cultural barriers, and limited participation from marginalized groups hinder the effective utilization of available resources and inhibit the transformative potential of rural centres (Lyon, 2000). In other words, the absence of effective communication channels between rural centres and rural communities leads to limited awareness of the services and opportunities available. This barrier can result from inadequate infrastructure, limited access to technology, or ineffective outreach strategies.

Cultural and social factors, such as traditional beliefs and practices, can influence the level of awareness and participation in rural centres. Resistance to change, gender inequality, and social stigmas may impede the integration of rural centres initiatives within the community.

Lack of Trust and Confidence

Lack Of Trust and Confidence

Rural residents may exhibit limited participation in rural centres activities due to a lack of trust and confidence in the centre's ability to deliver on its promises. Negative experiences, scepticism about the benefits, or a history of failed projects can erode trust in rural centres. Limited awareness and participation undermine the potential of rural centres to drive meaningful rural development. The inability to reach and engage with the target population hampers the delivery of essential services, hindering progress in areas such as agriculture, healthcare, and livelihood enhancement. experiences, such as previous ineffective or failed development initiatives, can erode trust in rural centres (Pretty, 2003). Past negative experiences, broken promises, or unfulfilled commitments can generate scepticism and reluctance among community members to actively engage with rural centres. Overcoming this mistrust requires acknowledging and addressing historical grievances while demonstrating a commitment to transparency and accountability.

Lack Of Effective Communication

Lack of effective communication and perceived inefficiencies in rural centres operations can also contribute to the lack of trust. Insufficient information flow, limited stakeholder involvement, and a lack of transparency in decision-making processes can lead to a perception of exclusion and marginalization (Fisher, 2013). Community members may question the relevance and effectiveness of rural centres, leading to a diminished sense of trust and confidence. Improving communication strategies is crucial for rebuilding trust. Regular and transparent communication channels, including community meetings, newsletters, and social media platforms, can bridge communication gaps and keep community members informed about rural centres activities, progress, and outcomes (Arnott et al., 2021). Clear and accessible information builds trust and enhances understanding and support for rural centres initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Rural centres play a critical role in addressing the development needs of rural areas. It has navigated numerous challenges to promote rural development and inclusive growth. Rural centres face various challenges in their efforts to catalyse rural development. Inadequate infrastructure and connectivity, financial constraints, limited skilled manpower, low awareness and participation, and the need for sustainability are among the key hurdles. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts between government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities. Adequate funding, investment in infrastructure, capacity building programs, and effective communication strategies are vital to overcome these obstacles and unlock the true potential of rural centres in transforming rural areas.

Despite the numerous challenges faced, rural centres have shown remarkable resilience and commitment to rural transformation. By addressing infrastructure limitations, securing financial resources, bridging the digital divide, and investing in human resources, rural centres has made significant strides in improving the lives of rural communities. Continued collaboration and innovative approaches will be crucial in overcoming future challenges and achieving sustainable rural development.

By addressing limited infrastructure, financial constraints, human resource capacity and socio-cultural barriers, rural centres have made significant strides in transforming rural areas. The organization's efforts to engage stakeholders, secure funding, invest in capacity building, and promote community participation have been instrumental in surmounting these challenges. With continued dedication and innovative approaches, rural centres are poised to drive sustainable rural transformation and bridge the divide between rural and urban areas.

Rural centres have been established as vital hubs for rural development, serving as platforms to deliver essential services, promote socio-economic growth, and empower rural communities. However, limited awareness and participation pose significant challenges to the effectiveness and impact of rural centres. This paper aims to explore the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to address the issue of limited awareness and participation in rural centres. Addressing limited awareness and participation in rural centres is crucial for unlocking their full potential in driving rural transformation. By understanding the factors contributing to this issue and implementing targeted strategies, rural centres can bridge the awareness gap, enhance community participation, and effectively contribute to sustainable rural development and empowerment.

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