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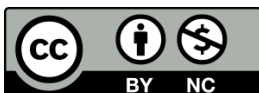
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## Community-based Empowerment: Unveiling patron-client Patterns in Voluntary Trader Partnerships for Enhanced Production in Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya

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### ABSTRACT

Enhancing production activities in Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya is achieved through mutually beneficial partnerships among traders, exemplifying a community-driven empowerment model. This approach is introduced as a response to counter the negative perceptions associated with interventionist empowerment strategies implemented by head of village. The objective of this research is to uncover the interconnected pattern involving traders with ample capital collaborating with those lacking financial resources. Employing a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach, the data analysis utilizes the patron-client theory. The study identifies the effectiveness of an empowerment model that optimizes the local potential of traditional snack production, deeply rooted in the community's traditions. The empowerment mechanism is executed through voluntary connections established between major traders providing capital and smaller traders contributing culinary products. Small traders, as beneficiaries, get provision of materials, production tools, and skill enhancements offered by larger traders. Similarly, major traders benefit by gaining access to a market for the product of culinary, thereby expanding their customer base. These personal, voluntary, and tradition-bound relationships reflect dyadic connections characterized by an imbalance, potentially leading to domination and exploitation.

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Community-based empowerment, Industry-community interaction, Culinary arts communication, Model patron-client relationships

## Introduction

Models of empowerment that highlight intervention patterns involving external parties with significant personal interests (White, 1996) can influence the perception of community apathy within similar empowerment frameworks. The community of Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya, who are the beneficiaries, experienced such dynamics. Observations revealed that specific assistance models discontinued due to facilitator

interests being fulfilled, leading to the stigma of exploitation by certain parties. In response, the Desa Kolot community initiated the formation of a mutually beneficial empowerment pattern. This collaborative relationship manifested in the traditional culinary production process, involving the provision of capital for traders with sufficient funds and supplying production products for those lacking capital. This dynamic process contributed to economic stability and needs fulfillment. The emerging business ties were not formalized through a written agreement but were rooted in voluntarism, creating a mutually beneficial business relationship.

Despite representing community-based empowerment efforts, these formed business ties are often overlooked by researchers. Current research concentrates on two key aspects: the role of institutions in community development and the effectiveness of community-based empowerment. In terms of community development, scholars such as Mustangin et al. (2017) emphasize the pivotal role of leadership, while conflicting views exist regarding the contribution of institutions to welfare improvement (Masrukin et al., 2013). Meanwhile, the research spotlight on community-based empowerment has revealed varying perspectives. Katiah et al. (2019), Muhammad R.F. and Aliyudin (2018), and Waridah (2021) highlight the inefficacy of certain empowerment patterns, attributing it to the marginalization of craftsmen and mismanagement of local potential. Conversely, Wibhisana (2021) discovered that a well- designed community empowerment model can serve as a new income source for village communities. The approach to community-based rural empowerment fundamentally aligns with a development model oriented towards the interests of rural communities, facilitated by external stakeholders (Firman, 2021).

This study aims to address the limitations of prior research by examining the relationship patterns established in the community-based empowerment process. The empowerment model fostering connections among entrepreneurs in Desa kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya, West Java is scrutinized using three key inquiries. The initial query explores the nature of relationships formed between traders with ample capital and those lacking sufficient funds. A descriptive pattern is presented to illustrate the intertwining of phenomena based on traders' experiences. The second question seeks to identify the factors influencing the development of these relationship patterns, emphasizing a critical examination of the phenomenon. The third question delves into the impact of the relationships forged during community-based empowerment activities.

This study departs from the argumentation that empowerment dynamics involving local actors with capital are more prone to establishing imbalanced relationships. In the economic relationship pattern, the imbalance model manifests through the utilization of resources owned by the lower-level party for the benefit of the party possessing complete capital (Korovkin, 1988). The capital-endowed party tends to establish connections by fulfilling the needs of the lower-level party, anticipating reciprocation as part of the exchange. The exchange variable is pivotal reciprocally in the patron-client relationship (Scott, 1972). Consequently, this relationship creates a dependency dynamic through the provision of production goods, fostering dependence on the party providing them (Akhtar,

2011). Hegemony is shaped in this relationship pattern, yet it may not be perceived as binding or burdensome.

## **Literature review**

### *Community-based development: identifying local structure of power*

The concept of community-based development pertains to initiatives that foster community self-reliance and growth by tapping into their inherent potential. Rooted in the theory of revolutionary action, which asserts that oppressed individuals must unite to enhance their own destinies (Stoecker & Falcón, 2022), this approach involves organizing potential with the involvement of all societal elements. The model of community participation serves as a mechanism to integrate local knowledge into the decision-making process (Corburn, 2003). Integral to achieving program benefits aligned with needs, participation is a crucial element guiding the empowerment process, leading to enhanced conditions for beneficiaries (Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2009). This emphasis on improvement underscores the community's independent efforts to address social challenges, defining community-based development as participation involving groups with development goals.

Debates about what constitutes a community in community-based development arise from discussions around geographical and conceptual boundaries that blur power, economic, and social structures (Guijt & Shah, 1998). The efficacy of participatory strategies hinges on a clear understanding of local power structures, which both constrain and enhance prospects for participatory development (Bertana, 2020; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020). This enhancement is closely tied to social capital, seen as an asset for benefiting communities. The social capital is recognized for binding groups together and acting as a bridge between them, thus serving as a vital source of community strength (Delilah Roque et al., 2020; Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020). Understanding the nature of social capital in its cultural and political context is crucial for viewing collective action in development as a contextualized process that considers the power structures faced by beneficiaries, particularly those in poverty (Halstead et al., 2022).

### *The Role of agents in Community-based development*

The role of the agent in community-based development is characterized as that of an actor intervening to enhance the community's self-resilience and elevate their standard of living. This intervention considers its impact on mobilizing the community, fostering collective action, and ensuring robust participation (Hassan et al., 2021). Intervention tasks may involve two types of agents: internal and external. Internal agents bring the advantage of local knowledge, crucial for developing untapped potentials to enhance community welfare (Dwijayanti et al., 2020). However, challenges arise from potential negative aspects tied to local agents' personal interests, making their position less promising in the community intervention process due to vulnerability to transactional forms (Ribot, 1999).

External agents, such as government or NGOs, can also implement intervention models. For these external agents, sensitivity to the social and cultural conditions of the community is crucial to maximize the community's potential for receiving benefits. External actors face a formidable challenge from local elites with high capital in the community, necessitating the dismantling of their dominance, which can impede the community empowerment process (Syukri, 2023). Intervening as an external actor may encounter barriers related to incentives (Villalba et al., 2020) and a limited understanding of local power dynamics (Lacey- Barnacle et al., 2023; Muscat et al., 2020; Ware & Laoutides, 2021).

#### *Patron-Client in Community-based empowerment*

Some scholars in social studies extend interpersonal aspect in patron-client relationship into the domain of cultural institutions. The moral component is wielded as a tool to stabilize patronage relationships within local communities, aligning with the expectations desired by the client (Lewis & Hossain, 2022). Efforts are underway to introduce social models that alter the nature of patronage, allowing for a reevaluation of client submission by considering variables beyond the patron-client relationship (Leonard et al., 2010). Patrons are viewed as individuals reciprocating support, particularly in the form of electoral backing (Weingrod, 1968). Sorauf (1956) defines patronage as an incentive system used in political activity. Informal, personal relationships between actors with unequal power structures continuously involve the exchange of resources (Nunan et al., 2020). The relationship between patrons and clients encompasses the sharing of fundamental values, moral obligations and emotional, trust and empathy shaping a relationship characterized, such as particular, personal, voluntary, and institutionalized nature (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984, p. 6; Firdous et al., 2023).

The exchange of resources based on loyalty and solidarity in the patron- client relationship is considered at odds with the ethos of the participation process in empowerment. Chando (2021) argues that community-based empowerment models should highlight active participation, deeming the passive form arising from the patron-client model contradictory (Cox, 2009). De Wit and Berner (2009) re-identify the concept, examining patron-client relationships in impoverished areas where intermediaries play a role in improving economic status. The vertical intermediary relationships prevalent in various community development programs align with the fundamental concept of patronage. Sita Mishra et al. (2022) illustrate that the patronage relationship acts as a mediator facilitating connections between producers and consumers. Additionally, Peter Walters et al. (2021) identify the patron-client pattern as a factor hindering the community empowerment process.

## **Research Methods**

This study employs a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach to explore meaning and actions based on the researcher's interpretation and understanding

of the phenomenon under investigation (Hollstein & Kumkar, 2021). The phenomenological approach delves closely into the experiences and interpretations of actors practicing an action (Neubauer et al., 2019). Data collection involves observation and interviews, using a semi-structured interview model with open-ended questions. Business actors in Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya, serve as the subjects for observations and interviews.

The selection of Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya, as the research object is motivated by the entrepreneurs' independent empowerment efforts, driven by a negative stigma associated with the government's integrated village program for group empowerment. The unique reality of empowerment in Desa Kolot stems from experiences with alternative empowerment models. Furthermore, the research focuses on this location due to a development model aligned with the community's tradition of producing traditional culinary, thereby intersecting with preservation.

Data obtained from the collection process undergoes analysis through triangulation, utilizing data from different times, spaces, and individuals. The analysis follows three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Patron-client theory is applied in the process of drawing conclusions, providing an analytical model to explore power phenomena related to horizontal and primordial dimensions. Power relations are shaped by status inequalities, representing conditions of exchange (Scott, 1972).

## Results

This section centers on the phenomenon of community empowerment in Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya, exploring it through three explanatory models. The initial explanation delves into the depiction of business development forms designed to empower traders lacking capital. This discussion aims to identify various factors contributing to the sustainability of the community development model, which is the focal point of the second discussion. The third discussion addresses the implications of the relationship patterns formed to enhance the economic status of the Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya community. Detailed descriptions of these three models are provided in the subsequent explanation.

### *Culinary Industry in Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya: from tradition to business*

The culinary industry in Desa Kolot has undergone significant growth, evolving into a prominent culinary center in Tasikmalaya. Rooted in a home industry tradition passed down through generations, culinary entrepreneurs rely on independent capital and skills, utilizing production tools and materials sourced from household equipment. The autonomy in industry management directly affects capital availability. When culinary production costs rise, output is minimized, potentially impacting the ability to meet market demand. Production goals are primarily geared towards fulfilling daily needs,

including those of school children. The management of the culinary industry in Desa Kolot follows a family system, with culinary products distributed directly to traditional markets and through door-to-door sales. The traditional sales approach, contingent on demand, results in a production mechanism relying on a made-to-order system (refer to Figure 1.). Group production involves family members with an uneven division of labor, encompassing tasks such as drying and baking, pounding, and compounding.

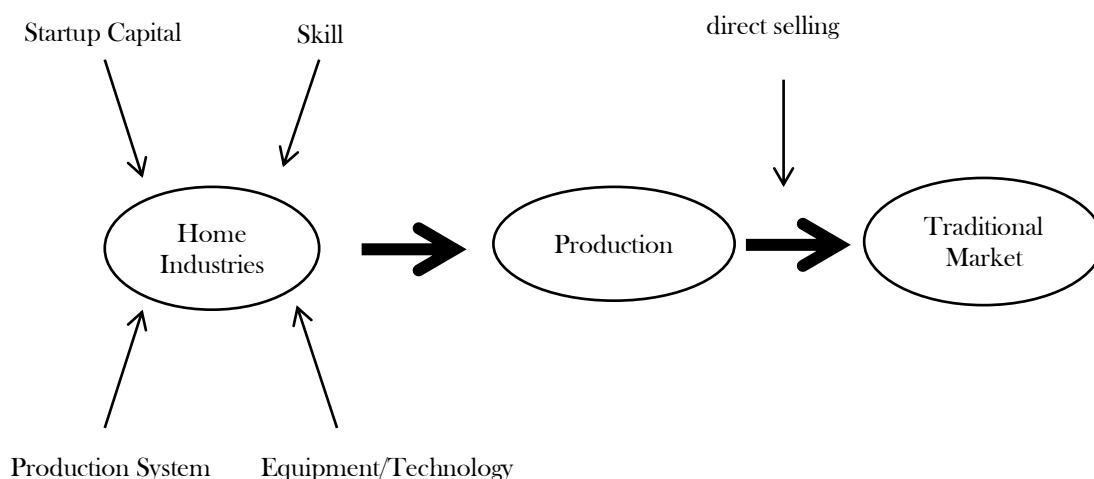


Figure 1. Traditional management in culinary industry of Desa Kolot. *Source:* Authors' elaboration.

Enhancements to management, rooted in a traditional, fulfillment-oriented daily need system, are achieved by fostering relationships among traders. Data reveals two distinct trader characteristics influencing their interactions: those with ample capital and those lacking sufficient funds. Traders with significant capital serve as providers for small traders without enough resources. Moreover, these major traders act as collectors of culinary products from smaller traders, consolidating them in their shops and refraining from direct sales in the market. Addressing capital constraints inherent in traditional management, large traders overcome these challenges by supplying raw materials and production tools to small traders (refer to Figure 2.). At times, large traders extend further support by providing training to enhance the processing and marketing skills of small traders. Flexible payment arrangements, allowing small traders to pay in installments for the provided production tools, are also part of this pattern of production-distribution relationship. The willingness and emotional bonds fostered through the traders' initiative make this production-distribution relationship non-binding and free from burdensome constraints.

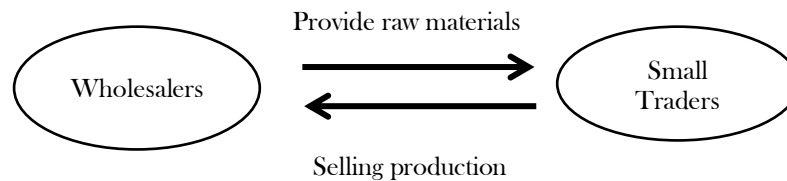


Figure 2. New model of production-distribution. *Source:* Authors' elaboration.

Connections founded on the symbiotic model of mutualism and voluntarism operate within the confines of trade ethics, established through an informal agreement by large traders. These ethical standards hinge on the productivity levels of the small traders they engage with, allowing large traders to decide whether to continue or terminate their production-distribution relationship based on these benchmarks. Ethical standards also incorporate unwritten moral principles, mandating that one small trader engages exclusively with one large trader, while a large trader may engage with multiple small traders. Following this ethical value, a large trader may terminate a relationship with a small trader associated with another large trader. Communication ethics serve as a criterion through which large traders assess small traders, extending to family relationships. Consequently, family standards of honor, ethics, and communication patterns are considered by large traders in evaluating their partnerships. Regarding pricing, the dominant position lies with the large trader, who acts as the decision-maker, while the small trader adheres to the instructions of the patron. If small traders secure better prices, the pricing policy aligns with the preferences of the large traders.

*Business Relationship Formation Factors: from solidarity to empowerment*

The data indicates two key factors shaping business practices under the empowerment model in Desa Kolot. Firstly, there's preservation-based empowerment. The Desa Kolot community's practice of crafting traditional foods, handed down through generations, is a form of cultural preservation. Leveraging their skills in making these traditional foods, the community maximizes its potential by meeting various needs and distributing culinary products. These traditional snacks, maintained as products for sale, are featured at various events and have evolved from collaborative efforts into economically valuable products. The economic background of business actors, ranging from middle to lower class, aligns with efforts to enhance the value of production in collaboration with larger traders, ultimately contributing to the economic improvement of the community. The preservation of tradition, manifested through traditional snacks, transcends a profit-centric focus and becomes an activity aimed at improving welfare.

Secondly, there's caring-based empowerment. Overcoming production limitations due to capital constraints and marketing reliance on traditional markets is addressed through partnership capital, an integral component of caring-based development. This relationship is forged without rigid and binding agreements, fostering economic



advancement between communities. The foundation of care in this partnership model encourages business actors of all ages, from young people to adults and even grandmothers, to participate in production. Overcoming distribution limitations through the provision of sales points by larger traders contributes to the establishment of a culinary hub, attracting both locals and travelers. This bolsters Desa Kolot's reputation as a culinary center.

Thirdly, non-burdensome relations play a pivotal role. The economic improvement of the Desa Kolot community is influenced by a balanced capital intake and agreements devoid of burdensome conditions. Both large and small traders prioritize maintaining positive relations, emphasizing the ethical norms ingrained in Desa Kolot society. The ethics governing communication and partnership, deeply rooted in tradition, stand as the primary factors contributing to the success of this pattern. Agreements on selling prices, material costs, and installment amounts for production equipment underscore that the non-burdensome relationship pattern is a key factor supporting the community's economic progress, ensuring benefits are shared among traders without objections.

*Impact of Business activities on the economic-development relationship model in Desa Kolot, Cikalong: The New form of Community-Based Empowerment*

The business dynamics within the culinary industry in Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya, are instrumental in shaping a novel relationship model within the community empowerment process, fostering collaboration between well-capitalized large entrepreneurs and smaller entrepreneurs lacking financial resources. These relationships, grounded in mutually beneficial interdependencies, contribute to the establishment of a community that collectively attains prosperity. The data highlights two distinct empowerment models prevalent in the culinary industry. Firstly, the employee relationship model is characterized by the dominance of large entrepreneurs in ensuring profitability while creating favorable conditions for small entrepreneurs during the production process. Large entrepreneurs supply capital goods as raw materials, stabilizing the production efforts of small traders. The establishment of relationships takes into account physical and economic conditions, with a focus on production productivity. The link between large and small traders also considers exclusivity, ensuring that small traders maintain a singular association with one large trader. According to one large trader, the consideration for exclusivity is tied to the productivity of their goods, making profit considerations the foundation for providing capital goods. This "profitable" requirement positions small traders as "employees" in the business relationship.

Second, the partner relationship. The benefit orientation of large traders is not the main consideration in the business relationships of traders in Desa Kolot. The partner relationship model emphasizing a symbiotic relationship that prioritizes sustainable empowerment. Wholesalers adopt the role of business partners, offering production equipment and facilitating skills development. Unlike an industrial mechanism, the provision of production tools, such as ovens, dryers, or gas fuel, is carried out by large traders with small traders obligated to pay for these tools in installments. Large traders

also extend loans to small traders for their production needs. In supporting production, large traders provide training to enhance the skills of small traders, elevating production quality standards. The upgrading of skills, provision of production tools, and capital loans by large traders are non-binding, rooted in a mutually beneficial partnership.

The foundation of community development in Desa Kolot within the culinary industry rests on a mutually beneficial relationship that transcends profit-centric considerations. In this framework, large traders establish the price of raw materials, which is the responsibility of small traders, without any suspicion of markups. Conversely, large traders agree to the price set by small traders for the production goods. The surplus from sales, in comparison to the benchmark price of raw materials, constitutes the profit for small traders. The profit sought by small traders is grounded in meeting their daily needs with sufficiency. As expressed by one small trader:

“The important [thing] is the difference in sales of manufactured goods. The issue of cutting raw materials and meeting other needs is not a problem for us. The important thing [for me] is to earn money [to] take home to fulfill my family’s needs.”

One of the major traders acknowledged and endorsed this agreement model, providing the following illustration:

“The client received 25 kg of raw materials and a three-day production process to make it opaque. Their revenue, after deducting liabilities, is IDR280,000. The client’s performance is excellent and falls into the productive category. The client is free to continue producing, and he is proud of this kind of achievement.”

The production collaboration, intended to enhance each other’s economic well-being, fosters a conducive partnership between large traders and numerous collaborators. A queried wholesaler disclosed having thirty partners, including sixteen involved in *buram* production, three in *kolontong*, three in *gulampok*, two in *rengginang*, two in sale, two in *opak aci*, one in chips, one in *komet*, and one client producing *wajit*.

## Discussion

Enhancing the economic value of traditional culinary production in Desa Kolot, Cikalong Tasikmalaya involves a community-based empowerment manifested in a collaborative relationship between wholesalers and small traders. Small traders, facing limitations in both capital and product distribution, receive support from large traders. Large traders provide raw materials and receive the products from small traders under the condition that this relationship remains exclusive. Small traders are restricted to collaborating with a single large trader, and large traders supply materials to their many partners. Adherence to this unwritten agreement is essential for the continuity of the partnership. The traditional supply model operates on the principles of mutual benefit, voluntariness, and non-binding commitments. Both small and large traders have the freedom to choose

partners aligned with their respective objectives. These partnerships, forged for common goals, are not bound by officially specific institutions but are unified by a shared commitment to preserving traditions that contribute to economic advancement.

There are three discernible trends in the relationship patterns established between large traders and small traders. Firstly, the personal relationship is characterized by the intrapersonal obligation imposed on small traders to cultivate loyalty, trade attachments, and communication ethics with a specific large trader. This intrapersonal commitment may result in severing the trade relationship if not upheld. Secondly, the relationship is voluntary, emphasizing its non-binding nature. Both large and small traders have the freedom to terminate or initiate partnerships, forming the foundation of the relationship on voluntary aspects. Thirdly, relationships are institutionalized through tradition. The bond between large and small traders, devoid of formal agreements or contracts, is structured within an institutional framework known as the tradition of mutual assistance. These three emerging tendencies from the data illustrate the intertwining of patronage within economic improvement activities, aligning with the empowerment model.

The patronage pattern observed in the real-life community development in Desa Kolot signifies the institutionalization of the traditional structure within the village community, relying on local actors deemed to possess significant economic capital to fulfill their needs. In the context of community-based empowerment, this patronage relationship, although considered contrary to the ethos of participatory processes (Cox, 2009), serves as a catalyst for accelerating economic development within the community. The intermediary role of patronage relationships, chosen by scholars to broaden the scope of patrons and clients (De Wit & Berner, 2009), effectively establishes a model of attachment with local traders having homogeneous capital adequacy, playing a pivotal role in enhancing the community's economy. Tim Dorlach (2021) refers to this as the impact of homogeneous local power, expediting economic improvement.

Partnerships emerging from patronage relationships contribute to community development through community-based empowerment. The emphasis on the availability of supportive facilities in economic improvement, formed through patronage relationships, plays a crucial role in elevating the level and nature of participation and collective action in community development projects (Gilmore et al., 2020). Collective action, stemming from group formation, joint problem identification, and business development, occurs through community-initiated patronage relationships. Scholars like Lena Partzsch (2017) and Dominique Coy et al. (2021) argue that the focus on empowerment is rooted in collective strength, fostering social and economic transformation within the community.

The patronage relationship model identified in this community-based empowerment pattern addresses the effectiveness of similar development patterns proposed in various studies. The success or failure of development patterns involving communities, as found by Katiah et al. (2019), Muhammad R.F. and Aliyudin (2018), and Waridah (2021), is influenced by the position of actors who can or cannot mobilize the citizens' desires

through collective action. The impetus for forming collective action often rests with actors possessing a higher level of capital, typically government and institutions (Masrukin et al., 2013; Mustangin et al., 2017), whose relationships are not formed through personal, voluntary, and culturally bound connections. Empowerment models executed by institutions tend to be ineffective and unsustainable (Olsson, 2022).

The inclination to boost active community participation in building a collaborative movement, with a focus on local actors having ties, contributes to improving welfare. This pattern illustrates that actor-to-client ties in empowerment mechanisms are essential for the success demonstrated through collective action. Furthermore, it underscores that clientelism can have a participatory impact in forming the impetus for actions that enhance living standards. The discovery of a patronizing relationship in the process of empowering small traders who become clients, undertaken by large traders acting as patrons, introduces a novel pattern in the study of community-based empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

In contrast to conventional views of community-based empowerment as an intervention model, this study unveils a distinctive approach. The empowerment model explored here engages large traders with more capital in uplifting the economy of small traders with limited capital, leveraging financial power. The resultant relationship, although imbalanced with restrictions on small traders in accessing large traders, provides an avenue for economic improvement. Conversely, large traders enjoy the freedom to extend capital to multiple small traders, leading to increased profits. The voluntary and personal nature of this relationship, acting as an intermediary, proves beneficial for the economic advancement of small traders who previously faced challenges expanding their businesses due to capital and marketing constraints. This intermediary role emerging as a means of economic improvement introduces a novel pattern in community-based empowerment.

The patronage cultivated from the relationship patterns between large and small traders in this study is analyzed through the application of patron-client theory. This theory adeptly examines the dyadic relationship between a party with a higher status, safeguarding someone in need of support. While some studies may view this theory as conflicting with the participatory nature of empowerment, a closer examination of the intermediary aspect establishes a connection between need fulfillment and empowerment. However, it's important to note that this study focuses solely on the didactic relationship from large traders to small traders, excluding complex relationships involving higher-modeled actors with vulnerabilities to exploitation. This limitation presents an avenue for future research to either substantiate or critique the findings of this study.

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#### **Author's declaration**

The authors, namely Muchammadun (author 1/A1), Zaenudin Amrulloh (author 2/A2), and Rahadiyand Aditya (author 3/A3), affirm that this manuscript has been meticulously prepared and endorsed for submission to the journal. The specific contributions of each author are delineated as follows: A1 and A2 formulated the research methodology; A3 conducted the literature review analysis; A1 oversaw the data collection process, while all team members managed the archival of data acquisition outcomes. The collaborative efforts of all authors culminated in the completion of this article. This study offers fresh insights for filling the gap of social religious policies and the practice of indigenous believers' wellbeing in rural communities.

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#### **Availability of data and materials**

All data are available from the authors.

#### **Competing interests**

None. The authors declare no competing interest.

#### **Additional information**

No additional information related to this research.

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