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Understanding Community Participation in Rural Development: Social and Cultural Perspectives

Abstract: The evolving paradigm of rural development has shifted from top-down approaches to participatory models that position communities as central actors in development processes. This study explores how social and cultural dimensions shape community participation and influence the inclusivity and effectiveness of rural development initiatives. Employing a literature review within an interpretivist framework, the study analyses purposively selected Scopus-indexed articles using a thematic interpretative approach to identify patterns related to participation, cultural values, social structures, and power relations. The findings reveal that community participation is a socially embedded and context-dependent process, significantly influenced by cultural norms, local knowledge, and social hierarchies. Participation is found to be non-universal, with variations shaped by traditions, belief systems, and structural inequalities, particularly affecting marginalized groups such as women, older adults, and indigenous communities. Furthermore, collaborative governance models, including multi-stakeholder approaches such as the pentahelix framework and participatory geographic information systems (GIS), demonstrate strong potential for enhancing engagement, although their effectiveness depends on alignment with local socio-cultural contexts. The study highlights that meaningful participation requires not only institutional support but also sensitivity to cultural identity and social dynamics. These findings imply

that sustainable rural development strategies must integrate social and cultural perspectives to ensure inclusivity, relevance, and long-term impact.

Keywords: community participation, rural development, social determinants, cultural values, participatory governance

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of rural development has undergone a significant paradigm shift from top-down approaches to participatory models that position communities as central actors (Lee & Wang, 2026). Community participation is no longer viewed as a supplementary component but rather as a fundamental determinant of sustainable development success. Within this framework, social and cultural dimensions play a crucial role in shaping how communities engage in development processes. Globally, evidence

suggests that participation among rural communities remains uneven and often limited, particularly in developing regions. Amezcua-Aguilar et al. (2026) highlight the importance of sociopolitical strategies in increasing the participation of vulnerable groups, such as older adults. At the same time, Rwirahira et al. (2026) reveal persistent structural barriers that limit rural women's economic engagement. These findings indicate that participation is not yet fully inclusive.

Bai et al. (2026) demonstrate that protecting traditional villages and advancing sustainable development require integrating local knowledge with modern approaches. However, a gap persists between the potential for community participation and its practical implementation. Many development programmes fail to adequately incorporate local cultural values (Nnawulezi et al., 2026). A significant research gap lies in the limited number of studies that comprehensively integrate social and cultural dimensions into analyses of rural community participation. Existing research tends to prioritize economic or technical aspects, such as infrastructure and investment, while overlooking the underlying social dynamics. Chimphero et al. (2026) find that community engagement and capacity building are critical determinants of sustainable rural water supply systems. However, this study primarily focuses on functional outcomes and does not fully explore how cultural values influence participation.

Das (2026) highlights the role of social drivers in sustaining social forestry initiatives, while Domingo (2026) shows that community involvement in rural literacy programmes enhances educational outcomes. Nevertheless, these studies approach participation from sector-specific perspectives rather than as a holistic socio-cultural phenomenon. In the healthcare sector, Jawad et al. (2026) identify barriers to accessing rural health services, including social factors such as distrust and marginalization. This suggests that power relations and complex social structures also shape participation (Iriani et al., 2026).

Iriani et al. (2026) examine sustainable tourism village development through a pentahelix model, demonstrating that multi-stakeholder collaboration can enhance community participation. However, the study focuses more on institutional arrangements and pays limited attention to the influence of local cultural contexts. Meanwhile, Qin et al. (2026) reveal that community participation in tourism within migratory villages in China evolves dynamically alongside social change. This highlights that participation is not static but is influenced by ongoing socio-cultural transformations.

Roncancio-Burgos et al. (2026) showed that participatory geographic information systems can strengthen community involvement in decision-making processes. However, such technological approaches may be less effective if they do not align with local sociocultural contexts (Naika & Pawar, 2026). The novelty of this study lies in its effort to integrate social and cultural perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of community participation. Participation is conceptualized not merely as an action but as a socially embedded process influenced by values, norms, and cultural identities (Lewis et al., 2026).

Additionally, this research seeks to address gaps in the literature by examining how cultural elements, such as traditions, beliefs, and local practices, shape patterns of community participation (Jawad et al., 2026). This approach aims to produce more

contextually grounded and relevant insights into rural development. The urgency of this research is further reinforced by global challenges such as climate change and widening social inequalities. MacIver et al. (2026) argue that local communities play a vital role in addressing these challenges through sustainable development approaches.

Moreover, Naika and Pawar (2026) demonstrated that empowering rural communities, particularly women, is essential for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This underscores the importance of understanding the factors that influence participation. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature in three ways: (1) it integrates social and cultural perspectives into the analysis of community participation in rural development, an aspect that has largely been overlooked by studies prioritising economic or technical dimensions; (2) it identifies the non-universal, context-dependent nature of participation and the structural barriers faced by marginalised groups such as women, older adults, and indigenous communities; and (3) it offers practical implications for designing more inclusive and context-sensitive governance and policy frameworks. By gaining a deeper understanding of social and cultural dimensions, policies and programmes can be designed more effectively to encourage meaningful community participation.

METHOD

This study employed a literature review approach to explore the dynamics of community participation in rural development from social and cultural perspectives (Firmansyah & Dede, 2022). The study was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing that community participation is not merely a technical process, but a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by cultural values, local knowledge and collective practices. The sampling technique was conducted purposively by selecting scholarly articles indexed in the Scopus database that provided rich and in-depth qualitative insights into community engagement, rural livelihoods, and participatory development. The search used the string TITLE-ABS-KEY(("community participation" OR "community engagement" OR "community involvement" OR "citizen participation") AND ("rural development" OR "rural community*" OR "rural area*" OR village* OR countryside) AND (social OR sociocultural OR "social structure*" OR "social capital" OR culture OR cultural OR "cultural value*" OR tradition* OR "local knowledge" OR indigenous)) and covered peer-reviewed journal articles published in English or Indonesian between 2013 and 2025. This process identified 35 articles that met the inclusion criteria for the thematic analysis. Articles were excluded when they did not focus on rural communities, community participation, or the social and cultural dimensions examined in this study. The inclusion criteria focused on studies addressing themes such as social relations, cultural practices, local governance, and community-based development across diverse rural contexts, thereby ensuring analytical depth and contextual diversity in the dataset.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic interpretative approach to identify patterns of meaning embedded within the selected literature. The analytical process involved iterative reading and re-reading of the articles to achieve deep familiarity with their conceptual arguments, empirical findings, and theoretical perspectives. Key findings and statements related to community participation, social interaction, and cultural influences were identified as the units of analysis. These units were systematically coded and

categorized into emerging themes, including forms of participation, social capital, cultural norms, power relations, and local knowledge systems that shape community engagement in rural development processes.

This analysis emphasized interpretative depth by examining how participation is constructed, negotiated, and transformed across different socio-cultural and institutional contexts. Attention was given to how rural communities navigate tensions between traditional values and modern development interventions, as well as how cultural beliefs and social structures influence decision-making and collective action. Reflexivity was applied throughout the analytical process to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the original contexts of the reviewed studies while allowing for critical engagement with broader theoretical debates on participation and development. Methodological rigour was enhanced through transparency in coding procedures, consistency in theme development, and careful consideration of contextual variations, ensuring the credibility, dependability, and interpretative validity of the findings.

This qualitative literature review aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of community participation as a context-dependent and culturally embedded process rather than a uniform development mechanism. By synthesizing evidence from Scopus-indexed studies, this research highlights how participation in rural development reflects complex interactions between social structures, cultural practices, and local agency. Furthermore, this approach contributes to the advancement of rural development studies by positioning community participation not only as a tool for programme implementation but also as a dynamic process of meaning-making through which identities, power relations, and development trajectories are continuously shaped and redefined.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social and Cultural Determinants of Community Participation

The social and cultural determinants of community participation constitute a foundational dimension in understanding how rural development initiatives are shaped, negotiated, and sustained within local contexts. Participation is not merely a procedural inclusion of community members in development programmes; rather, it is deeply embedded in the social fabric and cultural logic of the communities themselves. This implies that participation is influenced by shared values, belief systems, and historically rooted practices that guide how individuals perceive collective action and communal responsibility (Awoonor-Williams & Overå, 2022). At the core of this perspective is the recognition that social values play a crucial role in motivating or constraining participation. In many rural communities, values such as mutual aid, solidarity, and collective well-being form the basis of community engagement. These values often determine whether individuals are willing to contribute time, labour, or resources to development initiatives. Conversely, where social fragmentation or distrust exists, participation may be limited or unevenly distributed.

Cultural norms further shape participation by establishing expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and acceptable forms of engagement in the community. These norms are often implicit yet powerful, influencing who participates, how they participate, and the

extent to which their voices are heard (Carter et al., 2013). Gender norms may restrict women's participation in decision-making processes, while age-based hierarchies may privilege elders over younger community members. Local practices, including customary rituals and community gatherings, serve as important platforms for participation (Gammage et al., 2016). These practices provide socially recognised spaces where individuals can engage in dialogue, negotiate interests, and collectively make decisions. In this sense, participation is not an externally imposed mechanism but an extension of existing cultural practices that have long facilitated communal interactions (Van Ninh & Van Tam, 2026).

The concept of non-universal participation is particularly relevant in this context. Participation varies significantly across different rural settings due to variations in cultural traditions, social structures, and historical experiences (Kunda-Ng'andu et al., 2026). What is considered active participation in one community may differ substantially in another, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive approaches in development planning. Traditional knowledge systems represent another critical determinant of participation. Indigenous and local knowledge often guide how communities interact with their environment and manage resources (Volzone et al., 2026). As highlighted by Thakar and Dave (2026), traditional ecological knowledge plays a vital role in conservation practices, and its recognition can enhance community engagement by validating local expertise and experience.

Das (2026) emphasizes the importance of integrating traditional village knowledge into sustainable development frameworks. Their findings suggest that when local knowledge is acknowledged and incorporated into development strategies, communities are more likely to participate actively, as they perceive the initiatives as relevant and respectful of their cultural identity. Cultural identity is a powerful driver of participation (Jumah et al., 2026). When development initiatives align with local cultural values and reinforce a sense of identity and belonging, community members are more inclined to engage. Conversely, initiatives that disregard or undermine cultural identity may face resistance or apathy from the community (Putthidech et al., 2026). The role of social structures, including kinship systems, leadership patterns, and community hierarchies, cannot be overlooked. These structures influence access to decision-making processes and determine whose voices are prioritized. In many cases, participation is mediated through existing power relations, which may either facilitate or hinder inclusive engagement (Kagoya et al., 2026).

Muñoz Olivar et al. (2026) illustrate how traditional practices, such as the role of traditional birth attendants, are deeply embedded in cultural systems and continue to shape community participation in healthcare. Their study highlights that participation is not only about involvement in formal systems but also about the continuation and adaptation of culturally grounded practices. Moreover, Roncancio-Burgos et al. (2026) demonstrate that awareness and participation in environmental conservation among rural communities are closely linked to the interplay between ecological knowledge and socioeconomic conditions. This underscores the importance of understanding participation as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by both cultural and material factors (MacIver et al., 2026).

Language and communication patterns also play significant roles in shaping participation. The use of local languages and culturally appropriate communication methods can enhance inclusivity and understanding, whereas the imposition of external communication styles may create barriers to effective engagement (Jawad et al., 2026). Religious beliefs and spiritual practices further contribute to shaping the community's participation. In many rural settings, religion provides a moral framework that influences attitudes towards collective action, responsibility, and stewardship of resources. Development initiatives that align with these beliefs are more likely to garner community support (Lewis et al., 2026).

Another important aspect is the intergenerational transmission of cultural values and practices (Bai et al., 2026). Participation is often learned through socialization processes within families and communities, where individuals acquire norms and behaviors related to communal involvement from an early age. The dynamic nature of culture means that participation is not static but evolves over time (Naika & Pawar, 2026). External influences, such as globalization, migration, and technological change, can reshape cultural practices and, consequently, patterns of participation. This creates both opportunities and challenges for rural development (Qin et al., 2026).

In some cases, cultural change may lead to the erosion of traditional practices that once facilitated participation in the community. However, it can also give rise to new forms of engagement that reflect changing social realities (Thakar & Dave, 2026). Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing adaptive and responsive strategies. The interaction between formal development institutions and informal cultural systems is another critical factor (Bobbo & Kato Kale Kapume, 2026). Successful participation often depends on the ability of formal programs to engage with and build upon existing cultural practices rather than attempting to replace them.

Figure 1 presents a word cloud of the terms most frequently associated with social and cultural determinants of participation, in which words such as “values,” “norms,” and “local knowledge” are the most prominent, reflecting the centrality of socio-cultural factors identified in the reviewed literature.



Figure 1. Word cloud Social and Cultural Determinants

Inclusive Participation and Marginalised Groups in Rural Communities

Inclusive participation in rural development has increasingly become a central concern in contemporary development discourse, particularly in relation to marginalized groups such as women, older adults, and indigenous communities (Bay et al., 2026). While participatory approaches aim to ensure that all members of society are involved in development processes, participation often remains uneven and exclusionary in practice (Clack, 2026). This highlights the importance of critically examining the structural, social, and cultural barriers that shape who can participate and whose voices are recognised (Iriani et al., 2026).

At its core, inclusive participation is grounded in the principle of social equity, which emphasizes the fair distribution of opportunities, resources, and decision-making power (Zhang et al., 2026). However, in many rural contexts, entrenched inequalities limit the ability of marginalized groups to engage meaningfully in development initiatives. These inequalities are often reinforced by longstanding social hierarchies and institutional arrangements that privilege certain groups over others (Kurnaz, 2026). For instance, women in rural communities frequently encounter gender-based barriers that restrict their participation in public and economic spheres. Bobbo and Kato Kale Kapume (2026) demonstrate that, despite the potential of foreign direct investment to enhance women's economic participation, structural constraints, such as limited access to education, financial resources, and decision-making platforms, continue to hinder their participation. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that address systemic gender inequalities (Kurnaz, 2026).

Zhang et al. (2026) highlight the critical role of women-led agricultural initiatives in advancing sustainable development goals. Their research indicates that when women are empowered to participate actively in rural livelihoods, they contribute significantly to economic resilience and community well-being. However, achieving such empowerment requires overcoming deep-rooted socio-cultural norms that often confine women to domestic roles (Clack, 2026). Older adults represent another group whose participation is frequently overlooked in rural development. Amezcua-Aguilar et al. (2026) introduce the concept of "senefficiency" (senior efficiency) as a sociopolitical strategy to activate the generativity and inclusion of older populations. Their work illustrates that older adults possess valuable knowledge, experience, and social capital that can contribute meaningfully to community development, yet they are often marginalized due to age-related stereotypes and exclusionary practices (Kurnaz, 2026).

In contrast, Indigenous communities face unique challenges related to cultural marginalization and historical exclusion. Their participation in development processes is often constrained by a lack of recognition of their rights, knowledge systems, and governance structures (Chimphero et al., 2026). Inclusive participation in this context requires not only engagement but also respect for cultural autonomy and self-determination of the Indigenous peoples. Structural barriers play a significant role in shaping the outcome of participation. These barriers include limited access to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and financial services, which disproportionately affect marginalized groups (Nnawulezi et al., 2026). Domingo (2026) emphasizes the importance of financial inclusion

in enabling rural populations, particularly women, to participate in economic activity. Without access to financial resources, participation is symbolic rather than substantive.

In addition to structural constraints, social barriers such as discrimination, stigma, and exclusionary norms, further limit participation. Seyedtabatabaei and Fatemi (2026) explored how psychological and cultural factors, such as dependency norms among rural women, can inhibit self-employment and active engagement in development initiatives. These findings highlight the complex interplay between internalized beliefs and external social pressures (RwiraHira et al., 2026). Cultural barriers also significantly influenced participation. In many rural settings, cultural norms dictate appropriate roles and behaviors for different groups, thereby shaping the boundaries of participation. For example, traditional gender roles may discourage women from speaking in public forums, while cultural perceptions of aging may limit the involvement of older adults in decision-making processes (Sasikumar et al., 2026).

The intersectionality of marginalization adds another layer of complexity to inclusive participation. Individuals may experience multiple forms of exclusion based on gender, age, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Maness et al., 2026). Understanding these intersecting identities is essential for designing interventions that address the specific needs and challenges of diverse groups. Inclusive participation also requires attention to power relations within communities (Lee & Wang, 2026). Participation is not a neutral process; it is shaped by the dynamics of power that determine whose voices are heard and whose interests are prioritized. Without addressing these power imbalances, participatory approaches risk reinforcing existing inequalities (Maness et al., 2026).

Therefore, efforts to promote inclusive participation must go beyond mere representation and focus on meaningful engagement. This involves creating enabling environments where marginalized groups can express their perspectives, influence decision-making and benefit from development outcomes (Sasikumar et al., 2026). Such environments require institutional support and cultural transformation. Capacity building is a critical component of inclusive participation (RwiraHira et al., 2026). Providing marginalized groups with access to education, skills training and information can enhance their ability to engage effectively in development processes. However, capacity-building initiatives must be context-sensitive and aligned with local needs and realities (Junead et al., 2026).

Policy frameworks also play a vital role in shaping inclusive participation. Governments and development agencies must adopt policies that explicitly promote inclusion and address structural inequalities (Seyedtabatabaei & Fatemi, 2026). This includes implementing gender-sensitive policies, recognizing Indigenous rights, and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities for Indigenous women. Community-based approaches offer promising pathways for enhancing inclusion (Domingo, 2026). By involving local stakeholders in the design and implementation of development initiatives, these approaches cultivate a sense of ownership and accountability among the community members. However, they must be carefully designed to avoid elite capture and ensure that marginalized voices are not overlooked (Nnawulezi et al., 2026).

Figure 2 illustrates the keyword pattern for the inclusive participation and marginalised-groups theme, underscoring the recurring emphasis on inclusion, equity, and

the position of marginalised groups within the reviewed studies. The role of social capital in facilitating participation should be considered in future studies. Strong networks of trust, cooperation, and mutual support can enable marginalized groups to overcome barriers and engage more actively in community life (Chimphero et al., 2026). Conversely, weak social capital can exacerbate exclusion and limit participation opportunities (Kurnaz, 2026).



Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential for assessing the effectiveness of inclusive participation strategies. These mechanisms should incorporate indicators that capture not only the extent of participation but also its quality and impact on marginalized groups (Zhang et al., 2026).

Figure 2. Wordcloud Inclusive Participation and Marginalised

Community Participation in Sustainable and Transformative Rural Development

Participatory governance has emerged as a critical framework for advancing inclusive and sustainable rural development, particularly through the integration of multi-stakeholder collaboration (Clack, 2026; Iriani et al., 2026). Unlike traditional governance models that rely heavily on top-down decision-making, participatory governance emphasizes shared authority, collective decision-making, and the active involvement of diverse actors, including government institutions, local communities, private-sector actors, and academic institutions (Bay et al., 2026; Iriani et al., 2026).

This collaborative approach reflects a shift towards more democratic and responsive development practices. At the centre of participatory governance is the recognition that a single actor cannot effectively address complex rural development challenges. Instead, they require coordinated efforts that draw on the strengths, knowledge, and resources of multiple stakeholders (Clack, 2026). This multi-actor engagement enables more comprehensive and context-sensitive solutions, as each stakeholder contributes a unique perspective and expertise. In this context, the concept of collaboration extends beyond mere coordination; it involves meaningful partnerships characterized by mutual trust, shared goals, and continuous dialogue. Effective collaboration requires mechanisms that facilitate communication, negotiation, and joint decision-making among stakeholders, ensuring that community voices are not marginalized (Kurnaz, 2026).

One prominent model that embodies this collaborative approach is the pentahelix model, which integrates five key actors: government, academia, business, community, and

media. Chimphero et al. (2026) demonstrate how this model can be applied in the development of sustainable tourism villages, where each stakeholder plays a distinct yet interconnected role in enhancing community participation and local development outcomes. In the pentahelix framework, government institutions provide regulatory support and policy direction, while academic institutions contribute research and innovation. The private sector offers investment and market access, and the community serves as both beneficiary and active participant. The inclusion of media further strengthens communication and public awareness, amplifying community voices and promoting transparency.

Another important approach within participatory governance is the use of participatory geographic information systems (GIS). Sasikumar et al. (2026) highlight how participatory GIS enables communities to actively engage in spatial planning and decision-making processes. By incorporating local knowledge into mapping and data analysis, this approach enhances the relevance and legitimacy of development interventions. Participatory GIS also empowers communities by providing them with tools to visualize and articulate their needs, priorities, and resources. This strengthens their capacity to participate in governance processes and promotes greater accountability among decision-makers. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on the accessibility of technology and the capacity of community members to use it effectively (RwiraHira et al., 2026).

Community policing represents another model of participatory governance that underscores the importance of collaboration between authorities and local communities. Junead et al. (2026) illustrate how community-based policing strategies can reduce livestock theft in rural South Africa by building trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility between law enforcement and residents (Lee & Wang, 2026). This approach highlights the significance of local knowledge and community involvement in addressing security challenges. By engaging community members as active partners rather than passive recipients of services, community policing enhances both effectiveness and legitimacy. It also demonstrates how participatory governance can be applied beyond development projects to broader aspects of rural life (Sasikumar et al., 2026).

The role of institutional frameworks in supporting participatory governance cannot be overlooked. Effective governance requires formal structures that facilitate stakeholder engagement, define roles and responsibilities, and ensure their accountability. Without such frameworks, collaborations may remain superficial or fragmented. Maness et al. (2026) emphasize the importance of structured engagement mechanisms in supporting participation in practice-based research networks. Their centralized survey model demonstrates how systematic approaches to stakeholder engagement can enhance participation and improve the quality of collaborative outcomes (Domingo, 2026).

Power dynamics represent a critical challenge within participatory governance. While collaboration aims to promote inclusivity, existing power imbalances among stakeholders can influence decision-making processes. For instance, government agencies or private sector actors may dominate discussions, thereby limiting the influence of community members (Nnawulezi et al., 2026). Addressing these power imbalances requires deliberate efforts to create equitable spaces for participation. This includes ensuring that

Figure 3 displays the keyword pattern for the participatory governance theme, in which terms such as “collaboration,” “trust,” and “stakeholder” appear most frequently, reinforcing the discussion of collaborative governance mechanisms presented in this section. The integration of local knowledge with scientific and technical expertise is a key strength of participatory governance. By valuing and incorporating community knowledge, development initiatives can become more contextually relevant and culturally appropriate to the community. However, participatory governance faces practical challenges, including resource constraints, limited capacity, and institutional resistance to change. Implementing collaborative models requires time, effort, and sustained commitment from all stakeholders.



Figure 3. Wordcloud Community Participation

Table 1. Summary Participation in Rural Development: Social and Cultural Perspectives

Perspectives				
Theme		Keywords	Description	Implication
Social and Cultural Determinants of Community Participation		social values, cultural norms, local practices, traditional knowledge, cultural identity, social	Community participation is deeply embedded in social values, belief systems and cultural practices.	Development strategies must be culturally sensitive, integrate local knowledge, and adapt

	structures, universal participation	non-	It is shaped by norms, traditions, and local knowledge, making participation context-specific, rather than universal. Social structures and power relations determine who participates and how they engage.	to specific social contexts to ensure meaningful and sustainable participation in the project.
Inclusive Participation and Marginalised Groups in Rural Communities	inclusion, marginalised groups, gender inequality, indigenous communities, older adults, structural barriers, social equity, intersectionality		Participation remains uneven due to structural, social, and cultural barriers affecting vulnerable groups, such as women, the elderly, and indigenous communities. Inequalities in access to resources, education, and decision-making limit inclusive engagement. Power relations and social norms further reinforce exclusion.	Policies and programs must address structural inequalities, promote social equity, and empower marginalized groups through inclusive, context-sensitive, and participatory approaches.
Participatory Governance, Collaboration, and Development Models	participatory governance, multi-stakeholder collaboration, pentahelix model, participatory GIS, community policing, institutional frameworks, trust, power dynamics		Participatory governance emphasizes collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including the government, communities, private sector, and academia. Models such as the pentahelix and participatory GIS enhance engagement, while trust, communication, and institutional support are critical for effective collaboration.	Institutions should invest in trust-building mechanisms, clarify stakeholder roles across the pentahelix, and strengthen communication channels so that collaborative governance translates into equitable decision-making rather than symbolic participation.

CONCLUSION

Across the reviewed studies, spanning contexts as varied as Malawi, Iran, China, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda, community participation in rural development is shown to be a socially embedded and culturally shaped process rather than a uniform technical mechanism. Values, norms, local knowledge, and power relations shape both the extent and inclusivity of engagement, particularly for marginalized groups. These patterns cluster within distinct political-economic conditions; however, several of the reviewed cases show that local knowledge or strong social capital fails to translate into meaningful participation once external institutions impose rigid programme structures. This variation cautions against reading community participation as a single global pattern; the findings below should be treated as context-bound insights rather than a universal model. For future research, it is recommended that empirical and field-based studies explore the dynamic interaction between cultural transformation and participatory practices across diverse rural contexts to generate more context-specific and comparative insights. The implication of this study is that policymakers and development practitioners must design more inclusive and culturally responsive strategies by integrating local knowledge systems, addressing structural inequalities, and enabling equitable multi-stakeholder collaboration to achieve sustainable and transformative rural development.

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Ethical Approval

This study is a literature review entirely based on secondary data from previously published scientific publications. As it does not directly involve human participants, no primary data collection was conducted, and there was no access to personally identifiable data; therefore, this study does not require ethical approval from an ethics committee or institutional review board (IRB). All sources used are public, indexed, and have undergone peer review according to academic standards.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest, whether financial, personal, or professional, with any party or organization that could affect the objectivity, conduct, or results of this study.

Transparency of Data

The author guarantees the transparency and validity of the data presented in this article and that other supporting research materials are available honestly and can be accounted for to enable further scientific verification.

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The Statement on the Use of AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are used solely to assist with language editing, grammar checking, and enhancing the clarity and readability of the manuscript. AI is not used to formulate research questions, develop the conceptual framework, conduct qualitative document analysis, interpret findings, or formulate scientific conclusions. The authors are fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, and academic integrity of the content of this manuscript. AI tools are not recognized as authors or contributors in accordance with prevailing ethical standards in academic publishing.

Authors' Contributions

The contributions of the authors in the preparation of this article are as follows:

- Steven Alezender: Responsible for research conceptualization, online data collection, and drafting the initial manuscript.
- Suhadirman: Responsible for methodological supervision and literature review
- Salasiah: Responsible for critical editing, and finalization of the article prior to submission to the journal.

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