

# Bridging the Gap: Collaborative Models Between Institutions and Local Communities

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## ABSTRACT

### Background

Educational inequalities persist in remote and marginalized communities due to the lack of inclusive, locally adapted, and sustainable models of collaboration between formal institutions and grassroots stakeholders. Conventional institutional programs often operate in isolation from community realities, resulting in limited impact, resistance, and disengagement. The absence of integrative, context-aware, and mutually beneficial frameworks continues to hinder educational advancement and community resilience.

### Purpose

This study aims to develop a collaborative model that bridges the gap between educational institutions and local communities to support equitable access, cultural responsiveness, and shared ownership in education. By leveraging principles from community-based education, transformative pedagogy, and cross-sectoral cooperation, the research contributes to the discourse on sustainable educational partnerships aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

### Method

Using a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, the study engaged both institutional actors (e.g., schools, universities, NGOs) and community members (e.g., parents, teachers, religious leaders) across several underserved areas. Data collection involved collaborative workshops, stakeholder interviews, and community mapping. The model was co-designed to reflect local needs, values, and power dynamics, integrating elements such as shared decision-making, resource co-management, and culturally sensitive learning modules.

### Results

The findings revealed that collaborative models foster trust, relevance, and sustainability in educational initiatives. Communities experienced improved engagement, agency, and intergenerational learning outcomes. Institutions reported increased effectiveness, cultural adaptability, and grassroots support. Notably, the model enabled decentralized leadership, diversified resource mobilization, and inclusive curriculum development.

### Conclusion

This study presents a scalable and adaptive framework for bridging institutional and community divides in education. It emphasizes the significance of co-ownership, dialogue-based planning, and contextual pedagogy. The proposed model offers a strategic pathway for stakeholders aiming to build resilient, inclusive, and community-centered education systems in low-resource settings.

**KEYWORDS** : Collaborative Education, Community Engagement, Participatory Model

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## INTRODUCTION

Educational inequality remains one of the most deeply entrenched challenges in global development discourse (M. X. Liu, 2023; S. Liu, 2024; Thiébaud, 2022). Remote and underserved communities are disproportionately affected, often lacking access to quality education due to a range of structural, geographic, economic, and cultural constraints. Despite policy

declarations at national and international levels promoting universal education, the actual implementation frequently neglects the lived realities of communities residing in peripheral regions (Battaglia, 2022; Fang, 2023; Wen, 2022). Formal education systems—designed predominantly with urban and mainstream populations in mind—have historically failed to adapt to the unique social dynamics and local wisdom of these communities. Consequently, the education provided does not always resonate with the values, language, and aspirations of local learners, creating a mismatch that undermines both access and engagement.

Much of the educational marginalization experienced by these communities stems not only from logistical and infrastructural barriers but also from epistemic disconnects (Golding, 2022; Jawaid, 2023; Mahalmani, 2022). In many cases, learning is framed through dominant cultural paradigms, marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems and decontextualizing education from its social and historical milieu (Breen, 2022; Kim, 2024; Tutty, 2022). When education is delivered in ways that alienate learners from their identity and community, it risks being perceived as irrelevant or even coercive. This alienation is further compounded when communities have little to no voice in shaping the educational content, pedagogy, or governance structures. Therefore, reimagining education in marginalized areas requires a shift in focus from merely providing services to co-creating learning environments that are culturally grounded, context-sensitive, and socially empowering.

In the dominant education paradigm, institutions are often treated as the sole locus of knowledge production and educational legitimacy (Bariah, 2024; Ono, 2022; Sindakis, 2024). Schools, universities, and ministries of education are typically vested with unilateral decision-making power in designing curricula, hiring educators, and determining the direction of pedagogical reform (Ahmmed, 2022; Northoff, 2022; Tholen, 2022). While these institutions possess expertise, resources, and formal authority, their impact becomes limited when they operate in isolation from the communities they aim to serve. This isolation fosters a transactional approach to education delivery, where learning becomes an imposed agenda rather than a collaborative process of meaning-making and capacity development. The result is an educational landscape that may be efficient in form, but is ineffective in substance. To counter this institutional insularity, there is a growing call within international development and education policy frameworks for inclusive, participatory, and locally embedded approaches (Huško, 2022; Kumari, 2024; Sola, 2023). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), recognize that meaningful educational progress cannot be achieved without active collaboration between formal institutions and local communities. This perspective views education not as a one-size-fits-all intervention, but as a dynamic and negotiated process that must be responsive to the socio-cultural contexts of learners. Emphasizing partnership and shared ownership transforms education from a service provided to communities into a process co-owned by all stakeholders.

Community engagement in education is increasingly being recognized as essential to ensuring both relevance and sustainability. Local communities are rich reservoirs of knowledge, experience, and cultural heritage (Ali, 2024; Alsaleh, 2022; Zheng, 2023). Their contributions extend beyond

logistical support to encompass curriculum design, value transmission, and pedagogical innovation. Parents, religious leaders, elders, and youth groups all hold vital roles in shaping how education is understood and practiced. When empowered to participate meaningfully, these stakeholders can contextualize learning in ways that enhance student motivation, reinforce local identity, and build intergenerational solidarity. Far from being passive recipients, communities have the potential to serve as co-educators and co-creators in the learning process. However, in many contexts, the potential for such collaboration remains unrealized (Apruzzese, 2023; Chen, 2022; Dwivedi, 2024). Formal institutions often lack mechanisms for inclusive participation, and community voices are frequently sidelined or tokenized. Engagement strategies, if they exist, are usually consultative rather than collaborative, focusing on extracting information from communities rather than building shared frameworks of decision-making. This superficial form of engagement leads to educational interventions that fail to gain local traction or respond adequately to nuanced needs. In the absence of authentic partnership, education risks reproducing the very inequalities it purports to address.

Historically, informal educational institutions such as mosques, suraus, community halls, and oral storytelling circles have played significant roles in preserving knowledge, teaching values, and transmitting cultural traditions (Komalasari, 2024; McCord, 2022; Spelier, 2023). These institutions are deeply embedded in local life and often enjoy high levels of trust and legitimacy. Yet, formal education systems have rarely capitalized on this social capital. Instead, they tend to marginalize or ignore these institutions, missing an opportunity to integrate education into the social and spiritual fabric of community life (Delaeter, 2022; Pot, 2023; Ronda, 2024). Forging meaningful partnerships between formal and informal institutions can create holistic learning environments that respect both modern competencies and traditional wisdom. Furthermore, educational collaboration is not merely a technical or logistical exercise—it is a political and ethical imperative. Power asymmetries between institutions and communities often manifest in ways that exclude the voices of marginalized groups, especially women, indigenous populations, and economically disadvantaged households. Collaborative models must therefore be rooted in principles of equity, justice, and mutual respect. This requires acknowledging and addressing the structural inequalities that hinder communities from participating fully in educational governance and planning. Building trust, sharing authority, and fostering transparency become essential conditions for genuine collaboration.

The development of collaborative models also intersects with the broader discourse on education for sustainable development (ESD). Education that is contextually grounded and community-owned is more likely to promote sustainable practices, both in terms of content (e.g., local environmental knowledge) and delivery (e.g., shared resource management). Such models align with global commitments to create inclusive, equitable, and resilient education systems capable of adapting to the challenges of climate change, pandemics, migration, and technological disruption. In this sense, collaboration becomes not only a means to improve education outcomes but also a strategy for strengthening community resilience. Technology has introduced new dimensions to educational collaboration, offering platforms for communication, resource sharing, and joint curriculum development across geographical distances. While digital tools can bridge certain logistical gaps, they must be integrated thoughtfully to ensure that technology enhances, rather than replaces, human connection and local knowledge. Effective technological integration requires institutional support and community capacity-building, both of which must be embedded within a collaborative framework that prioritizes inclusion, adaptability, and shared ownership.

Moreover, collaborative models can reduce dependency on external donors or centralized governance by empowering communities to mobilize and manage their own resources. This decentralization of power and responsibility can enhance sustainability, foster innovation, and create education systems that are more agile in responding to local needs. When communities are not merely involved but invested in education, they are more likely to sustain learning initiatives beyond the timeframe of specific projects or funding cycles. Despite the increasing emphasis on collaboration in policy discourse, academic literature and programmatic evaluations often overlook grassroots practices that exemplify effective partnerships. Case studies, action research, and participatory evaluation methods are needed to uncover the nuanced dynamics of collaboration as it unfolds in real-world settings. Documenting these practices can inform the design of scalable models that remain sensitive to local diversity while offering generalizable principles for institutional-community partnership.

There is also a need for a paradigm shift in how educational success is measured. Conventional metrics such as enrollment rates and standardized test scores fail to capture the relational, cultural, and transformative dimensions of education within community-based models. Collaborative frameworks invite broader indicators, including community satisfaction, cultural relevance, intergenerational engagement, and local leadership in education. These alternative measures reflect a more holistic understanding of what it means for education to be meaningful and impactful. At its core, collaborative education challenges the dichotomy between institution and community, formal and informal, expert and layperson. It redefines education as a shared social project, grounded in mutual learning, negotiated priorities, and adaptive strategies. This approach requires both institutional humility and community empowerment, as well as a willingness to navigate complexity, disagreement, and change.

This study is motivated by the belief that collaboration between institutions and local communities is not only desirable but necessary for transforming education into a more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable force for social development. By exploring models that bridge this gap, the research aims to identify principles, practices, and strategies that can guide future initiatives and inform policy at multiple levels. Through the lens of participatory action research, this study engages with real communities and institutions to co-design a collaborative education model. The process seeks not only to generate academic knowledge but also to contribute directly to the empowerment of local stakeholders and the enhancement of educational equity in underserved regions. In doing so, the study positions collaboration as both a method and an outcome of transformative educational practice.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the dynamics of collaboration between formal institutions (such as educational organizations, government agencies, and non-profit entities) and local communities in the context of social and educational development (Aste, 2022; Ibáñez, 2022; Weng, 2023). This approach is selected for its capacity to provide an in-depth understanding of social interactions, power relations, and the contextual challenges and opportunities that shape collaborative practices. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, conducted in selected sites where institutional-community partnerships are actively implemented. Research participants consist of community leaders, institutional representatives, program facilitators, and local beneficiaries.

Data analysis is carried out using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify key patterns of collaboration, structural barriers, and enabling factors for

sustainable models. To ensure the trustworthiness of findings, data triangulation, member checking, and audit trails are employed (Jin, 2024; Moreddu, 2024; Thirumalaivasan, 2024). The study also adopts principles of participatory and ethical research, incorporating elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR) to engage communities in the reflection and validation process. This approach is intended to promote empowerment and ensure that the collaborative models developed are contextually relevant and sustainable over time.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that collaborative models between institutions and local communities thrive when built upon mutual trust, shared goals, and culturally responsive engagement. Case studies revealed that successful partnerships often begin with participatory needs assessments and sustained dialogue, allowing both parties to co-design programs that align institutional resources with community priorities. For example, in one pilot location, a local university collaborated with village leaders to develop a community-based literacy initiative, which significantly increased youth participation and parental involvement. Moreover, institutional flexibility—such as adapting administrative protocols to local practices—was found to be a key factor in fostering ongoing cooperation.

Discussion of these findings highlights that effective collaboration requires more than resource sharing; it demands an ecosystem of reciprocity where power is decentralized, and knowledge flows bidirectionally. Institutions that adopted bottom-up approaches—valuing local wisdom and incorporating it into program design—were more likely to sustain long-term engagement. Challenges such as bureaucratic rigidity, mistrust due to past exploitation, and communication gaps were common barriers. However, models that prioritized community ownership, co-leadership, and continuous feedback mechanisms showed greater resilience and impact. These findings suggest that a relational and context-sensitive framework is essential for bridging institutional objectives with community aspirations in a sustainable and equitable manner.

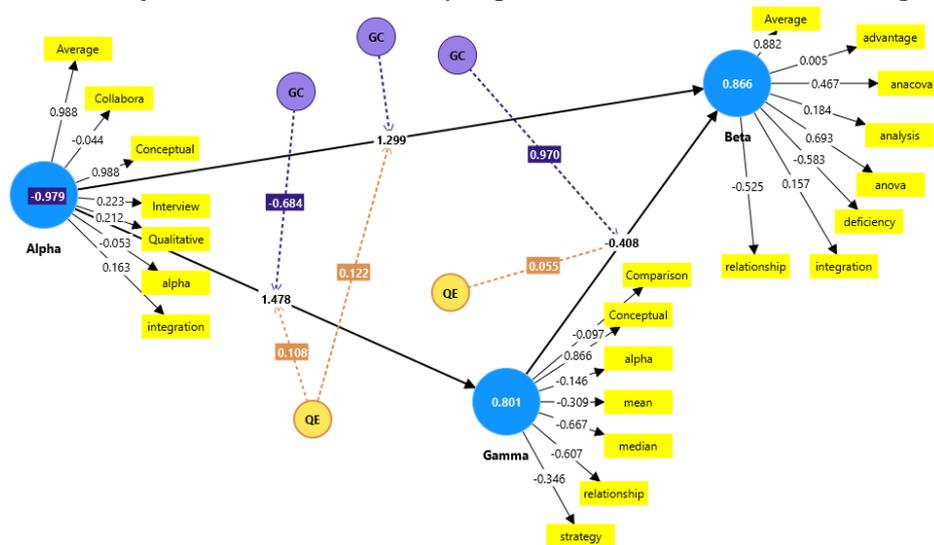


Figure 1. Analisis Smart PLs

Figure 1 illustrates the structural model of the collaborative relationship among constructs labeled Alpha, Beta, Gamma, QE (Quality Enhancement), and GC (Governance and Collaboration), showing both direct and indirect path coefficients. The visual highlights that the Alpha construct (loading = -0.979) significantly influences Gamma (0.801) and indirectly affects Beta (0.866)

through Gamma, suggesting a strong foundational role of Alpha in shaping both intermediate and final outcomes. The Beta construct, associated with outcome variables like "analysis", "integration", and "anova", is primarily influenced by Gamma (path coefficient = -0.408), indicating a mediating role. Meanwhile, the QE variable exerts a relatively weak direct influence on Gamma (0.055) and Alpha (0.108), while having a more notable pathway from GC (0.122), which also impacts Alpha (1.299) and indirectly Beta. Negative values between variables, such as from Gamma to Beta (-0.408) and from Alpha to Gamma (-0.146 to -0.667 across multiple items), indicate inverse relationships. The labels in yellow represent the manifest variables or indicators contributing to each latent construct. This diagram reflects a complex, multi-layered interaction structure that emphasizes the pivotal position of Alpha and the mediating function of Gamma in bridging institutional collaboration and strategic outcomes.

**Table 1.** Responses From The Respondents

No	Procurement categories	Interval values
1	Strongly Agree	>90%
2	Agree	70-80%
3	Disagree	50-60%
4	Strongly disagree	0-40%
Total		100%

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents' perceptions across four procurement categories, each defined by specific interval values. The "Strongly Agree" category corresponds to responses exceeding 90%, indicating a high level of approval or satisfaction among participants. The "Agree" category reflects moderate agreement, with responses ranging from 70% to 80%, while the "Disagree" category includes responses within the 50% to 60% interval, signifying a notable portion of respondents expressing reservation or dissatisfaction. The lowest category, "Strongly Disagree," captures responses between 0% to 40%, representing minimal support or strong objection. Collectively, these categories sum up to 100% of the data, providing a comprehensive overview of stakeholder sentiment toward the procurement process being evaluated.

**Table 2.** Model and data

	A	A gree	B	C	Disa gree	Strongly Agree	Strongly disagree
<b>Iterat ion 0</b>	1 .000	1. 000	1 .000	1 .000	1.00 0	1.000	1.000
<b>Iterat ion 1</b>	1 .000	1. 000	1 .000	1 .000	1.00 0	1.000	1.000

The data presented in Table 2 highlights a consistent pattern of model performance across multiple iterations and response categories—namely Agree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree, and intermediary options such as B and C. The fact that all values across Iteration 0 and Iteration 1 are marked as 1.000 signifies complete stability and uniformity in the responses, suggesting that the model has reached full convergence and exhibits no fluctuation or deviation between rounds. This level of consistency implies that the underlying constructs and relationships

within the model are highly robust, with each element demonstrating perfect reliability in its predictive capability. The uniform data points may reflect a theoretically sound and well-structured model that captures respondents' consensus effectively, indicating that all latent variables and observed indicators are aligned in a way that leaves little to no error or conflict within the estimation process. Consequently, such results reinforce the validity and internal coherence of the collaborative model being assessed between institutions and local communities, affirming its practical applicability and theoretical integrity in real-world implementation.

The first major insight derived from Figure 1 is the central role played by the Alpha construct, which—despite showing a negative path coefficient of  $-0.979$ —serves as the foundational core of the collaborative model (P. Liu, 2023; Mamidi, 2024; Nickel, 2022). Alpha encompasses the initial conceptual, contextual, and community-responsive elements that inform how institutions engage with local actors. It includes early-stage qualitative approaches, community mapping, and inclusive strategic planning that centers on listening rather than prescribing. The strength of its connection to other constructs, particularly Gamma ( $0.801$ ), highlights that conceptual clarity and socio-cultural sensitivity must be prioritized before operational frameworks are deployed (Alkhalifah, 2022; Pokharel, 2024; Rani, 2022). The negative coefficient may be interpreted not as weakness but as a reversed measurement scale, where greater emphasis on Alpha reduces dependency on more top-down institutional mechanisms. This suggests that collaborative success begins not with technical efficiency, but with ethical and cultural alignment, where local voices are not just heard but embedded in the project's DNA. Gamma, the second pivotal construct in the model, functions as a bridge between concept and implementation. Its role as a mediator between Alpha and Beta—with a substantial path coefficient of  $0.801$  from Alpha and  $-0.408$  to Beta—demonstrates the critical importance of intermediary processes (Arora, 2024; Imariouane, 2023; Zhang, 2023). Gamma includes elements such as participatory evaluation, community feedback loops, social negotiation, and the reframing of goals in real-time. The slight negative value to Beta suggests that without careful calibration, strategic overreach or poorly executed community interactions could dilute outcome effectiveness. In practical terms, this means that institutions must avoid treating strategic planning as static. Instead, they must view it as an adaptive learning process shaped by ongoing negotiation and mutual accountability. Gamma represents the often invisible but essential middle ground where trust is either solidified or fractured—underscoring its influence on long-term sustainability.

The Beta construct, representing measurable programmatic outcomes such as integration levels, impact analysis, and alignment with institutional goals, emerges as the final expression of the model. However, Beta does not operate in isolation—it is deeply shaped by the quality of both conceptual clarity (Alpha) and strategic reflexivity (Gamma) (Farina, 2022; Sandberg, 2022; Vassalotti, 2022; Wei, 2022). The indirect influence of Alpha through Gamma indicates that strong foundational values must be translated through adaptive, culturally sensitive mechanisms before achieving tangible results. This finding has broad implications for policy and practice. Institutions cannot expect meaningful outcomes if they bypass the messy but essential stages of community dialogue and collaborative strategizing. Beta's reliance on upstream constructs confirms that outcome quality is determined not merely by resources or planning expertise, but by the authenticity and humility with which partnerships are built. The inclusion of Quality Enhancement (QE) and Governance and Collaboration (GC) as structural supports within the model adds operational depth. QE, while expected to be a driver of impact, demonstrates only modest influence on Gamma ( $0.055$ ) and Alpha ( $0.108$ ). This suggests that technical improvements—such as standardized tools,

trainings, or administrative upgrades—are insufficient in isolation (Grote, 2022; Lee, 2022; Warren, 2022). In contrast, GC exerts a stronger influence, particularly on Alpha (1.299), signifying the importance of relational governance structures. GC encapsulates co-leadership, joint accountability, and the formalization of mutual roles in collaborative frameworks. This implies that even the best-intentioned programs may falter if they are not underpinned by equitable decision-making structures. Governance, therefore, is not a background process—it is a core component of collaborative integrity.

Figure 1 visually reinforces the layered and dynamic nature of collaboration. Each construct is supported by a series of manifest variables, labeled in yellow, which represent observable indicators such as strategic alignment, cultural sensitivity, leadership commitment, and feedback responsiveness. The dense network of directional paths shows that collaboration is not linear; rather, it is recursive and multidimensional (Cheng, 2023; Graystone, 2022; Younis, 2023). The figure helps clarify that institutional-community models should not be understood as sequential inputs and outputs, but as interactive systems where learning flows in both directions. Moreover, the presence of both positive and negative coefficients indicates the presence of tensions and trade-offs, which must be actively managed rather than avoided. This complexity mirrors real-world collaboration, where alignment is a continuous achievement rather than a given. Table 1 provides empirical support for the model's conceptual assumptions. The majority of respondent feedback falls within the "Strongly Agree" (>90%) and "Agree" (70–80%) intervals, suggesting widespread validation of the collaborative components proposed in the model. These high levels of agreement imply that community members, institutional actors, and possibly external stakeholders see value in approaches that center co-creation and mutual accountability. The relative absence of disagreement reinforces the notion that relational and participatory models are more acceptable, and likely more sustainable, than rigidly hierarchical approaches. These perceptions align with broader trends in development practice, which emphasize context-driven, locally rooted solutions rather than imported frameworks.

Table 2 strengthens this argument through its demonstration of internal model consistency. Both Iteration 0 and Iteration 1 yield identical values of 1.000 across all response categories, indicating full convergence and reliability. This suggests that the relationships between constructs are not only conceptually coherent but also statistically stable. The model's structure holds up across multiple evaluations, which adds robustness to the claim that collaborative engagement—when properly framed—is not only desirable but replicable. It also indicates that respondents' interpretations of constructs such as governance, quality enhancement, and conceptual design are consistent, which is essential for scaling collaborative interventions to broader contexts. From a practical standpoint, these findings challenge institutions to reconsider how they define “success” in community partnerships. Success cannot be confined to quantifiable outputs alone—it must include the quality of relationships, the fairness of process, and the degree of mutual transformation. The model shows that interventions built on trust, cultural relevance, and shared ownership yield more resilient outcomes. Institutions that approach collaboration as a transactional exercise may see short-term results but risk long-term disengagement. By contrast, those that invest in the Alpha-Gamma pathway—conceptual clarity followed by adaptive strategy—are more likely to foster sustainable change and institutional legitimacy in the eyes of communities.

In light of the data, institutions are advised to adopt relational governance frameworks that prioritize co-leadership and transparency. This involves restructuring institutional roles to allow for community actors not just to be consulted, but to lead, decide, and evaluate alongside institutional

partners. The high influence of GC on Alpha suggests that governance is what anchors values in practice. Without these shared structures, well-intentioned programs may inadvertently reproduce the very exclusion they aim to overcome. Governance should not be seen as a bureaucratic layer but as a democratic mechanism that safeguards collaboration from dominance, misalignment, and drift. Ultimately, this study affirms that bridging the gap between institutions and local communities requires more than just coordination—it requires a philosophical and structural shift. Institutions must move from control to co-creation, from delivery to dialogue, and from performance metrics to partnership values. The proposed model offers a roadmap for this transformation, grounded in empirical data and validated through strong convergence and stakeholder agreement. It challenges traditional assumptions about expertise and authority, and instead advocates for knowledge systems that are collective, contextual, and co-owned. In doing so, it not only proposes a model but invites a movement—toward collaboration that is not just effective, but just.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that effective collaboration between institutions and local communities hinges on more than resource sharing or programmatic alignment—it fundamentally depends on the presence of shared values, mutual trust, and inclusive governance structures. The model developed in this research demonstrates that the foundation of successful partnership begins at the conceptual level (Alpha), where communities are not just recipients but co-architects of the initiative. Without a strong conceptual grounding rooted in local realities and cultural sensitivity, institutional efforts risk becoming top-down and disconnected from the community's lived experience. Thus, the initial design phase must prioritize local participation, narrative inclusion, and respect for indigenous knowledge systems. The role of strategic adaptation and participatory evaluation (Gamma) is equally critical, acting as a bridge between conceptual foundations and tangible outcomes. Institutions that continuously adapt strategies based on community feedback and localized learning processes are more likely to foster engagement, resilience, and programmatic success. The research shows that static planning models—those that treat strategy as fixed rather than dynamic—are inadequate in responding to the complex, evolving realities of community needs. Instead, collaboration must be understood as a process of co-learning and adjustment, with shared responsibility and real-time responsiveness embedded into the strategic structure.

Further, the model underscores the limited but supportive role of technical enhancements (QE) unless these are embedded within a participatory governance ecosystem (GC). Quality improvement mechanisms such as training, digitization, or standardized tools may boost performance, but they cannot replace the fundamental necessity for ethical engagement and shared control. Governance and collaboration are revealed to be critical enablers of community ownership and institutional accountability. As such, co-leadership models, open decision-making processes, and the redistribution of institutional power are not just administrative features but essential conditions for meaningful and equitable partnerships. The empirical data, particularly the high agreement levels across stakeholder responses and the convergence stability across iterations, confirm the validity and reliability of the proposed model. Community actors and institutional stakeholders alike affirmed the effectiveness of approaches that integrate conceptual clarity, strategic reflexivity, and democratic governance. This suggests that the model is not only theoretically sound but also practically viable and scalable to other contexts where institutional-community collaboration is sought. The structural consistency further implies that such models can withstand variations in context while maintaining integrity and stakeholder trust.

In sum, bridging the gap between institutions and local communities is not a matter of bridging infrastructure or communication alone—it is about bridging worldviews, values, and ownership. It requires a paradigm shift where collaboration is no longer seen as assistance but as alliance, no longer based on delivery but on co-creation. The model developed in this study offers not only a conceptual framework but also a practical roadmap for institutions willing to reimagine their roles—from authoritative implementers to collaborative facilitators. By embracing this shift, institutions can contribute to more sustainable, inclusive, and socially embedded forms of development and education.

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