



Exploring the role of social enterprises in improving local development in the Philippines : DOCHSEi's case

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Abstract:

This research investigates the role of social enterprises in fostering local development in the Philippines, with a particular focus on the Davao Oriental Coco Husk Social Enterprise, Inc. (DOCHSEi). The study aims to elucidate how social enterprises, especially those in which the poor are principal stakeholders (SEPPS), contribute to economic, social, and environmental development at the local level. Employing a case study methodology combined with qualitative analysis of secondary data, the paper examines DOCHSEi's initiatives in transforming coconut husk waste into value-added, eco-friendly products, thereby creating employment opportunities for marginalized groups and promoting sustainable community development.

Key findings reveal that DOCHSEi significantly contributes to local development by generating jobs, reducing poverty, empowering women and youth, and mitigating environmental degradation through innovative waste management. The enterprise's activities have enhanced social inclusion, increased household incomes, and provided a model for sustainable, community-led economic growth. However, the research also identifies critical challenges, including limited access to financing, regulatory hurdles, and the need for greater ecosystem support.

The study concludes that social enterprises like DOCHSEi are vital catalysts for inclusive growth and poverty alleviation in the Philippines. It underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, policy support, and sustainable business models in scaling the impact of social enterprises. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and social entrepreneurs seeking to leverage social innovation for local development.

Keywords: Social enterprise, local development, poverty alleviation, sustainable livelihoods, coconut husk, DOCHSEi, Philippines

JEL Codes: O10 , O35 , Q01, L31 .

Introduction :

The social enterprise movement has emerged and expanded since the 1980s, as one of the most powerful paths to social innovation to eliminate or reduce social problems (Lumpkin, Bacq, & Pidduck, 2018). Social enterprises play a crucial role in achieving economic and social development by creating new employment opportunities, increasing income, and enhancing service provision. Therefore, they have come to be viewed as an effective means of overcoming social challenges, providing effective and sustainable social innovation solutions, and meeting needs that the public sector cannot provide (Palil, Ismail, Zain, & Abu Bakar, 2021).

For many years, social enterprises were primarily associated with non-profit organizations, which have no owners in the traditional sense and whose managers can only earn "reasonable" compensation. Over time, a growing number of non-profits have begun to adopt and pursue earned-income strategies, largely as a means of reducing their reliance on donations and grants (Katz & Page, 2010, p. 60) .

Social entrepreneurship has long been considered a key driver for enhancing local development in low-income communities experiencing significant social and environmental problems. The importance of social enterprises in local development lies in aligning their development with the growing demand for public service. However, the majority of social enterprises face challenges of survival and low performance. The factors contributing to the success of these initiatives and the obstacles faced by social entrepreneurs remain poorly understood. Consequently, Social enterprises require support from various stakeholders, including governments, investors, and consumers, to thrive and create lasting impact. Therefore, many countries, particularly the European Union, the United States, and East Asia, have enacted social enterprise legislation to stimulate the growth of this sector.

The Philippines is one of the Asian countries that has considered social entrepreneurship an opportunity to bridge development gaps and achieve the Philippine National Vision 2040, the strategic vision developed by the National Economic and Social Development Authority of the Philippines, which is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

There is actually no formal definition in the Philippines for social projects. However, a group of stakeholders including Institute for Social Enterprise in Asia (ISEA), led by Dr. Lisa Dacanay, recently proposed a Social Enterprise Bill. Known as Social Enterprises in which the Poor are Principal Stakeholders (SEPPS). These organizations focus on a social mission generating wealth while taking into account social,

environmental and financial aspects. Their central ambitions are to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life for marginalized groups. Moreover, it follows a distributive enterprise orientation (Darko & Quijano, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview on social entrepreneurship in the Philippines, focusing on DOCHSEi social enterprise and its actual contribution to enhancing development in the region of Davao oriental, Mindanao. The paper is organized as follows: section one gives an overview of the definition of the social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurs and social enterprise; section two discusses the role of SE in achieving local development; section three represents an overview of social enterprises in the Philippines (SEPPS); section four discusses the case of DOCHSEi; and its impact on social, economic and environmental level.

I. The role of social entrepreneurship in achieving local development:

Social enterprises operate primarily at the local level, delivering goods and services that have an individual impact, but also collectively impact communities and society (Haugh, 2005, p. 6). The impact on local development is due to the characteristics of these entities, which give them certain advantages over other actors: Social purpose: The primary purpose is to serve a community or group of people. Limited profit distribution: Organizations may not distribute profits or may distribute only a portion of them. Democratic governance: Different stakeholders participate in the governance process. Multi-stakeholder governance allows for the identification of local needs and resources and the provision of optimal solutions to problems. Decision-making is democratic, with each member having voting rights. Autonomy: These are independent entities not subject to the leadership of public institutions or other organizations (PETRESCU & STĂNILĂ, 2012, p. 349).

Before addressing the role played by social institutions in achieving local development, we must first define the term social institutions and the terms associated with it: social leadership and social entrepreneurship.

I.1 Defining social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneur and social enterprise:

The notions of social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneur and social enterprise are sometimes used in the literature, indiscriminately, although, there are some important differences between them. These three concepts are used almost interchangeably in most of the English-language literature, although the choice of one term rather than another is not neutral (Petrella & Battesti, 2014).

Dees, explains the various meanings given to the concept "Social Entrepreneurship" in his research titled "The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship". He refers that while the term "social entrepreneurship" is becoming more widely recognized, it can mean different things to different people, leading to confusion. Some individuals associate social entrepreneurship merely with not-for-profit organizations that start earned-income or for-profit projects. Others define it as the process of creating a not-for-profit organization. Besides, there are those who use it to describe business owners who engage social responsibility into their business practices (Seelos & Mair, 2004, p. 3) .

Zahra (2009) provided a widely used definition. This definition states that "Social entrepreneurship encompasses the activities and processes undertaken to discover, determine and exploit opportunities in order to improve social wealth by creating new ventures or managing existing organizations in an innovative way" (Dentchev, Roncancio, Outsios, & Alba, 2023, p. 9). All of the definitions leads us to conclude that the literature has not yet achieved the required balance for the concept of social entrepreneurship (Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010, p. 38) .

Social enterprise is a part of social entrepreneurship, meaning that a social enterprise is a project with a social mission, helping to meet the needs of individuals which the state was unable to meet, provide solutions to social problems through innovative ways to create social value and bring about noticeable change.

There are five indicators that define the social dimension of initiatives resulting from social entrepreneurship so that they can be described as social enterprises: (1) a clear goal to serve the community; (2) an initiative emanating from a group of citizens; (3) decision-making authority not dependent on the possession of capital; (4) a participatory dynamic that includes various stakeholders; and (5) restrictions on profit distribution (DEFOURNY, 2004).

In its widespread usage, "social entrepreneur" is the individual and "social enterprise" is the organization. Therefore, social enterprise is an institutional expression of the term "social entrepreneur" (Alter, 2007). The notion of "social entrepreneur" focuses on the individual characteristics of the entrepreneur and his behavior. According to Zahra et al (2009) social entrepreneurs are individuals with precise abilities, values and capacities and who are interested in chasing opportunities to create social value in an innovative way. According to the literature, Mair and Noboa (2006) cite a set of key characteristics found in social entrepreneurs, like moral judgement, empathy, social networking skills for support and self-efficacy (Caballero & Fuchs, 2013).

I.2 Main contributions of social entrepreneurship to local development:

Social entrepreneurship is the sum of actions and actions undertaken by citizens to build institutions in order to find solutions to social problems such as poverty, disease, illiteracy, environmental corruption, human rights violations and corruption issues so that life and its causes can be improved for many people. From this standpoint, social entrepreneurship can contribute, through the efforts of social entrepreneurs, to achieving sustainable development at the local level (Abbas, 2017, p. 353), through:

- **Improving the welfare of local systems :**

Social enterprises, thanks to their institutional characteristics, primarily improve the welfare of local systems by increasing the supply of quasi-public goods, resulting in increased employment and productivity (Noya, *The Changing Boundaries of Social Enterprises*, 2009, p. 212). Since production is based on trust and participation, efficiency and effectiveness can be enhanced with limited reliance on traditional management forms, whether hierarchical or bureaucratic. Furthermore, the production of socially oriented services, characterized by a high level of personal content, fosters self-sufficiency in the medium to long term.

- **Creating social capital:**

The distinctive characteristics of social enterprises make it clear that they rely on increasing the capacity of local actors to operate. They aim to accumulate social capital, which refers to social relationships and ties, enhance trust in individuals and institutions, and mobilize local resources to solve community problems (PETRESCU & STĂNILĂ, 2012, p. 350). Social entrepreneurs therefore tend to embrace social responsibility because it provides an opportunity to learn and effectively utilize social skills (Hidalgo, Monticelli, & Bortolaso, 2021, p. 19) and develop new values through collaboration with target populations, employees, and volunteers. This leads to enhanced solidarity and social capital to support the organization of the social enterprise (Kim & Lim, 2017, p. 3).

- **Creating job opportunities:**

Social enterprises create new opportunities at the local level, focusing on groups that struggle to move between local areas, such as women, and finding employment, such as youth. Thanks to the specific regulatory environment of social enterprises, which creates the necessary conditions for providing specific services, they are able to create additional work opportunities that do not replace existing jobs (Borzaga & Tortia, 2008, p. 22) either through new job opportunities or through work integration programs (Haugh, 2005, p. 6).

- **Alleviating poverty:**

Social entrepreneurs create social enterprises that provide employment opportunities, training, care, and a host of services to marginalized groups. Kareem (2015) argued that social entrepreneurship has a clear link to poverty reduction, while Arejiobe et al. (2023) emphasized the need for social innovation, social value, and impact to promote poverty alleviation. Recognizing social entrepreneurship as an independent variable is an important step toward promoting inclusion and poverty eradication. This can be achieved through job creation and the development of innovative and sustainable solutions that address the root causes of poverty, thus shifting from economic exclusion to social participation and improving quality of life (Majeed, Abbas, Agha, & Kadhim, 2024, p. 10).

- **Preserving the intercultural heritage:**

Social entrepreneurship offers alternative solutions to environmental problems through recycling and up cycling projects, innovative use of renewable resources, and organic production of good (Ali, 2021, p. 72). These enterprises can play an important role in responding to environmental demands at the local level by raising awareness and environmental education among citizens. Effective participation in local development takes various forms, such as the creation of new community-based companies, which in turn assist them in implementing new environmental activities by providing feasibility studies, sector knowledge, connections with companies operating in the area, and free advice on how to improve their environmental work, such as environmental audits and environmental management programs (Noya & Clarence, The Social Economy Building Inclusive Economies, 2007, p. 108).

II. An overview of the state of Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprises in the Philippines:

The Philippine economy is among the accelerated growing in Asia with a mean growth rate of 6.5% over the past seven years. However, the growth has not been inclusive as the country continues to face high levels of poverty and inequality. The Philippines ranks 113th out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index, with 22 million Filipinos still living below the poverty line (ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, 2018). This indicates that the occasion is provided to social enterprises to counter these negative social trends and better align with local development goals.

There are insufficient publications on social enterprises in the Philippines, making it difficult to determine the scale of the sector. However, we attempt to provide some available data and statistics on social enterprises in the Philippines.

II.1 Emergence of social entrepreneurship and its definition in the Philippines:

In the Philippines, The concept of social entrepreneurship first appeared in the 1990s. At that time, social entrepreneurship was viewed as “a community of worker-owners searching to ameliorate their conditions through collective, cooperative and wealth-sharing mechanisms” (Morato, 1994). The development of a conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship, an action research collaboration began in 2002 between scholars and practitioners in Asia (including the Philippines). Based on important cases of social entrepreneurship in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and India, a definition of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise was developed. Social entrepreneurship is understood as “the promotion and development of enterprises or organizations aimed at creating wealth for the benefit not only of individuals or families but also of specific circles, sectors or communities, often the public or marginalized groups of society” (Dacanay, Social Enterprise in the Philippines: Social Enterprises with the Poor as Primary Stakeholders, 2017, p. 5) .

As stated by Dacanay, definition of SEPPS involves three aspects (Dacanay, Social Enterprise in the Philippines, 2012, pp. 252-253).

First, SEPPS are organizations with social mission, aiming to alleviate or eliminate poverty, improving the quality of life of specific poor groups. **Second**, SEPPS are wealth-creating organizations with a dual outcome of social and financial impact. They create wealth to support their social goals, which are reducing poverty and enhancing the well-being of the poor. **The third** aspect is that SEPPS follow a distributive orientation meaning, distributing the surplus or profits to the underprivileged, and reinvesting the earnings back to the organization in order to achieve and uphold its commitment to social objectives (Dacanay, Social Enterprises with the Poor as Primary Stakeholders: Responding to State and Market Failures in the South, 2013, p. 3).

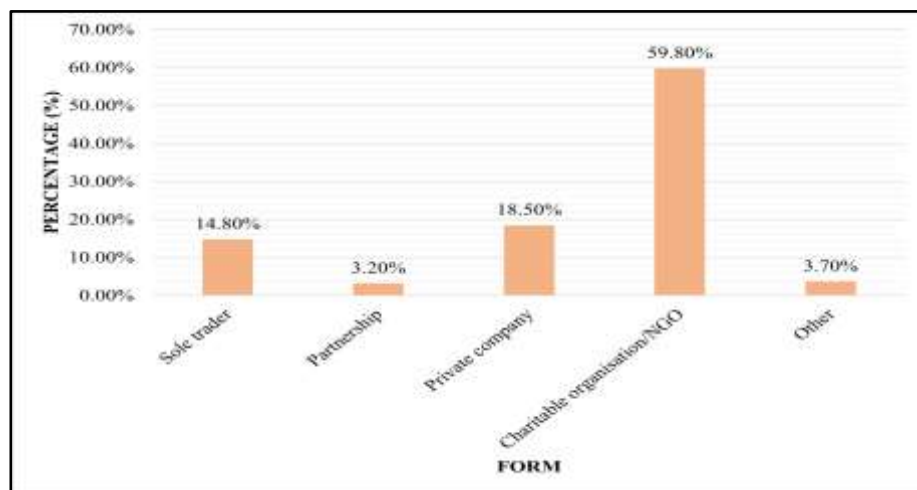
II.2 Number and common forms of social enterprises in the Philippines:

According to one estimate, there may be as many as 164,473 social enterprises in the Philippines, constituting 17% of the 987,974 registered companies. Of these social enterprises, 70% operate as micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), 23%

as nongovernment organizations, and 6% as cooperatives (Yukiko & Durreen, JULY 2019).

Social enterprises in the Philippines take various legal forms shown in the following Figure:

Figure1: Legal forms for social enterprises to register their businesses in The Philippines



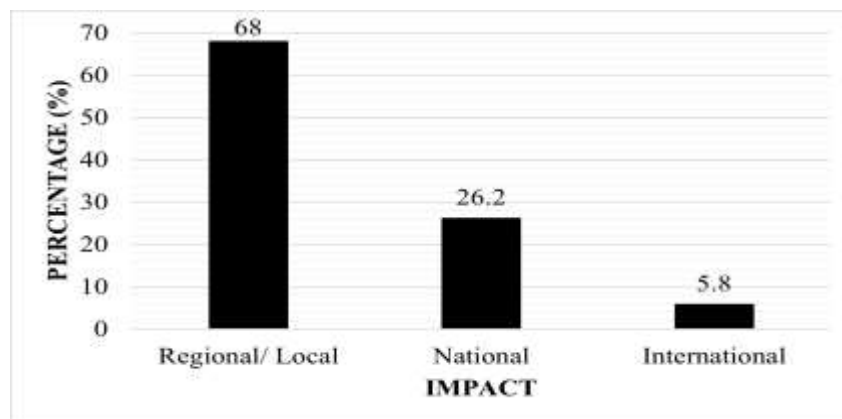
Source: Prepared by the researchers based on (British Council, February 2021)

The figure above shows that Charitable organisations, or similar, were most frequently existed in the Philippines.

II.3 The impact of social enterprises in the Philippines:

Social enterprises in the Philippines cater to and are managed by indigenous communities, the rural and urban underprivileged, women, individuals with disabilities, as well as overseas Filipino workers and their families. These social enterprises aim to offer essential services, fair employment opportunities, market access, and sustainable sources of income (Council, 2020, p. 14). Its impact is mostly at the local level, as shown in the following graph:

Figure2: Geography of operations of social enterprises in the Philippines

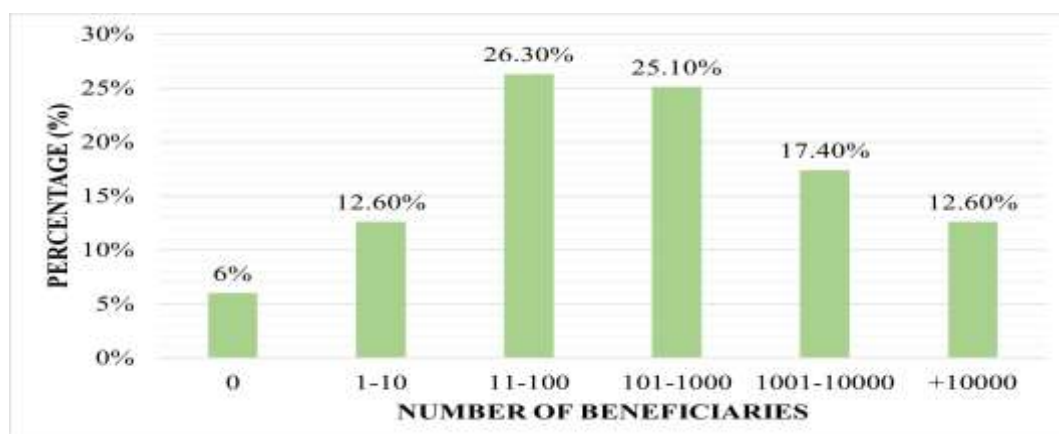


Source: Prepared by the researchers based on (British Council, February 2021)

The figure shows that most social enterprises in the Philippines operate at the local level, representing 68 percent of the total enterprises and just 5.8 percent of social enterprises operate internationally.

Like in many other countries, the social enterprises in the Philippines are mainly concentrated in the capital city. The formal social enterprise community is settled in Manila, creating a close-knit group where individuals are usual with each other. However, the total number of social enterprises, including both formal and informal ones, is significantly higher, as pointed out by Dacanay's research. (Darko & Quijano, 2015, p. 7). Many social enterprises are expanding their activities to meet the needs of the population. The following figure shows the number of beneficiaries of social enterprises' services.

Figure (3): Number of beneficiaries

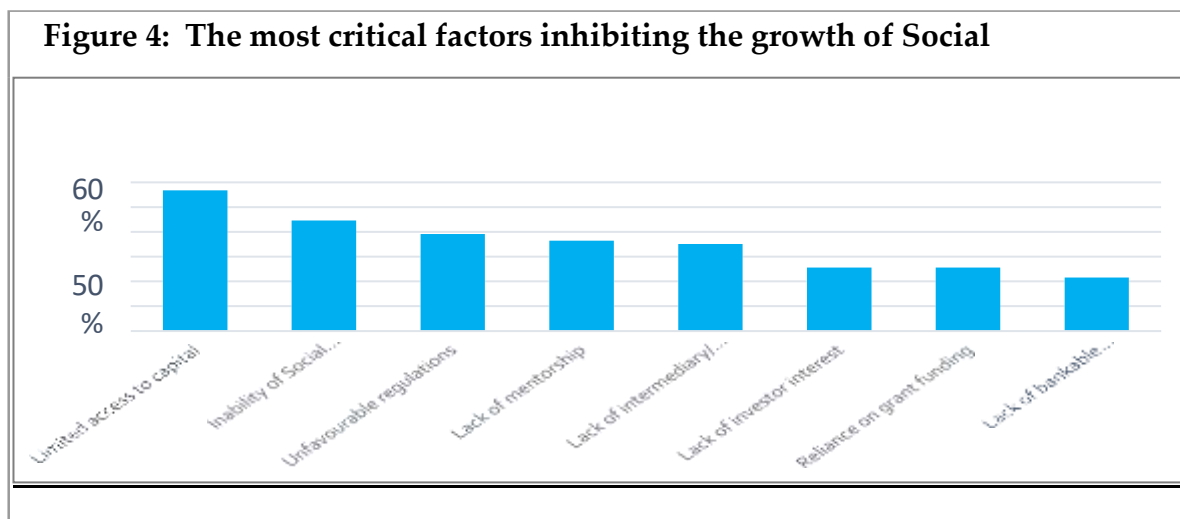


Source: Prepared by the researchers based on (British Council, February 2021)

We can conclude from the above figure that nearly a third of social enterprises in the Philippines are serving over 1,000 people

II.4 Challenges faced by social entrepreneurs in the Philippines:

Although statistics indicate a growth in the number of social enterprises in the



Source: (ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, 2018).

Philippines, it does not meet the desired level. Studies indicate that the reason for this is the presence of several obstacles, as illustrated in the following figure.

Most social enterprises remain limited in size and scale due to critical gaps in (i) Find the right financing, (ii) Innovative financial methods to unlock further capital, (iii) Understanding the Social Enterprise Ecosystem, and (iv) Statistics on the impact of social enterprises (Yukiko & Durreen, JULY 2019).

We note from the figure above that the biggest challenge facing social enterprises in the Philippines is obtaining funding, followed by inability of social then unfavourable regulation.

III. The case of Davao Oriental Coco Husk Social Enterprise inc: DOCHSEi

Davao Oriental Coco Husk is a Social Enterprise and non-government organization at the same time. It was created by Unlad Kabayan in San Isidro, a municipality in Davao Oriental, Mindanao province in the Philippines in 2004. DOCHSEi is a coconut husk processing plant, aims to help and improve the economic living conditions marginalized groups such as farmer and those who don't own a land, in order to contribute to economic growth of the municipality.

III.1 The context in which the DOCHSEi was created:

Coconut farming is a fundamental aspect of the Philippines agricultural industry, as it supports the livelihoods of millions of farmers. Therefore, it is essential to understand the socio-economic barriers and prospects faced by these farmers is essential to achieve sustainable development and formulate effective policies (Buted, 2024, p. 24). Coconut is one of the most major yields grown by above 11 million farmers, mainly low income smallholders from 90 countries. What distinguishes coconut is that every part of the coconut palm can be used into numerous products with high economic value like copra, flour, sugar, virgin coconut oil, coco water, coconut milk/cream, desiccated coconut, coconut milk powder, coconut shell charcoal-based activated carbon, among others (Darko & Quijano, 2015, p. 4). Thus, it is popularly known as "Tree of Life" (Gurbuz & Manaros, 2019, p. 235)

Due to the Philippines location in the ring fire, it is highly vulnerable to volcanoes, earthquakes and typhoons. Among the most dangerous typhoons typhoon Yolanda, also known as Haiyan, which took more than 6000 lives in 2013, as well as damaging the Visayas region, thus, destroying the livelihoods of many individuals. Apart from these natural disasters, the country also faces several social problems including poverty, certain ethnic communities like indigenous groups, economic disparities faced by women, as well as challenges related to gang violence and crime (Darko & Quijano, 2015, p. 4).

All these challenges and problems call for discovering sustainable solutions to address them. Various initiatives, especially those classified as social enterprises, have been founded to generate profits while solving social issues. DOCHSEi is one of the living examples that have worked to change the livelihoods of the Davao oriental locals in Mindanao.

Among the three major islands, Davao Region was the largest producer of coconut during the quarter with 461.07 thousand metric tons output or 13.5 percent share. Completing the top three regions with the highest coconut production were Northern Mindanao and Zamboanga Peninsula with corresponding productions of 452.33 thousand metric tons (13.3%) and 437.60 thousand metric tons (12.8%) (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2023).

III.2 DOCHSEi creating and activity development:

The following table gives a concise overview of DOCHSEi before diving into the details of its major contributions to the local community.

Table 1: details about DOCHSEi

Type of business	Processing coco husk. Products : coco coir/fiber, coco dust, geo-nets and handicrafts.
Registered	Under security and exchange commission SEC, , Department of Trade and Industry DTI, Fiber industry and Development Authority FIDA, and Barangay Micro-Business enterprise in municipality of San Isidro BMBE.
Mission	Raise the income of the Coco farmers, providing employment, offering an investment placement for the migrant workers that bring about the socio-economic growth of the community.
Employment	125 workers
Initial investment	Unlad Kabayan 2.5 million pesos, CFLI 1.5 million pesos, Kalumonan 1million pesos
Community links	Employment of women in their homes. Employment of landless and poor tenant farmers. Income to coconut tenant farmers for otherwise waste product 100pesos/truck load of husks.
Location	San Isidro, Davao Oriental, Gov.Generoso, Davao Oriental, Manay, Davao Oriental
Capacity(no.of hasks/day)	20,000
Equipments	1 Decorticating machine, 7 Weaving machines, 120 twinning machines

Source: (Kioloa, 2015)& (PRDP, 2016, p. 211)

III.3 Contribution of DOCHSEi in local development:

Davao Oriental Coconut Husk Company (DOCHSEI) is a social enterprise that aims not only to make a profit but also to serve the wider community to which it belongs. DOCHSEi has helped the locals in the municipality in different aspects, evidenced by the creation the creation of job opportunities for several marginalized groups, promoting social integration, empowerment, elevating poverty, as well as producing economically valuable and environmentally friendly products and reducing the migration of workers from Davao Oriental to cities.

- **Contributing to creating employment opportunities:**

The DOCHSEI 's most significant contribution to job creation came after the typhoon that struck Davao Oriental in 2012, causing extensive crop damage amounting to approximately PHP 8.5 billion. It also resulted in the loss of approximately one million jobs, mostly in agriculture. To address this crisis, the provincial government called on all

stakeholders to contribute to job creation and stimulate local growth. Davao Foundation, with support from the Mindanao Rural Development Project, established two coconut factories in the towns of Governor Generoso-GovGen (District 2) and Manay (District 1). Workers were hired and trained to operate a hulling machine, a screening machine, and a packing press. To provide additional employment opportunities, women and youth were trained in braiding and weaving geogrids. By the end of December of that year, 45 workers were employed in fiber production, nine women and youth in braiding and weaving, while 30 GovGen smallholder coconut farmers provided the husk requirements. In December, DOCHSE was one of the "Ten Promising Social Enterprises" awarded by the SIPAG-Villar Foundation. The award was P100,000.00, which DOCHSEi used to build sheds in community production centers (UNLAD Kabayan, 2013).

- **Promoting sustainable local development**

In addition to its goal of bringing economic benefits to the community, DOCHSEi was also founded as an environmentally friendly enterprise. Before its inception, coconut husks were considered a waste product of the local coconut industry, clogging local streams and rivers and seeping into the ocean, killing fish, coral, and other marine life. DOCHSEi provided farmers with a means of earning money from this waste by converting it into coir fiber, which is used to make string, erosion-resistant mats, flowerpots, hats, bags, wall decorations, door mats, and mattress covers (Community Economies Collective & Gibson, 2009).

The transformation of coir into geotextiles, such as erosion control nets, plays a crucial role in rehabilitating soil in areas that have been subjected to logging or mining activities. Additionally, the production of bio-organic fertilizers from coir pith contributes to enhanced crop yields, improved crop quality, soil structure enhancement, soil fertility restoration, and the enrichment of soil with microorganisms. It is worth noting that since coconut coir is originated from the coconut fruit itself, it is not necessary to cut down trees to get these materials. Coconut coir is a sustainable alternative that helps reduce deforestation as it is biodegradable and poses no threat to the environment (UNLAD & Kalumonan, 2014, pp. 19-20) .

- **Poverty alleviation:**

Given the growing demand for organic fertilizers and nets, DOCHSE and BUNEKO (Bunot Negosyo sa Kolambugan) launched home-based production initiatives in Davao Oriental and Lanao del Norte. By establishing community production centers, these organizations provided opportunities for mothers to work from home, enabling

them to care for their young children and earn an income at the same time (UNLAD Kabayan, 2013, p. 8). As the number of plants grown increased, the number of families receiving support increased, putting food on the table and sending their children to school, thus alleviating poverty. This demonstrates how the impact of DOCHSEi can extend to the entire community, including youth and women.

- **Value-Added Products:**

DOCHSEi sought to develop value-added products and modify the perception of bunot from being merely waste to valuable natural resource, by incorporating it into the product formulation and improve them. The social enterprise promoted these value-added products in an effort to create more job opportunities for both plant workers and society. The strategic diversification of DOCHSEi's product lines is key as it provides financial flexibility to alleviate future losses that may emerge if any of the company's principal products cope with low sales or a significant deterioration in demand (UNLAD & Kalumonan, 2014, p. 19).

The DOCHSEi's founders are committed to continuing to make a positive difference in the lives of marginalized groups by transforming agricultural waste (coconut husks) into usable and exportable products in a still volatile, but promising, global market

Conclusion:

Social Enterprises (SEs) have a tremendous potential to address the gaps exacerbating poverty and inequality. When properly supported and resources mobilized to achieve greater scale and impact, SEs are critical vehicles to achieving inclusive growth. This paper finds that social entrepreneurship is an engine of local development due to its significant and effective role in creating job opportunities, reducing poverty, and promoting social inclusion through its social enterprises.

This paper highlights social enterprises in which the poor are primary stakeholders (SEPPs), which take the form of cooperatives or associations. These SEPPs may partner with NGOs or other entities wealth-generating activities, which the latter use to support and achieve their social goals while adhering to their distributive enterprise philosophy

This study explores the importance of the coconut industry in the Philippines, emphasizing its contribution to the livelihoods of farmers. Coconut is an important natural resource with multiple uses in the Philippines, particularly in Davao City, the country's leading producer of coconut. DOCHSEi's use of coconut husks is a strategic

move that has enabled it to diversify and develop environmentally friendly products, furthermore, providing employment opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged segments of society, including women and youth.

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