



Factors Influencing the Empowerment of Local Artisans and Entrepreneurs and the Role of Local Government in Nurturing Creative Ecosystems in Initao, Misamis Oriental, Philippines

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Abstract. This study examines the factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs in selected barangays of Initao, Misamis Oriental, and the role of local government units (LGUs) in nurturing creative ecosystems. Drawing from a mixed-methods design, 129 participants, including artisans, entrepreneurs, community members, and LGU personnel, provided data through surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs). Findings indicate that key factors, such as skill development programs, access to resources, market opportunities, innovation, and supportive policy frameworks, significantly contribute to entrepreneurial empowerment and ecosystem development. Quantitative analysis revealed strong positive correlations between these factors and the development of creative ecosystems, with innovation and product development showing the highest impact. Qualitative data highlighted challenges, including limited funding, complex bureaucratic processes, and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder artisans' and entrepreneurs' potential. However, existing municipal support, community collaboration, and proposed enhancements, such as tailored training programs, resource hubs, and policy reforms, demonstrate opportunities for improvement. This study underscores the importance of holistic government initiatives to foster sustainable creative industries and empower rural communities, emphasizing the need for consistent support, infrastructure, and market linkages to unlock the full potential of Initao's creative economy.

Keywords: *Creative ecosystems, Entrepreneurial empowerment, Local government initiatives, Rural creative industries, Innovation and product development.*

Introduction

Creative industries have emerged as a transformative force in driving economic growth, cultural preservation, and social innovation across the globe. In rural communities, empowering artisans and entrepreneurs is crucial not only for sustaining livelihoods but also for fostering inclusive development and strengthening creative ecosystems. The Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028 underscores the critical role of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and highlights the importance of local government units (LGUs) as enablers of sustainable development through training, innovation, and market access. However, challenges persist in rural areas such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and fragmented government support, particularly in municipalities like Initao, Misamis Oriental.

Previous studies affirm that LGUs are central to creating enabling environments for creative industries. Fazlagić and Szczepankiewicz (2020) proposed a conceptual model showing how local governments must adapt to the creative economy's growing share in GDP by supporting innovation and fostering conducive business environments. Similarly, Zaki et al. (2016) emphasized that government actors and communities are pivotal in entrepreneurial ecosystems, as shown in Yogyakarta's traditional market-based creative economy. These findings highlight the interdependence of local leadership, policy, and community collaboration in sustaining creative enterprises.

The role of artisans has also gained scholarly attention in recent years. A systematic review by Hasanah et al. (2023) noted that artisan entrepreneurship thrives on dynamic capabilities such as innovation, adaptability, and cultural authenticity, which are reinforced by government, financiers, and social networks. This aligns with Lakshana et al. (2024), who demonstrated that digital platforms like the Community Crafts Hub can empower artisans by connecting them with global markets, enhancing visibility, and promoting sustainability. Beyond infrastructure and policy, effective leadership of local chief executives is equally vital. Carvajal and Sanchez (2024) showed that leadership qualities of LCEs—such as fostering economic dynamism, resiliency, and innovation—are integral in building competitive creative communities. Earlier studies (Kaki et al., 2016) also confirmed that entrepreneurship motivation and education facilitated by local government agencies significantly contribute to the growth of small enterprises, though gaps in resources and sustainability remain. Taken together, these studies stress that local governments, when strategically engaged, are not only administrative providers of goods and services but also catalysts of creative economies that can empower rural artisans and entrepreneurs.

This study builds on these perspectives by examining the factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs in Initao, Misamis Oriental, while analyzing how LGUs contribute to nurturing creative ecosystems. By combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research addresses gaps in literature on localized empowerment strategies within the Philippine context, offering practical insights for policy and community development.

To achieve these aims, the study identifies specific objectives that guide the inquiry. These include determining the key empowerment factors for artisans and entrepreneurs in terms of skill development, access to resources, market



opportunities, innovation, government support, and legal frameworks. Additionally, the study seeks to assess the contribution of these empowerment factors to the development of creative ecosystems in Initao. It also examines the relationship between empowerment and ecosystem growth, while documenting the lived experiences and challenges faced by artisans and entrepreneurs in accessing municipal support. Collectively, these objectives provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing empowerment and ecosystem development in rural creative economies.

Specifically, this study aims to:

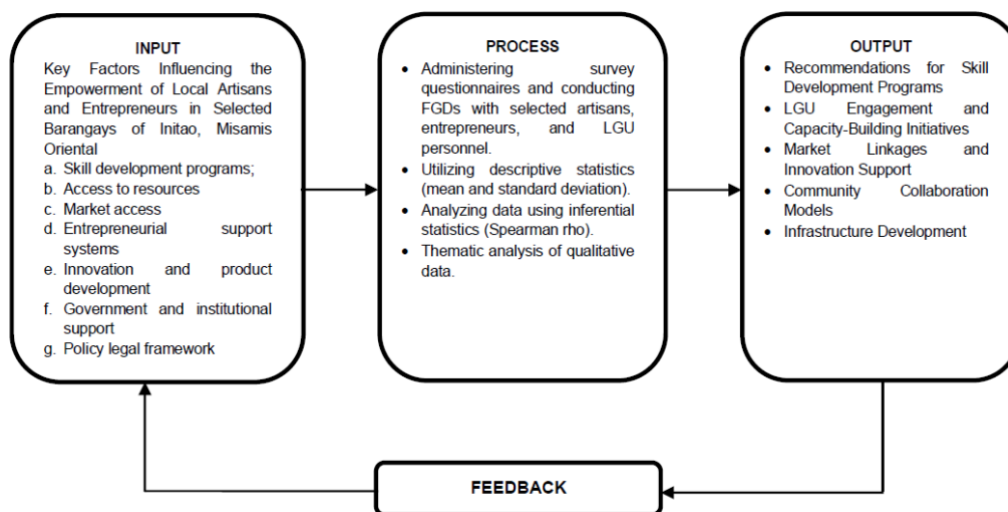
1. What are the key factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs in selected barangays of Initao, Misamis Oriental, specifically in terms of:
 - a. Skill development programs;
 - b. Access to resources;
 - c. Market access;
 - d. Entrepreneurial support systems;
 - e. Innovation and product development;
 - f. Government and institutional support; and
 - g. Policy legal framework?
2. How does the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs contribute to the development of creative ecosystems in selected barangays of Initao?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs and their contribution to the development of creative ecosystems in Initao, Misamis Oriental?
4. What are the experiences and challenges local artisans and entrepreneurs face in accessing municipal support and resources for nurturing creative ecosystems?

This study is grounded on Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which posits that organizational success and sustainability depend on the active involvement of multiple stakeholders. In the context of creative ecosystems, artisans, entrepreneurs, local government units (LGUs), communities, consumers, and financial actors all play interconnected roles in shaping empowerment and development outcomes. As highlighted by Hasanah et al. (2023), artisan entrepreneurship thrives when supported by diverse stakeholders, while Zaki et al. (2016) emphasized that government actors and communities are pivotal in sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystems. Similarly, Fazlagić and Szczepankiewicz (2020) stressed that LGUs must create enabling environments through policies, resources, and innovation support. Anchored in this theory, the study assumes that empowerment is a shared responsibility and hypothesizes that stronger stakeholder engagement leads to more sustainable creative ecosystems.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework follows the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model with feedback to explain how the study was conducted. The input identifies the key factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs in Initao, including skill development programs, access to resources, market access, entrepreneurial support systems, innovation and product development,

government and institutional support, and policy/legal frameworks. The process involves administering surveys and focus group discussions with artisans, entrepreneurs, and LGU personnel, and analyzing the results using both descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as thematic analysis for qualitative data. The output highlights the expected results in the form of recommendations such as enhanced skill development programs, strengthened LGU engagement, market linkages and innovation support, community collaboration models, and improved infrastructure. The feedback loop ensures continuous refinement, allowing recommendations to be reassessed and improved based on community and government responses. Overall, the framework illustrates how empowerment factors, through systematic data collection and analysis, translate into actionable strategies that can nurture sustainable creative ecosystems.



Methodology

The study involved 129 participants, including 14 local artisans, 8 entrepreneurs, 69 community members from Initao, and 38 LGU-Initao personnel. Participants were selected through convenience and purposive sampling to represent various artisan and entrepreneurial sectors. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) with 15 participants were conducted to provide deeper qualitative insights into their experiences and perspectives.

A mixed-methods design was employed by integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the quantitative strand, data were gathered using a validated Likert-scale survey questionnaire that measured the factors influencing empowerment and the development of creative ecosystems. The survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to describe the level of agreement, and inferential statistics (Spearman rho) to test the relationships between empowerment factors and creative ecosystem development.

For the qualitative strand, semi-structured FGD guides were used to capture narratives about participants' lived experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding local government support and entrepreneurial empowerment. Moreover, 15 participants were purposively selected to join the focus group



discussions (FGDs). The selection criteria included: (1) being an artisan, entrepreneur, or LGU personnel directly engaged in creative or entrepreneurial activities; (2) having at least two years of experience in their respective field or community involvement; and (3) willingness and availability to participate in the discussions. This purposive sampling ensured that participants had sufficient knowledge and lived experiences relevant to empowerment and creative ecosystem development in Initao.

Discussions were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes such as limited funding, skill gaps, and community collaboration. The qualitative data were used to complement and explain the quantitative findings, thereby strengthening the validity and richness of the results.

The research process included securing necessary permissions, refining and pilot-testing instruments, distributing surveys, and conducting FGDs. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Initao College Ethics Committee.

Results and Discussions

I: What are the key factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs in selected barangays of Initao, Misamis Oriental?

Table 1.

Summary of the Key Factors Influencing the Empowerment of Local Artisans and Entrepreneurs in Selected Barangays of Initao, Misamis Oriental

Constructs	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Skill development programs	3.14	0.54	High
Access to resources	3.13	0.54	High
Market access	3.18	0.50	High
Entrepreneurial support systems	3.17	0.51	High
Innovation and product development	3.18	0.52	High
Government and institutional support	3.18	0.52	High
Policy legal framework	3.19	0.53	High

Legend: 1.00-1.74 = Strongly Disagree (Very Low); 1.75-2.49 = Disagree (Low); 2.50-3.24 = Agree (High); 3.25-4.00 = Strongly Agree (Very High)

The study identified key factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs in selected barangays of Initao, Misamis Oriental. The analysis covers seven constructs: skill development programs, access to resources, market access, entrepreneurial support systems, innovation and product development, government and institutional support, and policy and legal framework.

The overall mean for the construct “Skill Development Programs” was 3.14 ($SD = 0.54$), interpreted as “High.” Respondents agreed that skill development programs provided by the local government significantly enhance their skills and contribute to business growth. Training programs were perceived as relevant and effective in addressing the needs of artisans and entrepreneurs. However, while the programs are beneficial, the mean scores suggest there is room for improvement in tailoring specialized workshops for niche industries. This finding aligns with Kumar (2024), who emphasized that skill-building initiatives are vital in fostering

entrepreneurial competencies, particularly in rural settings where access to advanced training is often limited.

Moreover, the overall mean for “Access to Resources” was 3.13 ($SD = 0.54$), also interpreted as “High.” Respondents acknowledged sufficient support in accessing financial resources, raw materials, and production facilities. The government was noted to facilitate connections with suppliers and distributors, further enhancing resource accessibility. These findings are consistent with the study by Priya & Mohanasundari (2024), which highlighted that government interventions in resource allocation directly impact the productivity and sustainability of small businesses.

Additionally, the construct “Market Access” achieved the overall mean of 3.18 ($SD = 0.50$), interpreted as “High.” Respondents agreed that government support in promoting market access through trade fairs, exhibitions, and promotional efforts enabled them to reach broader customer bases. Programs that connect artisans with buyers and distributors were especially valued. Supporting studies, such as that of Onego et al. (2023) and Shelton & Minniti (2018), have shown that improved market access is a critical enabler of economic empowerment for marginalized entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the overall mean of 3.17 ($SD = 0.51$) reflects a high level of agreement on the effectiveness of “Entrepreneurial Support Systems”. Respondents acknowledged the government’s role in fostering innovation, offering financial incentives, and organizing programs that encourage creativity and experimentation. This aligns with the findings of Ermawati (2023), which highlight the importance of local support systems in driving entrepreneurial success through innovation-focused interventions.

With an overall mean of 3.18 ($SD = 0.52$), this construct “Innovation and Product Development” was also rated as “High.” Respondents agreed that mentorship programs, networking opportunities, and support for navigating legal and regulatory requirements significantly impacted their ability to innovate and improve business strategies. Studies by Hoeffcker et al. (2023) emphasize the need for structured innovation programs, particularly for small businesses, to remain competitive in dynamic markets.

In addition, the overall mean for this construct “Government and Institutional Support” was 3.18 ($SD = 0.52$), interpreted as “High.” Respondents recognized the collaborative efforts of government agencies and institutions in providing holistic support, including practical training and development opportunities. Such partnerships were noted to create an enabling environment for artisans and entrepreneurs to thrive. Similar findings were reported by Melo et al. (2024), who argued that institutional support plays a critical role in entrepreneurial development, particularly in underserved areas.

Finally, the construct on “Policy and Legal Framework” received the highest overall mean of 3.19 ($SD = 0.53$), interpreted as “High.” Respondents agreed that local government policies and legal frameworks effectively reduce barriers to entry, support business growth, and encourage innovation. Adequate regulatory support ensures smooth business operations, reflecting findings from Amit et al.



(2024), who emphasized the role of policy environments in fostering entrepreneurship and small business success.

Across all constructs, the high mean scores indicate strong agreement among respondents that the local government plays a crucial role in empowering artisans and entrepreneurs through targeted interventions. However, incremental improvements, particularly in specialized training and resource accessibility, could further enhance empowerment outcomes. This study underscores the importance of holistic government initiatives, as supported by the literature, in fostering entrepreneurship and innovation in rural communities.

II: How does the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs contribute to the development of creative ecosystems in selected barangays of Initao?

Table 2.

Summary Table for the Empowerment of Local Artisans and Entrepreneurs Contribute to the Development of Creative Ecosystems in Selected Barangays of Initao

Constructs	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Empowerment of Local Artisans and Entrepreneurs	3.19	0.50	High
Nurturing of Creative Ecosystems for Local Artisans and Entrepreneurs	3.24	0.52	High

Legend: 1.00-1.74 = Strongly Disagree (Very Low); 1.75-2.49 = Disagree (Low); 2.50-3.24 = Agree (High); 3.25-4.00 = Strongly Agree (Very High)

Table 2 presents how the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs contributes to the development of creative ecosystems in selected barangays of Initao. The overall mean of 3.19, interpreted as “High,” suggests that the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs in Initao is significantly evident. This analysis highlights the critical role of capacity-building initiatives and community support in fostering confidence and business sustainability. The findings align with studies emphasizing the relationship between entrepreneurial empowerment and business success. For instance, Alfaizi et al., (2024) posited that access to training and resources significantly enhances entrepreneurial outcomes. Moreover, community recognition bolsters motivation and entrepreneurial resilience, as supported by the work of Nafukho & El Mansour (2025).

Moreover, the overall mean of 3.24, interpreted as “High,” demonstrates a positive perception of the development of creative ecosystems. This analysis highlights the interconnectedness between innovation, collaboration, and ecosystem development. The findings echo Skavronska’s (2024) concept of the creative class, which emphasizes the need for fostering environments conducive to innovation and collaboration. Similarly, Ermawati (2023) emphasized that creative ecosystems thrive when local governments, institutions, and businesses actively support innovation and cultural industries. These elements are evident in Initao’s nurturing of its creative ecosystem, which drives both economic and cultural development.

III: Is there a significant relationship between the factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs and their contribution to the development of creative ecosystems in Initao, Misamis Oriental?

Table 3.

Relationship Between the Factors Influencing the Empowerment of Local Artisans and Entrepreneurs and their Contribution to the Development of Creative Ecosystems in Selected Barangays of Initao

Variables		r_s value	df	p-value	Remarks
Skill Development Programs	Empowerment and Creative Ecosystem Development	0.743	128	<.001	Highly Significant
Access to Resources		0.715	128	<.001	Highly Significant
Market Access		0.739	128	<.001	Highly Significant
Innovation and Product Development		0.847	128	<.001	Highly Significant
Entrepreneurial Support Systems		0.840	128	<.001	Highly Significant
Government and Institutional Support		0.829	128	<.001	Highly Significant
Policy legal framework		0.790	128	<.001	Highly Significant

The data presented in Table 3 reveals a strong and highly significant relationship between various factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs and their contribution to the development of creative ecosystems in selected barangays of Initao. All variables, including Skill Development Programs ($r_s = 0.743$), Access to Resources ($r_s = 0.715$), Market Access ($r_s = 0.739$), Innovation and Product Development ($r_s = 0.847$), Entrepreneurial Support Systems ($r_s = 0.840$), Government and Institutional Support ($r_s = 0.829$), and Policy Legal Framework ($r_s = 0.790$), show a positive correlation with the development of the creative ecosystem, with all p -values being less than 0.001, indicating statistical significance.

The highest correlation was observed between Innovation and Product Development ($r_s = 0.847$), emphasizing that fostering innovation and developing unique products or services has the most substantial impact on both the empowerment of artisans and entrepreneurs and the growth of the creative ecosystem. Additionally, Entrepreneurial Support Systems ($r_s = 0.840$) and Government and Institutional Support ($r_s = 0.829$) are also significant drivers, highlighting the importance of comprehensive support structures in empowering local entrepreneurs.

These findings support the idea that a combination of skill development, access to resources, market opportunities, and supportive government and institutional frameworks are key contributors to the success of creative ecosystems. Research by Skavronska (2024) and Ermawati (2023) further emphasizes the role of these factors in building sustainable creative industries. Moreover, the work of Olarinde & Auta (2024) reinforces that innovation, supported by strong institutional frameworks, drives both entrepreneurial growth and broader ecosystem development. This affirms the importance of these relationships in Initao's context, where empowerment and ecosystem development are closely intertwined.



IV: What are the experiences and challenges local artisans and entrepreneurs face in accessing municipal support and resources for nurturing creative ecosystems?

Table 4.
Thematic Analysis of Experiences and Challenges Faced by Local Artisans and Entrepreneurs in Accessing Municipal Support

Themes	Sub-themes	Significant Statements	General Descriptions
Access to Resources	Limited funding	"No funding and support." (Artist 12)	Artisans and entrepreneurs struggle to access financial resources needed to sustain and grow their businesses, hindering their capacity to thrive.
	Insufficient municipal programs	"There's a need for more sustainable programs and LGU support to motivate hidden skills among artisans." (Artist 2)	Municipal programs to support creative ecosystems are perceived as insufficient, lacking consistency and sustainability for long-term growth.
	Limited affordable spaces	"Local artisans and entrepreneurs often face challenges including limited affordable spaces..." (Artist 7)	Affordable workspaces are scarce, making it difficult for artisans and entrepreneurs to produce and showcase their work effectively.
Complex Bureaucratic Processes	Time-consuming applications	"Bureaucratic processes can be time-consuming, discouraging many from seeking support." (Entrepreneur 3)	Complex and lengthy bureaucratic requirements discourage local artisans and entrepreneurs from pursuing municipal support.
	Lack of awareness	"Access to information is limited - we do not know where to start most of the time." (Entrepreneur 2)	Many artisans and entrepreneurs are unaware of available municipal programs or how to access them due to ineffective communication and outreach.
Skill and Market Development	Skill gaps	"Conduct seminars and workshops to enhance our talents for artists." (Artist 3)	Artisans recognize the need for additional training and workshops to improve their skills and competitiveness in the market.
	Limited marketing support	"Limited affordable spaces, skill gaps, and inadequate marketing support." (Artist 7)	Inadequate marketing support prevents artisans and entrepreneurs from reaching broader markets, limiting their growth potential.
Infrastructure and Facilities	Inadequate infrastructure	"Many challenges of artisans encounter but the local government solves and the artisan can help in many ways." (Artist 14)	While some infrastructure support exists, it is often inadequate or unevenly distributed, limiting accessibility and utility for artisans.
	Delayed responses	"Delayed responses to requests." (Artist 6)	Municipal responses to requests for resources or support are often delayed, slowing down artisans' and entrepreneurs' progress.
Community and Collaboration	Unity and collaboration	"There is insufficient support, but through unities and collaboration, no problem cannot be solved." (Artist 13)	Despite challenges, artisans and entrepreneurs often rely on community collaboration and mutual support to overcome obstacles.
	Marketplace opportunities	"Creating a schedule of marketplace 'tabo' so that small-scale vendors can sell their products during the special day." (Entrepreneur 4)	Scheduled marketplaces provide small-scale vendors with an opportunity to showcase and sell their products, fostering economic activity within the community.
Positive Experiences	Recognition of existing support	"I'm happy because the facilities have been given, and support for support"	Some artisans feel grateful for the existing municipal support, particularly in

Themes	Sub-themes	Significant Statements	General Descriptions
Proposed Solutions	Improved LGU involvement	<i>tools and materials used in every activity." (Artist 8)</i> <i>"LGU should find ways to help artists grow and encourage the development of their talent and ideas." (Artist 11)</i>	providing facilities and materials for their creative activities. Suggestions include greater LGU involvement in providing consistent funding, better communication, and tailored support to foster creativity and entrepreneurship.
	Simplified processes and increased outreach	<i>"Strengthening communication between the local government and the community could make a big difference." (Entrepreneur 3)</i>	Simplifying bureaucratic processes and enhancing communication between LGUs and the creative community can encourage more participation and utilization of resources.

The table highlights the diverse experiences and challenges faced by local artisans and entrepreneurs when accessing municipal support. Key themes include limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and complex bureaucratic processes, which hinder their ability to nurture creative ecosystems. Many artisans struggle with a lack of awareness, insufficient training opportunities, and inadequate marketing support, exacerbating skill gaps and limiting market access.

Despite these challenges, some positive experiences, such as provided facilities and community collaboration, show potential for improvement. Proposed solutions include simplifying application processes, increasing LGU outreach, and offering consistent funding and training programs. By addressing these barriers, municipalities can better empower artisans and entrepreneurs to thrive in creative industries.

Conclusion

The study identified critical factors influencing the empowerment of local artisans and entrepreneurs in Initao, Misamis Oriental. These include skill development programs, access to resources, market access, entrepreneurial support systems, innovation and product development, government and institutional support, and policy legal frameworks. The findings revealed a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the positive impact of these factors on their empowerment and contribution to the development of creative ecosystems.

Strong relationships were found between these factors and the growth of creative ecosystems, with innovation and product development showing the highest correlation. The thematic analysis further highlighted challenges, such as limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, complex bureaucratic processes, and insufficient municipal programs. However, community collaboration and recognition of existing support demonstrated potential for overcoming these obstacles.

Overall, the study underscores the significance of comprehensive and holistic approaches by local governments to foster entrepreneurship and creative industries. While existing efforts are commendable, further enhancements are necessary to sustain growth and maximize the potential of local artisans and entrepreneurs.



Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Policy and Legal Frameworks.** Local government should sustain and expand enabling policies that reduce business barriers, provide tax incentives, and protect intellectual property rights for artisan products. Continuous review and simplification of regulations will ensure long-term sustainability.
2. **Enhance Government and Institutional Support.** Foster partnerships between LGUs, educational institutions, and private organizations to provide holistic support such as financial literacy, mentorship, and technical training for artisans and entrepreneurs.
3. **Expand Market Access Opportunities.** Develop more frequent trade fairs, online selling platforms, and partnerships with tourism initiatives to broaden artisans' customer reach locally and internationally.
4. **Improve Skill Development Programs.** Tailor training workshops to specific artisan needs (e.g., weaving, handicrafts, food processing) and integrate digital skills to enhance competitiveness.
5. **Increase Access to Resources.** Establish a centralized resource hub where artisans can easily access funding, raw materials, equipment, and shared production spaces.
6. **Strengthen Entrepreneurial Support Systems.** Provide structured mentorship and incubation programs for startups, focusing on product innovation, business management, and sustainability practices.
7. **Recommendation for Future Studies.** Future research may disaggregate findings by respondent groups—such as artisans, entrepreneurs, community members, and LGU personnel—to capture more nuanced perspectives. This will allow for a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and contributions of each group in fostering empowerment and developing creative ecosystems.

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