

## **Beyond Aid: A Case Study of Youth-Led Social Entrepreneurship, Agency, and Dignity through Kikobana**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper investigates the phenomenon of youth-led social entrepreneurship as an alternative and complimentary form of development, analyzing the case of Kikobana, an organization of social entrepreneurship in Uganda. Building on the concepts of capability approach, agency, dignity, empowerment, and youth social entrepreneurship, the study discusses how entrepreneurship could bring development further from resource provision to participation and self-reliance. It is shown that Kikobana generates several forms of agency at once. Vocational education enables the development of participants' capability to make, earn money, and participate in the market, whereas the production of school bags turns capabilities into a tangible contribution which can be used to promote recognition, confidence, and self-reliance. The case demonstrates how the young entrepreneur becomes the designer of development through establishing the link between his/her passion for running and social enterprise that involves consumers, producers, and communities in the social value chain. Nevertheless, there are certain limitations associated with the scale, dependency on the market, and ability of economically vulnerable groups to engage. All things considered, development should be not only measured in terms of the resources provided but also in terms of capabilities, agency, participation, and dignity developed and control over economic future acquired.

**Keywords:** *social entrepreneurship; agency; dignity; participation; youth leadership; self-reliance*

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## Introduction

For decades, development has meant poverty reduction, education, and health services delivered to disadvantaged communities, supported by substantial resources from governments, agencies, and NGOs. These efforts have improved many lives (Mkandawire et al., 2024). Yet many communities still struggle with persistent social and economic problems, prompting doubt about the long-term effectiveness of assistance-based practice. Easterly (2006) argues that large, top-down aid systems often fail precisely because they answer to donors rather than to the people they intend to serve, rewarding the appearance of activity over measurable improvement in recipients' lives. This critique does not deny that aid can help; it questions whether aid alone can produce durable change.

A central question in development studies concerns the relationship between aid and agency. Aid can be vital in emergencies and acute need. But some scholars argue that sustainable development depends on people taking charge of their own futures rather than relying primarily on external help (Miyano, 2021). This reflects a shift away from dependency and toward agency, participation, and independence—a shift that reframes the central question of development from “what do people lack?” to “what can people do, and what stands in their way?”

This study explores that shift through youth-led social entrepreneurship. Rather than relying solely on donations, social enterprises pursue sustainable systems that generate both revenue and social benefit (Setiawan, 2023). The paper examines Kikobana, a running-oriented enterprise founded by Junbeom (Jayden). A cross-country runner and team captain, Jayden built Kikobana to fuse his passion with a social mission: revenue from the brand supports single mothers who complete sewing training and provides schoolbags for elementary students in Uganda (Adewole, 2022). The enterprise is therefore not a charity that collects donations but a business whose ordinary commercial activity is designed to produce a social return.

This is not an argument to stop giving aid. Rather, it asks whether models based on participation, dignity, and agency can supplement traditional aid and support more sustainable outcomes (Miyano, 2021), positioning people not only as those who are served but as participants in and designers of development (Zimmerman, 1995). The paper proceeds by setting out a conceptual framework, presenting Kikobana as a case, analyzing how the model encourages agency, and considering the model's limitations before drawing implications for development practice.

## Background and Conceptual Framework

Development programs typically address urgent problems such as poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and unequal access to resources. NGOs and charities work to meet these needs, but face an ongoing challenge of sustainability (Habtom, 2016). Girls Be Strong, an NGO operating in Uganda, illustrates this work: it supports single mothers through sewing schools that build income-generating skills, and supports children's education through its Hope Hill program. Sustained engagement with communities in Uganda, including cultural exchanges with Korea, reveals that despite many forms of assistance, certain long-term problems persist, fueling debate over whether development should center on assistance or on participation and ownership (Bikadho et al., 2025).

The notion of poverty in modern times is not only related to the lack of material things but also to social, economic, and institutional obstacles to leading a valued life (Alkire et al., 2025). The capability approach provides a useful perspective for understanding the broader concept of development in terms of moving away from one that is resource-based to one which is opportunity-based with respect to leading a preferred way of living and being (Lal et al., 2023). This concept has been extended to social entrepreneurship through recent literature. For example, the capability approach was used contextually by Lal et al. (2023) in a social enterprise in India, eKutir, and showed that different types of capabilities were developed and functioned in the diffusion of the SE activity, thus creating social value. Their research not only shows the potential of the capability approach as a normative theory of development but also as a tool for analyzing the capacity of entrepreneurial interventions to extend people's possibilities and welfare. The distinction is relevant to the present study because it is not just the outputs of the Kikobana model that should be understood as vocational training, income generation, and participation, but rather mechanisms that can extend participants' capacities to do something. In this way, the question isn't whether resources are being made available but whether there are increasing opportunities for people to be involved, contribute, choose, and strive for desired aims.

Although capability theory has been used to analyze social entrepreneurship at large (Lal et al., 2023), the phenomenon of youth social entrepreneurship has also been explored (Alzate et al., 2024; United Nations, 2020); however, not much research exists on how the capability-participation-agency model can be put into practice by a particular youth-founded enterprise, namely, through how one particular founder's identity serves as the conduit connecting the business to the capacity-building capability of an NGO partner. This gap is what the Kikobana–Girls Be Strong partnership is designed to explore.

This study compares two approaches. The traditional aid-centered model moves resources from donor to recipient; this can help, but may restrict participation and entrench dependency (Brautigam & Knack, 2004; Fentahun, 2023). The agency-centered model, exemplified by social entrepreneurship, has consumers support a social enterprise that in turn creates opportunities for local producers and community members to participate in development (Littlewood et al., 2025; Enaifoghe, 2026). The analysis is organized around four conceptual shifts: aid to agency, charity to participation, recipients to designers, and dependency to self-reliance. These shifts are not a rejection of aid but a reorientation of its purpose—from meeting needs in the present to building the capacity that makes future aid unnecessary.

Two concepts sharpen this framework. *Aid dependency* describes a condition in which individuals, communities, and organizations rely on external support over long periods, which can undermine local initiative and weaken the institutions that sustain self-reliance; Brautigam and Knack (2004) find that high and sustained aid flows can erode the quality of governance by reducing accountability to citizens. Critics therefore argue that development should aim to reduce the need for aid by building sustainable opportunity (Niyitunga & Jahed, 2025). *Poverty porn*—the portrayal of suffering to attract attention or funds—raises a second, ethical concern. While such imagery can mobilize resources, it risks framing people solely as victims, obscuring their capabilities and reinforcing an unequal donor–

recipient relationship in which the global poor appear only as objects of pity (Mahmoud & Nang, 2024; Shabbir et al., 2025). The capability approach offers an alternative that respects people's talents and agency, and that insists representation itself is part of how development either affirms or diminishes dignity (Lal et al., 2023). The way a development effort depicts its beneficiaries is thus not incidental; it shapes whether they are seen as contributors or as cases to be managed.

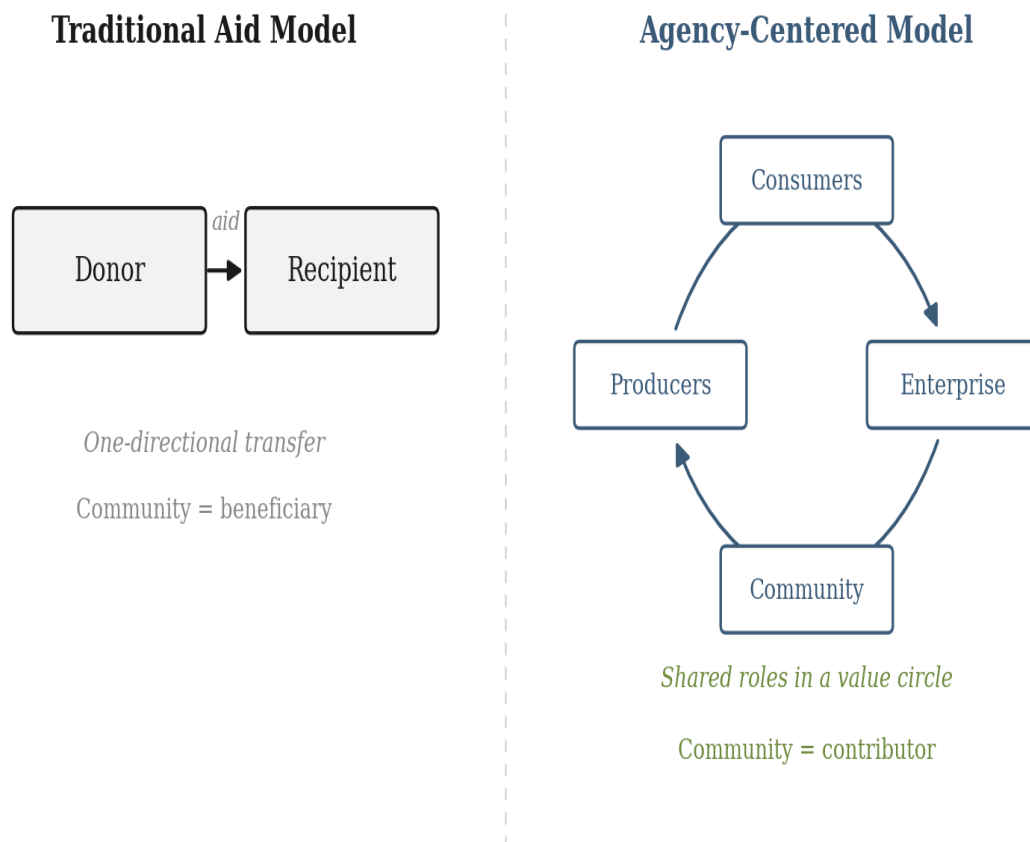


Figure 1: Traditional Aid Model versus Agency-Centered Development Model

*Note. In the aid model, the community only receives resources transferred from the donor. In the agency-centered model, roles are shared across a circle of consumers, the enterprise, producers, and the community.*

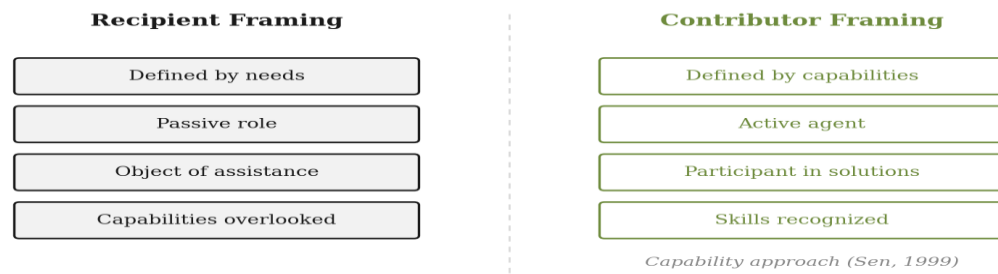


Figure 2: Recipient Framing versus Contributor Framing in Development Practice

*Note. The recipient framing (left) views people as passive and defined by their needs; the contributor framing (right) views them as active agents with skills, consistent with the capability approach (Lal et al., 2023).*

The framework also draws on the idea of empowerment. Zimmerman (1995) describes psychological empowerment as a process through which people gain a sense of control over their own lives, develop a critical awareness of their social environment, and participate in actions that affect outcomes they care about. Empowerment, in this view, is not something delivered to people but something they develop through participation. This connects the abstract language of agency to a concrete claim: that taking part in productive, valued activity can itself change how people see themselves and their possibilities.

Sources of evidence for the Kikobana case include the corporate's publicly available information, which includes their website, their brand story, and descriptions of the products and campaigns, alongside descriptions of the existing programs of Girls Be Strong (the sewing school and Hope Hill Education Project), as well as secondary academic literature on development theories and youth social entrepreneurship. This research has not involved any independent interviews with the participants, employees, or Girls Be Strong. The main reason why sources of evidence might present bias in this case is that the main case material was provided by the company itself and hence it will tend to highlight the intended social value of the enterprise and overlook any problems faced or issues arising.

The operating model was developed by Jayden in Girls Be Strong, using pre-existing activities such as the sewing trainings of the NGO and the Hope Hill program, and without developing any new activities. Those women participating in the sewing activity and those students receiving the school bags were not part of the development of the operating model since they had participated in the existing Girls Be Strong activity, but did not design the entire enterprise. This distinction is important for the paper's arguments regarding agency since the current operating model acts as a conduit for the creation of participation and capabilities, but its design has not yet been a participatory one, as admitted in Section 5.5.

Kikobana has been chosen as an information-dense case for this study due to its representation of the relationship between youth entrepreneurship and agency-oriented development. Thus, in addition

to considering the development approach utilized by this social enterprise, this analysis will focus on those aspects of youth-based social entrepreneurship that have been identified within the literature as well. These include entrepreneurial spirit, social orientation, innovativeness, participation, and resource and network mobilization. Specific focus will be paid to the manifestation of these attributes within the context of Jayden's establishment of Kikobana.

The starting point of this chain of empowerment is capability (Sen, 1999), which is the precondition, as this means having the freedom to transform resources into valuable actions. The participation itself is the actual behavioral act that happens as a result of the capability. Empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995) occurs as a psychological process as a consequence of participation, which provides an individual with the sense of control and critical awareness because of participation itself, not prior to it. The result of this process is agency, which is the ability to make and implement one's choices. Dignity here is not another step but the affective result which accompanies all previous steps, when one is treated as a producer rather than a consumer of his/her own resources.

### **Youth-Led Social Entrepreneurship**

Youth-led social entrepreneurship is an evolution of social entrepreneurship, specifically introducing youth to the role of recognizing social issues, developing a socially focused entrepreneurial solution, and marshalling resources to address social and economic value. The United Nations (2020) defines youth social entrepreneurship as a tool that can contribute to the creation of employment and income, as well as youth participation and broader development goals. Youth social entrepreneurship is therefore particularly relevant to the agency-centered perspective on development, as young people are viewed and empowered in their role as actors who can define and execute solutions to social problems, rather than mere beneficiaries of development initiatives.

The current body of literature indicates that there are some interdependent characteristics that describe youth social entrepreneurship. These involve striving for social change through entrepreneurial activity, innovative ways of dealing with community problems, mobilization of social networks and resources, and generation of economic value along with social value (Alzate et al., 2024). Young social entrepreneurs may therefore hold a unique place in development as those who engage in business activity while having a direct stake in solving social issues. Meanwhile, youth-driven enterprises are constrained in ways such as lack of access to finance, experience, networks, institutional support, and other assets. What makes the concept of youth social entrepreneurship different from others is not that young individuals have more potential to be innovative than any other stakeholder but rather that the concept gives youth a chance to engage in the design and implementation of solutions for social issues (United Nations, 2020; Alzate et al., 2024).

It is particularly relevant in development contexts where youth are typically characterized as "unemployed," "vulnerable," or "the next generation of leaders." Youth social entrepreneurship provides an alternative vision of how youth should be viewed as players of today in the spheres of economy and society. The United Nations (2020) calls for youth social entrepreneurship to become a tool of youth engagement along with sustainable development; it is also important to note that it depends on the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Research into youth social entrepreneurship identifies several social factors that could be leveraged to make an impact on their community, including social

capital, social engagement, innovation, and social change (Alzate et al., 2024). Therefore, the key element of youth-led social entrepreneurship is not just about being young; it's about putting young people in the driving seat to link entrepreneurial initiatives to social goals.

This distinction is very relevant to the Kikobana case in terms of analysis. Jayden's involvement starts with his own identity as a team captain and nationwide runner and the establishment of a social enterprise that sees its business operations adding value for development in Uganda. He does not enter development through a conventional model of aid or charitable organization, but rather through an entrepreneurial one where he relates consumers to the enterprise and the community participants. Kikobana is thus a case in point through which to explore how youth agency, entrepreneurial initiative, and social purpose can become connected. The case does not prove that youth-led enterprises are better than conventional development organizations; it does, however, enable the study to explore whether and how young people can become development organizations by designing a development program through market-based social entrepreneurship.

### **Research Questions**

The study asks how youth-led social entrepreneurship might encourage agency, participation, and self-reliance:

RQ1: Can youth-led social entrepreneurship promote agency where traditional aid tends to foster dependency?

RQ2: How can market participation foster dignity and self-reliance in development?

RQ3: How can business activity generate social impact without relying on donation-only models?

RQ4: How do the characteristics of youth-led social entrepreneurship enable young people to act as designers of development rather than recipients of programs?

### **Methods**

This study uses a qualitative conceptual case study approach. Its aim is to analyze models of development rather than to produce statistical results. Evidence is drawn from development interventions in Uganda, the work of Girls Be Strong, and the planned design and projected operations of Kikobana, alongside academic literature on development theory, aid dependency, dignity, participation, agency, and social entrepreneurship. A comparative analytical approach examines how aid-centered and agency-centered models differ in their effects on participation, dignity, ownership, and self-reliance.

Rather than treating the models as mutually exclusive, the study investigates the relationship between assistance and agency, with particular attention to whether social entrepreneurship enables people to act as participants rather than only recipients. As a conceptual case study, the analysis is illustrative rather than confirmatory: it uses a single, information-rich case to clarify how an agency-centered model might work in practice, not to establish statistical generalization.

## Conceptual Analysis

### Limitations of Traditional Aid-Centered Models

Traditional aid has clear merits: it can support people and communities facing poverty and economic hardship, and is often necessary, particularly in emergencies where immediate transfers save lives (Fentahun, 2023). Problems arise when projects offer little room for involvement and ownership, casting communities as recipients rather than participants and orienting development toward receiving help rather than building self-reliance (Brautigam & Knack, 2004; Niyitunga & Jahed, 2025). When key decisions rest with donors and external organizations, communities have little influence over the design and implementation of programs meant to serve them, which can diminish local ownership and limit the sustainability of any gains once external support ends (Bikadho et al., 2025). The comparison suggests that outcomes improve when communities contribute their own knowledge and skills, since participation builds a sense of ownership that endures beyond the life of a single project. The limitation, then, is not that aid is harmful but that aid structured as one-directional transfer tends to leave the underlying capacity for self-reliance undeveloped.

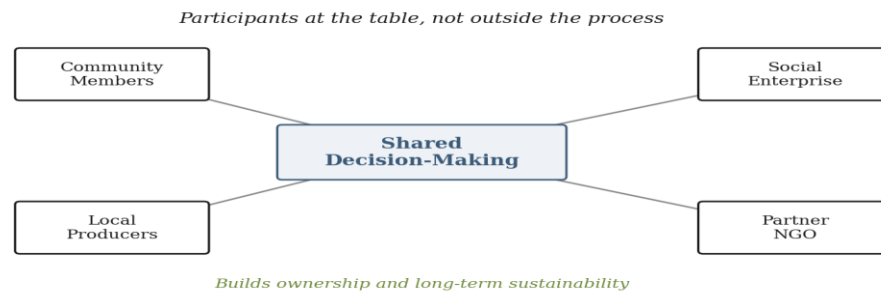


Figure 3. Participatory Development as Shared Decision-Making

*Note. Development is more likely to be sustainable when community members participate in decision-making rather than receiving pre-designed projects from outside the process.*

### Kikobana as an Agency-Centered Alternative

Kikobana is branded as a running-oriented company that conducts economic operations tied to a social mission in Uganda. Rather than fundraising, it earns revenue from running apparel and accessories and invests that revenue into vocational and educational programs. Its products—running vests, socks, caps, and accessories—are sold through the official website and select physical stores, targeting runners willing to buy from purpose-driven brands. This positioning matters: because the enterprise sells a desirable product rather than soliciting charity, its relationship with consumers is one of exchange rather than appeal, which avoids the donor–recipient framing discussed above.

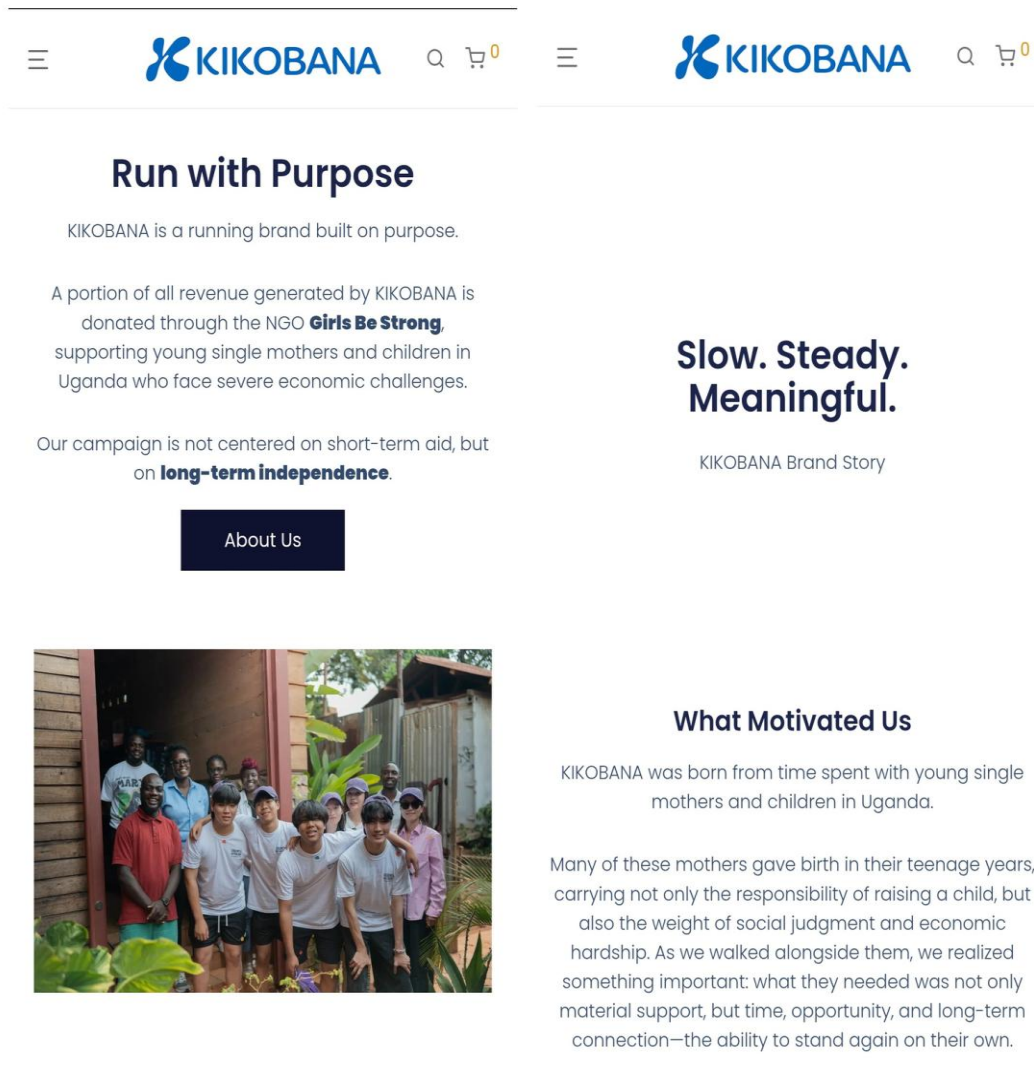


Figure 4. Kikobana Website Homepage

*Note. The Kikobana homepage (left) and brand story page (right), describing the brand's purpose and its partnership with Girls Be Strong.*

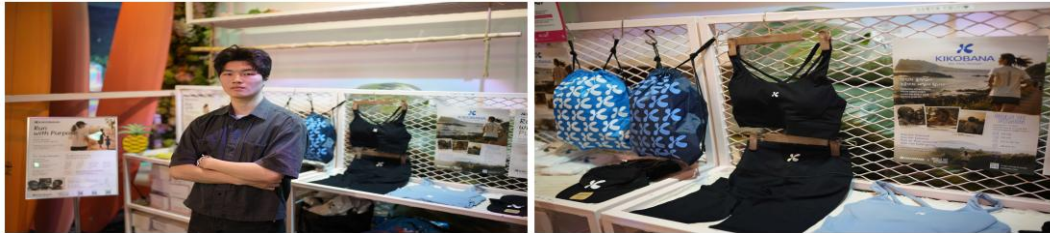


Figure 5. Kikobana Products Available in a Physical Store

*Note. Kikobana running apparel and accessories displayed at a physical store, alongside campaign materials describing the social mission.*

The social mission operates through two linked projects with Girls Be Strong. A vocational sewing project teaches single mothers skills they can use for income and involves them directly in production: the school bags distributed to Ugandan students are sewn by participants themselves. The Hope Hill Education Project helps children access learning materials. Unlike charity, Kikobana works through market participation: consumers generate revenue by purchasing products, linking consumers, the enterprise, and the community in a single value chain (Littlewood et al., 2025; Enaifoghe, 2026). The result is a circuit rather than a transfer—value created by consumers funds skills that produce goods for a third group, and each participant contributes something rather than simply receiving.

The choice of design was far from being coincidental but was based on the theoretical considerations formulated in Section 2. The choice of single mothers as producers rather than receivers of the bags to be distributed is connected with the distinction that is made by the capability approach between having access to a resource and acquiring the capability to do something (Sen, 1999; Lal et al., 2023). This is why sewing skills were selected as the intervention strategy rather than a direct gift in the form of a bag, since the skill could be transferable. Connecting training with an actual product to be created was another implementation of the dignity principle discussed above. Likewise, having a fixed amount of commercial proceeds devoted to social reinvestment instead of making social spending an afterthought or relying on it to be dependent on donors operationalizes the transition from aid to agency (Section 2) by determining the size of the social impact based on the success of the company itself and not external contributions. In this way, the theoretical framework served as a constraint to the model design rather than just an analytic tool used after the design process was completed.

### **Projected Operational Model (2026–2027)**

Because Kikobana launched in 2026, the following figures are forward-looking projections, not realized results. They illustrate how the agency-centered model is intended to function and are built upward from planned first-year production volumes and unit prices (Table 1). The cost assumptions reflect the typical structure of small apparel ventures, in which fabric, sewing, and printing make up the largest share of unit cost; here the cost of goods is estimated at roughly half of the retail price, in line with common practice for small-batch sportswear sold directly to consumers.

Table 1. Projected First-Year Revenue, Kikobana (2026–2027)

| Product      | Unit Price (KRW) | Projected Units | Revenue (KRW) |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Running vest | 37,000           | 200             | 7,400,000     |
| Socks        | 15,000           | 100             | 1,500,000     |
| Cap          | 20,000           | 100             | 2,000,000     |
| Accessories  | 10,000           | 200             | 2,000,000     |
| Total        |                  | 600             | 12,900,000    |

*Note. Figures are projected first-year targets, not actual operating results.*

Projected first-year revenue totals 12,900,000 KRW across four products. Of this, roughly 50% covers cost of goods and 15% covers operations, leaving approximately 35%—about 4,515,000 KRW—for social reinvestment (Table 2). Separating revenue from reinvestment in this way is deliberate: it makes clear that the social return depends on the enterprise being commercially viable, not on the generosity of any single donor.

Table 2. Projected Allocation of Revenue to Social Reinvestment (2026–2027)

| Category            | Share | Amount (KRW) | Purpose                                 |
|---------------------|-------|--------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Cost of goods sold  | ~50%  | 6,450,000    | Materials and production                |
| Operating costs     | ~15%  | 1,935,000    | Logistics, marketing, admin             |
| Social reinvestment | ~35%  | 4,515,000    | Sewing training, school bags, Hope Hill |

*Note. Cost of goods reflects fabric, sewing, and printing for small-batch sportswear; operating costs cover logistics, payment fees, and marketing. Shares are first-year estimates and would shift as order volumes grow.*

This reinvestment supports three linked outcomes: sewing training for three single mothers, production and distribution of 50 school bags, and continued support for Hope Hill (Table 3). Crucially, the single mothers are not passive recipients but producers within the model; the bags distributed to students are made through the sewing program itself. Consumer revenue funds a training opportunity that in turn yields a tangible good serving a third group. This circular structure distinguishes the model from a one-directional donation. The targets are deliberately modest, reflecting a realistic first-year youth venture; their value lies less in magnitude than in the structure they represent, which is designed to be repeatable and to grow as revenue grows.

Table 3. Projected Social Outcomes, Year 1

| Outcome                           | Projected Target |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Single mothers in sewing training | 3                |
| School bags produced              | 50               |
| Students receiving bags           | 50               |
| Revenue reinvested socially       | ~4,515,000 KRW   |

### Agency, Dignity, and Youth Leadership

The notion of agency, which can be defined as the ability to change one's situation, to make decisions, and to actively participate in the problem-solving process (Nyagwaya et al., 2026), is crucial for the analysis. The capability approach allows explaining how it might take place through the Kikobana framework. Instead of focusing on training, income, and other material means as the outcomes of development, the capability approach examines how the development expands the possibilities of those who benefit from such programs. This application of the capability approach is supported by Lal et al. (2023) who state in their empirical research of the social enterprise eKutir that social enterprise activities expanded various capabilities that led to the creation of social value. Applying the capability approach to the Kikobana case, one might understand the sewing training not only as the acquisition of certain skills but as an expansion of people's capability to produce, earn money, participate in markets, and make economic decisions. The production of school bags can become a manifestation of the mentioned capability, and both income and recognition might enhance the agency required for participation and self-sufficiency. Thus, the sequence is resources → capabilities → participation → contribution → agency.

The youth perspective is one that is layered onto this process. According to Alzate et al. (2024), there is a set of themes that may be considered shared cues in the research on social entrepreneurship of youth: innovation, social change, community involvement, social capital, and entrepreneurial strategies. What makes Jayden valuable is not only the fact that he is a young man but mainly because he is the type of young person who can see the social problem and create an organizational path to solve it. Kikobana serves as a response to the unique aspect of his cross-country running experience and his role as team captain, drawing on a personal passion and a social cause. The case, therefore, is an example of linking ideas of youth identity and entrepreneurial initiative to development practice in a way that is not separate from it.

Kikobana also shows a fundamental difference between the young beneficiary of development and the young designer of development. Jayden does not participate solely as a recipient of instruction, support, or funding from a field-based development program. Instead, he creates a business model that enables consumers to buy items, earn income, and channel social resources into vocational training and educational assistance in Uganda. This is not an assertion that all youth-led enterprises are successful in overcoming poverty as compared to traditional development institutions. Instead, it shows another form of youth engagement within development, which is initiating, organizing, and trying out linkages between economic activity and social goals.

In this role, the enterprise in particular constitutes a chain of participation of various actors. The enterprise is started by Jayden. Consumers are engaged in the process through their purchases. The enterprise puts the resources together and runs them. Community members are engaged as skill and educational providers and benefactors of the enterprise. This brings about a structure that is not a mere "donor-recipient" format, as development is spread throughout a network of players who all invest in the development process. Youth-led social entrepreneurship can, in this respect, make agency available to the young, not only for the people served by the development program but also for designing a development mechanism by them.

Dignity also comes from the same. Once again, the individual becomes a product or a producer and is appreciated for what they have to offer, not for their deficiencies. The bags that get to students are a tangible reminder of that contribution, and this is a very different experience than a transfer. Meanwhile, the case also revealed greater connections between youth agency and community agency and showed that they are not the same. The ability to design the model is given to Jayden as the enterprise founder, and the sewing participants have gained their agency by learning skills and participating in the production. Thus, the case indicates that local youth social entrepreneurship can provide several layers of agency in one model of development.

Academically, this connection between youth entrepreneurship and agency-centered development provides an interesting link. Social entrepreneurship by the youth has been recognized as a field that does not only concentrate on job opportunities and the establishment and development of youth ventures but also youth involvement, socio-cultural changes, innovation, and sustainability (Alzate et al., 2024; United Nations, 2020). These concepts converge in a useful example: a young entrepreneur establishes a mechanism for social value creation for the involvement of consumers, producers, and communities within a commercial enterprise such as Kikobana. The case therefore advances a wider social scientific framework of the youth as not only a 'survivalist class' in need of 'development' interventions but also as potential actors who can help to create and organize their own 'development' response.

This is an interpretation limited by the case. The Kikobana project is youth-based with very few outputs during the first year, and the model cannot state that a social enterprise led by youth will generate similar outputs in different contexts. Furthermore, there are numerous obstacles when it comes to establishing businesses, such as financing, experience, business connections, capacity building, and access to markets (United Nations, 2020; Alzate et al., 2024). The importance of this case is not only about ensuring the active participation of youth in the design of development initiatives but also about showing an approach to consider, through which entrepreneurial activities could be used to involve others as well.

### **Limitations of the Agency-Centered Model**

An honest assessment must acknowledge the limits of market-based development. First, scalability is uncertain: a venture producing fifty bags addresses individual livelihoods but cannot, on its own, resolve structural poverty, which still requires public investment, functioning institutions, and at times conventional aid. Yet this limitation also clarifies the model's purpose. Kikobana is not offered as a substitute for structural reform but as a demonstration that even small ventures can shift the

relationship between people and the resources meant to help them; its contribution is in the structure it models, which can be adopted at larger scale, rather than in the magnitude of its first-year output.

Second, market participation as a route to dignity risks excluding those who cannot participate economically—the elderly, the seriously ill, or those without marketable capacity—for whom rights-based support remains essential. This is a genuine boundary, and it argues against treating market participation as the only path to dignity. The appropriate conclusion is not that agency-centered models should replace aid but that the two should be matched to circumstance: market participation where people can contribute, and rights-based provision where they cannot.

Third, social enterprises are exposed to market risk; revenue that funds social programs can fall as well as rise, making purely market-dependent provision less reliable than its advocates sometimes suggest. A downturn in sales directly threatens the social mission, whereas a grant, once committed, does not. This suggests that agency-centered models are most robust when they complement, rather than wholly replace, more stable sources of support. Taken together, these limitations do not negate the model's value; they define its proper role as a complement to aid rather than a replacement for it.

## Discussion

The analysis supports viewing development as agency creation, not only assistance provision. While aid matters, individuals and communities must ultimately be active participants in shaping their futures (Brautigam & Knack, 2004; Niyitunga & Jahed, 2025). In the Kikobana model, people contribute to development rather than only receiving it, which opens possibilities for greater ownership and sustainability and establishes a meaningful link between agency and self-reliance: the activities people learn to do, and the confidence that comes from doing them, can support long-term economic and social benefit that outlasts any single intervention (Nyagwaya, 2026).

Dignity emerges as a key outcome alongside resources and services. Participation allows people to engage in meaningful activity and to be valued for their skills, supporting the self-respect and sense of belonging that pure assistance may not provide (Littlewood et al., 2025). This is consistent with Zimmerman's (1995) account of empowerment as something developed through participation rather than delivered from outside. Social entrepreneurship also reshapes development relationships. Instead of a stark donor–recipient divide that can entrench unequal power (Fentahun, 2023), it builds participation networks among consumers, entrepreneurs, producers, and communities oriented toward contribution and cooperation (Enaifoghe, 2026). The relationship becomes lateral rather than vertical—a network of people exchanging value rather than a hierarchy of giver and receiver.

These observations connect to a broader debate about the ethics of representation. By positioning beneficiaries as producers and contributors, an agency-centered model resists the “poverty porn” framing that reduces people to their suffering (Mahmoud & Nang, 2024). How a venture depicts and involves the people it serves is therefore not a marketing detail but part of its development logic: a model that shows people working and contributing tells a different, more accurate story than one that shows only need.

## **Implications for Global Development**

The analysis has several implications. First, development must build agency, not just provide resources, but the question is whether both participation in solution design and design itself are important. Second, dignity and participation should also be given more visibility as development aims, for development programs should be judged not just on what they offer but on their ability to allow people to participate and make choices (Littlewood et al., 2025). The Kikobana case has indicated that these concepts can be translated to a market-oriented approach where social value is generated by inclusive participation and not merely passed through.

Thirdly, the case has broader implications for the position of youth in development. Youth are not to be seen exclusively as objects of development initiatives or potential leaders who will bring their contribution when they are older. Social entrepreneurship is another possibility: young entrepreneurs are today's designers of development. They can identify social issues, define entrepreneurial solutions, coordinate entrepreneurial efforts, raise capital, and link economic business activity to social goals. Previous studies indicate that the social entrepreneurship of youth can be distinguished by four factors: innovation, social change, social capital, participation, and entrepreneurial strategies (United Nations, 2020; Alzate et al., 2024). Kikobana demonstrates this by using a successful example of a young entrepreneur who linked an existing personal passion with a social purpose and built a business people and community members could be a part of developing.

This does not suggest that social entrepreneurship must take the place of traditional development institutions or aid. In addition to all this, youths are also limited by issues such as availability of financial resources, experience, networking, institutional support, and market environment. Market-driven solutions are not always available for those who do not have access to the market on economic grounds (United Nations, 2020; Alzate et al., 2024). This implies that the implication is complementing rather than substituting. Development agencies can build the necessary infrastructure through which youths can be provided with an opportunity to undertake social enterprises, and when markets fail to provide any sort of safeguard, traditional aid is essential.

Last, the case proposes a model of a social enterprise, by which economic activity would be connected with social impact—not the exclusive path of support provision, nor even the one that would take the place of support provision times when aid was required, but one that could be used for complementation; for self-reliance and participation (Enaifoghe, 2026). The everyday lesson for practitioners is whether interventions address a need or increase the capacity to address a need in the future. From the research perspective, it serves as an illustration of the importance of looking at youth-led social enterprises not just as a solution to youth unemployment but as one way in which youth can become agents of change in designing development.

## Conclusion

This research looked at the idea of youth-led social entrepreneurship as a type of development characterized by agency, involvement, and dignity as per the development theory, along with the example of Kikobana and his partnership with Girls Be Strong. It can be seen from the analysis that apart from solving their problems, people need to have an opportunity to shape their future lives. Kikobana is an agency-focused approach where business is linked to vocational training and education as well as community engagement.

The analysis also shows why it is important to include the youth dimension. The youth-led approach of social entrepreneurship should not be reduced to the term "social entrepreneurship" implemented by a young individual. Its importance is to both raise awareness among youth as actors of development, enabling them to perceive social issues, develop entrepreneurial solutions, mobilize resources, and link economic activity and social goals. For Kikobana, Jayden's identity as a runner laid the groundwork for the initiative to include a social lift, making his personal passion a social cause. The case thus exemplifies the fact that youth entrepreneurship can provide a specific pathway into development design and also provides opportunities for other actors to learn and be active in development design.

The model brings single mothers in as recipients and participants and producers, and consumers are placed in as participants in the social value chain through purchases at the community level. This builds on the overarching argument in the paper that dignity is enhanced by valuing individuals as able rather than simply as 'needs-based.' In parallel, however, the case does not prove that youth-led social entrepreneurship is more effective than traditional aid and that, because of that, youth entrepreneurship can cure structural poverty. It also suffers from low volume, having a restricted number of people eligible for it financially and vulnerability to market conditions as well as economic constraints typical of young business owners.

The case content, therefore, is not necessarily representative. It demonstrates capability building and production processes while also showcasing how young people can be positioned as beneficiaries or future leaders and become current designers of development through youth-led social entrepreneurship. The study is also relevant in terms of size, inclusiveness, and risk, as it provides some degree of support to the hypothesis that development is more likely to occur in cases where people have the ability to invest in themselves.

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