

Self-reliant economic development for poverty eradication under the SDG agenda



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ABSTRACT

Persistent poverty remains a major global challenge despite the efforts made under the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recent global crises, including economic shocks, climate change, and health emergencies, have shown the weaknesses of development models that depend heavily on external aid and foreign investments. This study examines self-reliant economic development as a sustainable and resilient approach to poverty eradication, especially in relation to SDG 1 (No Poverty). The study used a qualitative literature review to analyze the concepts, strategies, and applications of self-reliant development models. The findings show that self-reliant economic development focuses on local resource mobilization, community empowerment, financial inclusion, small and medium enterprise development, and investment in human capital. These approaches can provide more sustainable poverty reduction outcomes than dependency-based models. The study also found that empowering women and youth, supporting entrepreneurship, and encouraging innovation can strengthen local economic resilience and reduce vulnerability to external shocks. However, several challenges remain, including global inequalities, weak institutions, governance problems, social exclusion, and technological limitations. The study highlights the importance of community participation, institutional support, and effective policies in achieving sustainable poverty eradication under the SDG agenda.

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1. Introduction

Global efforts to eradicate poverty have recorded measurable progress, largely aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. Nevertheless, recent global disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic and intensifying climate crises, have exposed the fragility of these gains, revealing that poverty not only persists but has, in many contexts, worsened significantly (Sachs et al., 2020). These developments underscore the urgency of rethinking prevailing development strategies and highlight the necessity of strategically embedding self-reliant economic development

within the SDG framework to achieve durable poverty eradication.

Although SDG 1 explicitly targets the eradication of poverty in all its forms by 2030, progress remains uneven and insufficient. While reductions in extreme poverty were observed between 2015 and 2018 (UN, 2022), current trajectories suggest that the 2030 target is increasingly unattainable, particularly in fragile states and remote rural regions (Leal Filho et al., 2021). These patterns reveal structural weaknesses in development approaches that rely heavily on external interventions, which often lack resilience, local ownership, and long-term transformative capacity. Consequently, poverty's persistence necessitates a critical reassessment of dominant paradigms and a shift towards strategies that cultivate endogenous capacity, community empowerment, and genuine self-determination.

Self-reliant economic development offers a distinct paradigm centred on mobilizing internal resources, local knowledge, and indigenous

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institutions as primary drivers of economic progress. Rather than privileging external financing or imported development models, this approach emphasises local ownership, value creation, and reinvestment within communities, thereby strengthening local economic ecosystems and enhancing resilience (Lertthanakulvat and Sonsuphap, 2024). Contrary to aid-dependent models, which may impose conditionalities, distort local markets, and undermine sustainability, self-reliance prioritizes empowerment and long-term self-sufficiency (Nchofoung et al., 2022). This distinction reflects a growing scholarly consensus advocating a shift from assistance-based interventions towards enabling communities to generate sustainable livelihoods autonomously.

Moreover, self-reliant development stands in direct opposition to extractive investment models, where external actors exploit local resources or labour with minimal reinvestment and significant capital outflows (Gwara and Ogbonnaya, 2024). Such models often exacerbate inequality, environmental degradation, and social displacement, reinforcing the “resource curse” observed in many resource-rich developing countries. Empirical evidence suggests that reliance on mineral-based foreign investment frequently fails to alleviate poverty among local populations and may entrench underdevelopment. Conversely, self-reliance emphasises sustainable resource management, local entrepreneurship, and capital retention, ensuring that economic value circulates within communities and contributes to long-term socioeconomic stability (Ussher et al., 2021).

The persistence of poverty despite global SDG efforts can thus be attributed to recurring global shocks, climate instability, and entrenched structural inequalities that continuously erode development gains. Many individuals who escape extreme poverty remain economically vulnerable, easily pushed back into deprivation by external shocks (UN, 2022). These realities expose the limitations of top-down, externally driven development models that insufficiently account for local contexts and often fail to generate sustainable outcomes. A strategic reorientation towards community-driven, self-reliant approaches is therefore essential for building resilient local economies capable of withstanding global volatility.

Self-reliant economic development contributes to durable poverty eradication by strengthening community agency, reinforcing local institutions, and aligning economic activity with social and environmental well-being (Lertthanakulvat and Sonsuphap, 2024). By prioritizing local resource utilization, sustainable agriculture, digital inclusion, and participatory governance, self-reliance fosters authentic economic independence and mitigates external vulnerability (Yadav et al., 2024). The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh exemplifies this approach by leveraging microcredit and social solidarity mechanisms to empower impoverished women, stimulate grassroots entrepreneurship, and

reduce poverty through internally driven economic activity rather than unconditional external transfers (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Similarly, small and medium-sized enterprises play a critical role as engines of employment, inclusive growth, and innovation, particularly in developing economies (Kumar and Suppiah, 2023; Mwale, 2020). Fiscal decentralization further strengthens self-reliance by enabling subnational governments to allocate resources responsively and stimulate localized development (Monkam and Mangwanya, 2024).

Despite extensive scholarship on sustainable development, a critical research gap remains regarding the mechanisms through which self-reliant economic development functions as a primary strategy for poverty eradication under the evolving SDG agenda. According to Putri and Putri (2022), existing studies largely emphasise external aid effectiveness or macroeconomic growth, with limited empirical focus on community-driven strategies and their comparative resilience against extractive capital flows. Furthermore, the interaction between community agency, institutional capacity, and enabling policy environments, particularly fiscal decentralization and SME support, remains insufficiently theorized and empirically synthesized in relation to SDG 1.

Thus, this study aims to examine self-reliant economic development as a transformative strategy for accelerating poverty eradication and enhancing resilience within the SDG framework. Specifically, it seeks to analyse the distinctions between self-reliance, aid dependency, and extractive investment models; assess the impact of self-reliant strategies on poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods; and identify enabling policy, institutional, and community-based frameworks that effectively scale self-reliant development for achieving SDG 1.

The study carries significant policy and practical implications for governments, development agencies, and communities. By clarifying the mechanisms and benefits of self-reliant economic development, it offers actionable insights for shifting policy emphasis from external capital dependence to endogenous capacity-building, local enterprise development, and community empowerment (Tackie et al., 2022). Ultimately, the findings highlight the centrality of community agency, institutional responsiveness, fiscal decentralization, and circular economy principles in fostering resilient and equitable development pathways aligned with the SDG agenda (Boon and Anuga, 2020; Voulvoulis, 2022).

Despite extensive research on sustainable development and poverty reduction, most studies emphasise external aid, growth, or investment. Limited attention is given to self-reliant economic development within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study synthesizes interdisciplinary literature to propose a framework integrating community empowerment, financial inclusion, human capital, and sustainable local production.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative literature review approach to examine the conceptual foundations, strategic mechanisms, and practical implications of self-reliant economic development for poverty eradication within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework. The research was based on a systematic search and synthesis of scholarly literature to identify relevant theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and policy discussions related to self-reliance and sustainable development. The literature search was conducted between January and March 2025 using several major academic databases to ensure comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed research. The primary databases included Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar – all selected due to their wide coverage of interdisciplinary studies in development economics, sustainability, and social policy.

An initial exploratory search was first conducted to identify commonly used terminologies in the literature, after which a structured search strategy was developed using combinations of keywords and Boolean operators. The main keywords used in the search process included “self-reliant economic development,” “self-reliance and poverty eradication,” “community empowerment and sustainable development,” “financial inclusion and poverty reduction,” “microcredit and local economic development,” “human capital development and poverty alleviation,” and “Sustainable Development Goals and poverty.” These keywords were applied in the title, abstract, and keyword fields of each database to ensure the relevance of retrieved publications. In addition, backward and forward citation tracking was conducted to identify additional relevant sources from the reference lists of key articles.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the literature, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during the screening process. The inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, book chapters, and reputable institutional reports that discussed themes related to self-reliant development, poverty eradication, community empowerment, financial inclusion, human capital development, or the SDG framework. Publications written in English and primarily published between 2000 and 2025 were prioritized, although several foundational theoretical works were also included to provide conceptual grounding. Conversely, non-academic sources such as opinion articles, blogs, and non-reviewed reports were excluded. Studies that were not directly related to economic development or poverty reduction were also omitted, as well as duplicate records identified across multiple databases.

After the screening process, the selected literature was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Each publication was carefully reviewed to extract key arguments, theoretical perspectives,

and empirical findings related to self-reliant development strategies. The extracted information was then coded and organised into thematic categories through an iterative comparison process. This analysis resulted in the identification of several core themes, including conceptual and theoretical perspectives of self-reliance, strategies for self-reliant poverty eradication, inclusive approaches emphasizing women and youth empowerment, and the structural challenges and barriers affecting implementation. These themes subsequently formed the analytical framework for the results and discussion presented in this study, enabling a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge on the role of self-reliant economic development in achieving sustainable poverty eradication under the SDG agenda.

This study employed a desk-based qualitative literature review; no primary data were collected. Scholarly perspectives, empirical evidence, and policy discussions were synthesised to examine the conceptual and practical dimensions of self-reliant economic development for poverty reduction within the Sustainable Development Goals framework. AI tools were used solely for drafting and language refinement, without influencing the analysis or interpretation of content.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Conceptual and theoretical perspectives

Self-reliance in economic development represents a multidimensional concept integrating economic, social, and moral imperatives in the pursuit of sustainable national progress. It refers to the capacity of a nation or community to generate, mobilize, and effectively utilize its own resources to achieve self-sustaining growth without excessive dependence on external aid, imports, or foreign financial assistance. At its core, self-reliance emphasises endogenous capacity-building through the strengthening of domestic industries, human capital formation, institutional effectiveness, and technological innovation as foundations for resilience and national dignity. Importantly, self-reliance does not imply economic isolationism; rather, it advocates balanced and strategic interdependence, whereby countries participate in global trade and cooperation while safeguarding policy autonomy and economic sovereignty. The concept gained prominence during the post-colonial era, when newly independent states sought to overcome structural dependency and externally imposed economic patterns that perpetuated underdevelopment.

As argued by [Todaro and Smith \(2020\)](#), self-reliance involves internal transformation that prioritizes domestic production, equitable resource distribution, and participatory governance to ensure that development outcomes serve national interests and broad societal welfare rather than external actors. Beyond material dimensions, self-reliance

encompasses psychological, cultural, and intellectual independence.

Sen (1999) conceptualized development as the expansion of human capabilities and freedoms, underscoring the importance of enabling individuals and communities to make autonomous economic decisions. From this perspective, self-reliance is inseparable from empowerment, local knowledge systems, and ethical governance. Excessive reliance on foreign models and external assistance can generate structural subordination, which weakens indigenous creativity and long-term innovation capacity. Therefore, economic self-reliance must also reflect a moral commitment to accountability, integrity, and responsible stewardship of resources. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific emphasises that strengthening domestic production systems, food security, and social protection mechanisms enhances resilience during global crises, including pandemics, financial shocks, and climate-related disruptions. In this sense, self-reliance functions as both an economic strategy and a resilience framework that safeguards national stability amid global uncertainty.

Practically, self-reliant development entails diversifying domestic production structures, promoting small and medium enterprises, investing in education and research, and building technological ecosystems aligned with national priorities. It also requires effective public institutions capable of transparent governance, inclusive policymaking, and efficient resource management. A supportive policy environment must encourage entrepreneurship, reduce inequality, and foster social cohesion to ensure broad participation in development processes.

According to Sachs (2015), sustainable development can only be realized when countries build strong domestic foundations that enable them to compete and collaborate globally from positions of strength. Thus, self-reliance represents not a rejection of globalization but a demand for fair participation grounded in mutual respect and equity. It envisions holistic progress that harmonizes economic efficiency with social justice, environmental sustainability, and moral responsibility, positioning nations as creators of their own development trajectories rather than passive recipients of external prescriptions.

The philosophy of self-reliance aligns closely with the vision of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda 2030, which seeks inclusive, equitable, and sustainable global transformation. Both frameworks emphasise empowerment, resilience, and domestic capacity-building as prerequisites for long-term sustainability. Self-reliance underpins SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting productive employment, entrepreneurship, and economic diversification. By fostering endogenous growth and reducing structural dependency, it strengthens local industries and creates inclusive job opportunities

that support equitable wealth distribution. Furthermore, it contributes to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) by encouraging domestic technological advancement and value-added production chains, enhancing competitiveness while reducing vulnerability to global market volatility. Strengthened domestic systems also support SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action) by promoting resource efficiency, renewable energy adoption, and sustainable agricultural practices. At the community level, self-reliance resonates with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through participatory governance and local empowerment, ensuring development processes reflect community needs and cultural contexts. Education, central to SDG 4 (Quality Education), becomes a transformative tool in this paradigm, equipping individuals with skills, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial capabilities essential for domestic productivity and innovation.

Contrasted with dependency-driven development, self-reliance represents a fundamentally different paradigm. Dependency-oriented models rely heavily on foreign aid, external capital, and imported technologies to stimulate growth, often reinforcing asymmetrical global economic relationships. Dependency theory highlights how structural imbalances perpetuate underdevelopment by confining developing nations to raw material exports and debt accumulation. Such patterns generate vulnerabilities, including external debt crises, capital flight, and limited policy autonomy.

In contrast, self-reliance seeks economic sovereignty through domestic industrialisation, human capital enhancement, and technological self-sufficiency. While dependency-driven approaches may produce short-term growth through foreign direct investment or donor-funded initiatives, they frequently fail to establish long-term economic independence and may introduce policy conditionalities that undermine national priorities. In many contexts, structural adjustment programmes emphasizing liberalisation and austerity have exacerbated inequality and weakened social welfare systems.

Instead, self-reliance promotes sustainable autonomy – the ability to engage internationally from a position of strength rather than subordination. It encourages strategic and equitable partnerships while maintaining control over national development agendas. This paradigm prioritises qualitative transformation over mere quantitative growth, expanding productive capacities, strengthening institutions, and enhancing social welfare outcomes. As global challenges intensify, including climate change, economic instability, and public health crises, internally robust economies are better positioned to absorb shocks and maintain continuity in essential services. Ultimately, self-reliance redefines development as a self-sustaining process rooted in empowerment, governance,

integrity, cultural identity, and environmental stewardship. It advocates global engagement that is reciprocal and fair, ensuring that integration into the international economy reinforces rather than compromises national resilience. In doing so, self-reliance provides a pragmatically effective and

ethically grounded framework for achieving sustainable prosperity, social justice, and long-term economic sovereignty within an interconnected world. Fig. 1 shows the conceptual framework for self-reliance in economic development with the SDG Agenda.

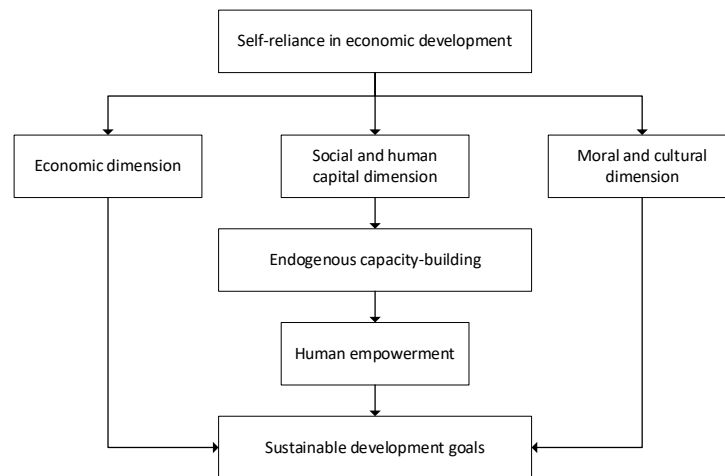


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework for self-reliance in economic development with the SDG agenda

3.2. Strategies for self-reliant poverty eradication

Poverty eradication within the framework of self-reliant economic development requires a shift from short-term welfare assistance toward long-term capacity-building strategies that enable individuals and communities to sustain their livelihoods independently (Dushkova and Ivlieva, 2024). Within the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) framework, self-reliance emphasises community participation, decentralized governance, and locally driven economic initiatives that strengthen internal development capacities (OECD, 2020). Rather than eliminating external support, a self-reliant approach seeks to reduce structural dependency by empowering communities to develop sustainable solutions to poverty (Yesudian, 2007). Based on existing literature, four interrelated strategies are central to advancing self-reliant poverty eradication: (i) community-based economic empowerment, (ii) financial inclusion and microcredit, (iii) human capital and skills development, and (iv) sustainable resource utilization with local production.

Community-based economic empowerment is widely recognized as a key pillar of self-reliant poverty eradication because it mobilizes local resources, strengthens entrepreneurship, and promotes participatory governance (Surya et al., 2020). Within this approach, communities are positioned as active economic agents capable of organizing and sustaining productive activities that address structural poverty challenges. Community empowerment strengthens local ownership of development initiatives and shifts development efforts from individual assistance toward collective economic participation (Firdaus et al., 2025; Dushkova and Ivlieva, 2024). Empirical studies show that community-driven initiatives enhance employment generation, local enterprise

development, and skill formation, thereby addressing both economic and social dimensions of poverty (Shafik, 2026; Yu et al., 2026). Furthermore, community-led development programmes demonstrate that external resources can be strategically utilized to strengthen indigenous capacities and institutional resilience, enabling communities to pursue sustainable and locally grounded development pathways (Lertthanakulvat and Sonsuphap, 2024). These approaches align closely with the SDG framework by integrating economic empowerment, social inclusion, and sustainability within local development processes (Henfrey et al., 2023).

Financial inclusion and microcredit represent important strategies for advancing self-reliant poverty eradication by enabling marginalized individuals and communities to access formal financial services and participate in productive economic activities (Goel, 2023). Financial inclusion involves providing accessible financial services, including savings, credit, payment systems, and insurance to populations typically excluded from the formal financial system (Vincent and Sivakumar, 2019). Limited access to finance often constrains the ability of low-income groups to transform entrepreneurial potential into sustainable livelihoods (Yu et al., 2026). In this context, microcredit plays a critical role by offering small-scale financing to low-income individuals and micro-entrepreneurs, often without conventional collateral requirements (Giva et al., 2024). By supporting entrepreneurship, self-employment, and livelihood diversification, microcredit addresses structural causes of poverty while strengthening household economic resilience (Jain et al., 2024). In addition, community-based financial mechanisms such as savings groups, cooperatives, and microfinance institutions strengthen financial literacy, social

capital, and collective financial governance through peer monitoring and trust-building within communities (Ojong and Simba, 2019; Mori et al., 2025). As a result, financial inclusion contributes directly to SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by enabling sustainable income generation and inclusive economic participation.

Human capital and skills development constitute a fundamental strategy for promoting self-reliant poverty eradication. Poverty is widely recognised as a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond income deprivation to include limited education, inadequate skills, and restricted productive capabilities (Islam, 2006). Investments in education, vocational training, and healthcare, therefore, play an important role in improving labour productivity, expanding employment opportunities, and supporting long-term economic growth (Bykova et al., 2024). Within a self-reliant development framework, strengthening human capital enables individuals to participate more effectively in economic activities, adapt to labour market demands, and utilise financial resources more productively (Cole et al., 2011). Empirical evidence also highlights the role of targeted skills development programmes in strengthening the economic capacity of vulnerable populations. For example, Mohsin et al. (2021) showed that zakat-supported vocational training programmes enhance income-generating capabilities among the productive poor in rural Pakistan, demonstrating how external support can function as an enabler of self-reliance rather than a source of long-term dependency. Human capital development, therefore, complements financial inclusion and community empowerment by strengthening individuals' capabilities to sustain productive economic activities. This perspective aligns with the SDGs, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), which emphasise the importance of education and skills development in promoting inclusive and sustainable economic participation (Onatunji, 2024).

Sustainable resource utilisation and local production represent an important strategy for strengthening self-reliant economic systems by emphasizing the responsible and long-term use of locally available resources (Vuksanović et al., 2024). This approach integrates natural resource management, local labour, indigenous knowledge, and small-scale technologies to support community-based economic activities and livelihood generation (Maldet et al., 2024). In many developing regions, such practices include sustainable agriculture, community-based fisheries and forestry, agro-processing enterprises, handicrafts, cottage industries, and ecotourism initiatives. By anchoring production locally, economic value is retained within communities, increasing local income and reducing economic leakage (Ruane, 2014). These locally grounded production systems strengthen economic

resilience, particularly in rural and resource-dependent areas, while reducing dependence on volatile global markets (Motadi, 2025). Nevertheless, achieving long-term sustainability requires continuous policy adaptation, cross-sectoral collaboration, and responsible resource management (Kuyvenhoven, 2004). In line with the SDG framework, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 15 (Life on Land), sustainable resource utilization and local production enhance local productive capacities while promoting environmentally responsible livelihood systems.

Overall, these four strategies illustrate how self-reliant economic development provides a comprehensive pathway for poverty eradication within the SDG framework. Community empowerment strengthens local ownership, financial inclusion enables economic participation, human capital development enhances productive capabilities, and sustainable local production reinforces economic resilience. Together, these strategies shift poverty reduction from dependency-based assistance toward a development process rooted in empowerment, resilience, and long-term sustainability.

3.3. Inclusive approaches

Women and youth empowerment constitute central pillars of self-reliant economic development because both groups function as critical agents of transformation, innovation, and social resilience. A self-reliant development model prioritises the mobilisation of internal resources, skills, and knowledge to enable communities to shape their own economic trajectories, and within this framework, empowering women and young people is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity for inclusive and sustainable growth. As Garces (2022) argued, authentic development involves expanding people's capabilities and freedoms so they can make meaningful choices and determine their own futures accordingly, while self-reliance requires that women and youth be positioned not as passive beneficiaries of welfare but as active contributors to production, governance, and social innovation. Their empowerment strengthens domestic capacity by stimulating entrepreneurship, enhancing human capital, and fostering community-based responses to poverty and inequality.

Women's empowerment involves expanding access to quality education, financial services, property rights, digital resources, and leadership opportunities. When women participate fully in economic life, the benefits multiply across households and communities, generating broader social returns. Chigbu and Nekhwevha (2023) demonstrated that gender equality directly contributes to sustainable growth and poverty reduction, reinforcing the objectives of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and

Economic Growth). Economically empowered women tend to invest more consistently in children's education, nutrition, and health, thereby creating intergenerational cycles of human capital development that reinforce national self-sufficiency. Furthermore, women-led enterprises and cooperatives diversify local economies, reduce overreliance on single export sectors, and build resilience against external shocks. Empirical evidence indicates that access to microfinance, vocational training, and cooperative structures enhances productivity and strengthens local value chains (Maldonado-Castro et al., 2024). Thus, women's empowerment within a self-reliant paradigm is advanced not only through equity and social justice but also through structural economic transformation rooted in domestic capacity-building.

Youth empowerment is equally vital, particularly in developing countries where young populations represent a significant demographic dividend. When adequately supported through education, skills training, and entrepreneurial opportunities, youth become engines of productivity and innovation. The UNDP (2022) emphasised that youth empowerment enhances economic dynamism, reduces unemployment, and fosters social stability, all of which are indispensable to a self-reliant economy. Investing in technical and vocational education, digital literacy, and start-up ecosystems equips young people to become job creators rather than job seekers, aligning with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). Moreover, youth participation in community governance ensures that development planning reflects long-term societal needs and intergenerational equity. However, meaningful empowerment requires dismantling structural barriers such as gender discrimination, youth marginalisation, limited credit access, and weak institutional support. Moallemi et al. (2020) contend that sustainable development can only be achieved when all segments of society are mobilized as contributors to national progress. Therefore, integrating gender equity and youth inclusion into policy design and institutional frameworks is fundamental to operationalising self-reliance.

Closely connected to empowerment is the imperative of reducing inequalities, a core objective of SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Persistent disparities in income, education, and opportunity undermine social cohesion and restrict participation in economic life, thereby weakening national resilience. A self-reliant development strategy addresses inequality by strengthening domestic systems, particularly through education, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Roberts et al. (2015) conceptualised development as the expansion of human freedoms, including the freedom to access knowledge, pursue enterprise, and participate in decision-making processes. Education functions as a foundational equaliser by equipping individuals with cognitive skills, technical competencies, and critical thinking capacities

necessary for productive engagement. Günther et al. (2022) highlighted that inclusive education systems serve as catalysts for sustainable development by building human capital aligned with local economic priorities. In many contexts, education for self-reliance emphasises vocational and entrepreneurial training tailored to domestic industries, thereby bridging the gap between schooling and employment while nurturing indigenous innovation. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN, 2021) underscored that investment in equitable education reduces structural disparities and enhances collective productivity, enabling nations to compete globally without sacrificing economic autonomy.

Entrepreneurship further reduces inequality by expanding access to income-generating opportunities and fostering grassroots innovation. Small and medium enterprises act as engines of inclusive growth, particularly when supported by accessible financing, business development services, and digital infrastructure (Gherghina et al., 2020). By empowering women, youth, and rural populations to establish sustainable enterprises, governments can reduce dependency on external assistance and stimulate local wealth creation. Morris et al. (2020) argued that entrepreneurship enhances not only income but also agency and self-determination, key components of social mobility and structural transformation. Innovation, both technological and social, complements these efforts by improving productivity and expanding access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and financial inclusion. Raman et al. (2025) noted that innovation-driven economies demonstrate greater adaptability to global disruptions while distributing benefits more equitably across populations. Within a self-reliant framework, innovation includes locally grounded solutions that integrate indigenous knowledge with modern technologies, such as renewable energy initiatives, digital platforms for rural markets, and sustainable agricultural practices. Collectively, education, entrepreneurship, and innovation form an interconnected triad, where education builds capacity, entrepreneurship converts capacity into economic activity, and innovation sustains competitiveness and inclusiveness. Together, they create a virtuous cycle of empowerment that aligns with the SDG vision and the ethical foundations of self-reliance, ensuring that development emerges from within the society and enables every individual to contribute meaningfully to shared and sustainable prosperity.

3.4. Challenges and barriers

Self-reliant development under the SDG framework is fundamentally constrained by entrenched structural inequalities within the global economic system. Many developing countries remain positioned in upstream, low-value segments of global value chains, relying heavily on primary commodities and low-technology exports. Such

positioning exacerbates income disparities and limits domestic industrial upgrading, as countries engaged in raw-material exports tend to experience higher internal inequality compared to those participating in knowledge-intensive sectors (Coveri et al., 2024). Empirical evidence further indicates that shifts in global trade and production networks have intensified socioeconomic and environmental disparities, particularly among low-income nations (Wang et al., 2025). Commodity dependence and volatile terms of trade expose these economies to external shocks, reinforcing fiscal instability and poverty cycles. These structural imbalances restrict policy autonomy and weaken efforts toward inclusive growth aligned with SDG 1 and SDG 10.

Global financial structures and environmental vulnerabilities deepen these constraints. Heavy reliance on foreign direct investment may generate growth without broad-based development, as benefits are often concentrated among elites or foreign firms rather than dispersed across local communities (Muturi, 2023). Similarly, external debt obligations and aid conditionalities can narrow domestic policy space and redirect priorities away from endogenous capacity-building (Gräbner-Radkowsitch and Strunk, 2023). Climate change compounds these dependencies by disproportionately affecting poorer nations with limited adaptive capacity, thereby eroding livelihoods and intensifying poverty risks. Collectively, these interconnected global dependencies constrain self-reliant strategies unless accompanied by deliberate efforts to strengthen domestic resilience and rebalance value capture within the international system.

Institutional and governance weaknesses represent another critical barrier to sustainable, self-reliant poverty eradication. Effective institutions characterized by transparency, accountability, and regulatory quality are widely recognized as foundational for aligning governance with sustainable development objectives (Hamid and AIObaid, 2025). However, weak rule of law, corruption, and fragmented bureaucracies often divert public resources from essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, thereby undermining inclusive development (Omri and Mabrouk, 2020). In such contexts, regulatory gaps, particularly in resource-intensive sectors, may allow exploitation without meaningful local benefit, reinforcing structural inequality and eroding public trust.

Cross-country analyses confirm that institutional quality significantly influences SDG performance. Countries with stronger governance systems and lower country risk tend to achieve greater welfare gains and more consistent development progress (Barbier and Burgess, 2021). Conversely, limited municipal capacity, poor inter-agency coordination, and the absence of standardized sustainability practices impede effective implementation of community-based initiatives (Rincón et al., 2021). These governance deficits reduce the effectiveness of

poverty reduction strategies, weaken participatory development processes, and ultimately constrain the realisation of self-reliant economic transformation.

Social and cultural barriers further restrict inclusive participation in development processes. Persistent discriminatory norms, including patriarchal gender structures, ethnic marginalisation, caste hierarchies, and stigma against vulnerable groups, limit access to education, employment, assets, and political representation. Such harmful norms often become institutionalised, reducing opportunities and perpetuating intergenerational poverty. Research on social inclusion also emphasises that intersecting identity categories shape individuals' access to rights, resources, and participation in development outcomes, thereby influencing the distribution of opportunities within societies. When marginalized communities are systematically excluded, national development efforts lose both human capital potential and social cohesion necessary for self-reliance.

Technological and infrastructure disparities intensify these social inequalities. Limited access to reliable electricity, transportation, and digital connectivity constrains productivity, market integration, and service delivery. The digital divide significantly increases the probability of relative poverty, especially among low-income and less-educated households (Zeng et al., 2025). Without adequate digital literacy and technological infrastructure, rural entrepreneurs, small farmers, and marginalised communities are unable to access broader economic networks and essential services. Bridging these technological gaps, alongside promoting inclusive education and social reform is therefore essential for enabling broad-based participation in sustainable, self-reliant economic development under the SDG Agenda.

4. Conclusions

This paper affirms that self-reliant economic development offers a credible and sustainable pathway for eradicating poverty within the SDG Agenda. Rather than treating poverty as a condition that can be resolved through short-term assistance or external dependency, this study demonstrates that durable poverty reduction emerges from strengthening internal capacities at the individual, community, and national levels. Self-reliance reframes development as a process rooted in local agency, institutional integrity, and responsible resource management, while still allowing constructive engagement with the global economy. When aligned with the SDGs, this approach enables countries to translate universal development goals into context-sensitive strategies that promote resilience, dignity, and long-term sustainability.

The analysis contributes to the literature by conceptualizing self-reliance as a multidimensional development paradigm that integrates economic productivity, social inclusion, moral responsibility,

and institutional capacity. The findings show a strong convergence between self-reliant development and the SDG framework, particularly in relation to poverty eradication, decent work, quality education, reduced inequalities, and sustainable production. Four interrelated strategies are identified as central to self-reliant poverty eradication: (i) community-based economic empowerment, (ii) inclusive financial systems supported by microcredit, (iii) sustained investment in human capital and skills, and (iv) environmentally responsible local production. This study further highlights that women and youth empowerment, alongside inequality reduction through education, entrepreneurship, and innovation, function as core drivers of transformation rather than supplementary policy goals. By synthesising these elements, the study advances an integrated framework that moves beyond fragmented or welfare-centric approaches to poverty reduction.

In terms of policy implications, governments should reposition endogenous capacity building as a primary development objective. This requires strengthening governmental institutions, improving transparency and accountability, and creating policy environments that support small and medium enterprises, local value chains, and community-based initiatives. Social protection mechanisms should be designed to complement productive inclusion by linking income support with skills development, access to finance, and local employment opportunities, ensuring that assistance enhances self-reliance rather than long-term dependency. Financial inclusion policies should combine access to credit with financial literacy and community-based governance to support sustainable entrepreneurship. Investment in education and training should prioritise relevance to local economic contexts, integrating vocational, digital, and entrepreneurial competencies. At the practical level, development practitioners and international partners are encouraged to adopt partnership-based models that reinforce local ownership, indigenous knowledge, and institutional resilience rather than externally driven interventions.

Future research should focus on empirically assessing the long-term impacts of self-reliant development strategies across diverse socioeconomic and institutional settings, particularly through longitudinal and comparative studies. Further investigation is also needed into the political-economic dimensions of self-reliance, including the roles of power relations, governance quality, and global structural constraints. From a practical standpoint, greater attention should be given to innovation-oriented approaches such as digital inclusion, green local industries, and youth-led enterprises as emerging drivers of self-reliant growth. Developing comprehensive evaluation frameworks that capture not only income outcomes but also autonomy, resilience, and capability expansion will be essential for measuring meaningful progress. Ultimately, advancing self-

reliant economic development represents a necessary paradigm shift for achieving lasting poverty eradication and realising the transformative promise of the SDG Agenda.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

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