

## Unveiling Equality: Transforming Indonesian Villages for Disability Empowerment

**Macaria Theresia Laiyan\***

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Merdeka Malang, Jl. Terusan Dieng No. 62-64 Klojen, Malang, East Java, 65146, Indonesia, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6936-9453>

**Bonaventura Ngarawula**

Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Merdeka Malang, Jl. Terusan Dieng No. 62-64 Klojen, Malang, East Java, 65146, Indonesia, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0932-7331>

**Wahyu Wiyani**

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Merdeka Malang, Jl. Terusan Dieng No. 62-64 Klojen, Malang, East Java, 65146, Indonesia, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4646-7730>

\*Corresponding Author email: [macariatheresia@gmail.com](mailto:macariatheresia@gmail.com)

### Abstract

**Background:** Everyone is entitled to be independent and have the power and freedom to make life choices. However, many people with disabilities still lack support from their environments, including their villages, which hinders their full empowerment.

**Objective:** This research explores an empowerment model for people with disabilities through the development of inclusive villages.

**Methods:** The research method applies a qualitative approach with a case study design involving 43 participants. The data collection techniques are interviews, observation, and documentation of primary and secondary data. Data validation involves triangulation of information obtained through content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity.

**Result:** The study demonstrates that the inclusive village model significantly enhances the empowerment of people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village, Pakisaji District. The local potential-based empowerment approach may increase the active participation of people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village, Pakisaji Subdistrict. In addition, supporting and inhibiting factors can be used to improve the empowerment of people with disabilities in the future.

**Conclusion:** Implementing the inclusive village model can potentially increase the empowerment of people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village, Malang District

**Unique contributions:** This study has shown that creating a welcoming village with a deep and intimate approach enhances empowerment among individuals with disabilities.

**Key recommendations:** Empowerment that enhances the self-worth of individuals with disabilities should be prioritised over focusing only on restoring physical abilities.

**Keywords:** Community Development, Disability, Sociology, Social Inequality, Social Work

### Introduction

Humans are inherently both independent and social beings. Individuals have unique characteristics that distinguish one another, including differences in their personalities (Beck & Jackson, 2020; Cirella et al., 2020). As social beings, humans need other humans to live life in society (Abbas et al., 2022; Crocetti et al., 2023; Greenwood et al., 2023). Every individual

is entitled to fundamental rights from birth, including the right to life, decision-making, protection, defence, being valued as a complete human, and the right to equality and empowerment (Hsb, 2023). Empowerment implies having the power to live independently, especially in fulfilling basic necessities (Dias, 2021; O'Donoghue & van der Werff, 2022).

Clark et al. (2019) stated that Robert Chambers revealed in his writing that empowerment is a social action to increase the scale/grade of human life regarding economic development that summarises social values to prevent further poverty. Empowerment is aimed at individuals and a group of people as part of actualising human existence, personally, family, and even nation. According to Sadabadi and Rahimi Rad (2021), global empowerment aims to fulfil basic necessities so that people can have freedom, reach productive sources to increase income and participate in development processes that affect them. The primary objective of empowerment is to encourage people to grow and explore their potential deeper.

In Indonesia, empowerment programs are aimed at groups of people who are vulnerable to not having power or those who need more support to improve, such as the urban poor, rural communities who have not been able to identify the potential for environmental development, widowed women, and disability groups with physical and mental disabilities (Warsilah, 2015). This research on empowerment should be emphasised for people with disabilities. It aims to realise the right of every human being to live free from any restrictions and provide opportunities for them to participate in social life and achieve decent welfare (Malik et al., 2021). Discrimination and crimes against people with disabilities still occur frequently, even in modern times. For example, there were at least 79 cases of sexual violence reported to the Women's National Commission in Indonesia during 2022. People with disabilities often experience difficulties in reporting their cases due to a lack of knowledge on how to report, fear, lack of support, and not being allowed to speak up. Physical discrimination also hinders their employment opportunities. In 2019, people with disabilities were not allowed to apply for Civil Servant Candidate positions because they were deemed physically and mentally unqualified, resulting in their applications being rejected.

According to international data, the number of people with disabilities worldwide is estimated to be around 1 billion people or around 15% of the total world population. In Indonesia, based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2023, the number of people with disabilities reached around 22.97 million, equivalent to around 8.5% of Indonesia's total population. This data emphasises the importance of paying attention to welfare, equality, and providing equal opportunities for people with disabilities according to their potential because they all have the equal right to live and participate in community life as Indonesian citizens.

Efforts to implement this law are being implemented in one of the villages in Malang Regency, the Mangliawan Village, Pakisaji District. According to village data from 2021 to 2023, there are a total of 44 people with disabilities. The types of disabilities include mentally disabled, physically disabled, autistic, visually impaired, hearing impaired, speech impaired, cerebral palsy (CP), cleft lip, down syndrome (DS), people with mental disorders (PWD), and multiple disabilities. Data collection on people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village, Pakisaji District, seems to encounter difficulties due to several obstacles, one of which is that many families are reluctant to recognise their family members as people with disabilities due to shame.

Currently, in Indonesia, people with disabilities experience various challenges, including economic and social problems that prevent them from getting access to education or employment opportunities (Erissa & Widinarsih, 2022). People with disabilities are vulnerable to discrimination. Cases of discrimination, bullying, and inequality are still common, both internationally and in Indonesia as well. It impacts on the ability of people with disabilities' self-confidence and ability to be empowered for their own lives. People with disabilities often

face oppression from their surroundings, even from their own families (Caron, 2021; Lessy et al., 2021). Families often do not acknowledge that people with disabilities also have the potential to improve and receive an education. Conversely, families who are supposed to provide support and understanding of their disabled family member's condition often do not provide the necessary support for their development. Therefore, empowerment should include efforts to change the mindset of non-disabled family members in order for them to properly educate and understand their disabled family members (Damianidou, 2023; Hughes, 2023).

Similar research has been conducted by Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2023), which focuses on empowering people with disabilities based on models through social reality studies and examines supporting and inhibiting factors in disability empowerment. Philpott et al. (2020) also explained in their research that the training of CBR personnel in South Africa contributes to disability empowerment and overcoming the oppression of disability. This study emphasises the empowerment of people with disabilities through organisations that aim to create inclusive villages, employing an in-depth and personalised approach by coordinators and disability handling teams in Mangliawan Village, Pakisaji District, Malang Regency.

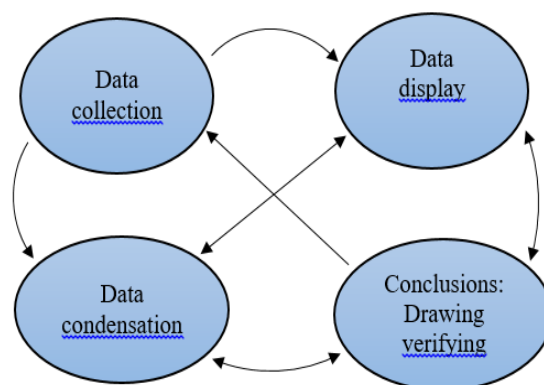
The advantages of this inclusive village model itself compared to the models in previous studies are that it focuses on direct subjects, specifically people with disabilities, observing the obstacles that occur in everyday life, regulations that support the existence and empowerment of disabilities, and forms of acceptance and social responsibility from the community with people with disabilities around them, as well as providing space and facilities to develop and empower. This research aims to examine the model and theoretical basis regarding the factors that support and hinder the empowerment of people with disabilities from inclusive villages as an effort to fulfil the rights of people with disabilities who are seen as subjects in the social order in general and has a specific purpose of describing the empowerment model from the implementation of inclusive villages among villages in the Malang district area.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To investigate the empowerment activities implemented for people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village.
2. To identify and analyse the barriers to empowerment faced by people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of local potential-based disability empowerment initiatives in Mangliawan Village.

### **Methods**

This research applied a qualitative approach complemented by a case study analysis of secondary data. This research strategy allows researchers to explore a phenomenon in detail, using various data collection methods to uncover rich details and complexities. Data collection included in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain primary data and secondary data through the fifth-grade homeroom teacher, the head of the school, the curriculum, research journals, government-issued books, and other reference sources relevant to this research. Data validation involves triangulation of information obtained through content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique used in this research is the interactive model technique, according to Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 2019; Sugiyono, 2016). The Miles and Huberman technique involves data collection, classification, presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2019). Researchers found that these steps can maximally analyse the data as follows:



**Figure 1.** Miles and Huberman’s Data Analysis  
 Source: Miles and Huberman, (Sugiyono, 2016)

This research was conducted in Mangliawan Village, Pakisaji District, Malang Regency. Based on observations, most Mangliawan villagers are traditional farmers with less prosperous economic status. The village also offers several bathing spots and nature tourism objects attractive to local tourists. In addition, some people in Mangliawan village are people with disabilities. The presence of people with disabilities in this village is one of the reasons and attractions for researchers to choose it as a research location. Based on the data in Mangliawan Village, Pakisaji District, Malang Regency, people with disabilities comprise of:

**Table 1.** Participant

<b>Kind of Disability</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Impaired	16 people
Disabled	11 people
Autistic	5 people
Visually Impaired	3 people
Deaf and Speech Impaired	2 people
CP	1 person
Cleft lip	1 person
DS	2 people
Mentally ill (PWD)	1 person
Double Impaired	1 person
<b>Total</b>	<b>43 people</b>

Given the average age, there are five people aged 60-66, 1 person aged 50-59, 2 people aged 40-47, 3 people aged 30-35, 6 people aged 25-29, 5 people aged 20-25, and 21 people aged 11-19. Based on their socio-economic situation, people with disabilities come from middle to lower-class families where their parents work as traditional farmers who are less prosperous and only rely on harvests; thus, most have not been educated regarding self-confidence about disabilities and the importance of education for people with disabilities.

The research informants were selected based on various subjects relevant to the research focus. First, it includes people with disabilities who are physically disabled and visually impaired who can communicate verbally. Second, parents of various types of people

with disabilities, such as the mentally disabled, deaf, speech impaired, autistic, mentally ill, multiply disabled, Cerebral palsy (CP), and cleft lip, who routinely care for and manage family members with disabilities. Third, the Mangliawan Village Head is a role holder in the village government and a provider of facilities for people with disabilities. Fourth, community leaders or local community members, including neighbours of people with disabilities. Lastly, volunteer representatives from Omah Gembira Community are actively involved in empowering people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village.

The researcher conducted the interview process using an intensive approach and communication. The interview questions were based on the nine indicators of inclusive villages stipulated in law 8 of 2016 on people with disabilities and social empowerment/inclusion theories on equality, empowerment, regulation, budget, education, and community views. The indicators typically cover the following areas:

1. **Accessibility:** Ensuring that public facilities, infrastructure, and services are physically accessible to people with disabilities.
2. **Participation:** Involving people with disabilities in decision-making, village planning, and community activities.
3. **Equality:** Promoting equal opportunities and non-discrimination for people with disabilities in all aspects of community life.
4. **Empowerment:** Creating opportunities for economic empowerment, such as access to employment, vocational training, or entrepreneurship support.
5. **Health Services:** Providing access to healthcare services that cater to the specific needs of people with disabilities.
6. **Education:** Ensuring that inclusive and quality education is available, including special education services and support for integrating people with disabilities into mainstream schools.
7. **Legal and Regulatory Framework:** Establishing laws, regulations, or village policies that protect the rights of people with disabilities.
8. **Budget Allocation:** Allocating sufficient funding for programs, initiatives, and infrastructure that support inclusivity.
9. **Community Awareness and Attitudes:** Promoting positive attitudes, awareness, and understanding of disabilities within the community to combat stigma and discrimination.

The questions were developed as an open-ended questionnaire to be answered by relevant informants. It allows informants to respond according to their views. Interviews were conducted jointly with pre-determined informants. For people with disabilities under 18, permission was obtained from parents/guardians to conduct interviews individually, with assistance from parents/guardians, and they were allowed to become data sources in this study. The researcher has also submitted a research permit to the relevant village government to carry out assessments, interviews, observations, and documentation to all parties who became informants in this study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *1.1. Empowerment Activities Empowerment of People with Disabilities in Mangliawan Village*

Mangliawan Village, Pakisaji Subdistrict, is one of the villages in Malang Regency with the most diverse people with disabilities. Indeed, establishing an inclusive village is a significant

step in empowering people with disabilities to be independent and contribute actively (Milner & Kelly, 2009). Various parties have tried to empower people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village. The role of the Mangliawan village government in building an inclusive village is as follows:

1. A budget allocates funds to empower people with disabilities in Mangliawan village based on the number of people with disabilities there.
2. Infrastructure that can help empower people with disabilities is provided, including canes, braille, styluses, 3-learning books, yarn, needles, colored pencils, crayons, puzzles, paper, and so on. A rehabilitation centre, a place or room for training and routine activities related to disability empowerment, is also available.
3. The rehabilitation centre's scheduled therapy program is structured, precise, and reliable. The program has been running smoothly so far. It has been very helpful in improving the development of functional abilities of the limbs and sensory, motor, and intellectual development.
4. The government will procure assistive devices for people with disabilities, such as crutches, wheelchairs, and hearing aids.

**Table 2. The Role of Disabilities in Mangliawan Village and Omah Gembira Community**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>The Role of Young People with Disabilities</b>
Omah Gembira Community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Engages directly in meeting and communicating with people with disabilities while learning and digging up personal information and cases experienced by people with disabilities.</li> <li>b) Empowerment is conducted according to the type and severity of the condition of people with disabilities; for example, for people with mild impairment, empowerment can be carried out through handicrafts and recycling waste that produces selling value.</li> <li>c) Educates families of people with disabilities, listens to the needs of people with disabilities, and provides training on effective treatment, care, and empowerment to families of people with disabilities.</li> <li>d) Voices the rights of people with disabilities to the government and mobilizes the spirit of young people they meet in the village to defend the rights of people with disabilities.</li> </ol>
Mangliawan Village Association	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The association conducts training programs for cadres of therapists on how to treat and empower people with disabilities.</li> <li>b) The association is active and creative in raising funds from both the government and the community to support the running of the existing activity programs.</li> <li>c) The association, in collaboration with the Bhakti Luhur Foundation, conducts training to improve</li> </ol>

	suffering for the visually impaired, creative economy training for the disabled, skills/talent enhancement for the mentally impaired, independence training, and daily activities such as bathing, toileting, eating, and dressing for CP, handicraft training for the disabled, sign language training for the deaf-speech impaired.
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*Barriers to Empowerment of People with Disabilities in Mangliawan Village*

In improving the skills training aspect, greater attention is also necessary in several other areas, such as providing inclusive education to allow people with disabilities to study in schools with competent teachers, increasing employment opportunities for those with adequate skills, providing ongoing psychosocial support, introducing appropriate assistive technology, and collaborating on an ongoing basis with NGOs and government agencies. The study by Sihombing et al. (2022) stated that training is very important for people with disabilities. The Inclusion Village program seeks training for people with disabilities in accordance with their respective talents and interests.

Table 3 proves this. This study's results discovered three main innovations in disability empowerment through inclusive villages: customization to the required competencies, periodic therapy, active skills training, and the formation of rehabilitation teams by the villagers themselves.

**Table 3. Overcoming Obstacles and Facilitating Factors: Empowering People with Disabilities**

<b>Barriers to Empowerment of People with Disabilities</b>	<b>Supporting Factors for Empowerment of People with Disabilities</b>
Infrastructure limitations that are not disability-friendly, such as lack of physical accessibility on roads and public facilities.	Trainers with disabilities have a higher sense of sensitivity, which makes members more at ease and will help them quickly understand the material provided.
Communication challenges with people with disabilities, such as the hearing and speech impaired, as well as controlling the emotions of some people with disabilities who are easily upset if they make mistakes in the training process.	The Omah Gembira community participates in bazaars or exhibitions in Mangliawan village or Pakisaji district so that this community can know many people about the efforts and works of people with disabilities.
Lack of job opportunities according to the interests and abilities of people with disabilities.	There are facilities brought by the Omah Gembira community when carrying out the empowerment process, such as materials for painting, sewing, colouring, drawing, playing music, 3M training (reading, writing, thinking), and so on.

Lack of planning and supervision in the implementation of inclusion and empowerment programs.	Support policies in the form of laws that support the rights of people with disabilities and encourage inclusion.
Lack of parental support for people with disabilities in development is needed for success in empowerment training.	The community begins to open up on disability issues and the importance of inclusion, which can change attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities.
Not applying the training received when interacting with the community at home causes people with disabilities to forget the material, resulting in volunteers repeating the explanation later in the training.	Cooperation between relevant parties in the form of close collaboration between local government, NGOs, community groups, disability organisations, and disability empowerment programs.

However, during the process of empowering people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village, several barriers were encountered that differed from previous research results due to differences in the community of the research subjects. One of the main obstacles in Mangliawan Village is the lack of disability-friendly infrastructure, such as road accessibility and adequate public facilities, wudu stations in mosques, disability-friendly public toilets, and a designated road for the visually impaired. It should be a significant concern for future development. In addition, people with disabilities also experience difficulties in obtaining skills training due to a lack of consistency in the implementation of training at home. Parents of people with disabilities do not consistently continue teaching practices at home, such as sewing, drawing, or using technology, resulting in them having to start from scratch when they retrain with the disability care community. It suggests the need for a more holistic approach to education from the community, including the importance of providing skills training at home with parents to build consistency and provide primary education for people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village.

Several studies explore the topic of community awareness and skills when interacting with people with disabilities. A relevant study by Mooney et al. (2019) investigated the barriers to community involvement for individuals with learning disabilities and suggested strategies to promote more inclusive participation. The inclusive research design enabled people with a learning disability to contribute to all stages of the research project, from identifying the issue to gathering data, analysing, and writing up.

The study by Chawa et al. (2021) showed that the community has insufficient skills and knowledge in interacting, for instance, using sign language and treating people with disability. As a result, they lacked awareness on disability issues. According to Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2023) barriers may include, but are not limited to, struggling to secure educational supports, accommodations, and therapeutic services; advocating for their rights; being isolated with limited social support; and finding healthcare providers who are knowledgeable about the needs of individuals with disabilities.

### *Evaluation and Effectiveness of Local Potential-based Disability Empowerment in Mangliawan Village*

The opportunity for self-actualisation provided by people with disabilities in the empowerment program run by Mangliawan Village has had a major influence in shifting the stigma of society in Mangliawan Village. Research by Sihombing et al. (2022) has shown that through programs



and activities that empower families and people with disabilities, the RBM post in Bah Sulung Village can be a vehicle to realise justice in terms of equality of rights and needs. The goal of disability-inclusive villages is to create change for the better and to make progress.

The Mangliawan Village community accepts the presence of people with disabilities like any other community, does not discriminate, is involved in village activities such as community service, deliberations, and others. In some elementary schools, they are often employed as teachers to coach extra-curricular arts and culture. This was much different before disabilities were involved in empowerment programs and activities or other activities in the village.

Residents in Bengkala Village communicate using a special sign language called mother tongue. Overall, the village community can understand sign language because the residents adhere to the principle of brotherhood (Made et al., 2023).

The empowerment of people with disabilities should be comprehensive, involving parents, empowerment agents, educational institutions, skills training providers, social community institutions, government, society, and most importantly, the individuals with disabilities themselves (Chawa et al., 2021; Ćwirynkało et al., 2024; Schloemer-Jarvis et al., 2022; van den Bogaard et al., 2024). This empowerment effort aims to realise a common vision, which is to provide a role that is under the potential and needs of people with disabilities. Considering the situation in Mangliawan Village steps to realise the concept of an inclusive village are important. It is intended that all members of the village community, including people with disabilities, feel safe, comfortable, and accepted in the surrounding environment.

This research is based on theories of empowerment and social inclusion appropriate to the local context, with Self-Reliance Theory and Social Change Theory as support (Adams, 2017; Avelino, 2021; Zimmerman, 2000). Establishing inclusive villages requires a close and personalised approach to people with disabilities to ensure adequate education. Despite still being a work in progress, the success of disability empowerment is evident from the community's positive response and the implementation of empowerment programs.

This research contributes to theories of empowerment and social inclusion. Mangliawan Village can be considered successful in increasing the participation and involvement of people with disabilities in village activities. This aligns with the principles of social inclusion that emphasise active participation and accessibility for all individuals, including persons with disabilities.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings and analysis, this study concludes that the Inclusive Village model can potentially enhance the empowerment of people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village, Malang District. Implementing this model aligns with the Empowerment and Social Inclusion theory principles, which emphasise the importance of active participation and accessibility for all individuals, including people with disabilities. During the research in Mangliawan Village, people with disabilities were involved in various activities, such as training with Omah Gembira and participatory activities, such as community service and village development meetings. In addition, the formation of the "DIFASARI" organisation at the village level, although still awaiting official designation, indicates an effort to form an inclusive community for people with disabilities in Mangliawan Village. The theoretical implications of this research refer to the Theory of ACTORS on empowerment, which points out that the competence of individuals with disabilities must support empowerment and that they can adapt to various situations of inclusion. Empowerment can also form a solid community, as happened in Mangliawan Village. Empowering people with disabilities through the Inclusive Village model is a complex challenge that requires cooperation, coordination, and awareness from the entire community. Overcoming various inhibiting factors and utilising supporting factors, it is

expected that the inclusion of people with disabilities in village communities can continue to increase.

Nonetheless, this study has weaknesses in policy evaluation conducted by village governments to ensure overall compliance with laws and regulations and monitoring against negative stigma from village communities towards people with disabilities. This research aims to encourage government attention toward the empowerment of people with disabilities and the allocation of appropriate financial support. Several challenges and barriers that hinder the expansion of the disability empowerment model were also identified in this research. These challenges include limited resources and funding for disability inclusion programs, lack of adequate policy frameworks and implementation mechanisms, and the persistence of stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities. Further, suggestions for future research could include a comparative study of the Disabled People Empowerment model in Mangliawan Village and other villages. In addition, research could focus on improving social inclusion for people with disabilities in different sectors, such as education, health, and employment.

### **Limitations and recommendations for future research**

The research also highlighted several challenges and limitations that hinder the expansion of this model, such as limited resources, inadequate policy frameworks, limited funding for disability inclusion programs and inadequate implementation mechanisms, as well as the persistence of stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities. Future research could conduct comparative studies with other inclusive villages. In addition, research can focus on improving social inclusion for persons with disabilities in various sectors, such as education, health, and employment.

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