

A Mechanism to Promote Large Businesses towards Operating as Social Enterprises through Business Collaboration with Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)

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Abstract

This study aims to: (1) examine the role and concept of social enterprises in business and social development, particularly in the context of Thailand; (2) analyze the mechanisms for promoting large businesses to operate as social enterprises; and (3) investigate the models of business collaboration between large enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The investigation utilized a qualitative documentary methodology. We got the right documents from academic databases and public sources like Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. The criteria for selection included scholarly articles that had been peer-reviewed, policy studies, and other research that dealt with social enterprise, business collaboration, corporate social responsibility, and the growth of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). The chosen materials were published in the last 20 years and were chosen based on how relevant, credible, and consistent they were with the study's goals. We used content analysis to look at [insert number] documents by putting them into groups and putting them together.

The results show that getting large businesses to work as social enterprises needs support from many different sectors through three main ways: (1) policy and legal mechanisms, such as regulatory frameworks, legal recognition, and public support measures; (2) economic incentive mechanisms, such as tax breaks, financial support, and ways to lower the risk of socially oriented investments; and (3) collaborative network mechanisms, such as partnerships between large businesses and SMEs in the forms of business networking, joint value chain development, and knowledge, technology, and innovation transfer. This kind of partnership makes small and medium-sized businesses stronger, creates more jobs in the community, and helps build a fairer and longer-lasting economy. The report indicates that governments should make clear legal frameworks and support measures for social companies. At the same time, big corporations should engage with small businesses to build stronger networks to help company growth and long-term social and economic development.

Keywords: Social Enterprise, Business Collaboration, Large Corporations, SMEs, Inclusive Business

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Introduction

In the last several decades, the way businesses work throughout the world has changed a lot. It has gone from being based on rivalry to being based on working together and being good for the environment. This change has happened because of problems that are getting more complicated in the economy, society, and the environment, such as climate change, income disparity, and the need for development that includes everyone. Consequently, the notion of social enterprise has garnered significant attention in both academic and corporate spheres globally (Hussain et al., 2023; Ghosh et al., 2024). Social companies have two or more aim that work together to achieve both economic and social and environmental goals. This is commonly called the "triple bottom line" (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Austin et al., 2006). This concept has become an important way to promote sustainable development by using market-based methods to solve problems in society (Salwan et al., 2025; Mair & Martí, 2006).

Simultaneously, business collaboration has emerged as a crucial strategic method for augmenting organizational competitiveness and generating shared value. The relational approach posits that competitive advantage is not exclusively obtained from internal resources, but also from inter-organizational interactions and networks (Dyer & Singh, 1998). In this context, big companies have a big impact on both global and local value chains. They affect manufacturing standards, market access, and systems for innovation (Gereffi et al., 2005). Ayyagari et al. (2007) and Fajarika et al. (2024) say that small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) are important for economic growth, creating jobs, and spreading income. Working together with major companies and small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) through things like knowledge transfer, technological support, and network integration has been proven to make SMEs more competitive and encourage new ideas (Audretsch et al., 2023; Guimarães et al., 2021). Moreover, this type of collaboration helps to reach sustainable development goals by encouraging inclusive business ecosystems and the generation of shared value (Sinkovics et al, 2021; Weng et al., 2024).

In Thailand, the idea of social business has been pushed more and more as part of national development plans to reach growth that is both inclusive and long-lasting. The Thai government has put in place policies and institutions to help social enterprises. For example, the Social Enterprise Promotion Act B.E. 2562 (2019) made it possible for the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion (OSEP) to give money, build capacity, and coordinate policies. SMEs are also very important to Thailand's economy. They make up more than 99% of all businesses and are a major source of jobs and GDP (Office of SMEs Promotion [OSMEP], 2023). However, many SMEs still have structural problems, such as not being able to get enough money, technology, or markets, even though these are important. So, making it easier for major companies and small and medium-sized businesses to work together has become a top policy goal in Thailand to boost competitiveness and promote inclusive economic growth.

Even if there is more and more research on social businesses and commercial collaboration, there are still certain gaps in the research. First, current research has predominantly analyzed social

enterprises from either a conceptual or organizational standpoint, with insufficient emphasis on the systemic mechanisms necessary for converting major firms into social enterprise-focused entities (Hussain et al., 2023; Minhas & Sindakis, 2022). Second, whereas previous studies underscore the significance of collaboration between major enterprises and SMEs, there is an absence of comprehensive frameworks that amalgamate policy, economic, and network-oriented mechanisms into a cohesive analytical model. Third, empirical and conceptual research in the Thai context is still not well-connected. They usually only look at either promoting social enterprises or developing SMEs, without looking at how they are connected in collaborative business ecosystems.

This study seeks to cultivate a thorough comprehension of the factors that can encourage large corporations to function as social entrepreneurs through collaboration with SMEs, specifically within the Thai setting. This research enhances academic discourse by amalgamating existing literature and policy frameworks, creating a cohesive analytical framework that incorporates various elements, including policy and legal systems, economic incentives, and collaborative networks. Furthermore, the study offers pragmatic insights for policymakers and business practitioners in formulating policies that promote inclusive business models and sustainable economic development.

Objectives

1. To examine the role and concept of social enterprises in business and social development at the international level.
2. To analyze the mechanisms for promoting large businesses to operate as social enterprises in a global context.
3. To investigate the models of business collaboration between large enterprises and SMEs across different countries and their implications for sustainable development.

Research Questions

1. What role does the concept of Social Enterprise play in current business development?
2. What mechanisms can encourage large businesses to operate as Social Enterprises?
3. How can cooperation between large businesses and SMEs create economic and social impact?

Literature Review

1. Concepts of Social Enterprise

A social enterprise (SE) is a way for businesses to combine social and economic goals (Austin et al., 2006). This idea has gotten a lot of attention in both business and academia. Social enterprises do not solely focus on maximizing profits; they aim to tackle social and environmental challenges alongside their business activities (Santos, 2012).

Many academics describe social enterprises as "hybrid" entities, combining characteristics of both business and non-profit organizations (Battilana & Lee, 2014). This means that the organization still uses market mechanisms and makes money from business activities to stay financially stable, but

it also puts its social mission first (Doherty et al., 2014). The concept of social enterprise is connected to the notion of creating shared value, which posits that businesses can generate profit while simultaneously contributing to social value through product design and value chain enhancement. Or the creation of a business ecosystem that supports social progress (Menghwar & Daood, 2021). As a result, Social Enterprise is seen as a key tool for promoting sustainable development and using market forces to solve social problems (Mair & Marti, 2006).

2. Concept of Business Collaboration

The concept of business collaboration arises from the view that an organization's competitive advantage does not come solely from internal resources, but also from relationships and cooperation between organizations (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Such collaboration can facilitate the exchange of resources, knowledge, technology, and business networks among organizations, resulting in the generation of shared value. Strategic alliances and networks have become very popular in the world of business strategy. Many businesses are choosing to work together instead of just competing to become more competitive and find new business opportunities (Gulati, 1998). The idea of "coopetition" also says that businesses can have both competitive and cooperative relationships at the same time. This means that businesses can compete in some markets. But working together on things like making new technologies, making things, or getting things to customers (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000) has become a very important strategy in today's fast-paced and highly competitive business world.

3. The Role of Large Businesses in Economic and Social Development

Because of their resources, technological skills, and international business networks, big companies are very important for economic and social development. Studies on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) demonstrate that contemporary enterprises prioritize not only profit maximization but also the resolution of social issues and the advancement of sustainable development (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). At the global economic level, big companies are often the main players in global value chains. They set the standards for production, distribution, and business for other companies in the network (Gereffi et al., 2005). This process enables large corporations to facilitate the inclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the value chain, thereby augmenting their capabilities. Because of this, big businesses don't just do business. But it also means making a business ecosystem that helps the economy and society grow in a bigger way.

4. The Role of SMEs in the Economic System

Many countries see small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) as an important way to boost the economy. They help create jobs, spread wealth, and encourage entrepreneurship (Ayyagari et al., 2007).

SMEs are often very strong and can quickly adjust to changes in the market. They also play a big role in encouraging innovation in their communities. However, SMEs often have trouble getting enough money, technology, and access to markets. Working with big companies is a great way for them to grow and reach their full potential. When small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) join the

business networks or value chains of big companies, they get access to markets, technology, and knowledge. This makes them more competitive and helps the economy grow at the local and national levels.

Research Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative research methodology, applying documentary analysis to systematically investigate and integrate current knowledge pertaining to social enterprises, business collaboration, and the advancement of small and medium-sized firms (SMEs). Documentary analysis is especially appropriate for this study as it facilitates the amalgamation of theoretical frameworks and policy-oriented ideas from several credible sources (Bowen, 2009).

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The research employs secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed academic journals and institutional records. We got the relevant materials from well-known international databases like Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar.

The criteria for choosing documents were: (1) they had to be published in peer-reviewed journals or trustworthy institutional sources; (2) they had to be relevant to important topics like social enterprise, business collaboration, corporate social responsibility, and SME development; (3) they had to be published within the last 20 years to make sure they were still relevant; and (4) they had to come from sources that could be checked and were academically sound. To keep the analysis accurate and high-quality, documents that didn't match these standards were left out.

Data Categorization and Recording Procedure

A structured data recording form was created and used throughout the analysis process to make sure that data was handled in a methodical way. This tool made it easier to get information from certain papers, put it in order, and compare it. The data were organized into analytical dimensions based on the study's goals and theoretical foundations. These included: (1) the conceptual roles of social enterprises; (2) policy and legal mechanisms; (3) economic incentive mechanisms; (4) collaborative network mechanisms; and (5) types of collaboration between large businesses and small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). We tagged each document based on these categories so that they could be interpreted in the same way and so that we could undertake a structured analytical synthesis.

Data Analysis

The research used a hybrid deductive–inductive content analysis methodology. A deductive framework was initially formulated, grounded in pertinent theoretical frameworks, including social enterprise models, inter-organizational collaboration, and value chain theory. An inductive method was then utilized to discern emerging patterns, links, and conceptual connections that were not previously established within the theoretical framework (Krippendorff, 2018). The analytical procedure comprised

four stages: (1) an exhaustive review and familiarization with the selected documents; (2) systematic coding employing both predefined and emergent categories; (3) thematic synthesis of key findings across sources; and (4) interpretation and integration of results into a cohesive conceptual framework elucidating the mechanisms by which large enterprises can be encouraged to function as social enterprises through collaboration with SMEs.

Research Rigor

Several tactics were put in place to make the methods more rigorous. First, we used more than one reliable data source to get data triangulation. Second, the structured data recording form made sure that data extraction and categorization were done in a consistent and open way. Third, using both deductive and inductive analytical methods made the results more reliable by combining theory-driven and data-driven points of view. These steps all help make the study more reliable, open, and strong in its analysis.

Results

An examination of scholarly documents, research, and reports pertaining to social enterprise, SME development, and business collaboration indicated that facilitating the conversion of large corporations into social enterprises necessitates support systems from various sectors, including government, private sector, and social sector. There are three main types of these mechanisms: policy and legal mechanisms, economic incentive mechanisms, and business collaboration network mechanisms.

1. Mechanisms for Promoting Large Businesses towards Social Enterprise

1.1 Policy and Legal Mechanisms

Policy and legal frameworks are essential in bolstering the involvement of large corporations in social enterprise. The government can set up policies or laws that make it easier for social enterprises to grow. For example, it can define the legal status of social enterprises, offer tax breaks, or fund projects that help social enterprises grow (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). Many countries have also put in place policies that help social enterprises grow by combining economic and social policies. For example, they might support government purchases from social enterprises or set up agencies just to promote and grow social enterprises. This helps make the business world a better place for social innovation and long-term business success (Santos, 2012).

1.2 Economic Incentive Mechanisms

Another important thing that can get big companies to join social enterprises is economic incentive mechanisms. These kinds of incentives could be tax breaks, money to help with social projects, or access to funding sources for social project development (Austin et al., 2006).

Several studies show that financial incentives can help businesses lower the risk of investing and keep working on projects that have a positive effect on society. The evolution of the shared value concept

enables businesses to effectively align their objectives with the generation of social benefits (Menghwar & Daood, 2021).

1.3 Collaborative Network Mechanisms

Collaborative business network mechanisms are essential for large corporations to function effectively as social enterprises, particularly through partnerships with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which can significantly influence the value chain of larger firms.

Inter-organizational collaboration demonstrates that... Organizations can share resources, knowledge, and new ideas by forming business alliances. This creates value for both the organization and society (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Moreover, cooperation between large companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) makes SMEs more competitive and helps the local economy grow (Ayyagari et al., 2007). In the realm of social enterprise, these collaborative networks can enable large corporations to assume a more proactive role in promoting small-scale entrepreneurship, generating economic opportunities within communities, and cultivating a more inclusive and sustainable economic framework.

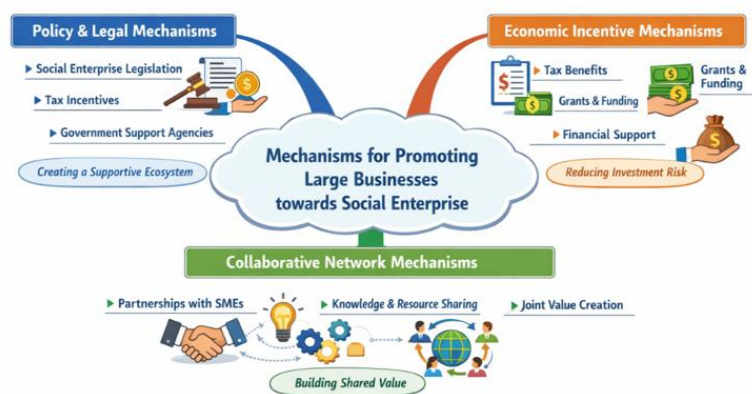


Figure 1: Mechanisms promoting businesses as social enterprises

2. Forms of Collaboration Between Large Businesses and SMEs

An examination of pertinent documents and research indicates that collaboration between large corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is an essential strategy for fostering inclusive and sustainable economic development. There are many ways that businesses can work together, which can help small businesses grow, give large businesses more business contacts, and create value for society (Gereffi et al., 2005; Dyer & Singh, 1998). The following are some of the most important types of collaboration:

2.1 Business Networking

Business networks are a big way for big companies and small businesses to work together. These networks allow organizations to connect resources, knowledge, and business opportunities (Gulati, 1998). They also make organizations more efficient by letting members share information, experiences, and technologies that are useful for running a business. In the world of social enterprise, networking between big companies and small businesses helps businesses grow in the community. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) can use the same markets and resources as big businesses, like

technology, distribution networks, and management systems. This makes small and medium-sized businesses more competitive and helps the economy grow in the long run (Ayyagari et al., 2007).

2.2 Joint Value Chain Development

Another way for businesses to work together is for large companies and small businesses to work together to build value chains. In global value chains, big companies often take the lead. They help set production standards, quality control, and manage production systems (Gereffi et al., 2005). When small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are part of the value chain of large businesses, they have more chances to get into new markets, learn about new technologies, and learn about management. It also makes SMEs more likely to meet production standards and compete in international markets. This kind of partnership can also benefit both businesses and society as a whole by helping to spread wealth, create jobs, and support local economic growth.

2.3 Knowledge and Innovation Support

Large companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can also work together by sharing knowledge, technology, and new ideas. This is very important for helping small business owners reach their full potential. Big companies can share what they know about how to manage and make things. Or, business network development projects or supplier development programs can give SMEs access to a number of standard systems. This transfer of knowledge helps small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) come up with new products and services and make their production processes more efficient, which makes them more competitive in the long run (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Collaboration in innovation also helps create a business ecosystem that supports the joint development of technology and innovation among business organizations, communities, and stakeholders. This is in line with the idea of sustainable economic development.

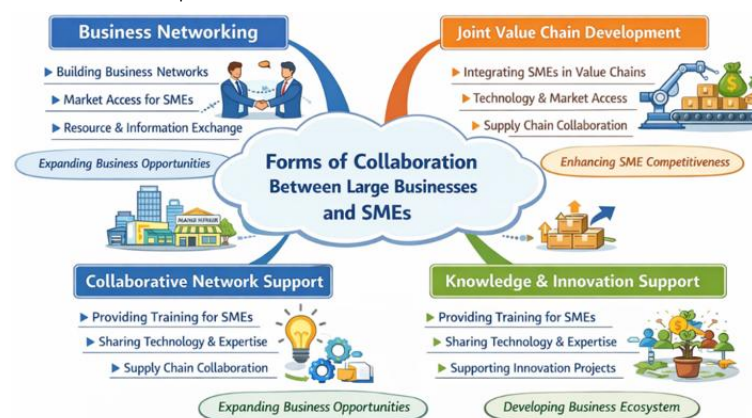


Figure 2 Collaboration strategies for businesses and SMEs

Discussion

The results of this study bolster and expand the current understanding of social enterprises and inter-organizational collaboration. In line with earlier research, the findings show that working together between big companies and small and medium-sized businesses is very important for boosting

innovation, making resources easier to get to, and promoting economic growth that includes everyone (Audretsch et al., 2023; Guimarães et al., 2021; Ayyagari et al., 2007). According to the relational approach, competitive advantage comes not only from a company's own resources but also from networks and interdependencies between companies (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Additionally, the research corroborates the notion of shared value, which posits that enterprises can concurrently yield economic returns and social advantages by strategically incorporating social objectives into fundamental company operations (Austin et al., 2006; Menghwar & Daoood, 2021).

Nonetheless, this study expands upon previous studies in numerous significant aspects. Previous studies have primarily focused on social enterprises at the organizational or conceptual level (Hussain et al., 2023; Santos, 2012). In contrast, this study offers a more integrative perspective by identifying and synthesizing three interconnected mechanisms—policy and legal frameworks, economic incentives, and collaborative network mechanisms—constituting a comprehensive system that facilitates the transition of large corporations towards social enterprise-oriented operations. Furthermore, while prior studies have underscored the significance of global value chains orchestrated by large corporations (Gereffi et al., 2005), this research enhances the discourse by focusing on the function of collaborative networks in promoting both economic advancement and social value generation at the community level. This integrative paradigm enhances the literature by connecting macro-level policy mechanisms with micro-level business practices in a cohesive analytical model. The results also show that big companies play a strategic role as "network orchestrators" in business ecosystems, which fits with new ideas about inclusive business and governance that focus on stakeholders (Sinkovics et al, 2021; Weng et al., 2024). By incorporating SMEs into value chains, large corporations can augment the capabilities of smaller entities while concurrently fortifying the robustness and inclusivity of the entire economic framework. This viewpoint aligns with stakeholder theory, which asserts that companies should generate value for a diverse array of stakeholders rather than concentrating just on shareholders (Freeman, 1984).

The report acknowledges significant hurdles and limitations in the implementation of collaboration models between major firms and SMEs, notwithstanding these contributions. One major problem is that power is not equal, which means that big companies frequently have more resources, bargaining strength, and the ability to make decisions. This mismatch might make it harder for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) to get fair terms, acquire strategic expertise, or fully benefit from working together (Gereffi et al., 2005). Also, disparities in how organizations work, how they manage people, and how well they can do their jobs can make it hard for people to work together. Formalized structures and standardized processes are common in big companies. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are usually more flexible, but they may not have formal systems or enough management skills. These variances might cause problems with communication, expectations that don't match up, and combined operations that aren't as efficient as they could be.

Also, structural problems, including not being able to get financing, gaps in technology, and institutional impediments, still make it hard for small and medium-sized businesses to join collaborative networks. These problems show how important it is for the government, the business sector, and supporting organizations to work together to build an environment that encourages long-term partnership. To get rid of these hurdles and make sure that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may fairly participate in business networks, we need policy changes, initiatives to increase capacity, and inclusive governance systems.

In conclusion, this study enhances knowledge by introducing an integrated framework that links policy, economic, and network dimensions to encourage large firms to function as social entrepreneurs through collaboration with SMEs. The results not only confirm established ideas but also enhance them by providing a systemic and contextually pertinent viewpoint, especially concerning inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Conclusion

This study seeks to examine the mechanisms that encourage large corporations to function as social enterprises through collaboration with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A review of pertinent literature, research, and reports was conducted through documentary research. The research revealed that encouraging large corporations to function as social enterprises necessitates support systems from various sectors, elucidated by three principal mechanisms:

Policy and Legal Mechanisms

The government is very important for the growth of social enterprises because it makes rules and laws that help them grow. For example, it defines the legal status of social businesses, offers tax breaks, and funds projects that help social enterprises grow. This makes it easier for social business groups to run their businesses.

Economic Incentive Mechanisms

Tax breaks, financial help, or the creation of public-private partnership projects are all examples of economic incentives that can get big businesses to join social enterprises and lower the risk of putting money into projects that have a social impact.

Business Collaboration Network Mechanism

Creating networks that connect big businesses and small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) is an important way to encourage the growth of social enterprises. This kind of cooperation can happen when businesses work together to make networks and build value chains. And helping small businesses learn and come up with new ideas makes them more powerful and makes the economy more open to everyone.

In conclusion, big companies can help social enterprises grow by working with small businesses. This not only helps small business owners reach their full potential, but it also supports long-term economic and social growth.

New Knowledge

This research is based on a comprehensive theoretical framework that synthesizes insights from social enterprise theory, inter-organizational collaboration, Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), and Stakeholder Theory to elucidate the mechanisms enabling large enterprises to function as social enterprises through collaboration with SMEs.

Firstly, the notion of social enterprise serves as the fundamental framework for this research. Social companies have two main goals: to make money and to solve social and environmental problems at the same time (Austin et al., 2006; Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). This is in line with the idea of producing shared value, which says that businesses may be more competitive while also helping society (Menghwar & Daood, 2021). In this context, big businesses are expected to do more than just make as much money as possible; they should also do business in a way that is good for society and the environment.

Second, inter-organizational collaboration theory says that companies can get a competitive edge by forming strategic partnerships and network linkages (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Gulati, 1998). When big businesses and small businesses work together, they can share resources, knowledge, and skills, which leads to new ideas and value creation throughout the business ecosystem. This viewpoint endorses the function of collaborative networks as a pivotal instrument for incorporating SMEs into value chains and augmenting their competitiveness.

Third, Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) offers an essential framework for comprehending the structural interdependencies between major corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). RDT posits that organizations rely on external resources frequently governed by other entities, resulting in power imbalances and strategic actions intended to navigate these dependencies (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In the context of this research, large corporations generally have superior access to cash, technology, and markets, whereas SMEs depend on these resources for their growth and survival. Collaboration thus serves as a strategic tool for managing resource dependencies, but it may also engender unequal power dynamics that affect the allocation of benefits within the network.

Fourth, Stakeholder Theory broadens the approach by asserting that firms must provide value for other stakeholders, including communities, employees, suppliers, and society as a whole, rather than concentrating just on shareholders (Freeman, 1984). This viewpoint is especially pertinent to social companies, since it underscores the necessity of reconciling economic goals with social obligations. In collaborative networks, big businesses are expected to be responsible stakeholders by helping small and medium-sized businesses thrive, encouraging fair collaborations, and helping the economy flourish in a way that includes everyone.

This study presents a comprehensive framework for the transformation of large enterprises into social enterprise-oriented organizations, driven by three interconnected mechanisms: (1) policy and legal mechanisms that shape the institutional environment; (2) economic incentive mechanisms that influence organizational decision-making; and (3) collaborative network mechanisms that facilitate

resource exchange and value co-creation. This integrative paradigm elucidates the structural and strategic dynamics of corporate collaboration while emphasizing the influence of power, dependency, and stakeholder engagement in the formation of sustainable and inclusive business ecosystems.



Figure 3: Enterprise transformation through SME collaboration

Recommendations

From the study results, the following guidelines can be proposed for developing mechanisms to support social enterprises through business collaboration:

Policy Recommendations

The government should develop systematic policies and measures to support social enterprises, such as establishing an agency to promote social businesses, developing laws that facilitate social business operations, and creating financial support measures for organizations operating social businesses.

Recommendations for the Business Sector

Large businesses should promote the creation of collaborative networks with SMEs by developing joint value chains, supporting the capacity building of small business owners, and transferring knowledge and technology to increase the competitiveness of SMEs.

Recommendations for Developing the Business Ecosystem

Collaboration between the government, business sector, and social sector should be promoted to create a business ecosystem that supports the development of social enterprises, including the creation of collaborative networks that connect entrepreneurs at various levels.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is a document analysis concentrating on the examination of concepts and theories derived from existing research. Consequently, forthcoming research should employ empirical methodologies, including case studies or field research, to investigate collaborative models between large corporations and SMEs in the establishment of social enterprises across diverse national and industrial settings.

Encouraging cooperation between big companies and small businesses is an important way to grow social enterprises. These businesses can help build an economic system that works for everyone at the organizational, community, and national levels.

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