

Lived Experiences Among Handicraft Entrepreneurs in Josefina, Zamboanga Del Sur

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of handicraft entrepreneurs in Josefina, Zamboanga del Sur, a rural municipality where handicraft-making serves as a primary or supplementary livelihood reliant on local materials, traditional craftsmanship, and small-scale production. Guided by the Sustainable Livelihood Framework and a phenomenological perspective, the research examined production and selling experiences, challenges encountered, coping strategies, and needed support. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed. Thirty handicraft entrepreneurs from the barangays of Bogo Calabat, Sebukang, Nopulan, Mansanas, and Nemeno were purposively selected based on active involvement in producing and selling products such as bukag (woven baskets), banig (woven mats), and pugaran (chicken coops). Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Four major themes described the lived experiences: Family-Inherited Handicraft Livelihood, Handicraft Production as a Source of Income, Manual Handicraft Production, and Unstable Selling Experiences. Seven challenges were identified: limited access to raw materials, risks in gathering raw materials, time-consuming production, lack of sure buyers, low profit and price bargaining, competition with modern and plastic products, and weather-related production delays. Participants coped through family cooperation and shared labor, price and product adjustments, budgeting and financial discipline, self-sourcing of raw materials, and continuous market searching. Four forms of government support were needed: transportation for product collection, display centers, financial assistance, and training for product development. The findings show that handicraft entrepreneurship remains a family-based livelihood sustained through resilience and adaptation, yet improved institutional support is required to strengthen sustainability, market opportunities, and the continuity of traditional practices. The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goals 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by addressing rural income generation, traditional enterprise viability, and alternatives to plastic products. Its sustainability impact lies in informing institutional and policy measures that enhance economic resilience, social cohesion through family-based production, and the long-term preservation of community-based craft livelihoods.

Keywords: Coping Strategies; Handicraft Entrepreneurship; Lived Experiences; Livelihood Sustainability; Phenomenological Study; Rural Entrepreneurship; Sustainable Livelihood Framework; Thematic Analysis

1. Introduction

Handicraft production represents an important source of livelihood in rural communities and contributes to the preservation of traditional craftsmanship (Bellver et al., 2023; Wondirad et al., 2021). Products such as bukap (large woven baskets), banig (woven mats), and pugaran (chicken nests) provide functional value while reflecting locally transmitted skills and cultural practices. Handicraft enterprises can create economic opportunities for small-scale producers, particularly when local materials and traditional knowledge are available (Wut et al., 2021; Yadav et al., 2023).

Despite these contributions, handicraft entrepreneurs may face limited market access, inadequate production materials, restricted business-development opportunities, and low or inconsistent sales (Dalal et al., 2024; Espaldon, 2025; Duale, 2024). In Josefina, Zamboanga del Sur, preliminary accounts identified challenges involving access to rattan and other materials, limited financial resources, uncertainty in finding buyers, and the time and physical effort required to gather and prepare materials. Products may remain unsold, while the lack of regular training and market opportunities can constrain enterprise development (Guzman & Apritado, 2024; Sudario, 2025).

The available literature and conceptual framing emphasize handicrafts as both economic and cultural activities sustained by local resources and traditional knowledge (Bellver et al., 2023; Peerzadah & Majeed, 2025). Key insights center on the dual role of handicrafts in generating household income and transmitting craft skills, alongside recurring constraints of material access, market uncertainty, and limited institutional support that shape the viability of small-scale rural enterprises (Dalal et al., 2024; Wondirad et al., 2021).

At the local level, handicraft-making functions as a primary or supplementary livelihood in selected barangays of Josefina, Zamboanga del Sur, relying on locally available materials, traditional craftsmanship, and small-scale production. Nationally and more broadly, such rural enterprises illustrate wider patterns in which traditional handicrafts support household economies yet confront competition from modern alternatives, inconsistent demand, and resource constraints common to many developing-context rural settings (Espaldon, 2025; Sudario, 2025; Duale, 2024).

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework provides a lens for considering how human, social, and financial resources shape livelihood strategies and sustainability (Karki, 2021). Human capital includes craft knowledge and production skills; social capital includes family cooperation and community networks; and financial capital includes sales income, savings, and access to financing (Boudreaux et al., 2021; Radiva et al., 2023). A phenomenological perspective complements this framework by focusing on how people understand and interpret their own lived experiences (Manem, 2023; Oluka, 2025; Mlotshwa & Murimbika, 2023; Bagcat & Sy, 2023). Together, these perspectives support an examination of both the practical conditions and personal experiences of handicraft entrepreneurs.

Existing accounts highlight practical difficulties—material access, physical effort, market uncertainty, and limited training—yet leave underexplored the detailed lived experiences of the entrepreneurs themselves (Peerzadah & Majeed, 2025; Zhao & Wibowo, 2021). This study addresses that gap by examining experiences in producing and selling handicrafts, the challenges encountered, the strategies used to cope, and the support participants believe would help sustain their livelihood. The findings may inform local livelihood programs and initiatives intended to strengthen rural handicraft entrepreneurship (Corrales Estrada, 2021; Guzman & Apritado, 2024).

Digital tools and online platforms have also been explored as ways to expand market reach for handicraft products (Ginez et al., 2025; Mekonen & Eshetu, 2024). The study aligns with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by documenting how handicraft entrepreneurship contributes to rural livelihoods and household income while identifying barriers that limit stable and productive employment. It supports SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through its focus on traditional, locally sourced production methods and the need to sustain craft practices amid competition from plastic and modern alternatives. It also relates to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by addressing the viability of rural community-based economic activities that rely on local resources and social networks.

The research contributes to socio-economic sustainability by clarifying the conditions under which family-based handicraft livelihoods can continue to generate income in rural settings. It advances cultural sustainability by documenting the transmission and practice of traditional craftsmanship. It further informs community and institutional sustainability by identifying practical support needs—transport, display facilities, finance, and training—that can strengthen local livelihood systems and preserve craft knowledge for future generations.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of handicraft entrepreneurs. This approach was selected to obtain detailed accounts of participants' experiences that cannot be fully represented by numerical data alone.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in five selected barangays in the Municipality of Josefina, Zamboanga del Sur: Bogo Calabat, Sebukang, Nopulan, Mansanas, and Nemeno.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were handicraft entrepreneurs actively involved in producing and selling handicraft products in the selected barangays of Josefina, Zamboanga del Sur.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Thirty handicraft entrepreneurs were selected through purposive sampling because they could provide relevant information about the phenomenon under study.

2.5 Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions was used to gather information about participants' experiences, production and selling challenges, coping strategies, and suggested support. The guide was reviewed by the research instructor, adviser, and editor for clarity and alignment with the study objectives, and it was also submitted for review to the Department of Trade and Industry in Josefina for content validity.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was sought from appropriate local officials before data collection. Participants received information about the study and provided informed consent. Individual interviews were conducted, and audio recording was used with participants' consent to support accurate transcription.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Researchers examined the transcripts, identified recurring patterns, and grouped related responses into themes aligned with the study questions. The researchers also consulted knowledgeable reviewers to support the credibility of the interpretations.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Participants' identities were treated confidentially, and the information collected was intended for academic purposes.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Lived Experiences in Producing and Selling Handicrafts

Three themes emerged from the participants' responses regarding their lived experiences.

3.1.1 Manual Handicraft Production

Participants described reliance on manual labor throughout the entire process of gathering, cleaning, drying, weaving, and finishing handicraft products. This dependence on handwork underscores the physically intensive nature of the livelihood and the limited use of mechanized methods in the local production setting.

3.1.2 Challenges in Gathering Raw Materials

Respondents reported difficulties in reaching mountainous areas, carrying materials over long distances, and handling sharp rattan amid difficult terrain. These physical and logistical demands form a core part of daily experience and directly shape the effort required to sustain production.

3.1.3 Unstable Selling Experiences

Participants experienced uncertainty when selling handicrafts in markets and barangays, with no assurance that buyers would purchase the products. Such unpredictability affects the reliability of income and contributes to the overall precarious character of the livelihood.

3.2 Challenges in Production and Sales

Seven themes captured the main challenges encountered by the participants.

3.2.1 Limited Access to Raw Materials

Respondents noted the high cost of purchased materials and the difficulty of finding and gathering materials from distant locations. This constraint reduces production volume and raises operating costs, limiting the entrepreneurs' ability to maintain steady output.

3.2.2 Risk in Gathering Raw Materials

Participants described physical dangers associated with steep or slippery paths, long-distance travel, fatigue, and possible injuries. These hazards add an element of personal risk that compounds the already labor-intensive nature of material collection.

3.2.3 Time-Consuming Production

The process of preparing, weaving, and finishing handicraft products was characterized as lengthy and labor-intensive. Extended production times restrict the quantity of goods that can be completed within a given period and delay income generation.

3.2.4 Lack of Sure Buyers

Sales remained uncertain, with products sometimes remaining unsold and customers occasionally requesting credit. The absence of guaranteed demand creates irregular cash flow and heightens financial vulnerability.

3.2.5 Low Profit and Price Bargaining

Participants found it difficult to earn sufficient income because of limited profits and customers who negotiated product prices downward. Price pressure erodes margins and makes it harder to cover both household and production expenses.

3.2.6 Competition with Modern and Plastic Products

Traditional handmade handicrafts faced competition from readily available modern or plastic alternatives. This market rivalry reduces demand for locally crafted items and challenges the long-term viability of traditional production.

3.2.7 Weather Conditions Affecting Production

Rainy weather caused delays in material preparation and production, particularly when materials required longer drying times. Weather-related interruptions disrupt production schedules and further contribute to income instability.

3.3 Coping Strategies

Five themes emerged regarding the strategies used by participants to manage their challenges.

3.3.1 Family Cooperation and Shared Labor

Family members assisted one another in gathering materials and producing handicrafts. Shared household labor helps distribute the physical workload and sustains production despite individual limitations.

3.3.2 Price and Product Adjustments

Entrepreneurs adjusted product prices or designs in response to customer preferences and market conditions. Such flexibility enables them to remain competitive and respond to fluctuating demand.

3.3.3 Budgeting and Financial Discipline

Participants managed their limited and irregular income carefully to meet household and business needs. Deliberate financial control allows the livelihood to continue even during periods of low sales.

3.3.4 Self-Sourcing of Raw Materials

Entrepreneurs gathered their own materials to reduce expenses associated with purchasing them. Direct sourcing lowers input costs and lessens dependence on external suppliers.

3.3.5 Continuous Market Searching

Participants visited different places and sought potential customers to increase their chances of selling products. Active market searching expands selling opportunities beyond immediate local outlets.

3.4 Suggested Government and Institutional Support

Four themes emerged regarding the support needed by handicraft entrepreneurs.

3.4.1 Transportation for Product Collection

Respondents requested assistance in transporting raw materials and finished products to reduce the burden of long-distance travel. Improved transport support would ease logistical strain and free time and energy for production.

3.4.2 Display Center

Participants called for the establishment of a permanent display and selling area where customers can conveniently view and purchase local handicrafts. A dedicated venue would increase product visibility and create a more stable market presence.

3.4.3 Financial Assistance Support

Access to financial assistance was sought to purchase raw materials and sustain business operations during periods of low sales. Targeted financing would help bridge income gaps and support continuity of production.

3.4.4 Training for Product Development

Training in product design, quality improvement, production techniques, and marketing was identified as necessary to improve product appeal and marketability. Skill-development opportunities would enhance competitiveness and open pathways for product innovation.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of combining the entrepreneurs' own coping strategies with institutional assistance. Improved access to materials, transportation, financing, training, and organized selling opportunities may help strengthen the sustainability of handicraft entrepreneurship in Josefina, Zamboanga del Sur.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This study concludes that handicraft entrepreneurship in Josefina, Zamboanga del Sur continues to experience various production, marketing, and environmental challenges, including limited access to raw materials, labor-intensive and time-consuming production, unstable sales, low profit, competition from plastic products, and weather-related delays. Despite these difficulties, the entrepreneurs demonstrate resilience by relying on family cooperation, financial discipline, self-sourcing of raw materials, price adjustments, and continuous market searching to sustain their livelihood. Strengthening government support is essential to ensure the sustainability and growth of handicraft entrepreneurship, as participants emphasized the need for transportation assistance, permanent display centers, financial support, and training programs to improve production, market access, and business competitiveness. Providing these forms of assistance can help preserve traditional handicrafts, improve the economic condition of handicraft entrepreneurs, and promote sustainable livelihood opportunities in the municipality.

The Department of Trade and Industry may conduct regular hands-on training programs focused on raw-material selection and preparation, improved weaving techniques, market-oriented designs, cost-based pricing, and digital promotion; the Local Government Unit of Josefina may establish a permanent display and selling center, provide scheduled transport assistance for remote entrepreneurs, and strengthen the One Town, One Product program by promoting local handicrafts as flagship products; government agencies and livelihood organizations may offer accessible financial assistance or low-interest loans tailored to handicraft entrepreneurs; entrepreneurs may be encouraged to form or strengthen cooperatives for collective marketing, resource sharing, and easier access to programs and buyers; local tourism offices and LGUs may promote handicraft products through cultural and tourism campaigns; entrepreneurs may adopt simple digital marketing strategies such as Facebook selling pages and online marketplaces, supported by training in basic photography and customer engagement; and future researchers may conduct comparative studies across municipalities and evaluate the effectiveness of existing government livelihood programs in improving income stability.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from appropriate local officials prior to data collection. All participants were fully informed about the purpose and nature of the research and provided voluntary informed consent before the interviews. Audio recording was carried out only with the explicit consent of each participant. Participant identities were treated with strict confidentiality, and all collected data were used solely for academic purposes. The researchers also consulted knowledgeable reviewers to support the credibility of the interpretations.

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