The Dynamics of Bricolage and Social Entrepreneurship - A Case Analysis of Art and Craft Bricoleurs

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Abstract. A constructivist strategy for development in developing and underdeveloped economies includes bricolage and social entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are not typically perceived as behaving in a linear manner that flows from inputs to results. Social entrepreneurship is an effort to create social value, thereby balancing social mission and the profit motive. In developing economies, social entrepreneurship has been gaining traction among policymakers and practitioners as a means to create social good for society. Nevertheless, these countries consistently face multiple challenges related to resource constraints. Bricolage enables the identification of unmet needs and markets, and is primarily focused on creating innovative combinations of available resources or inputs. This paper explores two case studies from the state of Kerala, India. This case uses a narrative approach to show how bricolage is used to create social value in a setting with very limited resources, and how these improvised innovations help tackle environmental problems while lifting the community. Furthermore, the discussion section examines the potential of a cooperative model of social entrepreneurship and proposes the PIER model to enhance social entrepreneurship and integrate innovation into bricolage for sustainability and scalability.

Keywords: Bricolage, Social entrepreneurship, Resource constraint, Innovation, Inclusion.

1 Introduction

Social entrepreneurship primarily focuses on creating innovative solutions to society's most difficult problems. Since social entrepreneurship thrives in situations with limited resources, social innovation is often pushed forward by people who know how to cleverly bring together and use whatever resources they have to solve real problems in society, a process known as "bricolage." Today, there is an increasing interest in social entrepreneurship and its potential to address social problems through innovative solutions in healthcare, food security, education, handicrafts, the environment, and other areas, as well as in creating sustainable production and supply chains. Unlike charities, which are mainly set up to give and help, social enterprises are trying to do two things at once: make a positive difference in society and earn enough money to keep the organisation going on its own: they want to make people's lives better and help society in a meaningful way and run a business that can financially sustain itself; hence, resource availability and effective utilisation are key challenges to achieving their social mission [1]. Furthermore, these enterprises rely on receiving resources at prices below market value or through non-economic modes of exchange, including sponsorship, volunteers, subsidies, and grants [2] as they face significant resource limitations. Nevertheless, a sizable number of new social firms do succeed in innovating despite these imposing obstacles. When resources are scarce, certain social companies exhibit specific behavioural patterns that enable them to innovate, while many others in a comparable situation fail. Social innovation encompasses a range of fields, analytical depths, tactics, and theories that have a lasting impact on the developmental agenda of emerging economies. One of the most important consequences of social innovation, according to [3] is the investigation of the processes by which such innovations develop, diffuse, and succeed or fail. The key to making social innovation really work is getting different sectors to work together. It means: people and organisations from government, businesses, and non-profits share ideas and values, rethink their roles and relationships, and pool their resources instead of working in silos. This paper explores the context of how bricolage can leverage social innovations in a resource-constrained environment using narrative analysis and a case study of two female bricoleur entrepreneurs whose social innovation is built on bricolage.

D. Choudhury et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the Indo-Bhutan Social Science Conference 2025 (IBSSC 2025)*,
Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1002,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-561-4_26

2 Literature review

2.1 Social entrepreneurship and solutions for the bottom of the pyramid

In the 1980s and 1990s, as impact-focused innovation and new entrepreneurial movements have gained momentum, mission-driven entrepreneurship has moved into the spotlight. Rooted in the cooperative traditions that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe, it has gradually shifted from a niche idea to a widely recognized and increasingly popular way of organising economic and community life. William Drayton popularised the concept of social enterprises and entrepreneurship, and ever since then, it has garnered increased interest from practitioners and academicians worldwide. Social entrepreneurship is a branch of entrepreneurship that focuses on starting and running ventures designed to solve social and environmental problems. Instead of only trying to make a profit, these initiatives use new and creative ideas (social innovation) to tackle issues like poverty, inequality, education, health, or climate change, while still working with an entrepreneurial mindset. Hence, their focus is on creating value for society, which is more than profit maximisation. The meaning of social entrepreneurship varies across different country contexts; nevertheless, it is unified in its mission to do good for the common good. In countries like Germany, France, and Ireland, it usually refers to non-profit organisations that provide social services and are largely funded and overseen by government agencies [4] while in the UK social enterprises are those non-profit organisations which use quasi-market strategies to increase the reach and effectiveness of their services in Spain social entrepreneurship is used to refer multi-stakeholder integration programs involving people who are otherwise excluded from labour markets [5]. In the U.S., social enterprises can be nonprofit or for-profit organisations that involve an activity with a social cause. According to [6] Social enterprises integrate two conventionally separate models: one that generates income through commercial activity and the other that pursues the goal of societal development. Using an inclusive approach, they may select between a for-profit, a non-profit or a hybrid model, such as education, healthcare, etc. People define social entrepreneurship in different ways, but most agree on the basics: it starts with noticing real problems in society, then developing practical social ideas, and finally turning those ideas into solutions that can support long-term, sustainable social development.

2.2 Resource Constraints and Bricolage

Entrepreneurs frequently work in environments with scarce resources. The absence of partners in the business environment may result from several factors, including the enterprise's own resources (such as an internal staff crunch due to a skill gap) or external factors, such as the target segment. Social enterprises have more severe resource constraints than their commercial counterparts because of their particular organizational structure and operating environment. These difficulties are even more pronounced for Social Enterprises operating in developing nations with complex socio-political environments [1]. An entrepreneur, as Schumpeter puts it, is a person with a wild spirit; when confronted with resource constraints, they actively engage with the problem and the available resources at hand to find a sustainable solution. Bricolage is the induction of resources at one's disposal to build sustainable solutions to resolve issues in resource-constrained environments in developing and underdeveloped economies. The term "bricolage" was first used in 1967 by [7] to describe the idea of creating something new by having actors recombine and modify already-existing resources. Bricolage basically means "making do" with whatever you already have and creatively turning those available materials and tools into something new and useful. Instead of going out and looking for the "perfect" materials to achieve a specific goal, a bricoleur works with whatever is already available. The basic idea behind bricolage is that what we call "resources" is not fixed or given; it is shaped by people, relationships, and context. Through these social interactions and creative rethinking, individuals are able to turn seemingly useless or overlooked things into something valuable – in other words, to create "something out of nothing. [8]. Further definitions describe entrepreneurial bricolage as a method to alleviate the resource constraints of new enterprises [9]. [8] suggested two types of bricolages: selective and parallel. Selective bricolage involves applying bricolage in limited areas that can aid the growth of the enterprise, whereas parallel bricolage refers to the excessive use of bricolage that may have a negative outcome. As they use amateur techniques with the help of their own resources and customer inputs, these will be discarded once the firm is established. They concluded that firms that use bricolage to counter environmental constraints tend to grow as they transition to more effective methods once resources become available. Ventures can explore and seize new prospects with the use of bricolage skills. The opposite is also true if bricolage capabilities influence opportunity

discovery and exploitation [10]. Entrepreneurs who practice bricolage not only accept restrictions but they mimic their surroundings and use the resources at their disposal to create the desired and practical outcomes. Bricoleurs examine resources from various perspectives within organisational systems, leveraging networking skills and acquired skills, as well as resources such as inventory and other organisational assets [11]. As a result, they have the ability to reassemble the "heterogeneous repertoire"[7], [11] of already-existent materials for new instrumental purposes. According to [7], Bricoleurs keep going back to the tools and materials they already have, looking at them again and again to see what else they can do with them. They then creatively reorganize these existing resources into new combinations, which they can adapt and reuse for different problems and tasks. In addition to a resource-constrained environment and formal organisations' inability to address a social issue, the government and public institutions also create a space for the adoption of bricolage. The urgency of the circumstance may also influence this. 'Emergency entrepreneurship' is a term suggested by [12], which examines how informal organising has been sparked by the failure of government agencies and other official groups to deal with a catastrophe. Private businesses, communities, or individuals voluntarily respond to a natural or man-made disaster.

Social bricolage was proposed by [13] and is described based on six constructs:

1. Making do means finding ways to create new opportunities or solve problems by using whatever resources are already available, instead of waiting for ideal conditions or perfect tools.
2. Not letting obstacles, shortages, and constraints, and choosing instead to push past them and look for creative ways forward. – It is the ability of social bricoleurs not to succumb to resource constraints, institutional constraints, or poor market returns
3. Improvisation – the highly creative social entrepreneurs who find innovative ways to create value through refining and improving with resources at their disposal, thereby creating workable solutions in an impoverished system.
4. Social value creation - a lively, ongoing process of building resources by strengthening relationships and trust, helping people develop skills, and bringing the community together to work on shared goals
5. Stakeholder participation – it involves many different players from both government and business taking part in the entrepreneurial process, putting clear governance systems in place, and using mission-driven enterprises to tackle social problems.
6. Persuasion - to secure further funding and community support to drive social innovation and change.

These definitions gave impetus to research and literature on social bricolage. Social bricoleurs are connected to the community and possess extensive knowledge of the local environment. Because they are rooted in the community, they understand its realities from the inside and can draw on local people, relationships, and assets to tackle small, everyday social problems close to home [11]. They exhibit traits common to social entrepreneurs, such as skilful handling of unforeseen opportunities, spontaneous invention, unplanned risk, and resource reallocation to generate social benefits. Social bricolage is when entrepreneurs step in to solve urgent social problems using whatever resources they can find around them [14]. It usually happens in tough situations where money and support are limited, the economy is unstable, and work or income tends to come in cycles, but people still find creative ways to help their communities. [11], [19]. Therefore, the engagement of social entrepreneurs in bricolage impacts social innovation and social business models, which is higher than their entrepreneurial ability. The studies conclude that social bricolage integrates the following constructs: ‘Making do’ is linked to providing new services with community engagement using unused resources to create social impact, not constrained by resource scarcity, improvisation through participation and networking, and social value creation through social innovation that are engaged with creating positive impact in local communities. In addition to posing challenges, the lack of resources in developing nations encourages entrepreneurs to pursue new business ventures and engage in proactive entrepreneurial practices. However, the growth of new businesses in these areas is more precarious and requires extra care and attention, since it usually works at a small scale and doesn’t have much competition in the market [16] It helps deepen our understanding of how ventures start, adapt, and grow when they must operate with very few resources. Entrepreneurial activity is significantly improved by resource bricolage. Resource bricolage requires team members to communicate and participate continuously to create beneficial interactions. Through emotional contagion, this process influences other team members by fostering entrepreneurial passion and cognition [17]. When entrepreneurs learn to work with whatever they have, they naturally start improvising

in how they run their ventures. This flexible, on-the-spot way of thinking and acting can strongly improve business performance. It helps in two ways: creative improvisation, where they experiment with new ideas and solutions as situations arise, and defensive improvisation, where they react quickly to protect the venture when unexpected problems or threats appear. Together, this resourceful mindset and improvisational approach make the venture more resilient and more likely to succeed. [18] Between the two, defensive improvisation generally has the bigger positive impact on how well the venture performs. At the same time, using bricolage inside the organisation (re-arranging and reusing internal resources) and outside it (tapping into contacts, partners, and community resources) further strengthens venture performance. These forms of bricolage also act as bridges that carry and amplify the positive effects of both creative and defensive improvisation.

3 Methodology

This study employed narrative analysis [19] and a multiple-case study approach, utilising in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs to examine the strategy adopted by Chenamangalam handloom weavers who were severely impacted by the catastrophic floods that devastated the state of Kerala, India, in 2018. The study tried to explore how they used bricolage and created handcrafted Chekutty dolls, It became a symbol of resilience and highlighted how community change-makers can imagine and build a viable business model, even when they have very few resources to rely on, which helped them to overcome the financial and social challenges to rebuild not only the handloom cooperative but also their lives[20]. The second case study is of Thenga, a homegrown brand from Kerala that crafts artisanal products from coconut shell waste, which is typically dumped in landfills, creating livelihoods and supporting environmental causes. In presenting the cases, we aim to demonstrate how women-led social enterprises in resource-constrained environments implement social bricolage, providing insights into the social entrepreneurial strategies used to overcome macro- and micro-environmental challenges, seize opportunities, innovate, expand, and contribute to economic development despite these constraints. The selection criteria were based on (a) bricolage-led social innovation, which emerged because of resource constraints faced due to natural disasters in the first case and environmental concerns and sustainability initiatives in the second case, and (b) This case looks at how a social enterprise keeps balancing its heart and its head staying true to its social mission while still earning enough money to survive and grow. It does this by examining six key aspects of social bricolage, showing how each one helps the organisation manage this tension in real life.

4 Narrative

4.1 The story of resilience built on Bricolage – The Chekutty dolls

The story of Chekutty dolls owes its origins to Lakshmi Menon, an art entrepreneur, fashion designer, and social entrepreneur. This adorable doll, crafted from Chendamangalam's handwoven clothing, is a symbol of resilience that stands tall, like a beautiful lotus in muddy waters, or the phoenix that rises from the ashes of torrential rains and floods that devastated Kerala in 2018. She is just a rag doll, small enough to fit in your hand [20] Lakshmi Menon believes in small ideas that have a ripple effect and transform society, and Chekutty stands as a testament to that, apart from the series of social ventures and ideas she has brought to create social value.

The village of Chendamangalam is located about 30 kilometres from Kochi. The place is known for its looms and handlooms. The Onam festival is the peak sale period in Kerala for traditional attire, as the entire state's natives don white handloom saris and mundus (dhotis). Like every year, the weavers filled the weaving units with saris and mundus (dhoti) well in advance to meet the festive demand. However, nature had a different plan; the torrential rains that spread havoc in Kerala, flooding the state like never before, had their destructive wrath on the weavers and their festive stock. The floodwaters flooded the units on August 15, 2018, a week before the annual state festival of Onam, and destroyed the stock, resulting in an average loss of Rs 21 lakh per handloom unit. A loss of 52 lakhs was sustained by the Karimpadam society alone, including losses of 8 lakhs in looms and equipment and 21 lakhs in clothing. When the floods destroyed their weaving units, along with their stock and raw materials, handloom weavers at Chendamangalam believed they had lost their only source of income. Gopinath

Parayil, a social entrepreneur who was actively engaged in flood relief activities visited the devastated weavers to understand their situation; the weavers told him that they had no choice but to burn the soiled stock as those were not saleable with the filthy waters entering their units where stocks were kept the clothes have turned to be just a bundle of filthy stinking soiled cloth pile, even cleaning with chlorine will not make any sense to bring it back to saleable stock. Seeing how deeply the weavers were trapped in debt and struggle, Gopinath and his friend Lakshmi Menon decided they could not just stand by. They set out to find a practical, sustainable way to help the weavers rebuild their lives.

Chekutty, the little doll, was born out of Kerala's worst floods as a symbol of hope and solidarity. On the Chekutty website, she is described as a mascot for a "new Kerala" one that is rebuilding itself with courage, compassion, and a willingness to move forward, even while carrying the stains and scars of what happened. Chekutty has marks on her clothes, just like the marks the floods left on people's lives, but she stands for every person who survived and chose to start again. The name "Chekutty" is also said to come from "Cherine Athijeevicha Kutty," which means "a child who survived the dirt, chaos, and destruction of the floods, and still stands alive, hopeful, and unbroken." Along with this, the slogan "Keralam onnai thunniketti" "Kerala stitched itself back together" beautifully captures how people came together after the disaster. The water-damaged fabric that could no longer be sold by the weavers was transformed into thousands of Chekutty dolls. These dolls quickly became a powerful, viral symbol of resilience, and the money raised from them helped support relief and recovery efforts across the state.

The Team identified that a single saree, which costs Rs. 1300, can be used to create 360 Chekutty dolls, thereby increasing its worth to Rs. 9,000, with each doll costing Rs. 25, according to Mr Gopinath. The weavers treated the soiled clothes with chlorine and handed them over to the volunteers. Lakshmi began organising workshops across different parts of Kochi, where people from all walks of life came together to help make these dolls. All the money earned from selling them was directed to The Weavers' Society. The making of the dolls involved volunteers from nine countries. Chekutty's journey did not stop in Kerala. It reached the global stage when the World Bank chose the doll as a special gift for its delegates at the UNRC in Geneva. That simple act gave Chekutty even more visibility and turned her into a powerful symbol of Kerala's resilience for the world to see. There was huge support from the market, with people buying these dolls and even paying above the standard price of Rs. 25. This allowed them to support the weavers' loss and provide them with funds. By then, the rag doll Chekutty had made its market across the globe and was sold on online retail platforms. The Chekutty initiative is currently a volunteer-run program. All the dolls made from the soiled cloth from the floods were sold out, thereby helping to reconstruct the lives of the weavers.

4.2 Thenga - The homegrown brand from the land of coconut Palms

Urbanisation and industrialisation generate a huge demand and supply nexus. Consequently, a huge amount of waste is generated. In Kerala, the land of coconut groves, the production of waste and by-products from the coconut processing industries is a huge problem in waste management, as approximately 62–65% of the coconut fruits' total weight is comprised of husk and shell, which are considered waste [21]. Most of these discarded shells end up in landfills, and the degradation process of the coconut shells takes approximately ten years, making them very difficult to dispose of compared to other biodegradable waste. Furthermore, coconut waste is often disposed of in an unquantifiable manner and is a significant pollutant, frequently dumped in areas such as vacant plots and beaches. Due to the fact that waste from coconuts, particularly the shells, takes roughly 10 years to break down in the environment, this problem is connected to litter in public areas. This gradual natural deterioration contaminates the urban environment.

In 2019, Maria Kuriakose, a management graduate and environmental enthusiast from the Thrissur district of Kerala, discovered the immense potential of these discarded shells in creating a sustainable, eco-friendly product line, as well as generating a livelihood for people at the bottom of the pyramid. A core Keralite at heart, she wanted to return to Kerala and establish an agro-based venture. Thenga (Coconut), the brand was born that specialises in the manufacture of products from coconut shells, as she realised that in Kerala, coconut oil is widely used, but the other parts of the fruit, like husk, shell, and water, which have a huge potential, are not fully utilised. This gap in the market, where there was an abundant supply of coconut waste of all forms underutilised, was where she saw her opportunity. Initially, she thought of using coconut water, which the vendors and the oil mills discarded, but

soon realised that burning coconut shells was a greater environmental pollutant and only a meagre portion of the burned shells are used as charcoal, with the help of her father a, mechanical engineer whose skills enabled the design of a low-cost machine that could quickly clean and smooth out coconut shells. It quickly turned into a family business as Maria's mother, Jolly, pitched in to collect coconut shells from local oil mills, which were the major raw material.

The company hired 10 artisans to design and curate a range of kitchenware. The core philosophy of Thenga is to be environment-friendly; coconut oil is used as a polish to give the bowl a shiny shine, rather than a chemical varnish. The company has today expanded beyond its original focus on bowls and cups to produce planters, tea-cups, gift hampers, and candlesticks. Maria is now considering a market expansion throughout Europe after selling more than 8,000 goods. The mainstay of Thenga is its non-toxic, 100% eco-friendly products. Today, they have 12 artisans curating products which are trendy and are becoming a lifestyle statement among environmental enthusiasts. The entry into the export market marked a significant leap, and today they maintain an online presence through First Cry, Amazon, and their own online retail site, showcasing a diverse array of upscale lifestyle products. They have a huge market in metropolitan cities in India and abroad. Her venture also focuses on women's empowerment, with a team of women employed, and among the 12 artisans, 7 are women. She plans to introduce more products, such as jewellery, toys, and packaging boxes. Her goal of boosting Kerala's economy by showcasing indigenous, environmentally friendly produce aligns with other UN SDG 2030 agendas, including inclusiveness and equity.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The article presents an analysis of innovation in a constrained environment, aiming to create socio-economic value. The aspects highlighted in the literature review as the six constructs of social bricolage: (a) Making do – the two ventures under study had novel strategies for utilising resources which were otherwise tagged as unfit for use and were categorised as waste into products with a message of resilience, as in the case of Chekutty, and environmentally friendly in the case of Thenga. (b) Their refusal to be held back by limitations pushed them to look for fresh, creative ways to use whatever resources they had. Instead of just trying to make money, they chose to place their products in the market with a deeper purpose, one that went beyond profit and focused on meaningful impact. (c) The volunteers justify improvisation through co-participation in the above context. Chekutty had the opportunity to craft and market the symbol of resilience worldwide. Furthermore, Thenga had employed women in 90 per cent of its operations, making it an inclusive and employee-driven organisation in the creative design, marketing, and operations of its products. (d) Social value creation and (e) Stakeholder participation through active engagement of weavers, community members, and societies who partook in making Chekutty from soiled clothes helped to build a robust supply chain, Thenga saw its products boarded in various platforms through stakeholder integration, sourcing of coconut shells was made easier with more owners of oil mills willing to participate and ensuring the shells are resized and cleaned as per the requirements of the firm. (f) Persuasion – Community participation and support for funds, as well as networking, have been the backbone of both ventures. Initially, like every venture, they had to take baby steps before stabilising and creating positive ripples in the market and society.

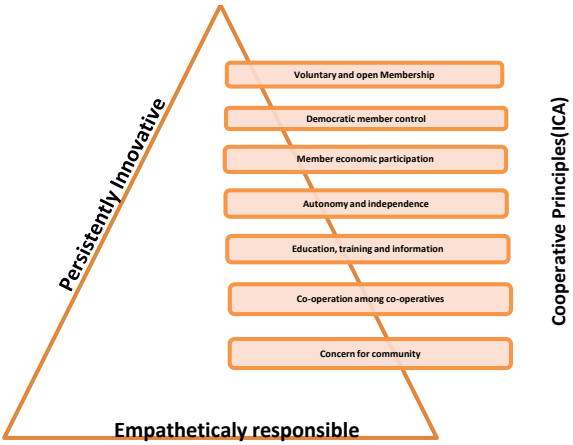
Based on the study's background, we propose a cooperative enterprise model that will engage more communities and empower people in resource-constrained environments, enabling bricolage. This approach can be driven through continuous innovation to scale and create a global impact.

The Cooperative Social Entrepreneurship model emphasises sustainable impact by integrating social and economic goals. It focuses on creating long-term solutions and generating social value rather than merely pursuing financial returns [22]. Cooperatives are typically driven by a social or environmental mission, aiming to address specific societal challenges. A cooperative is basically a group of people who choose to come together on their own to solve their shared problems and improve their lives. By pooling their resources and working side by side, they support one another's livelihoods, strengthen their community life, and help preserve their cultural traditions. The business they create is owned by all of them together and is run democratically, so everyone has a say in how it is managed. The cooperative approach aligns well with the broader objectives of social entrepreneurship. Cooperatives are often seen as valuable tools for rural development and poverty reduction. They often operate in

farming, livestock, forestry, and handicrafts. These cooperatives can help small-scale enterprises and rural producers by pooling resources, enhancing their bargaining power, and providing training and technical assistance. By being part of cooperative enterprises, individuals can gain greater control over their economic livelihoods, improve their socio-economic conditions, and contribute to community development [6]. They can boost innovations through the bricolage process, thereby creating and promoting sustainable solutions.

We propose an integrative PĪER model (Persistently Innovative and Empathetically Responsible) for the sustainable growth of cooperatives, a model that integrates cooperative principles and social enterprise paradigms for sustainable and holistic development in resource-constrained environments.

Fig. 1. PĪER model (Persistently Innovative and Empathetically Responsible) Model



(Source: Author's Own)

The proposed PĪER model emphasises an integrative approach to the principles of cooperatives and the need for continuous innovation to meet changing market trends and aspirations. The need to innovate product and service dimensions in the entire value chain is challenging with fast-paced technological disruption and lifestyle. Further member economic participation would strengthen both cooperative and members' benefits in terms of better income and standard of living. Persistent innovations can be driven through education, training and information principles, which aid capacity building among the members. The principle of autonomy would further strengthen the process by bringing in entrepreneurial capabilities in risk-taking and decision-making without compromising on member participation in decision-making. At their core, cooperatives are about people choosing, out of their own free will, to work together and care for one another and their community. Because membership is voluntary and open to all, and because there is a genuine concern for the well-being of the community, cooperatives are built on a sense of empathy and responsibility. Put simply, a cooperative is a group of people who join together to run a business that they all own and manage collectively. They do this so they can better handle their shared money matters, support each other socially, and keep their culture and traditions alive, and decisions are made democratically so that everyone has a voice. These societies operate on principles of mutual aid, equity, and solidarity, making them inherently empathetic and community-focused. These case studies serve as testimony to the fact that adaptability, innovation, and in these settings, being able to bounce back and adapt is more important than having a perfectly designed structure on paper. Bricoleurs help build this resilience by creatively using whatever resources are available to keep things moving forward. We further argue that policies and systems to encourage and support bricoleurs in building sustainable models of inclusive social impact require support from various sectors worldwide, especially the Government and other public bodies.

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