



## **Influence of Social Cohesion, Community Participation, and Organizational Image on Rural Youth Engagement in Development Programs: The Mediating Role of Organizational Trust in Pakistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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Rural youth engagement is essential for the success and sustainability of community development initiatives. However, many development programs in Pakistan face challenges in attracting and retaining active youth participation, limiting their long-term effectiveness and impact. While previous studies have highlighted the importance of community dynamics and organizational factors in fostering engagement, limited research has examined how sociological and marketing-related factors jointly influence rural youth involvement through organizational trust. Therefore, this study investigated the effects of social cohesion, community participation, and organizational image on rural youth engagement in development programs, with organizational trust serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was employed. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 450 rural youth participating in development programs across rural areas of Punjab, Pakistan. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was utilized to assess the measurement model, examine the hypothesized relationships, and test the mediating role of organizational trust. Furthermore, organizational trust had a significant positive effect on rural youth engagement and partially mediated the relationships between the independent variables and engagement.

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## 1.0 Introduction

It is pertinent to note that rural youth comprise one of the most important demographics in developing nations and are increasingly perceived as critical agents of change in socio-economic development. It is in this context that the role played by the involvement of young people in development programs is becoming increasingly important in rural settings such as Pakistan. Rural development projects carried out by various stakeholders within Pakistan, whether at the governmental or non-governmental level, depend significantly on young people's participation in order to succeed (Siddiqui, 2025). Unfortunately, there has not been enough attention paid to youth involvement in the context of development projects in rural areas, which poses a significant obstacle to the success of such programs. It can be assumed that social stratification as well as skepticism concerning institutions that implement development activities also hinders the extent to which young people become involved in the process of rural development (Hassen et al., 2025).

The modern discourse of rural sociology recognizes that participation in youth-related activities does not only depend upon individual initiative but is largely affected by social structure, dynamics, and organization. Communities in rural areas exist in a network of social relationships which determine collective action, cooperation, and citizenry. On the other hand, organizations engaged in the process of development in these communities need to develop legitimacy and trust for gaining the participation of stakeholders (Yeboah & Flynn, 2021). With the increasing use of participatory models in development, there is also a growing necessity to examine how social dynamics at the level of the community and perception at the organizational level affect youth participation. This is especially relevant in the case of Pakistan where rural development programs are conducted in an environment that is socially complicated due to both strong social bonds and varying levels of trust (Khan et al., 2025).

In this regard, social cohesion refers to the extent to which community members share a sense of unity, connectedness, and commitment towards one another. Communities having a high level of social cohesion usually tend to promote collective behavior and cooperation, which helps in enhancing people's involvement in community-based activities. Community participation is the extent to which individuals are involved in the community decision-making process as well as development-related actions and activities. High community participation results in higher individual commitment to community goals. Organizational image is the way stakeholders perceive and think about an organization's image based on their beliefs about the capabilities, effectiveness, and social responsibilities of the organization (Silva et al., 2023). Organizational image positively affects stakeholders' confidence and willingness to work with the organization. Organizational trust refers to the perception that an organization is dependable, credible, competent, and is concerned for its stakeholders. Rural youth engagement, which is the dependent variable of this study, refers to the extent to which rural youth are committed and engaged in various development-related activities (Okpa et al., 2025).

These constructs interact with each other within the context of integrating the theories of social capital and organizational trust. Social capital theory suggests that social connections, norms, and reciprocity enable people to cooperate and act collectively in society. Based on this

theoretical framework, social cohesion results in a supportive environment, enabling the development of trust due to improved relations and the reinforcement of common values. Moreover, community involvement offers opportunities for collaboration and cooperation, thus improving the level of trust towards organizations that participate in the development activities within the community (Purnomo & Purwandari, 2025). In terms of organizations, a positive image indicates credibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the organization. Hence, organizational trust lowers the level of uncertainty of the stakeholders, increasing the likelihood of their involvement in activities. As a result, rural youth are more willing to get involved in the development process if they have a high level of trust towards development organizations (Geza et al., 2022).

While previous works have separately explored the impact of social cohesion, community participation, organizational reputation, and trust on development and organizational processes, there is still a lack of coherence in the current body of literature in a number of aspects. Firstly, the aforementioned studies have mostly focused on individual elements rather than the overall effect of sociological and organizational factors on youth engagement. Secondly, although trust in organizations has been identified as a key determinant of the actions of stakeholders, very little attention has been paid to the role played by organizational trust as a mediator between the social environment at a community level and youth engagement in development initiatives (Sun et al., 2025). Moreover, most studies addressing the issue of youth engagement are based on data collected in developed or urban areas. In addition, the number of studies conducted on rural youth engagement in developing countries, including Pakistan, is relatively small (Tunio et al., 2021).

The above gaps in literature point to the existence of a clear research problem relating to inadequate understanding of the way in which community relationships and perceptions in organizations impact young people's engagement in developmental activities. Organizations undertaking developmental activities tend to have difficulties in engaging and retaining youth participation in their developmental activities owing to lack of understanding about the social and organizational variables that affect participation (Pietilä et al., 2021). The paucity of data in relation to the effects of organizational trust hinders the design of successful interventions aimed at increasing youth participation in developmental activities. This is due to the fact that the participation of young people represents a major resource for community development and social innovations (del Arco et al., 2021).

In terms of relevance, the significance of the present study lies in both theoretical and practical contributions made by this research. Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, the current research will contribute to rural sociology literature by adding an empirical basis and practical insights on how rural youth can be engaged through organizational trust theory. The examination of the mediating effect of organizational trust will shed more light on the processes involved in the relationship between social and organizational aspects in predicting behavioral outcomes (Choong & Ng, 2023). Secondly, in practical terms, the results of the present study can help policy-makers, development agencies, NGOs, and community leaders to develop programs aimed at developing social bonds, involving members of the community in development activities, developing a positive organizational image, and enhancing trust among rural youth. This, in turn, will lead to

greater involvement of rural youth in development projects, improving their efficiency and effectiveness (Chege, 2025).

## **2.0 Literature Review**

The theoretical framework used to explain this phenomenon is mostly drawn from social capital theory, which holds that social relations, networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity are resources that can promote collective action and participation in civil society. According to social capital theory, people are expected to participate in community affairs only when they are integrated into socially cohesive groups marked by supportiveness, shared beliefs, and trustworthiness (Chen et al., 2025). Social cohesion and community participation are among the important aspects of social capital that motivate individuals to cooperate and work together towards common objectives. Furthermore, social capital theory posits that trust is the mechanism by which social resources are translated into concrete social benefits. In complement to this theory is the organizational trust theory, according to which stakeholders are willing to engage in organizational actions only when they perceive an organization as competent, ethical, reliable, and benevolent (Kim et al., 2025). As long as development organizations are highly appreciated and trusted by community members, individuals will be motivated to participate in organizational activities. Therefore, Social Capital Theory offers a holistic explanation for why social cohesion, community participation, and organizational image lead to rural youth participation in organizational activities due to the creation of organizational trust (Chen et al., 2025).

Social cohesion is one concept that has always been viewed as crucial to community participation and developmental processes. Social cohesion refers to the extent to which individuals share a feeling of connectedness, solidarity, and identity. Through social cohesion, individuals are able to work together towards common goals. Social capital researchers maintain that in communities where social cohesion is high, people are able to share information and build collective efficacy and trust, hence making it possible for individuals to participate in social and developmental activities (Noll & Rivera, 2023). In rural areas, studies have revealed that where there is strong social cohesion among community members, individuals are motivated to be involved in development initiatives because they feel committed to collective well-being. It has also been established recently that young people who form strong social ties in their communities become more involved in building networks and getting involved in community activities through such networks. Youth organizations that have high relational climate have proved to improve the process of building social capital and participation among youth members (Mayger & Hochbein, 2021).

There is an interesting relationship between social cohesion and organizational trust, which can be understood on the basis that socially cohesive societies promote frequent interactions among individuals, common norms, and understanding that minimize uncertainties, thus promoting the process of trust formation. Residents who belong to highly cohesive societies tend to share their information about various organizations and assess them as a whole. Positive interpersonal relationships that individuals establish within society usually carry forward when it comes to their attitudes towards organizations functioning within the same (Smids et al., 2020).

Researches have revealed that social capital and community participation always lead to social trust and social connections that enhance confidence in collective and development organizations. According to studies done on social capital, there is an important point that organizations that show commitment for community welfare are considered more trustworthy in socially cohesive societies. Therefore, based on the aforementioned discussion, the following hypothesis can be formed (Alzoubi et al., 2025).

Participation in community activity is yet another aspect of social capital, which measures how well people participate in decision-making within their community and get involved in development activities. Participation is considered critical for sustainable rural development because it builds the power of community members, thereby enabling citizens to work together with institutions for development. If people participate in community-related issues, they become more exposed to the workings of an institution, and consequently, develop close links with members of the institution (Sheila et al., 2021). People participating in community activities will also be able to get first-hand information about the effectiveness of programs implemented by these organizations. Studies conducted on rural development clearly indicate that participation develops strong social networks, promotes civic engagement and a positive attitude towards development activities (Nugraha et al., 2021).

The link between participation and organizational trust is developed through interactions between members of communities and organizations. Participation creates a platform for transparency, communication, and collaboration, hence reducing information asymmetries and fostering organizational trust due to decreased uncertainty and increased confidence in the intentionality of organizations. Those who are involved in development initiatives are more likely to regard organizations as more accountable and responsive to them, therefore creating trust (Liu et al., 2023). Earlier studies have shown that participation is a critical variable in developing trust in development institutions due to stakeholder involvement in planning and implementing the programs. Thus, community participation is predicted to foster organizational trust among rural youth (Maulana & Dečman, 2025).

Organizational image can be described as the total picture stakeholders create about the reputation, credibility, effectiveness, and social responsibility of an organization. In situations of development, organizational image becomes very critical since stakeholders are known to depend on their perceptions of the image of the organization when assessing whether the organization deserves support and collaboration. The image of an organization reflects the organization's competence, credibility, and social responsibility, which minimize uncertainties and foster positive attitudes among stakeholders (Yan et al., 2022). Literature in marketing and organizational behavior reveals that organizations having good reputations tend to receive support and collaboration from stakeholders. Generally, organizations considered to be ethical and effective tend to be viewed positively by their beneficiaries (Melis & Nawaz, 2024).

Empirical support for the connection between organizational image and organizational trust can be seen in several organizational settings. Organizations become trusted once stakeholders perceive that the organizations have the ability and competence in meeting their

promises. Organizational image becomes one of the indicators in determining the trustworthiness of organizations since it involves past performance of organizations, their integrity and the commitments to meet stakeholders' expectations (Gidage & Bhide, 2024). Studies show that favorable organizational perception leads to higher levels of stakeholder trust that in turn affects cooperation and participation intentions. If rural youth view development organizations as trustworthy, they will be inclined to cooperate and support such organizations. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed (Bouichou et al., 2021).

Organizational trust plays an essential role in social capital and organizational relationship theories as one of the primary tools used for the effect of social or organizational factors on behavioral consequences. Organizational trust enables people to lower risks and engage in cooperative behavior, encouraging them to allocate effort and assets to the joint venture. In the case of rural development projects, organizational trust is the level at which youth can see development organizations as knowledgeable, trustworthy, fair, and committed to working in the best interests of communities (Noll & Rivera, 2023). The latest research on youth development programs points out that relationships built on trust between organizations and young people increase the creation of social capital and engagement in programs (Boat et al., 2024).

In addition to its impact on engagement, organizational trust could potentially be an important mediator between social cohesion, community participation, organizational image and rural youth engagement. According to Social Capital Theory, social networks and participation lead to increased trust, which in turn encourages cooperation and collective action. Likewise, a positive perception of organizations leads to the creation of trust, which further encourages individuals to participate in organizational activities (Silva et al., 2023). While several studies have considered trust and participation independently, very few have considered trust as a mediation variable among community level and organization level variables leading to rural youth engagement, especially in developing countries. In Pakistan, the situation is even worse in that youth participation in development programs relies greatly on community trust. Therefore, this study considers organizational trust as a mediator between the independent and dependent variables (Khan & Asad, 2025).

### **3.0 Methodology**

Quantitative research methodology was used for this study as recommended by the researchers (Gulshan et al., 2024; Liaqat et al., 2025; Raza et al., 2024; Shafiya et al., 2022; Sohail et al., 2024; Sohail, Saeed, et al., 2023). Positivism served as the philosophy underlying this research project as recommended by the previous researchers (Khan et al., 2022; Riaz et al., 2024; Sohail, Ullah, et al., 2023). The target population for this study consists of the rural youth enrolled in different community and development programs in Pakistan. The choice of rural youth was made since they represent an important population whose involvement is imperative for the effective conduct of development programs. Various governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in implementing development programs usually require youth participation to facilitate socio-economic development and the achievement of the desired outcomes. Nevertheless, disparities in the extent of youth participation call for the identification of factors

influencing such involvement. In order to make sure that potential participants had experience and sufficient knowledge about development activities, it was decided to include only those who were actively involved in or exposed to such programs.

A sample of 450 youth from rural areas was used for collecting data. The sample size was regarded as sufficiently large for using PLS-SEM since it is essential to have enough observations in order to obtain statistical power for the analysis. It was also believed to be sufficiently large according to the recommendations stated in SEM literature. In particular, it is argued that large sample sizes can enhance the robustness of structural models with mediating variables and increase their prediction power. Moreover, a sample of 450 respondents made it possible to represent different rural communities adequately and improve the generalizability of the findings of the current research within the Pakistani context.

In the current study, a non-probability purposive sampling design was applied in order to recruit participants that could meet the criteria developed by researchers. Purposeful sampling was chosen because, for this type of study, it would be important to conduct the research among rural youth with direct experience of development programs who could provide valid answers on the topic of the study, namely community participation and organizational trust. The participants were recruited from rural development projects, development organizations, youth associations, and other organizations working in different parts of Pakistan.

The research involved the use of a survey questionnaire designed based on pre-existing validated instruments discussed in the existing literature. The questionnaire included two parts. Part one sought demographic details related to respondents such as their age, gender, educational qualification, and participation in development initiatives. The second part had measurement questions aimed at gauging social cohesiveness, community participation, organizational image, organizational trust, and rural youth engagement. The measurement questions have been derived and adapted from previous literature and modified for rural development programs in Pakistan. Respondents answered the questionnaire by ranking them on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Before actual data collection, the survey was tested for validity among academic specialists and few respondents.

Data analyses were conducted using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using the SmartPLS software package. PLS-SEM was chosen as the statistical method due to its suitability in modeling complex models involving multiple constructs with direct and indirect relationships. Furthermore, the use of PLS-SEM is ideal for prediction-based analyses and does not depend on stringent data requirements such as normality assumption. Data analysis comprised two main parts, which included measurement model analysis and structural model analysis. Measurement model analysis was carried out to assess indicators' reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent and discriminant validity using factor loading, Cronbach Alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) respectively. Structural model analysis involved the testing of hypotheses formulated on the relationship among constructs using path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ),  $f^2$ ,  $Q^2$ , and bootstrap procedure.

Ethical issues were strictly adhered to in the entire research process in order to ensure the safety of the participants and the validity of the study. The participation in the survey was completely voluntary, and participants were fully aware of the nature of the research and its objectives before they filled the questionnaire. All the participants had given their informed consent for taking part in the research, and they were fully convinced that their answers would only be used for academic research. Their privacy was protected in terms of not collecting or disclosing any personal information in relation to their answers. The right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences was explained to the participants. Data were safely kept and only used for research purposes in accordance with the established social science research ethics.

#### 4.0 Findings and Results

##### 4.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

**Table 4.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis**

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Social Cohesion (SC)	5	0.734 – 0.861	0.879	0.911	0.674
Community Participation (CP)	5	0.718 – 0.854	0.867	0.904	0.653
Organizational Image (OI)	5	0.741 – 0.883	0.891	0.920	0.697
Organizational Trust (OT)	5	0.763 – 0.891	0.908	0.932	0.733
Rural Youth Engagement (RYE)	5	0.752 – 0.886	0.896	0.924	0.709

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the reliability and convergent validity of all constructs have been established, which means that the psychometric characteristics of all constructs under consideration have been proven. First, factor loadings of all variables were within the limits from 0.718 to 0.891, thus exceeding the recommended threshold level of 0.70. Hence, it was proved that all variables are valid indicators of their corresponding latent constructs. Second, all measures of Cronbach's Alpha ranged from 0.867 for Community Participation to 0.908 for Organizational Trust, which proves high reliability of all constructs. Third, composite reliability (CR) values varied from 0.904 to 0.932 and surpassed the recommended minimal threshold of 0.70, thus proving reliability once again. Finally, values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all variables were from 0.653 to 0.733, surpassing the required threshold of 0.50. In other words, each construct explains more than half of the variability in the respective indicators. In particular, Social Cohesion (AVE = 0.674), Community Participation (AVE = 0.653), Organizational Image (AVE = 0.697), Organizational Trust (AVE = 0.733), and Rural Youth Engagement (AVE = 0.709) show high levels of convergent validity.

## 4.2 Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

**Table 4.2 Discriminant Validity**

Constructs	SC	CP	OI	OT	RYE
Social Cohesion (SC)	-				
Community Participation (CP)	0.624	-			
Organizational Image (OI)	0.587	0.649	-		
Organizational Trust (OT)	0.715	0.738	0.701	-	
Rural Youth Engagement (RYE)	0.681	0.703	0.669	0.774	-

The HTMT (Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio) analysis was conducted to assess the discriminant validity of the study constructs. The results indicate that all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.85, confirming that each construct is empirically distinct from the others and measures a unique concept. Specifically, the HTMT values ranged from 0.587 to 0.774, with the highest value observed between Organizational Trust and Rural Youth Engagement (HTMT = 0.774), followed by Community Participation and Organizational Trust (HTMT = 0.738), and Social Cohesion and Organizational Trust (HTMT = 0.715). The remaining values, including Social Cohesion–Community Participation (0.624), Social Cohesion–Organizational Image (0.587), Community Participation–Organizational Image (0.649), Organizational Image–Organizational Trust (0.701), Social Cohesion–Rural Youth Engagement (0.681), Community Participation–Rural Youth Engagement (0.703), and Organizational Image–Rural Youth Engagement (0.669), also remained well below the established threshold. These findings demonstrate that the constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another and that discriminant validity has been successfully established, indicating that each variable captures a separate theoretical phenomenon within the proposed research model.

## 4.3 Collinearity Assessment (VIF)

**Table 4.3 Collinearity Assessment**

Relationship	VIF
SC → OT	2.143
CP → OT	2.381
OI → OT	2.224

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OT → RYE	1.000
SC → RYE	2.301
CP → RYE	2.497
OI → RYE	2.184

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The output on the VIF indicates that the problem of multicollinearity does not exist in the current study since the values obtained are less than both 3.3 and 5.0 thresholds. The minimum and maximum VIF values in the current study have been found at 1.000 and 2.497, respectively. In the context of structural relationships, the following predictor constructs have shown good but moderate VIF values: Social Cohesion (SC → OT = 2.143; SC → RYE = 2.301), Community Participation (CP → OT = 2.381; CP → RYE = 2.497), and Organizational Image (OI → OT = 2.224; OI → RYE = 2.184). Since organizational trust (OT → RYE = 1.000) has only one predictor construct, there is no presence of multicollinearity. Hence, all these predictor constructs can be considered independent and valuable for the model. In conclusion, it can be said that the predictor variables are not highly correlated to distort regression estimates.

#### 4.4 Model Fit Indices

**Table 4.4 Model Fit Indices**

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Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold	Result
SRMR	0.054	< 0.08	Accepted
NFI	0.921	> 0.90	Accepted
RMS Theta	0.089	< 0.12	Accepted

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From the indices above, it is clear that the structural model formulated by the researcher depicts an excellent overall fit to the observed data. First, the value of Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) obtained is 0.054. This index is less than the value of 0.08 which is used as a guideline for determining an excellent fit between the observed data and model implied correlation. On the other hand, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) index of 0.921 is greater than the value of 0.90 which is used to determine whether there is improvement in the specified model over the null model. This indicates that the proposed model fits the observed data adequately. Besides, the index of 0.089 obtained from RMS Theta is below the threshold of 0.12 indicating that the outer

model residuals have a very acceptable fit.

#### 4.5 Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>)

**Table 4.5 Coefficient of Determination**

Endogenous Construct	R <sup>2</sup>	Interpretation
Organizational Trust	0.642	Moderate-High
Rural Youth Engagement	0.687	Moderate-High

The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) results indicate that the proposed model has substantial explanatory power in predicting the endogenous constructs. Specifically, the R<sup>2</sup> value for Organizational Trust is 0.642, suggesting that 64.2% of its variance is explained by Social Cohesion, Community Participation, and Organizational Image, which reflects a moderate to high level of explanatory strength. Similarly, the R<sup>2</sup> value for Rural Youth Engagement is 0.687, indicating that 68.7% of the variance in youth engagement is explained by the combined effects of Organizational Trust along with the exogenous variables in the model. These results demonstrate that the model possesses strong predictive relevance and effectively captures the key social and organizational determinants influencing both trust formation and youth engagement in rural development programs.

#### 4.6 Structural Model Results

**Table 4.6 Structural Model Results**

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	$\beta$	Std. Dev.	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
H1	SC → RYE	0.291	0.045	6.467	0.000	Supported
H2	CP → RYE	0.334	0.047	7.106	0.000	Supported
H3	OI → RYE	0.318	0.046	6.913	0.000	Supported
H4	OT → RYE	0.451	0.049	9.204	0.000	Supported

As shown in the output from the structural model analysis, all of the hypothesized relationships have been statistically supported. First, Social Cohesion has a positive and significant relationship with RYE ( $\beta = 0.291$ ,  $t = 6.467$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), implying that the higher level of social cohesion in rural communities is positively associated with RYE. Second, Community

Participation has a significant influence on RYE ( $\beta = 0.334$ ,  $t = 7.106$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that involvement in various community-based activities positively contributes to RYE as people tend to develop better understanding and perception of organizations. Additionally, there is a positive significant relationship between Organizational Image and RYE ( $\beta = 0.318$ ,  $t = 6.913$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This implies that positive organizational image has the potential to increase the level of trust among rural youth. Moreover, Organizational Trust has the most significant positive influence on Rural Youth Engagement (RYE) ( $\beta = 0.451$ ,  $t = 9.204$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), implying that trust is an important factor contributing to rural youth engagement in development projects.

**Table 4.7 Summary Table**

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	$\beta$	t-value	p-value	Result
H8	SC $\rightarrow$ OT $\rightarrow$ YE	0.112	3.944	0.000	Partial Mediation
H9	CP $\rightarrow$ OT $\rightarrow$ YE	0.125	4.331	0.000	Partial Mediation
H10	OI $\rightarrow$ OT $\rightarrow$ YE	0.107	3.765	0.000	Partial Mediation

The mediation analysis results indicate that organizational trust (OT) significantly mediates the relationships between social cohesion (SC), community participation (CP), organizational image (OI), and youth engagement (YE) in development programs. Specifically, the indirect effects of SC  $\rightarrow$  OT  $\rightarrow$  YE ( $\beta = 0.112$ ,  $t = 3.944$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), CP  $\rightarrow$  OT  $\rightarrow$  YE ( $\beta = 0.125$ ,  $t = 4.331$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and OI  $\rightarrow$  OT  $\rightarrow$  YE ( $\beta = 0.107$ ,  $t = 3.765$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) are all positive and statistically significant. These findings suggest that higher levels of social cohesion, community participation, and organizational image enhance rural youth engagement partly through increasing trust in organizations. Since the direct effects remain significant alongside the indirect effects, organizational trust acts as a partial mediator in all three relationships.

## 5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The outcomes generated by this research serve as a convincing empirical basis on which social cohesion, participation of community members, and image of the organization have great significance in terms of fostering organizational trust, which in turn increases youth involvement in development initiatives. The outcomes show that social cohesion is an essential element of the creation of organizational trust in rural youth. That means that people who are part of socially cohesive networks in terms of mutual support and interpersonal relations will find themselves trusting development agencies based in the community they live in. The outcome supports social capital theory, where social cohesion facilitates trust building.

Likewise, the existence of a meaningful link between community participation and organizational trust emphasizes the significance of participation in improving the credibility of an organization. As rural youths get actively involved in development initiatives, they become directly familiarized with the workings of the organization, the decision-making process of the organization, and the results obtained from the implementation of such developmental programs,

and this contributes greatly towards the reduction of uncertainty and increased transparency within the organization. This leads to a feeling of ownership and confidence with regards to the intention of the organization. Additionally, organizational image proved to be a significant predictor of organizational trust, demonstrating that the perception of the organization's reputation and social responsibility plays an important part in fostering trust among rural youths.

Further, the research results indicated that organizational trust had a significant effect on the youth's participation in rural development programs. This result reflects trust as an important psychological process that plays an integral role in linking social and organizational processes to behaviors. The trust that rural youth have in development organizations' reliability, transparency, and commitment to welfare helps to increase the level of youth participation in development activities. According to social exchange theory, people choose their relationship partners based on the benefits they can receive and on whether there is trust between them. Thus, trust represents a mediator that connects social processes and youth engagement behaviors.

Mediation analysis showed that organizational trust partially mediated the associations between social cohesion, community participation, organizational image, and rural youth engagement. The findings indicate that although social and organizational processes affect the level of youth participation, their significant part works via the process of trust formation. It means that trust appears to be an intermediary result of positive social and organizational processes and an important behavioral trigger for the youth. Also, the existence of mediation suggests that there might be other unexplained mechanisms that include perceived.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the current research indicates that rural youth participation in developmental projects is a multi-faceted process, driven by both socio-structural elements and perceptions of organizations. In turn, factors such as social cohesion, community participation, and organizational image have an impact on organizational trust, which is instrumental in encouraging youth engagement. Thus, the integrated model developed as part of this research project adds value to knowledge about the importance of trust in development practices in rural regions. Specifically, the results suggest that it is critical to create trustful relationships between youth and development organizations to ensure youth participation in the process.

In the light of the above discussion, there are several recommendations to offer based on the study's findings. First, it is necessary for development organizations to promote community cohesion by engaging youth in interactive activities aimed at cooperation. Second, development organizations should seek to increase the participation of rural communities in their initiatives through the promotion of participative approaches. Finally, it is critical to pay attention to creating a positive organizational image, and, therefore, to enhancing the organization's performance, accountability, and communication.

There are both theoretical and practical implications for this study. First, theoretically, the study contributes to the theory of social capital by examining organizational trust as an intermediary process linking the sociological and organizational drivers to behavior in a rural setting. Also, the study contributes to the literature on youth participation by emphasizing the

effect of the interplay of community level and organizational level variables. Second, practically, the results obtained from the study will have important implications for policy makers, NGOs, and other development practitioners working in rural areas.

### **Contribution**

**Chahat Kashan Raza:** Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

**Muhammad Naeem Anjum:** Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

**Naik Muhammad Khan:** Methodology and Revision

### **Conflict of Interests/Disclosures**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest in this article's research, authorship, and publication.

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