



From the Village to the World: Strengthening the Economic Independence of the Sewagati Women's Working Group through Partnership with the Merah Putih Cooperative

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Abstract. *The Sewagati Women Farmers Group (KWT) in Balecatuur Village, Gamping, Sleman, Yogyakarta has great potential in developing organic farming, processing crops, and managing waste banks. However, this group faces various challenges such as limited business capital, weak managerial and administrative capacity, minimal understanding of the cooperative system, and limited access to product marketing. This International Community Service Program (KKN) aims to build a strategic partnership between KWT Sewagati and the Merah Putih Cooperative to promote the independence and economic welfare of members, as well as to develop sustainable marketing strategies. The implementation method uses a participatory approach through location surveys, in-depth interviews, and partnership socialization. The results of the activities showed an increase in members' understanding of the benefits of cooperatives in terms of access to capital, marketing networks, and strengthening the people's economy. Input from Malaysian partners emphasized the importance of operational digitization, contract farming models, product certification, sustainable agricultural practices, and women's leadership training. This program is expected to become a transformative model for empowering women farmers, turning the potential of villages into global market opportunities through synergy between community groups, cooperatives, universities, and the government in realizing inclusive and sustainable economic development.*

Keywords: *Economic Empowerment; Economic Independence; Merah Putih Cooperative; Sustainable Agriculture; Women Farmers' Groups.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Women play a strategic role in the agricultural sector and rural economy, but to date they still face various limitations, particularly in terms of access to capital, business capacity building, and marketing networks. Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that women dominate the agricultural workforce, but this contribution has not been fully matched by economic independence and adequate institutional support. This condition emphasizes the importance of empowering women farmers through an integrated and sustainable approach. Therefore, to create sustainable equality, one of the national development priorities is women's empowerment (Sunu & Supratiwi, 2024).

The Sewagati Women Farmers Group (KWT), located in Balecatuur Village, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, is one form of community organization that plays a role in empowering women in the agricultural sector. This KWT carries out various productive activities, such as organic farming, crop processing, waste bank management, and the

production of processed foods and handicrafts. KWT is also considered a place for women to gain and share experiences, as well as build social networks. However, the empowerment process must be carried out in a manner that is consistent with its objectives so that KWT members can understand the information provided (Nido et al., 2024). Despite its strong economic potential and social capital, KWT Sewagati still faces a number of problems, including limited business capital, weak financial and group administration management, low digital literacy, and limited access to markets and business support institutions.

In addition, KWT members' low understanding of the cooperative system and business partnerships has resulted in economic activities that are still individual in nature and dependent on the local market. This situation has resulted in low added value for products and suboptimal sustainable business development. In fact, the existence of the Merah Putih Cooperative as a strategic government program has great potential to support MSMEs and farmer groups by providing access to capital, strengthening institutions, and expanding marketing networks based on the principles of a people's economy. This approach is in line with the national program through the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs on the establishment of the Merah Putih Village Cooperative, which is not only a savings and loan institution but also aims to improve the welfare of residents based on the principles of mutual cooperation, independence, and shared ownership (Arief & Haeruddin, 2025).

Based on these issues, a community service program is needed that can encourage the strengthening of the economic independence of KWT Sewagati through strategic partnerships with the Merah Putih Cooperative. A participatory approach through socialization, mentoring, and capacity building activities is expected to be a solution in increasing competitiveness, business sustainability, and the role of women in inclusive and sustainable village economic development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

People's Economy

The people's economy is rooted in the idea of an economy centered on the people as the main force in the economy, with the main objective of realizing social welfare and justice for all levels of society. Historically, this concept was initiated by the Proclamator, Drs. Mohammad Hatta, and supported by international conventions such as the ILO, which recognizes the people's economy as a system that promotes independence and resource management by local communities.

In rural enterprise development, the theory of people's economy emerged as a response to top-down development models, which often fail to capture social diversity and optimize local potential (Kuncoro, 1997). With this theory, a village is expected to be able to create its own economic management based on its cultural values and resources. Jalaludin et al. (2025) in (Sarman, 2025) show that strengthening the managerial capacity of cooperatives can reinforce their role as economic and social institutions that contribute to community empowerment. Granovetter's (1985) embeddedness theory also emphasizes that economic activities are always closely related to social institutions, where the success of rural economic development is largely determined by the strength of social networks and trust among residents, which are reinforced through the role of cooperatives and local institutions.

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory is a concept that focuses on the process of increasing the capacity and strength of individuals, groups, or communities so that they are able to manage and control various aspects of their lives independently and sustainably. Ife, Jim & Tesoriero, Frank (2016) define community empowerment as providing resources, opportunities, knowledge, and skills to citizens to improve their ability to determine their own future and participate in efforts to influence the lives of their group. In other words, community empowerment is the process of developing human resources or the community itself in the form of exploring personal abilities, creativity, competence, and better thinking and actions than before.

Community empowerment is a noble act because this program not only helps the community to improve their lives independently but also has an impact on national development. Community empowerment is a process of developing, independentizing, empowering, and strengthening the bargaining position of the lower classes against oppressive forces in all fields and sectors of life (Mustanir et al., 2023).

3. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This community service activity was carried out at the Sewagati Women Farmers Group (KWT) located in Balecatur Village, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. The implementation method used was a participatory approach, in which partners were actively involved in all stages of the activity, from problem identification to evaluation of the results. This approach aimed to ensure that the program implemented was in line with the needs of the partners and was sustainable. The main activities consisted of a survey, in-depth interviews, partnership socialization, and activity evaluation.

Site Survey

The survey was conducted in Balecatur Village, Gamping, Sleman, Yogyakarta with the aim of identifying the existing conditions and development potential of KWT Sewagati. Activities at this stage included:

- a. Applying for a permit from the manager of KWT Sewagati.
- b. Direct observation of the waste bank management system, financial administration, product packaging conditions, agricultural land, and production facilities.
- c. Identification of potential and problems encountered in business development.

In-depth Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the chairperson and active members of KWT Sewagati to gather in-depth information on:

- a. The history of the group's formation and organizational structure
- b. Financial management and business capital systems
- c. Work programs that have been and are currently being implemented
- d. Major challenges in business development
- e. Product production, marketing, and distribution processes
- f. Experience in partnerships with external parties
- g. Waste bank management mechanisms from collection to sale.

Partnership Socialization

The socialization was conducted to build understanding and commitment to a strategic partnership between KWT Sewagati and Koperasi Merah Putih. The socialization materials covered:

- a. The benefits of broader market access through the cooperative network in all urban villages
- b. Opportunities for capital and financing support for business development
- c. Strengthening the people's economy based on the principles of mutual cooperation and shared ownership
- d. Opportunities to become a supplier for the government's Free Nutritious Food (MBG) program with a minimum quota of 20%.

This stage also integrated input from Malaysian academic partners regarding operational digitalization, contract farming models, product certification, and women's leadership training to enrich the perspective of KWT development.

Activity Evaluation

The final stage is activity evaluation, which is carried out descriptively through discussions with partners to assess changes in understanding, member participation, and program sustainability potential. This evaluation is used as the basis for preparing recommendations and follow-up plans so that the partnership between KWT Sewagati and Koperasi Merah Putih can continue to be developed optimally.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Activity Results

The implementation of the International Community Service Program has made a positive contribution to increasing the institutional capacity and understanding of KWT Sewagati members. Based on the results of surveys and interviews, it was identified that KWT Sewagati, which was formed in 2022 with 20 active members, has great potential in managing organic farming businesses, producing herbal cookies, and managing waste banks. However, this group faces significant obstacles in the form of limited capital, which relies solely on member contributions, a lack of ability to prepare grant proposals, and a marketing system that is still limited to the neighborhood association (RT/RW) and orders from acquaintances.

The interviews showed that KWT Sewagati has received assistance from Mercuru Buana University Yogyakarta in the form of waste bank scales and oven equipment. The waste bank management system involves collecting waste from the community, sorting it by type with varying prices, and then selling it to collectors. Although waste bank prices are unstable because it does not yet have a permanent location and still uses neighborhood security posts, this activity continues as an effort to preserve the environment and provide additional income.

The partnership socialization activity with the Merah Putih Cooperative succeeded in providing KWT members with an understanding of the benefits of joining a cooperative, including:

- a. wider market access through a cooperative network throughout the village
- b. capital and financing support that is difficult to access individually
- c. strengthening the people's economy based on the principle of mutual cooperation
- d. the opportunity to become a supplier for the Free Nutritious Food (MBG) program with a minimum quota of 20%.

Feedback from Malaysian Partners

Collaboration with academic partners in Malaysia provides an international perspective that enriches the development strategy of KWT Sewagati. Malaysian partners emphasize five important aspects in empowering women farmer groups:

- a. The importance of digitizing group operations, including financial records, member databases, harvest management, and marketing through marketplaces. Digitization is seen as key to improving transparency, efficiency, and competitiveness of agriculture-based MSME products.
- b. A contract farming-based partnership model is recommended as a long-term cooperation scheme with cooperatives or marketing agencies, where product type, quality, and quantity are agreed upon from the outset to ensure income stability.
- c. Strengthening product certification and branding through local halal labels, processed product certification, and consistent branding is necessary for KWT products to have added value and be competitive in the regional market.
- d. Sustainable agriculture practices, including the use of organic fertilizers, household waste management for composting, and the integration of waste banks into the circular economy system, will preserve the environment while generating economic profits.
- e. The importance of leadership training for women because the success of women's farmer groups is highly dependent on internal leadership, so leadership, communication, and negotiation training for KWT administrators is very necessary.

Input from KKN Participants

KKN participants as program implementers in the field provided critical evaluations based on direct observation. The five main inputs provided are:

- a. The need to increase the administrative capacity of KWT in financial recording, simple report writing, and budget planning through advanced training with assistance from cooperatives or related institutions.
- b. The lack of understanding among members about the cooperative system, membership procedures, and the benefits of partnership requires more intensive socialization.
- c. The potential of processed products such as cookies, organic agricultural products, and crafts from waste banks has not been maximized, especially in terms of packaging, branding, and digital marketing.
- d. There is a need for a clearer organizational structure with a systematic division of tasks covering finance, production, marketing, and technology.

- e. Human resource challenges in preparing grant proposals require special training so that KWT can access more government or private assistance programs.

Program Impact Analysis

The integration of input from Malaysian partners and KKN participants resulted in a multidimensional impact analysis. After combining input from Malaysian partners and KKN participants, several potential impacts can be analyzed as follows:

Economic Impact

- a. Increased Income Through Wider Market Access
- b. The digitization of marketing and partnership with the Merah Putih Cooperative opens up greater distribution opportunities, allowing KWT products to reach a wider market.
- c. Production cost efficiency
- d. The use of digital technology and sustainable agricultural practices can reduce production costs while increasing sales value.
- e. Income security through contract farming
- f. The implementation of long-term cooperation based on contracts can provide price and demand certainty for KWT products.
- g. Increased product added value
- h. With better branding, certification, and packaging innovation, KWT products have the potential to fetch higher prices.

Social Impact

- a. Empowerment of women in the village environment
- b. Leadership, management, and marketing training will improve the quality of female human resources in RT 04, thereby strengthening their role in village economic development.
- c. Improved Social Cohesion Among Members
- d. A more professional organizational structure can build a sense of shared responsibility and strengthen solidarity among members.
- e. Increased Community Awareness of the Environment
- f. The waste bank and organic farming programs can encourage the community to be more concerned about waste management.
- g. Transformation of KWT as a Local Role Model
- h. With the success of the program, KWT Sewagati has the potential to become an example for other women's groups or KWTs in Gamping and Sleman Districts.

Environmental Impact

- a. Reduction of Household Waste Through Waste Banks
- b. Strengthening the waste bank system contributes directly to reducing the volume of waste disposed of in the environment.
- c. Improved Soil Quality Through Organic Farming
- d. The use of organic fertilizers and environmentally friendly farming practices improve soil fertility in a sustainable manner.
- e. Utilization of Waste for Products with Economic Value Plastic, paper, and organic waste can be managed as compost or crafts, thereby reducing environmental pollution.
- f. Increased Awareness of Sustainable Lifestyles Education and socialization programs encourage KWT members to adopt green living practices in their daily activities.

Sustainability Strategies

To ensure the sustainability of the program, five main strategies were designed:

- a. Formation of a digital management and administration team from KWT member representatives
- b. Continuous coordination with the village government and the Sleman Regency Agricultural Office for further training and access to capital assistance
- c. Online mentoring after KKN by students in the form of technical consultation and monitoring
- d. Networking development with cooperatives, local businesses, and digital marketing platforms
- e. Capacity building through continuous training in entrepreneurship, group management, and digital marketing.

5. CONCLUSION

The Community Service Program (KKN) conducted at the Sewagati Women Farmers Group (KWT) with a focus on strengthening partnerships with the Merah Putih Cooperative has had a positive impact on increasing the institutional capacity and economic independence of the group. This community service program has succeeded in increasing KWT members' understanding of simple financial management, the role and benefits of cooperatives, and business development opportunities through institutional cooperation.

The results of the activity show that KWT Sewagati has considerable business potential in the organic farming, product processing, and waste bank management sectors, but still needs strengthening in the areas of administration, marketing, and access to capital. Through

socialization and partnership assistance with the Merah Putih Cooperative, KWT obtained alternative solutions to expand its marketing network, improve access to financing, and strengthen the application of the principles of a sustainable people's economy. Overall, this activity made a significant initial contribution in encouraging KWT Sewagati to become a more independent, adaptive, and competitive business group.

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