



Empowering local communities in Ngrambe Village through service learning and entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

The CED Program of Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya aimed to empower small businesses in Ngrambe through service-learning and social entrepreneurship to address local socio-economic challenges. The program integrates academic knowledge with practical experience to promote sustainable development, community collaboration, and rural economic resilience. Using a structured methodology, participants improved their business operations by focusing on social media management and product development. The program supported 13 small businesses with 54 facilitators (9 lecturers and 36 students) from 4 institutions, which included international participants from 6 different countries. A preliminary survey identified the needs of local businesses, followed by planning and the implementation of service-learning projects. The program's impact was evaluated through targeted questionnaires. Small businesses in Ngrambe, Ngawi, benefited significantly from enhanced product packaging, creative digital marketing strategies, and business training, resulting in increased consumer interest and expanded online market reach. Meanwhile, participating students gained hands-on experience in business management and social entrepreneurship, while developing professional skills, cross-cultural collaboration, and social awareness. This collaborative initiative strengthened local businesses, fostered sustainable growth, and positively influenced the local economy and community dynamics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ngrambe Village is part of Ngrambe District in Ngawi Regency, East Java, Indonesia, a rural sub-region characterized by a predominantly agrarian economy with growing micro and small business activities. As of mid-2024, Ngrambe District had approximately 14 administrative villages. At the regency level, agriculture contributes around 32.9 percent of Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) to Ngawi, while household consumption accounts for 74.4 percent of expenditure (Susilo, 2024). Although this structure supports food production and local economic circulation, it also indicates limited diversification into higher-value-added sectors that could strengthen rural income growth. Within this

economic landscape, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play an important role in income diversification. In Ngrambe, most MSMEs are home-based food producers operating at a micro scale. These enterprises contribute to local employment and household resilience; however, they remain largely informal and locally oriented.

Despite consistent production activity, many MSMEs operate with limited product differentiation and minimal branding. Such conditions reduce perceived product value and limit competitiveness beyond traditional village markets. Marketing practices are predominantly conventional. Regional reports further indicate that hundreds of MSMEs in Ngawi Regency require structured mentoring to upgrade product quality and expand market access (BNI News, 2025). However, access to systematic product development support, branding assistance, and practical marketing guidance remains limited at the village level. As a result, although entrepreneurial activity is present, MSMEs in Ngrambe face constraints in strengthening product competitiveness and expanding their market reach. Taken together, these conditions depict Ngrambe as a rural economy in which micro enterprises require targeted support for product enhancement and marketing capabilities. The challenge lies in transforming products into competitive products with stronger branding, improved packaging standards, and broader market visibility.

The sustainability and competitiveness of the small-scale production in Ngrambe are also challenged by interrelated weaknesses in managerial practice, product development, and marketing strategy. The primary challenge lies not in production volume, but in the limited capacity to position locally produced items as competitive, value-added products within broader markets. Financial management practices among MSME owners remain largely informal. Many entrepreneurs do not maintain systematic bookkeeping, structured cost calculations, or regular profit analysis. Pricing decisions are often based on estimates rather than documented cost structures, making it difficult to manage cash flow and evaluate business performance. This weak managerial foundation limits strategic decision-making, reduces readiness for scaling, and restricts access to formal financing opportunities.

Simultaneously, product upgrading remains underdeveloped. While enterprises produce a diverse range of food items, including traditional snacks, cakes, beverages, chips, and flour-based products, visual identity and packaging quality are often minimal. Packaging is typically simple, using transparent plastic or basic wrapping without standardized labeling, nutritional information, expiration dates, or distinctive brand identity, which is not aligned with evolving consumer expectations. Marketing limitations further compound these constraints. Sales channels are predominantly offline, relying on neighborhood networks, direct selling, and periodic market days. Digital adoption is limited, and many entrepreneurs are unfamiliar with social media promotion, online marketplaces, or simple branding communication strategies. Without clear value propositions or structured promotional efforts, products remain indistinct within competitive food markets. Consequently, market reach remains geographically narrow and highly sensitive to fluctuations in local demand. These interconnected challenges indicate that the central development issue in Ngrambe is insufficient product strengthening and marketing capability, supported by limited managerial systems.

Various government and institutional initiatives have sought to support MSME development through general entrepreneurship seminars, access to microcredit schemes, and occasional technical training. However, these interventions are often short-term, fragmented, and insufficiently contextualized to the specific needs of rural enterprises. Training sessions typically emphasize motivational aspects of entrepreneurship rather than practical, hands-on improvements in branding, packaging design, financial recording systems, and digital marketing implementation. Resulting MSME owners acquire theoretical knowledge without structured guidance to translate learning into concrete product transformation.

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The absence of sustained mentoring further limits behavioral change and practical application. There is also a gap between academic knowledge and community-level business practice. Universities possess expertise in business management, marketing communication, accounting systems, and digital entrepreneurship. Yet, this knowledge is not consistently transferred through participatory, solution-oriented models that directly address the operational realities of rural MSMEs. Community engagement often remains charitable or observational rather than capacity-building. Consequently, a structured, integrated, and practice-based intervention is required.

The Faculty of Business at Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya (UKWMS) implemented a Community Engagement for Development (CED) initiative, titled *Empower & Thrive: Business Development for Sustainable Rural Communities*, to address the identified gaps. The program was grounded in service-learning and entrepreneurship frameworks, integrating academic coursework with structured, field-based community intervention. Rather than functioning as a standalone outreach activity, the initiative was embedded within the learning process, aligning theoretical instruction with real-world application. The program design began with a preliminary needs assessment.

Based on the assessment, the intervention was structured around three integrated pillars. First, managerial and financial capacity strengthening was conducted through applied workshops and mentoring sessions. MSME owners were introduced to simplified bookkeeping systems, cost-structure identification, break-even analysis, and pricing strategy formulation. Instead of relying on abstract lectures, participants used their own business data to calculate production costs and evaluate profit margins. This approach aimed to build practical managerial discipline and improve evidence-based decision-making.

Second, product upgrading and branding enhancement were facilitated through collaborative design activities. Students worked alongside MSME partners to evaluate packaging quality, completeness of labeling, and visual identity. Improvements included redesigning labels, clarifying brand names, standardizing essential product information, and refining packaging to enhance consumer trust and perceived value.

Third, market expansion strategies were introduced through basic digital marketing literacy and hands-on assistance with content creation. Entrepreneurs were guided in establishing social media presence, improving product photography, and developing concise promotional narratives. Training focused on accessible and low-cost digital tools appropriate to rural contexts. The objective was not to impose rapid technological transformation, but to initiate gradual integration into broader market ecosystems.

Throughout the program, students functioned as facilitators and co-creators under academic supervision. This participatory model ensured that solutions were context-sensitive, practically applicable, and jointly developed with MSME partners. By emphasizing collaboration rather than one-directional instruction, the approach reinforced ownership among entrepreneurs while simultaneously fostering experiential and reflective learning among students. The program was designed with integrated community and educational objectives. From a community development perspective, it aimed to strengthen the competitiveness and sustainability of food-based MSMEs through three primary interventions: improving financial management discipline via simplified bookkeeping and cost-based pricing practices; enhancing product value through packaging refinement, clearer labeling, and stronger brand identity; and expanding market reach through the introduction of accessible digital marketing strategies.

From an educational standpoint, the initiative embedded social responsibility within business education by providing students with structured, real-world problem-solving experience. Through

service-learning engagement, students applied theoretical knowledge in accounting, marketing, and entrepreneurship to concrete operational challenges faced by rural enterprises. This process cultivated entrepreneurial sensitivity, ethical awareness, adaptive thinking, and collaborative capability. By integrating financial strengthening, product upgrading, and gradual digital marketing adoption within a unified framework, the program positioned community empowerment as a sustained capability-building process rather than a short-term intervention. This integrated model contributes to sustainable rural development by bridging academic expertise with the lived realities of local economic actors, generating mutual value for both community partners and the university.

To further substantiate the identified constraints, a preliminary profiling of participating MSMEs was conducted during the initial needs assessment phase. It focused on three dimensions directly related to enterprise competitiveness and scalability: the level of digital adoption, perceived growth potential, and current sales turnover. The status of “low,” “medium,” and “high” was based on field observations, structured interviews with MSME owners, and comparative assessment across participating enterprises. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of participating MSMEs in Ngrambe Village

| Product | Level of Digital Adoption | Growth Potential | Level of Sales Turnover |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Mung bean drink | Low | High | Medium |
| Crispy peanut crackers | Low | Medium | Low |
| Salted eggs | Low | Low | Low |
| Cakes and puddings | Medium | High | Medium |
| Traditional crackers | Low | Medium | Low |
| Fermented sticky rice sweet | Medium | High | Medium |
| Guava juice | Low | Medium | Medium |
| Nut-based crackers | Low | Medium | Low |
| Instant ginger & turmeric drinks | Low | Medium | Medium |
| Corn flour & cassava flour | Medium | High | High |
| Rice-based crackers | Low | Medium | Low |
| Steamed coconut cake | Low | High | Medium |
| Stuffed pancake | Low | Medium | Medium |

The Concept of Service-learning

Service-learning is an educational approach that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection, fostering civic responsibility and enriching students’ academic experience (Cress, 2023). Prior studies highlight the dual benefits of service-learning: it provides students with hands-on experience in addressing real-world issues while benefiting communities through direct support and engagement. Research suggests that service-learning programs can be particularly impactful in rural areas by addressing specific community needs and fostering local development (Booth & Graves, 2018; Zastoupil, 2021). In the context of rural economic development, service-learning can support local enterprises by providing access to expertise and resources otherwise unavailable to these communities (Booth & Graves, 2018; Bringle et al., 2023). This model of learning allows students to engage directly with the community, identify their needs, and provide applicable solutions.

Previous studies have shown that this approach is effective in promoting social engagement and enhancing students’ practical skills. In a study by Salam et al. (2019), service-learning provides

a real alternative for aligning educational and research activities, thus students were involved in the research first as volunteers, later as service learners. Another study showed that the service-learning program prioritizes reciprocity and mutual benefit, community driven development, transparency, and sustainability and at the end-built partnership with the local community (Lund, 2018). Moreover, in Furco et al. (2023), the chapters examine service-learning partnerships on campus, among institutions, in urban and rural settings, and involving relationships across social sectors. These literatures have shown how service-learning has been effective for building social engagement and enhancing practical skills for students in their academic journey.

Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship refers to innovative efforts aimed at solving social issues using entrepreneurial principles (Geradts & Alt, 2022). It emphasizes creating social value and empowering marginalized communities through sustainable business models and socially oriented enterprises. Social entrepreneurship involves creating and applying innovative, sustainable solutions to address pressing social issues (Hervieux & Voltan, 2018), with a particular focus on marginalized groups (Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018). Social entrepreneurship positions this approach as a driver for sustainable development through economic innovation and community empowerment (Amruddin et al., 2024). Studies on social entrepreneurship in developing countries demonstrate its potential to support rural economies, enabling local enterprises to thrive by introducing new business models and strategies for social impact (Bento et al., 2019). This paper builds on this framework by examining how social entrepreneurship within the CED program fosters economic resilience and innovation among MSMEs in Ngrambe.

Community Development through MSMEs

MSMEs are key to economic development in rural areas, contributing to job creation, poverty reduction, and community resilience (Lal Verma et al., 2020). However, MSMEs in rural Indonesia often face challenges, including inadequate access to capital, limited market reach, and lack of business expertise. External support from educational institutions and community engagement programs can help empower these enterprises, providing vital resources and skills to overcome these barriers. Currently, Indonesia is massively carrying various development programs in various sectors of life. This development is a structured process involving the participation of all levels of society to achieve common good. The aim is to improve living standards, changing less developed economic conditions for the better. According to Kandis et al. (2024), MSMEs has a positive impact on the development of community empowerment. In line with the concept of community empowerment, research by Irawan et al. (2023), the community service activity concluded that the empowerment of MSMEs proves its effectiveness in identifying, overcoming, and providing concrete solutions to their challenges.

Rural Economic Development in Indonesia

The Indonesian government has implemented various policies aimed at promoting rural development, recognizing the need for equitable economic growth across regions. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has significantly impacted rural economies, underscoring the importance of resilience and adaptive strategies for sustainable development. Community-based initiatives that leverage local assets and external support have proven effective in other rural communities (Kandis et al., 2024). The Indonesia's rural development policies, the pandemic's effects on rural economies, and community-based initiatives have challenged the resilience in such settings. In the recent times, the rural economic

development in Indonesia also embraces the concept of Sustainable rural development, a critical component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on poverty reduction and economic inequality in rural areas (Irawan et al., 2023). This approach involves enhancing local community capacity through innovation, infrastructure improvements, and the application of locally adaptable technologies (Lal Verma & Nema, 2019).

This program was aimed at enhancing the capabilities of local MSMEs by introducing product innovations and digital marketing strategies through mentorship, marketing content design creation, and purchase of assets. Local MSMEs are mentored in product development and digital marketing. Product development ensures goods meet market demands by offering added value, while digital marketing leverages online platforms to promote products, increase brand awareness, and simplify marketing for entrepreneurs. At the same time, it provided students with hands-on learning opportunities through direct interaction with the community, with opportunities to develop social responsibility, contribute to community welfare, and promote environmental sustainability. The collaboration between students and MSMEs is expected to promote sustainable rural development. It fosters camaraderie through collaborative social projects for underprivileged communities and recreational activities, while also offering immersive experiences in Indonesia's diverse languages and cultures. Participating students learn and share best practices for peaceful coexistence and apply technical knowledge to address community challenges.

2. METHODS

Since 2018, CED-UKWMS has been an annual initiative for sustained community empowerment. For four months, the activities for the community service program were prepared, from March to June 2024. The implementation was carried out from 8th to 23rd of July 2024. This activity was conducted in two formats, online and offline. The service-learning activities took place at Ngrambe Village, Ngawi Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Thirteen small businesses participated in this initiative. The participants, contributing as the small businesses' facilitators, were 9 lecturers and 36 students. Participants in CED 2024 hailed from four institutions across four different countries. Collectively, all participants represented six nations: Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Korea, Vietnam, and Myanmar.

The implementation of the activities consisted of four stages, the preliminary survey, preparation and coordination, service-learning project, then evaluation and post-test, in accordance with Figure 1. Each stage involved specific objectives, responsible actors, and measurable outputs. The systematic implementation framework is presented in Table 2.



Figure 1. Problem solving solution framework

Preliminary Survey

At this stage, meetings with local leaders served as the initial step of the activities. The discussions focused on identifying potential problems faced by nearby businesses. Following that, the team and the local leaders decided that a program utilizing social entrepreneurship techniques was necessary to promote environmental sustainability and socioeconomic growth in the areas. The curriculum ought to offer students organized chances to engage with one another and collaborate across cultural boundaries to generate good ideas for the local business community's future.

Table 2. Implementation stages of the CED 2024 Program

| Stage | Timeline | Main Objectives | Responsible Actors | Expected Outputs |
|----------------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Preliminary Survey | February-March 2024 | Identify MSME conditions and community needs | Lecturers, local leaders | Identification of priority issues and intervention focus |
| Preparation & Coordination | February-June 2024 | Develop structured intervention plan and student readiness | Lecturers, students | Detailed action plans; seminar implementation; group project proposals |
| Service-Learning Project | 8 th – 23 rd of July 2024 | Implement financial strengthening, product upgrading, and digital marketing assistance | Lecturers, students, MSME partners | Improved packaging prototypes; basic bookkeeping records; social media accounts; promotional materials |
| Evaluation & Post-Test | 23 rd - 24 th of July 2024 | Assess program effectiveness and participant learning outcomes | Lecturers, students, MSME partners | Feedback data; assessment of perceived improvement; reflective evaluation |

Preparation & Coordination

For the service-learning project, participants designed comprehensive activities. Local students collaborated with the international participants prior to their arrival, the first phase was conducted virtually for a week. The result of this activity was a set of objectives that each participant group fulfilled using a thorough plan. The primary goals were social media management and product enhancement. This program starts with a seminar featuring 3 speakers to support the participants in both areas. For this program to be successfully implemented and accomplish its objectives, the seminar was organized to give student participants creative and useful skills to enhance people’s lives.

Service-Learning Project

Service-learning is a form of experiential learning that provides students with opportunities to deepen their understanding of concepts and theories in real-world settings (Lund, 2018). The goal of service-learning is to combine academic skills with contextualized community work so that participants may incorporate what they have learnt from their experiences and ideas (Cress, 2023; Furco et al., 2023).

In this program, cross-cultural living is a characteristic of service-learning methodologies. The goal of cross-cultural living is to foster peaceful coexistence among youth from different countries, races, religions, and genders through engagement and conversation. Participants were housed in local villagers’ homes. Participants learnt traditional songs and dances and got a taste of the villagers’ everyday life while they were there. Additionally, participants performed social duties, including community service at a nearby elementary and kindergarten school.

Evaluation and Post-Test

On the final day of the service-learning project, questionnaires were given to participating students and company owners. Various parties used the survey for different reasons. The questionnaire assessed the degree of success of the community service team’s activities for business owners.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

CED 2024 program was conducted in Ngrambe; The goal of the program was to develop local MSMEs in which line of business were food, beverages, and handicrafts. The key program activities cover

product development, digital marketing, and cultural exchange: The students worked hand in hand with MSMEs to improve their products' quality by initiating innovations in packaging and increasing possible values of the products. As illustrated in Figure 2, the students are redoing the production process to gain a deeper understanding of the business challenges.

The local products were improved in terms of branding and packaging to enhance their appeal to potential customers and create greater opportunities for entering new markets. As illustrated in Figure 3, the students and the lecturer are engaged in a discussion with the business owner regarding the packaging design.

In addition, the students collaborated with MSME owners to develop digital business profiles using online platforms. The recommended platforms included Google Business Profile and social media. To strengthen online promotion, promotional videos for MSMEs were created using Instagram Reels to expand their digital marketing reach. As illustrated in Figure 4, the students are taking product photos to be uploaded to the businesses' social media accounts.



Figure 2. Hands-on practice in the production process

Figure 3. Collaborative discussion on packaging design

Figure 4. Product photography for social media promotion

In addition to activities focused on the business sector, the students also participated in local cultural activities, such as learning traditional dances and playing gamelan music. These activities enhanced the students' cross-cultural experience while also introducing local culture to the international participants.

Table 3 of the first precondition of MSMEs in Ngrambe, Ngawi, indicate varied levels of preparedness across different aspects as perceived by lecturers, students, and MSME representatives. The average scores for all groups hover around 3.08 on a 5-point scale and approximately 61.63 percent on a percentage scale, reflecting moderate satisfaction overall. The highest scoring aspect was knowledge of sustainability business development, with averages above 68 percent across all groups, suggesting a strong understanding of this concept. Conversely, the aspect of marketing products through media and promotion scored the lowest at 55.71 percent, highlighting an area for significant improvement. Notably, MSME owners are seen to have opportunities for business growth, achieving above 65 percent in all groups. This analysis underscores the need to strengthen marketing capabilities and continue fostering sustainable business practices to maximize MSME impact and preparedness.

The survey results show that MSMEs in Ngrambe, Ngawi, are moderately prepared, with an average score of 61.63 percent. This indicates that they have a foundational level of readiness but still require improvements in several areas. One notable strength is their knowledge of sustainable business development, which scored the highest at 68.57 percent, showing that stakeholders have a good understanding of long-term and environmentally responsible business practices. However, a key

weakness lies in marketing, with the lowest score of 55.71 percent, reflecting challenges in creating impactful marketing materials and effectively promoting products, particularly through social media. Despite this, MSME owners are perceived to have strong opportunities for business growth, with scores above 65 percent, highlighting optimism about their potential for improvement and expansion. Overall, while there are strengths in sustainability and growth potential, MSMEs need targeted support in marketing and other areas to maximize their impact in the community.

Table 3. First precondition of MSMEs Analysis in Ngrambe, Ngawi

| Statements | Lecturers | | Students | | MSMEs | |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Scale | % | Scale | % | Scale | % |
| The condition of MSMEs was already good | 2.75 | 55.00 | 3.22 | 64.44 | 3.07 | 61.43 |
| The visibility (appearance) of the business's products from logo, packaging, or goodie bag is already satisfying. | 3.00 | 60.00 | 2.89 | 57.78 | 3.00 | 60.00 |
| MSME businesses already have equipment (banners, posters, banners, bottles, recording books, machines, mixers, juicers, sealers, or others that are satisfying | 2.88 | 57.50 | 3.22 | 64.44 | 2.86 | 57.14 |
| MSME businesses already have good marketing products through the creation of logos, packaging, videos, etc.) and massive promotions via social media | 2.63 | 52.50 | 3.00 | 60.00 | 2.79 | 55.71 |
| The MSME owner already has the opportunity for business growth. | 3.38 | 67.50 | 3.33 | 66.67 | 3.29 | 65.71 |
| I have learned about sustainability business development | 3.88 | 77.50 | 4.11 | 82.22 | 3.43 | 68.57 |
| In your opinion, this business community already had impactful programs before the Community Service 2024 started | 3.38 | 67.50 | 3.22 | 64.44 | 3.14 | 62.86 |
| Average | 3.13 | 62.50 | 3.29 | 65.71 | 3.08 | 61.63 |

Table 4. Postcondition of MSMEs analysis in Ngrambe, Ngawi after the community service

| Statements | Lecturers | | Students | | MSMEs | |
|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Scale | % | Scale | % | Scale | % |
| The community service program had a more positive impact on the business in Ngrambe Ngawi. | 4.25 | 85.00 | 4.67 | 93.33 | 4.79 | 95.71 |
| The community service program initiative has increased the visibility of the business's products from logo, packaging, and goodie bag. | 4.50 | 90.00 | 4.56 | 91.11 | 4.50 | 90.00 |
| The community service program has improved the MSME business with new equipment (machine, banner, bottle, book, mixer, juicer, sealer, etc.). | 4.63 | 92.50 | 4.44 | 88.89 | 4.57 | 91.43 |
| MSME businesses experienced increased marketing (creation of logos, packaging, videos, etc.) and massive promotions via social media through the community service program. | 4.38 | 87.50 | 4.33 | 86.67 | 4.64 | 92.86 |
| The community service program has given the MSMEs owner more possibilities for business growth. | 4.50 | 90.00 | 4.56 | 91.11 | 4.64 | 92.86 |
| I have learned more and more about sustainability business development through the community service program. | 4.50 | 90.00 | 4.78 | 95.56 | 4.79 | 95.71 |
| I believe that the community service program has had a tremendous impact on the local business community. | 4.63 | 92.50 | 4.67 | 93.33 | 4.86 | 97.14 |
| Average | 4.48 | 89.64 | 4.57 | 91.43 | 4.68 | 93.67 |

The post-condition analysis of MSMEs in Ngrambe, Ngawi, after the community service program, as depicted in Table 4., shows significant improvements in various aspects, with an average score of 91.43 percent. All aspects evaluated scored above 85 percent, indicating a high level of impact from the program. The most notable improvements include increased visibility of MSME products (90 percent), the provision of new equipment (91.43 percent), and the enhancement of marketing efforts through social media and creative materials (92.86 percent). Additionally, MSME owners experienced more opportunities for business growth (92.86 percent) and gained better knowledge of sustainable business practices (95.71 percent). The highest-rated statement (97.14 percent) reflects the stakeholders' belief that the program had a tremendous impact on the local business community. Overall, the community service program effectively strengthened MSMEs, enhancing their resources, marketing, and growth potential while fostering long-term business sustainability.

This result highlights the substantial positive impact of the community service program on MSMEs in Ngrambe, Ngawi. With an average score of 91.43 percent, the program significantly improved various aspects of MSME operations. It enhanced product visibility, provided new equipment, and boosted marketing efforts through creative materials and social media promotion. MSME owners also gained more opportunities for business growth and developed better knowledge of sustainable business practices. The program's most notable achievement was the stakeholders' perception of its tremendous impact on the local business community, reflected in the highest score of 97.14 percent. Overall, the program successfully empowered MSMEs by addressing critical areas for development, ensuring long-term growth, and creating a lasting positive influence on the local economy.

Table 5. The community service performance comparison results

| Statements | Pre | | Post | |
|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Scale | % | Scale | % |
| Overall business condition and performance | 3.01 | 60.15 | 4.57 | 91.35 |
| The visibility and appearance of the business's product (logo, packaging, or goodie bag) | 2.96 | 59.26 | 4.52 | 90.37 |
| Improving business pieces of equipment satisfaction (machine, banner, bottle, book, mixer, juicer, or sealer, etc.) | 2.99 | 59.65 | 4.55 | 90.94 |
| Having marketing products and massive promotions via social media through the creation of logos, packaging, and video promotions. | 2.81 | 56.17 | 4.45 | 89.01 |
| Business growth opportunity | 3.33 | 66.72 | 4.57 | 91.32 |
| Sustainability business development learning | 3.81 | 76.24 | 4.69 | 93.76 |
| Local business community impactful | 3.25 | 64.98 | 4.72 | 94.32 |
| Average | 3.17 | 62.67 | 4.58 | 91.58 |

The comparison of pre- and post-community service results, as shown in Table 5, conveys a significant improvement in MSMEs' overall conditions and performance, with the average score rising from 62.67 percent before the program to 91.58 percent after. Each evaluated aspect saw substantial growth. Visibility and appearance of business products improved from 59.26 percent to 90.37 percent, while satisfaction with business equipment increased from 59.65 percent to 90.94 percent. Marketing efforts, including social media promotions, rose from 56.17 percent to 89.01 percent. Business growth opportunities and sustainability business development learning also saw remarkable increases, reaching 91.32 percent and 93.76 percent, respectively. The most notable progress was in the perception of the community service program's impact on the local business community, rising from 64.98 percent

to 94.32 percent. Overall, the program significantly enhanced MSMEs' capabilities and performance, addressing key areas such as visibility, equipment, marketing, and sustainable growth while profoundly impacting the local business ecosystem.

Table 6. Self-assessment to contribute before community service

| Statements | Lecturers | | Students | | MSMEs | |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Scale | % | Scale | % | Scale | % |
| I am able to make a significant contribution to the socioeconomic development of local businesses. | 3.63 | 72.50 | 3.89 | 77.78 | 4.43 | 88.57 |
| I am able to significantly contribute to environmental sustainability and culture in my community. | 3.63 | 72.50 | 3.67 | 73.33 | 4.50 | 90.00 |
| I already had opportunities that enriched my business knowledge. | 3.75 | 75.00 | 3.78 | 75.56 | 4.50 | 90.00 |
| In a rural setting (village), I gained valuable business experience. | 3.75 | 75.00 | 3.78 | 75.56 | 4.64 | 92.86 |
| I am able to practice some of what I learn or experience about business in a good way. | 4.00 | 80.00 | 3.89 | 77.78 | 4.64 | 92.86 |
| I already acquired many soft skills such as teamwork, communication, creativity, and so on. | 4.00 | 80.00 | 3.89 | 77.78 | 4.29 | 85.71 |
| I am able to develop a local company's product or service. | 4.13 | 82.50 | 4.11 | 82.22 | 4.36 | 87.14 |
| I am able to do internet marketing initiatives for local businesses. | 4.25 | 82.50 | 4.11 | 82.22 | 4.14 | 82.86 |
| Average | 3.89 | 77.81 | 3.89 | 77.78 | 4.44 | 88.75 |

Table 6 presents a self-assessment of contributions before participating in a community service program, evaluated among lecturers, students, and MSMEs. It highlights their perceived abilities in areas such as business development, environmental sustainability, and skill application. Overall, the lecturers and students share similar average scores, both at 3.89 (77.81 percent and 77.78 percent, respectively), while MSMEs scored significantly higher with an average of 4.44 (88.75 percent).

Among the groups, MSMEs consistently displayed the highest confidence levels, particularly in their ability to contribute to environmental sustainability and culture, as well as gaining valuable business experience in rural settings, with scores exceeding 90 percent in several areas. In contrast, the lowest scores across all groups pertain to their perceived capacity to contribute to the socioeconomic development of local businesses, where lecturers scored 3.63 (72.50 percent), students 3.89 (77.78 percent), and MSMEs 4.43 (88.57 percent). Students and lecturers showed similar levels of confidence in their abilities, with both groups rating their soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, and creativity, relatively high (above 80 percent). However, MSMEs outperformed in all categories, reflecting a stronger belief in their readiness and capability to contribute, likely due to their direct involvement and practical experience.

The results suggest that while MSMEs exhibit high confidence in their contributions, there is room for improvement among students and lecturers, particularly in applying their knowledge to support socioeconomic development. Strengthening their practical skills, especially in business development and creating sustainable impacts in rural communities, could enhance the effectiveness of future community service programs.

Table 7. Self-assessment to contribute after community service

| Statements | Lecturers | | Students | | MSMEs | |
|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Scale | % | Scale | % | Scale | % |
| After the community service program, I am able to make a more significant contribution to the socioeconomic development of local businesses. | 4.00 | 80.00 | 4.33 | 86.67 | 4.79 | 95.71 |
| After the community service program, I am able to make a more significant contribution to environmental sustainability and culture in my community. | 4.13 | 82.50 | 4.44 | 88.89 | 4.71 | 94.29 |
| After the community service, I had more opportunities that enriched my business knowledge. | 4.25 | 85.00 | 4.56 | 91.11 | 4.64 | 92.86 |
| After community service, in a rural setting (village), I gained more valuable business experience. | 4.63 | 92.50 | 4.56 | 91.11 | 4.71 | 94.29 |
| After the community service, I am able to practice some of what I learned or experienced about business in a better way. | 4.63 | 92.50 | 4.44 | 88.89 | 4.86 | 97.14 |
| After the community service, my soft skills such as teamwork, communication, creativity, and so on are better than before | 4.63 | 92.50 | 4.33 | 86.67 | 4.93 | 98.57 |
| After the community service, I am able to develop more and more a local company's product or service. | 4.50 | 90.00 | 4.67 | 93.33 | 4.79 | 95.71 |
| After the community service, I can do more about internet marketing initiatives things for local businesses. | 4.63 | 92.50 | 4.56 | 91.11 | 4.79 | 95.71 |
| Average | 4.42 | 88.44 | 4.49 | 89.72 | 4.78 | 95.54 |

Table 7 illustrates the self-assessment of participants' contributions after completing a community service program, evaluated among lecturers, students, and MSMEs. The results show a notable improvement in confidence across all groups compared to the pre-community service assessment. Lecturers' average score increased to 4.42 (88.44 percent), students to 4.49 (89.72 percent), and MSMEs to 4.78 (95.45 percent), reflecting a stronger belief in their abilities. Among all groups, MSMEs consistently recorded the highest scores, with their average reaching over 95 percent, showcasing their confidence in making significant contributions after the program.

All groups saw substantial increases in their perceived abilities to contribute to the socioeconomic development of local businesses, with MSMEs scoring the highest at 4.79 (95.71 percent), followed by students at 4.33 (86.67 percent) and lecturers at 4.00 (80.00 percent). Similarly, participants reported enhanced skills in areas like environmental sustainability, business knowledge, and soft skills (e.g., teamwork and communication), with lecturers and students scoring above 85 percent and MSMEs exceeding 90 percent. The strongest area across all groups was their ability to practice what they learned or experienced in a business setting, with MSMEs achieving the highest score at 4.86 (97.14 percent), followed by students at 4.44 (88.89 percent) and lecturers at 4.63 (92.50 percent). Furthermore, the ability to develop local company products and conduct internet marketing initiatives also scored high across groups, reinforcing the program's practical impact.

The results highlight that community service programs significantly enhance participants' confidence and readiness to contribute to local businesses and communities. While all groups benefited, MSMEs demonstrated the highest level of improvement, likely due to their direct engagement with practical applications. This suggests that such programs are particularly effective in bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world application, particularly for students and lecturers.

Table 8. Self-assessment comparison results for before and after the community service

| Statements | Pre | | Post | |
|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Scale | % | Scale | % |
| Socioeconomic development ability of local businesses | 3.98 | 79.62 | 4.37 | 87.46 |
| Environmental sustainability and culture contribution | 3.93 | 78.61 | 4.43 | 88.56 |
| Enhancing business knowledge | 4.01 | 80.19 | 4.48 | 89.66 |
| Gaining business experience | 4.06 | 81.14 | 4.63 | 92.63 |
| Practicing running a business | 4.18 | 83.55 | 4.64 | 92.84 |
| Increasing soft skills | 4.06 | 81.16 | 4.63 | 92.58 |
| Developing local products or services | 4.20 | 83.95 | 4.65 | 93.00 |
| Increasing marketing initiatives for local business | 4.17 | 82.53 | 4.66 | 93.33 |
| Average | 4.07 | 81.45 | 4.58 | 91.33 |

Table 8 compares self-assessment results before and after participating in a community service program, showcasing improvements across all areas of contribution. The average score increased from 4.07 (81.45 percent) before the program to 4.58 (91.33 percent) afterward, indicating a significant boost in participants' confidence and readiness to contribute to local businesses and communities. Among the eight assessed areas, the largest improvements were seen in "socioeconomic development ability of local businesses" and "environmental sustainability and culture contribution." Scores for these areas rose from 3.98 (79.62 percent) and 3.93 (78.61 percent) pre-program to 4.37 (87.46 percent) and 4.43 (88.56 percent) post-program, respectively. These results highlight the program's impact on participants' awareness and ability to make meaningful contributions in these critical areas.

Other areas, such as "enhancing business knowledge" and "gaining business experience," also saw notable improvements, with post-program scores increasing to 4.48 (89.06 percent) and 4.63 (92.63 percent), respectively. Practical skills, such as "practicing running a business" and "increasing soft skills," showed similarly strong improvements, reflecting the program's effectiveness in bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world applications. The highest post-program scores were observed in "developing local products or services" (4.65 or 93.00 percent) and "increasing marketing initiatives for local business" (4.66 or 93.33 percent), both indicating substantial confidence in participants' ability to support local businesses effectively.

In summary, the comparison highlights the significant positive impact of the CED community service program in 2024, with improvements across all categories. Participants gained enhanced skills, knowledge, and confidence, particularly in areas related to business development, marketing, and socioeconomic contributions, making them better equipped to support local businesses and communities.

Discussion

The CED Program at UKWMS 2024 was designed to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world community development by encouraging students to engage directly with local communities. This program is a part of the university's broader commitment to social responsibility and aims to develop students' skills and awareness of the socio-economic challenges various communities face. The MSME demographic in Ngrambe, Ngawi, which is located near a Catholic Church, reflects the local community's entrepreneurial spirit, influenced by both traditional practices and the region's religious and social dynamics. Ngrambe, a rural district in Ngawi, East Java, is home to a variety of small

businesses that serve the immediate local population and nearby towns. The businesses here primarily consist of micro-enterprises, such as small-scale food vendors, tailoring shops, local crafts, agriculture-related enterprises, and small retail stores. These MSMEs are often family-owned and operate with limited capital, relying on local markets and personal networks for growth.

The presence of the Catholic Church plays a significant role in shaping the local MSME landscape. Religious and community-based organizations often offer support for social development programs, including training in business skills, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. These initiatives help local MSME owners improve their business practices and expand their reach (Irawan et al., 2023; Kandis et al., 2024). Additionally, the church's social teachings about justice and community welfare can influence business ethics, encouraging a sense of responsibility towards sustainable practices and community well-being (Lund, 2018). Local entrepreneurs also tend to maintain strong connections with neighboring towns, where they may access larger markets or support services (Bismala, 2017), but still rely heavily on local relationships and word-of-mouth marketing.

Despite facing challenges such as limited access to capital, infrastructure, and modern business technologies, MSMEs in Ngrambe are vital to the area's economy. They provide essential goods and services, create employment, and contribute to the community's resilience. Government and non-governmental organizations, alongside the church, play an important role in supporting these businesses through training programs and financial assistance, helping them adapt to changing economic conditions and improve their sustainability. This unique combination of local entrepreneurial activity and religious influence creates a distinct business environment that continues to evolve in Ngrambe.

The CED 2024 program has managed to gain several significant outcomes, in terms of empowering MSMEs and enhancing student skills. In the following part, it is obvious there are aspects achieved by the program that bring significant impact to the local community, including the enhanced MSME's capabilities to improve their product's quality and marketing strategies (creative digital marketing). From the students' side, the program has been successful in enriching the learning experience in the context of small and medium enterprises. Initially, the program offered intensive mentorship to the local business communities. The MSME owners managed to improve their products' quality, in terms of packaging and marketing strategies. Ensuring product safety and quality is vital for sellers and producers, making the right packaging essential, as it not only extends the shelf life of consumable goods by providing protection but also plays a key role in marketing (Halimah et al., 2024).

The business owners worked together with the students to plan and create more effective marketing strategies and design more attractive packaging for the products. The improved product packaging has attracted more local consumers and eventually also expanded online market access. Regarding digital marketing enhancement, implementing digital marketing strategies through social media and online business profiles significantly impacted the visibility of MSME products. Business owners could leverage digital marketing tools, including online store creation, through hands-on mentoring that ensures they can effectively apply these concepts to expand their market reach without traditional intermediaries as suggested by (Sanawiri & Amrulla, 2025). The students also created creative promotional videos to attract the attention of potential consumers, particularly younger audiences active on social media. Through this process, the participating students gained valuable hands-on experience in business management and social entrepreneurship. They learned the important practices of cross-cultural collaboration and effective communication within various kinds of social environments.

In addition, from the students' perspective, by joining this program, they got the opportunity to develop their professional skills and at the same time increase their social awareness. They were able to see by themselves how the solutions they developed had a significant and feasible impact on the

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local economy. From the students' perspective, participation in this program allowed them to develop professional skills while increasing their social awareness. They were able to see firsthand how the solutions they developed had a tangible impact on the local economy. As illustrated in Figure 5, the students are presenting the outcome of a newly designed banner for the store.



Figure 5. Presentation of newly designed store banner

MSME owners in Ngrambe gained access to resources like business training, mentorship, and financial literacy workshops, which helped improve their operational efficiency and enhance their business management skills. Additionally, these initiatives fostered networking opportunities, enabling MSMEs to connect with other local entrepreneurs, share best practices, and collaborate on joint ventures (Harvie, 2019; Jost, 2022). Community service projects often focus on addressing specific challenges faced by MSMEs, such as limited access to markets, inadequate infrastructure, product development or difficulty in securing promotion, thus providing practical solutions to these barriers (Kandis et al., 2024; Lal Verma & Nema, 2019). Moreover, by participating in community-based projects, MSME owners build stronger relationships with their customers and the broader community, reinforcing the sense of social responsibility and trust that is vital for business longevity. Overall, community service initiatives empower MSMEs in Ngrambe to become more resilient, improve their competitiveness, and contribute positively to the local economy and social fabric.

The benefit for MSMEs in Ngrambe from our CED community service program initiatives at 2024 can be significant, as such programs provide valuable support that strengthens local businesses and promotes sustainable growth. By engaging in community service projects, the CED 2024 program contributes meaningful insights for the field execution of service-learning and social entrepreneurship in a rural setting. Direct interaction between students and MSME owners has proven that innovative solutions can be nurtured by collaborative approach, which at the end would benefit both parties (Shivany, 2021; Tereshchenko et al., 2024). The application of digital marketing strategies showed it was a fruitful strategy in helping MSMEs in a remote village expand their market reach (Lal Verma & Nema, 2019). Moreover, emphasizing product development strengthened the competitive advantage of MSMEs, especially during the post Pandemic era.

4. CONCLUSION DAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The program demonstrated remarkable success in empowering MSMEs and enhancing student capabilities through mentorship, digital marketing strategies, and collaborative initiatives. MSME owners improved product quality, packaging, and marketing, resulting in greater local consumer interest and expanded online market access. Creative promotional efforts boosted the visibility of MSME products, particularly among younger audiences on social media. Meanwhile, participating students gained

invaluable experience in business management, social entrepreneurship, and cross-cultural collaboration, highlighting the importance of effective communication within diverse environments. The program underscored the transformative potential of service-learning and collaboration, as innovative solutions emerged to benefit both students and MSME owners, fostering competitiveness in the face of economic challenges posed by the pandemic. The CED 2024 program proved to be a highly effective initiative, demonstrating both theoretical and practical impact in empowering rural MSMEs and enhancing student competencies. Tangible improvements were observed in product packaging, digital marketing, and business operation practices among the MSMEs, contributing directly to increased visibility, consumer interest, and market access. These outcomes reflect the program's success in applying academic knowledge to real-world settings, validating the role of service-learning and social entrepreneurship in sustainable rural development. For students, the program offered hands-on business experience, improved cross-cultural communication, and nurtured a deeper sense of social responsibility. The mutual benefit generated from this collaborative initiative underscores the potential of university-community partnerships to drive meaningful, scalable changes in underserved areas.

Future programs should consider extending their duration to offer more comprehensive mentorship for MSMEs and deepen their impact. Expanding digital marketing efforts by incorporating e-commerce platforms and providing advanced training on social media management can further boost market reach. Engaging a diverse group of interdisciplinary students will ensure holistic and innovative solutions for rural community development. Programs like CED have the potential to act as a blueprint for fostering collaboration between universities and local communities, paving the way for sustainable rural development and empowering communities to thrive.

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