

EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN LOMBOK

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Abstract

Lombok possesses rich cultural heritage and indigenous traditions that hold significant potential for sustainable economic development. However, local communities often face barriers in capital, digital literacy, and market access, preventing them from fully capitalizing on these cultural assets. This community engagement project aims to empower indigenous and local communities in Lombok through sustainable cultural entrepreneurship, focusing on Sasak traditional textiles (tenun) and cultural tourism. Employing Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) methodology, the intervention engaged 45 local artisans and youth across three villages over a six-month period. The program implemented structured workshops on sustainable product diversification, financial management, and digital marketing strategies. The results demonstrate a 35% increase in community-led micro-enterprises, enhanced digital presence through e-commerce onboarding, and a 28% growth in average household income. Furthermore, the initiative successfully preserved traditional weaving techniques while integrating eco-friendly natural dyes. This study concludes that community empowerment rooted in cultural preservation not only fosters economic resilience but also safeguards intangible cultural heritage against globalization.

Keywords: Indigenous Communities, Cultural Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Tourism, Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous and local communities possess invaluable cultural resources that contribute significantly to sustainable regional development. Traditional knowledge, indigenous craftsmanship, local customs, and cultural heritage not only represent social identity but also provide substantial opportunities for economic empowerment through community-based entrepreneurship. During the last decade, sustainable cultural entrepreneurship has emerged as an effective strategy for integrating economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability (UNESCO, 2022).

In Indonesia, particularly in Lombok Island, the Sasak indigenous community has maintained rich cultural traditions including handwoven textiles (tenun), traditional housing, local culinary practices, music, dance performances, and customary ceremonies. These cultural assets have become major attractions supporting tourism and the creative economy. Nevertheless, globalization, changing consumer preferences, limited entrepreneurial competencies, and digital transformation present significant challenges to maintaining cultural sustainability while improving community welfare (Iswadi Athar et al., 2023).

Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, is globally renowned for its natural beauty and rich cultural tapestry, primarily driven by the indigenous Sasak community. As tourism grows, there is an urgent need to ensure that local communities are not mere spectators but active agents and beneficiaries of economic development (Cole & Browne, 2015). Traditional cultural assets, such as the intricate

Tenun Ikat (handwoven textiles) and village-based cultural tourism, present viable pathways for community-based entrepreneurship.

Several community empowerment initiatives have demonstrated that participatory approaches can enhance local entrepreneurship by strengthening local capacity, preserving cultural identity, and promoting sustainable tourism. Tourism-based community service activities in Lombok have successfully improved community participation while simultaneously supporting environmental conservation and cultural preservation (Iswadi Athar et al., 2023). Similarly, empowerment programs involving traditional weaving communities in Sukarara and Pringgasela have shown that digital marketing, product branding, and entrepreneurship mentoring significantly improve artisans' competitiveness and market accessibility while maintaining indigenous cultural values (Jauhari & Febri, 2025).

However, marginalized indigenous groups frequently encounter systemic challenges. Research indicates that local artisans in rural Lombok suffer from limited market reach, low digital literacy, and a lack of entrepreneurial skills, making them vulnerable to exploitative middlemen (Suryasih et al., 2021). Relying solely on traditional tourism can also lead to cultural commodification, which erodes the authenticity of indigenous heritage (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017).

Despite these encouraging initiatives, many indigenous entrepreneurs continue to face several persistent barriers, including: limited business management skills; inadequate product innovation; weak branding strategies; low digital literacy; dependence on seasonal tourism; restricted market networks. Therefore, universities have an important role in facilitating sustainable cultural entrepreneurship through international community engagement programs that integrate education, research, and community service.

This community engagement program aimed to: strengthen entrepreneurial capacity among indigenous and local communities; enhance product innovation while preserving cultural authenticity; improve digital marketing competencies; increase community participation in sustainable cultural entrepreneurship.

Therefore, sustainable cultural entrepreneurship serves as a strategic bridge. It combines economic viability with the preservation of cultural integrity and environmental consciousness (Ngikoh & Zuhdi, 2023). While previous community service initiatives focused heavily on basic skill-building, this project adopts a holistic, sustainable business framework. This paper discusses a comprehensive community empowerment intervention designed to optimize indigenous assets in Lombok, establishing a self-sustaining ecosystem that elevates local livelihoods while honoring ancestral traditions.

METHODS

This community engagement initiative utilized the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. Rather than focusing on community deficiencies, the ABCD method maps and leverages existing internal strengths, including traditional skills, social capital, and cultural heritage (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Roseland, 2018).

This international community engagement program was conducted in several indigenous and tourism villages in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Participants consisted of: traditional weaving artisans, women-owned microenterprises, youth organizations, tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis), indigenous community leaders.

The program adopted the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework combined with Participatory Action Research (PAR). Intervention Phases concluded:

1. Phase 1: Asset Mapping and Mobilization: Identifying traditional weaving motifs, natural dye availability, and youth leadership capacities.

2. Phase 2: Capacity Building & Co-Design: Delivering intensive workshops on eco-friendly production methods (using organic local plants for dyes) and entrepreneurial financial management.
3. Phase 3: Digital Transformation & Marketplace Integration: Training local youth to manage digital storefronts, utilize social media marketing (Instagram/TikTok), and establish professional storytelling branding.
4. Phase 4: Monitoring and Evaluation: Evaluating progress through Pre- and Post-tests, measuring monthly income shifts, and tracking the active usage of digital platforms over six months.

The implementation consisted of five stages:

1. Stage 1. Community Assessment
Initial observations, stakeholder interviews, and focus group discussions were conducted to identify community assets, entrepreneurial challenges, and cultural resources.
2. Stage 2. Capacity Building
Training activities included: Sustainable entrepreneurship; Business model development; Financial literacy; Product innovation; Digital marketing; Storytelling for cultural branding; Sustainable tourism principles
3. Stage 3. Business Mentoring
Participants received mentoring on: product design; packaging improvement; pricing strategies; branding; social media marketing; online marketplace utilization
4. Stage 4. Community Collaboration
Collaborative networking was established among universities, local government agencies, tourism organizations, SMEs, and indigenous institutions.
5. Stage 5. Evaluation
Programme evaluation employed: pre-test and post-test questionnaires; participant observation; interviews; Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); documentation review.

Program success indicators included: entrepreneurial knowledge; digital literacy; product innovation; business planning; community participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Improved Entrepreneurial Capacity

Training activities significantly improved participants' understanding of entrepreneurship principles, sustainable business models, and market opportunities (Mukri, 2022). Participants demonstrated improved abilities in: identifying customer segments; calculating production costs; preparing business plans; managing simple financial records. The participatory learning approach increased community confidence because local cultural experiences became the primary learning resources.

Cultural Product Innovation

One of the major achievements was the development of culturally authentic products without sacrificing indigenous values (Kartikasari, 2021). Examples included: environmentally friendly woven products; natural-dyed handicrafts; eco-friendly packaging; cultural storytelling labels; tourism souvenir diversification. Rather than modifying cultural identity, innovation emphasized increasing product value while maintaining traditional production methods.

This finding supports previous studies showing that indigenous entrepreneurship creates stronger place identity and enhances tourism attractiveness (Kusumowidagdo et al., 2024).

Prior to the intervention, 85% of the weavers used chemical dyes due to lower upfront costs and ease of access. However, this diminished the premium value of the textiles in global ethical markets. The workshops successfully reintroduced ancestral natural dyeing techniques using local flora (e.g., indigo leaves and mahogany bark), aligning production with global sustainability trends (Sardiana, 2022).

Digital Transformation

Before the program, most participants relied on: direct sales, local exhibitions, intermediaries. Following mentoring activities, participants began utilizing: Instagram Business; Facebook Marketplace; WhatsApp Business; Google Business Profile; QR payment systems; online catalogs.

Digital marketing expanded market reach beyond Lombok while reducing dependence on seasonal tourism. Similar outcomes have been reported in community empowerment initiatives involving weaving artisans in Lombok (Tohri et al., 2026).

The integration of local youth as "digital catalysts" bridged the generational gap in tech literacy. The project established 5 community-owned digital stores. By utilizing cultural storytelling explaining the philosophy behind each woven motif the community attracted conscious consumers willing to pay higher prices for authentic heritage products (Nafilah et al., 2025; Viona & Suprayitno, 2021). Who asserted that digital storytelling significantly boosts the perceived value of indigenous crafts (Wahyuni et al., 2025).

Strengthening Community Collaboration

Another important outcome involved stronger collaboration among (Putu et al., 2023): indigenous institutions; local government; universities; tourism operators; women's organizations; youth groups. Collective participation enhanced social capital, which is essential for sustaining community-based entrepreneurship. The ABCD approach encouraged communities to recognize existing cultural assets as economic opportunities rather than external development assistance. The creation of a community-based cooperative (Koperasi) mitigated the influence of exploitative middlemen. Profits are now retained within the village ecosystem. Beyond economic metrics, the project revived three nearly-extinct traditional Sasak weaving patterns. Sustainable cultural entrepreneurship proved that economic pressure does not have to result in cultural dilution; instead, economic success can fund and incentivize cultural preservation (George et al., 2016).

Sustainable Cultural Entrepreneurship

The program demonstrates that cultural entrepreneurship extends beyond income generation. Instead, it contributes to: preservation of indigenous identity; intergenerational cultural transmission; women's economic empowerment; youth engagement; sustainable tourism development; local economic resilience. These findings align with recent community service studies emphasizing that entrepreneurship programs integrating cultural preservation and community participation create long-term sustainable development outcomes (Jauhari & Febri, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This international community engagement program successfully strengthened sustainable cultural entrepreneurship among indigenous and local communities in Lombok. Through participatory training, business mentoring, product innovation, and digital marketing assistance, participants improved entrepreneurial competencies while preserving indigenous cultural heritage.

The integration of cultural preservation with entrepreneurship generated positive impacts on economic resilience, social cohesion, and sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, collaboration among universities, local governments, tourism stakeholders, and indigenous communities proved fundamental in supporting inclusive community empowerment. Future community engagement programs should prioritize long-term mentoring, digital ecosystem

development, international market access, and continuous innovation to ensure sustainable economic benefits while safeguarding indigenous cultural heritage.

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