



PRIMARY RESEARCH

Strengthening Indonesia's rural creative economy through volunteer engagement for sustainable development

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Abstract

Limited access to resources and entrepreneurial training in rural areas often hampers the development of a sustainable creative economy. This study aims to examine the role of volunteers in addressing these challenges and supporting the growth of the rural creative economy for sustainable development in rural areas of Indonesia, using the Lumbung Literacy Foundation as a case study. A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews with the foundation's founder, project leaders, village communities, and participants of the volunteer independence program, supplemented by observation and document analysis. The findings reveal that volunteers act as agents of change by fostering creativity and innovation within communities. They provide skill-building workshops, facilitate access to resources, and promote local products, which in turn improve community income and well-being. Volunteers also play a crucial role in expanding market networks for rural products by leveraging digitalization, such as online marketing and e-commerce platforms, enabling rural goods to compete in broader markets. This study emphasizes the importance of collaboration between volunteers and local communities, where skill transfer is adapted to the cultural context. Volunteer-driven initiatives have been shown to significantly contribute to sustainable rural development by empowering local economies and preserving cultural heritage through creative activities. It is recommended that similar programs be expanded to other rural areas in Indonesia by strengthening collaboration between governments, volunteers, and local communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Strengthening traditional skills through the empowerment of local communities in the rapid development of the creative economy and digitalization is a strategic issue in support of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The real sector economic contribution to culture industries, crafts, and the arts in Indonesia has very high potential and proves that the creative economy sector contributes greatly to the national economy. Over the last decade, however, the sector has been suffering various structural challenges. Another is the lack of infrastructure and access to technology found in rural areas, which inhibits businesses from participating in the digital economy. In rural areas, only 35% of creative businesses have

adequate internet access, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, highlighting that their outreach to larger markets is limited (Kemenparekraf, 2020).

The tiny yet dynamic creative economy sector in Indonesia continues to grow. However, it is not without the usual problems, such as the difficulties in obtaining funding access for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). Only 20% of creative SMEs have been able to obtain loans from formal financial institutions Creative Economy Agency, Bekraf (2020). As a result, their ability to innovate and expand their businesses gets severely restricted. In addition to this, the quality of Human Resources (HR) is another big challenge. According to the W.B (2021), 70%

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of creative economy players in Indonesia still do not have skills in technology, digital marketing, and product innovation. Low levels of education and training in these areas hamper the sector's competitiveness in the global market. Creative economic development in rural areas, as promoted in SDGs point 8, offers a potential strategy for creating inclusive and sustainable economic growth and providing decent work (UN, 2015). Based on data from the Ministry of Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia, Indonesia has 75,753 villages, of which 27.65% have superior goods products. As many as 10.35% of these villages have exported their superior products to other countries, while the other 89.65% have superior products that have not been exported (Ekraf, 2024). From these data, it can be seen that the marketing of superior products in Indonesian villages is still not maximized to reach the global market share, so further efforts are needed to expand export reach and increase product competitiveness in the international market. However, these efforts require structured interventions, such as increased access to technology, digital skills training, and business mentoring. Thus, empowering local communities through the creative economy can not only optimize regional potential but also contribute to the achievement of the global sustainable development agenda.

Sengkerang Village, located in East Praya Sub-district, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, is one of the villages with abundant natural resources and local culture. Although the village has relatively good access to technology and infrastructure, such as internet networks and basic facilities, the digital skills of the community are still relatively low. According to data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, only around 30% of villagers have a basic understanding of the use of digital technology for marketing and business management (Kemenkominfo, 2022). The digital marketing of local products is an area where there is great potential to develop the creative economy, but it is currently failing to reach its potential. Such skills in managing natural products such as bananas and roots that actually have high economic value have not been optimally explored. The absence of training and mentoring on product processing and diversification is an inhibiting factor in increasing community income (NTB, 2023).

Structured training programs aligned with skills development (digital and natural product management skills) are required to overcome these challenges and empower the communities. A study by (Samsudin et al., 2024), states that digital-based approaches like marketing training through social media and e-commerce can generate ru-

ral community incomes to increase by 40%-48%. Facilitating value-added processing of natural products, such as banana chips and tuber flour, further provides a better market opportunity. The synergy between digital skills and natural resource management gives Sengkerang Village great potential for a sustainable, creative economy. Not only will it enhance the economic well-being of the community itself, but it will also reinforce the economic resilience of the village against the threats of the global system.

Lombok Literasi Lumbung is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that focuses on education, health, social and entrepreneurship. With an emphasis on community empowerment, the NGO offers sustainable programs for literacy, welfare, and economic independence. One of Literasi Lumbung Lombok's important roles in such strengthening is through socialization activities and creative economy training in the community. They assist communities in acquiring skills in handicrafts, local product processing, and the use of digital marketing technology. The participatory methods that are applied facilitate the transfer of skills to the Sengkerang Village community that can be applied in daily life. On the other hand, there are still relatively few studies that examine volunteer participation in creative economy development in rural Indonesia, so further research is needed to provide empirical evidence and deepen understanding in this area.

Past research on the creative economy has also established the significance of the sector in provoking local economic growth, income generation, and empowerment at the local level. For example, research conducted by Hakim et al. (2024) and Syahri, Wahid, Wahid, and Azzahra (2025) highlighted that the creative economy not only functions to improve the economy but it is also a vehicle to develop local cultural identity, especially in culturally unique locations. A study conducted by Putranto and Kusumaningtyas (2024), concluded that a creative economy in rural society could contribute positively to society, particularly if done in synergy with other stakeholders like the government, non-governmental organizations, and volunteers. Furthermore, the primary inhibiting factors for rural creative economy development in Indonesia are limited access to training, fewer resources, and the inability to leverage digital marketing technology for local products (Rahman & Hakim, 2024; Sjaf et al., 2024; Tanjung, Kriswantriyono, Purnamadewi, Suhardjito, & Wulandari, 2024).

The involvement of governments and institutions in advancing the development of the rural creative economy has had diverse positive impacts, especially through empowerment programs and the physical development of infras-

structure. For instance, research by Sakinah, Fahlevi, and Rahmawati (2024), indicated that government assistance, which included training and the provision of capital, was capable of improving the rate of productivity among creative enterprises in rural regions and advancing the formation of indigenous product markets. Similarly, research by Manioudis and Angelakis (2023) and Mukaromah, Permana, and Astuti (2023) clarified that private institutions in partnership with the government are able to create a creative economy ecosystem that supports the sustainability of small and medium enterprises in villages. However, it is still rare to find research that explicitly examines how local communities or populations contribute to developing the creative economy in villages, even though community involvement is of central significance in ensuring the sustainability and responsiveness of creative economy innovations to local needs. The scarce literature points to a gap in the existing literature that needs a detailed investigation of the collaborative engagements of rural communities and the formal sector in developing the capacity of rural creative economies.

This research aims to bridge the gap in studies by examining the role of Literasi Lumbung Lombok volunteers in developing a creative economy in Sengkerang Village, particularly through socialization and digital marketing skills training as empowerment. The majority of existing studies focus on creative economic empowerment among urban communities or among communities with easy access to technology. Therefore, this research is expected to contribute to the scientific community regarding how volunteers can help in economic empowerment in villages with limited access to technology and resources. This research provides an overview of Sengkerang Village and its potential natural resources, the Literasi Lumbung Lombok volunteers' approach to transforming natural resources into innovative economic products, and the socialization and demonstration process of community empowerment. Furthermore, this study investigates the influence of digital marketing education in enhancing community competencies in marketing local products.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Creative Economy

A creative economy is concerned with powering economic expansion through the use of ideas and intellectual capital instead of physical resources (Howkins, 2002). The creative economy is concerned with using creativity, knowledge, and expertise to generate more economic and cultural value products and services (Dzhakisheva, Cherep, Kanabekova,

& Meldebekova, 2024). The sector weaves together cultural and commercial threads, connecting artistic expression to economic value (Tang, 2021). The literature emphasizes the dual agenda of the sector to promote innovation and maintain local identity since it safeguards cultural heritage in addition to boosting local economies (Pratomo, Santoso, Pangestuty, et al., 2024). The creative economy has been hugely lucrative in developing countries, providing sustainable jobs through local skills and minimizing the overdependence on conventional industries (Li & Yan, 2024).

Volunteer Program

Volunteer programs play a huge role in the development of communities and individuals (Akel & Mohammad, 2019; Harrington et al., 2021). Estes, Sittner, Hill, Gonzalez, and Handeland (2023) define volunteerism as an important aspect of community engagement that allows for individual growth while fulfilling local demands. Bharadwaj, Bijlani, Dinesh, and Tomar (2024) opine that volunteering activities raise social capital and improve the bonds between people in a community, which is the backbone of strong communities. Besides, Sanders and Balcanoff (2022), highlight that volunteerism fulfills a number of personal motives, like the need to acquire skills and a sense of purpose that subsequently enhances participation in community activities.

Entrepreneurial Digitalization Training

Digital entrepreneurship training promotes resilience and growth in businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises (Ismail, Ghazali, Hamid, Abdullah, & Palil, 2023; Hokmabadi, Rezvani, & de Matos, 2024; Sarif, Susanto, Retnasih, & Segaf, 2023). Evidence from Afandi, Amsari, and Hayati (2023) indicates that digital skills training enhances business effectiveness and coverage in the market and consequently empowers entrepreneurs to utilize online platforms for improved customer engagement. Equally, the literature stresses that online training increases flexibility in the fast-changing markets, as noted by (Tisin & Othman, 2024), who noted that digitally skilled entrepreneurs are better positioned to innovate and scale their ventures. Additionally, Petković, Gaev, and Bukonja (2024) established that digitalization training for entrepreneurs supports sustainable business practices through enabling data-based decision-making and process optimization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative study approach that attempts to explore an in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon through in-depth exploration in a natural environment (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The case study design was adopted

as it favors an in-depth exploration of phenomena in real settings (Warren & Bell, 2022). The research location was Sengkerang Village, East Praya Sub-district, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, which is an area known to be a tourist destination with community-based creative economy initiatives. The participants were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017), such as founders of foundations, project coordinators, and village members and volunteers involved in programs.

Three main methods were employed in collecting data: (1) observation, which emphasizes the examination of practices, interactions, and socio-cultural dynamics surrounding local skills (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017). Throughout the observation process, researchers keenly observed the setting, activities, people's interaction, and participants' perception; (2) semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with participants in order to examine their perceptions, experiences, and opinions regarding the contribution of local skills towards community empowerment (Siedlecki, 2022). The interviews conducted provided a qualitative analysis of the significance of local skills in the development of the creative economy, challenges, and strategies. A document review was also conducted, involving the examination of reports, media releases, and official documents for the development of the creative economy in Sengkerang Village (Morgan, 2022). Information gathered from documents was later merged with observation and interview data to enhance the analysis and gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Data were examined using a thematic analysis method (Clarke & Braun, 2017), including data coding, identification of themes, and interpretation of findings in terms of community empowerment through local skills. Triangulation of data sources and member checking methods were utilized to maximize the credibility of findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The Overview of Sengkerang Village and its potential natural resources Sengkerang Village, located in East Praya Sub-district, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, is known as one of the largest and highest quality tobacco producing areas in the region. Most of the people of Sengkerang Village depend on tobacco farming, which has become a major commodity in the local economy. Tobacco produced in this village has two types of products, namely raw tobacco, which is sold directly to buyers, and semi-finished tobacco, which is then supplied to

cigarette companies. This high dependence on tobacco has made the village community focus on one natural potential, neglecting other natural resources that could be utilized both for daily consumption and as value-added creative economy products.

In addition to tobacco, Sengkerang Village has various other potential natural resources that have yet to be fully explored or utilized. Several local plants that are abundant in this area, such as spices, bananas, and sweet tubers, have not been optimally utilized. Spices, which have high economic value, are often neglected because the community's main focus is on tobacco. Similarly, bananas and sweet tubers, despite being easily found foodstuffs, have yet to be further processed to increase their selling value. In fact, these local products have the potential to be developed into various creative economic products, such as processed foods or even health products based on natural ingredients, which can boost community income and expand employment opportunities in the village. This potential, if properly utilized, could contribute significantly to the sustainability of the local economy and the development of the creative economy in Sengkerang Village. The portrait of Sengkerang Village and its natural resources can be seen in Figure 1 below.



FIGURE 1. Portrait of Sengkerang village and its natural resources

The strategy applied by Literasi Lumbung Lombok volunteers involves processing natural resources into creative economic products for the community

Literasi Lumbung Lombok Volunteers apply various innovative strategies to process the abundant natural resources in Sengkerang Village into high-value creative economic products. One of the strategies implemented is the processing of local spice plants that are rich in potential, such as ginger, turmeric, and temulawak. These plants were previously underutilized by the local community. Through training and socialization, volunteers taught the community to process these spices into rhizome herbal drinks that have a high selling value, both in the local market and outside the region. This herbal drink product is not only beneficial for health

but can also be marketed as a distinctive traditional product that promotes local wisdom. This innovation provides an opportunity for the community to increase their income by utilizing spices that are easily found around them.

The second strategy implemented by volunteers is the innovation of banana processing, which was previously only used for wet food products such as fried bananas, banana compote, and banana cakes. With the guidance of volunteers, the community was given the training to process bananas into banana chips with various flavors, namely original, sweet, and spicy salty. Processing bananas into dry food products allows the products to have a longer shelf life and can be marketed to a wider market, even outside the region. This innovation not only increases the selling value of bananas as a local commodity but also provides a new alternative for the community in processing natural products that have been underutilized. With a variety of flavors, this banana chip product can attract more consumers, both as daily snacks and as regional souvenirs.

In addition, Literasi Lumbang Lombok volunteers also developed sweet potato-based products that were previously only processed in simple ways, such as boiling or steaming. In this strategy, sweet potatoes are innovated into "caring mas ubi," which is a dried sweet potato that has a longer shelf life and is easily marketable. Not only does caring ubi mas offer a unique flavor, but it can also be sold in a wider market, even as a souvenir product for tourists to take home. These sweet potato preparations have great potential as creative economic products that can be produced in large quantities and distributed to various regions. This innovation adds value to sweet potato as a local natural resource that can enrich culinary products and the creative economy in Sengkerang Village while opening wider market opportunities for the community.

The results showed that the volunteer program succeeded in increasing the community's competence in managing natural resources into creative economic products, which in turn contributed significantly to the improvement of the community's economy. The observation showed that the creative economic product processing training in Sengkerang Village, led by volunteers with a plain communication style and practice method, had a level of participants' active participation and communication. This is a reflection of the initiative of participants to acquire and master the newly acquired skills from the activity. Training that blends interactive approaches and simple practices exhibits a higher level of performance in boosting participants' creativity skills than training programs developed from lecture methods only (Gu, Ritter, Delfmann, & Dijksterhuis, 2022).

The training participants expressed their interest in this creative economy product processing training and plan to apply the skills acquired independently. In addition, they expressed plans to market the products in the immediate area as a first step in utilizing the knowledge gained. Entrepreneurship training and mentoring increase intrinsic motivation and entrepreneurial activity among participants (Ariadi, Relawati, & Agustina, 2024). Furthermore, the founder of the foundation and project leader of this program stated that this activity has been successful and confirmed the importance of training to maximize the use of natural resources that have significant potential for the welfare of the people of Sengkerang Village.

Through these strategies, Literasi Lumbang Lombok volunteers not only provide new skills to the community but also open their minds to the creative economic potential that can be developed from the natural products around them. With a practical training-based approach, the people of Sengkerang Village are expected to be able to process natural products more effectively and creatively, thereby improving their welfare and strengthening the local economy. Figure 2 shows the processed products from the creative economy training program as follows.



FIGURE 2. Processed products from the creative economy-training programme

Literasi Lumbung Lombok volunteers facilitate socialization and demonstrations to empower communities to produce creative economic products.

Literasi Lumbung Lombok Volunteers have an important role in delivering socialization and demonstrations of creative economic product production to the people of Sengkang. The initial socialization conducted was to give an overview of the potential of natural resources of local plants that have not yet been maximally utilized. The community was exposed, during this activity, to some of the local plants, like spices, bananas, and sweet potatoes, that can be processed into new economic goods with value added. Volunteers push the community to view these natural commodities as not only food for daily consumption but also raw materials for saleable products, enabling broader economic opportunities.

The process of socialization also comprised the transfer of economic and individual advantages associated with the innovative processing of natural resources. Socialization plays a key role in the enhancement of innovative economic growth, particularly in the context of the information technology revolution (Gasarov, Gasarova, & Krasota, 2022). Volunteers taught the community the health value of products such as rhizome herbal drinks, along with the financial value of gaining additional income from the sale of locally processed goods. The aim of this socialization was to enhance the community's awareness of the importance of developing creativity in natural product management and encourage them to unlock this potential in a way that is both productive and sustainable. This socialization also includes natural resource management, where innovative approaches are necessary, especially given the modern economic challenges (Shapovalova, 2023).

During the demonstration session, volunteers provided a step-by-step explanation of the process of generating these products in the creative economy. Demonstrations are a great pedagogical tool for conveying cooking concepts and methods in a social context (Ali et al., 2022). The demonstration started with the making of herbal drinks produced from rhizomes, which can be prepared very easily with ingredients that are abundantly found close to the village. Besides, the demonstration went on with the preparation of banana chips and sweet potato carang mas. Throughout the demonstration, volunteers presented the steps of preparing the products in simple terms, which were readily comprehensible to the community. In order to make each step of the process clearer, volunteers also prepared a step-by-step video demonstrating the production process, which is supposed to give a clearer and more detailed impression of how

raw materials can be transformed into saleable products. The findings of this research show that the socialization and demonstration method is an effective way of imparting knowledge and skills to participants in a concise and precise manner. With this method, participants are provided with the opportunity to engage actively during the demonstration, and feedback can be readily given at this point, thus improving overall and detailed understanding. The approach also facilitates the active engagement of participants in the learning process, thereby enhancing their memory and application of skills. Demonstration, therefore, is not merely a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge but also reinforces the application skills of participants in applied environments. Volunteers in the volunteer program identified the key role played by volunteers in facilitating socialization and demonstrations to enable communities. The volunteers supply the community with the necessary skills to create new economic products, thereby promoting sustainable economic development through available and comprehensible interactive workshops.

Demonstrations are not only theoretical but also include practical exercises that require members of the community to actively engage in the production process of objects. It requires hands-on experience, as this enables the community to acquire firsthand experience in applying the knowledge and skills that have been acquired through socialization and demonstrations. Through this active engagement, the population gains not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills that can be transferred to daily life (Rashid, Lani, Ariffin, Mohamad, & Ismail, 2024). Through this applied approach, Lumbung Literasi volunteers endeavor to empower the community by providing skills that can improve their economy and encourage the development of sustainable, creative economic potential. Figure 3 presents the socialization and demonstration of creative economy production activities for the participants as follows.



FIGURE 3. Socialisation and demonstration of creative economy production

The digital marketing training provided by volunteers enhances the community's skills in marketing local products. The digital marketing training offered by the volunteers of Literasi Lumbung Lombok significantly contributes to enhancing the people's marketing skills in Sengkerang Village for their products. As a component of educating production processes, the training also touched on the contribution of good marketing processes in the era of digitalization. One of the areas of emphasis in the training was the processes involved in attractive product packaging. Good packaging not only maintains the quality of a product but also serves as a strong visual appeal to customers. The community was taught the utilization of functional and good-looking packaging materials, like standing pouches or slim walls, which are well-known in the market. Good packaging gives the product being marketed a good first impression.

Aside from packaging, the training covered designing information and attention-grabbing product stickers. Volunteers conducted training on the use of widely accessible graphic design software, such as Canva, to enable the participants to design stickers on their own. Graphic design training with the use of software like Canva has demonstrated potential in enabling Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to design attention-grabbing promotional materials that align with their brand image (Sunarto & Setiadi, 2023). By utilizing such applications, communities are empowered to design products that fulfill their product identity without requiring advanced graphic design expertise. Such a capacity enhances the aesthetics of their products, thereby enhancing their marketability at both the local and broader levels. The training involved the design of informative and appealing product stickers for branding MSME products (Supriyanto, Radyanto, & Indarti, 2023). The training provided to MSMEs consisted of technology utilization, branding, packaging, and online marketing in order to value-add their products and outreach (Atmojo, Mahendra, & Perdana, 2023).

The digital marketing training involved the utilization of e-commerce platforms as a tremendously potent distribution channel. The group was introduced to a number of online shopping and selling platforms, including Shopee, Tokopedia, and TikTok Shop. Participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the registration process as sellers, in addition to procedures involved in promoting their products through these platforms. Through instructions on uploading products, crafting compelling descriptions, and pricing competitively, the training provided the community with the capacity to leverage the potential of e-commerce to reach more customers. Electronic marketing and e-

commerce websites are inevitable tools for businesses, particularly Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), to enhance outreach and increase sales (Teviana, Sienny, Hidayat, & Khaira, 2024). These platforms allow companies to engage with a larger audience, gather data on consumers to tailor marketing, and directly connect with consumers (Kamil et al., 2022). Social media and e-commerce websites provide companies with the potential to engage with a larger audience, enhance customer experience, obtain data, and attain marketing objectives more effectively (Hasan, Akter, Zahan Safia, Hossain Meraj, & Hasan, 2022). Nevertheless, technology integration and logistics management remain concerns. Ongoing training, technical infrastructure assistance, and government and e-commerce platform cooperation are recommended to maximize the potential of MSMEs in the digital era (Evasari, Utomo, & Ambarwati, 2019)

In general, the training program not only supplied the Sengkerang Village community with the skills required for packaging and marketing products but also with an understanding of digital marketing techniques that are capable of broadening their access to the market. With the utilization of digital technologies and e-commerce platforms, the community is in a good position to sell their products to more individuals and enhance the competitive edge of domestic products. The training program is a significant step in the development of the village's creative economy, facilitating individuals' access to the international market and encouraging the establishment of more sustainable economic opportunities. Figure 4 below illustrates the following activities in packaging and digital marketing training.



FIGURE 4. Digital packaging and marketing training

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be concluded that based on the results of this study, the volunteers of Literasi Lumbung Lombok have a role in the empowerment of the community of Sengkerang village in managing natural resources for economic products and creative value-added. The community is equipped with practical skills that have the po-

tential to improve the competitiveness of local products through training programs, including innovations in processing natural products, attractive product packaging, and digital marketing through e-commerce platforms. This innovation can provide market access, improve the economic welfare of its citizens, and maintain a sustainable, creative economy in rural areas.

The scope of this study was limited to Sengkerang Village, so the results of this study are not necessarily generalized to other villages with different characteristics. This study is also more about the empowerment program carried out by Literasi Lumbung Lombok volunteers in processing natural resources into economic creative products and utilization of digital marketing, not considering external factors such as capital access or government policies that can influence the success of the program. For further research, it

is recommended to explore the long-term impact of this empowerment on the economic welfare of the community and compare the implementation of the program in several villages with different characteristics. Further research also needs to consider other variables that can affect the success of the creative economy in rural areas. In addition, it is important to increase more solid collaboration within the hexalelix framework between academics, communities, government, industry, media, and legal and regulatory aspects to support sustainable creative economic growth in rural areas.

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