

Strengthening the Babakan Village MSME Forum through Collaboration for Competitiveness and Business Independence

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Article History

Received on 27 July 2026

1st Revision on 12 August 2026

2nd Revision on 03 September 2026

Accepted on 07 September 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This community service program aimed to strengthen a collaboration-based MSME forum in Babakan Village, improve participants' understanding of community governance, and clarify the Merah Putih Cooperative's role as a local business-service hub.

Research Methodology: The program was conducted on July 13 2026, 2026 in Babakan Village, Kertajati District, Majalengka Regency. The participatory approach combined stakeholder coordination, interactive lectures, case studies, discussions, needs mapping, group mentoring, descriptive evaluation, and follow-up planning. The evidence comprised attendance records, structured observations, discussion notes, documentation, and a target realization review.

Results: The attendance list contained 23 signatures, including 19 business actors from diverse sectors. Qualitative evidence showed that participants could regroup business problems initially viewed as individual into upstream, process, and downstream needs and connect them with forums and cooperative roles. The program documented stakeholder participation, produced an initial role map, and established follow-up directions, while formal forum documents and cooperative service operations remained pending.

Conclusions: The program contributed to an institutional pathway from one-off MSME training toward a forum-cooperative-village-university support system. Its immediate contribution was stronger social and organizational foundations rather than measured business performance improvement.

Limitations: No pre-test, post-test, satisfaction instruments, or measured adoption data were available, and formal forum documents had not yet been completed.

Contributions: The program offers a staged and measurable sustainability framework for forum formalization, member data, monthly coordination, pilot cooperative service, and quarterly evaluation.

Keywords: *Collaboration, Community Forum, Competitiveness, MSMEs, Village Cooperatives*

How to Cite: Abdullah, D., Masduki, M., Istiono, D., Hernita, N., & Milasari, M. (2026). Strengthening the Babakan Village MSME Forum through Collaboration for Competitiveness and Business Independence. *Yumary: Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*, 7(1), 107-116.

1. Introduction

Micro, small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are central to rural income, employment, and the use of local resources; however, their competitiveness is often constrained by weak management, incomplete business records, inconsistent product quality, limited market access, and fragmented cooperation. Digital tools can support sales, customer communication, and record-keeping; however, adoption depends on organizational readiness, skills, mentoring, and a strategy suited to business needs ([Tambunan, 2019](#); [Rahayu, & Day, 2017](#); [Eller, Alford, Kallmünzer, & Peters, 2020](#); [Garzoni, de Turi, Secundo, & del Vecchio, 2020](#)). For village enterprises, technology training needs to be connected with collective learning and follow-up routines rather than delivered as a stand-alone intervention ([Bouwman, Nikou, & de Reuver, 2019](#); [Matarazzo, Penco, Profumo, & Quaglia, 2021](#)).

Babakan Village, Kertajati District, Majalengka Regency, has household businesses in culinary products, snacks, grocery retail, vegetables, processed products, and simple services, among others. Its proximity to Kertajati West Java International Airport and the surrounding development areas offers market opportunities. However, previous studies have found that many actors still operate individually, use simple management systems, and lack a continuing collective business mechanism. A 2026 community service program introduced digital literacy, financial record-keeping, knowledge sharing, and business planning, and created an initial communication community ([Masduki, Umam, Suparto, & Pratama, 2026](#)). The unresolved challenge was to convert the communication group into a forum with membership, management, role division, regular agendas, documentation, and services that members could sustain after external mentoring ended.

The intervention was designed around one practical proposition: collaboration becomes useful when networks, trust, and shared goals are translated into repeated, problem-solving routines. Social capital explains the resources embedded in relationships, whereas a community of practice explains how actors learn through experience exchange and joint problem solving ([Nahapiet, & Ghoshal, 1998](#); [Putnam, 2000](#); [Wenger, 1998](#)). In Babakan, these perspectives were applied through supplier information exchange, joint identification of production and marketing problems, clear task distribution, documented decisions, and short learning meetings. Therefore, theory served as a concise program framework rather than a separate training objective.

The institutional design linked the MSME forum to the Babakan Village Merah Putih Cooperative. The forum was positioned as a space for communication, needs identification, and peer learning; the cooperative as a hub for member data, meetings, promotion, procurement, transaction records, and access to programs; the village government as a source of legitimacy and facilities; and the university as a provider of facilitation, mentoring, and evaluation of the program. This role distribution operationalized the triple-helix framework at the village level and reduced the risk that the forum would become an organization without member services ([Birchall, & Simmons, 2004](#); [Etzkowitz, & Zhou, 2018](#)).

Accordingly, the program addressed four specific challenges: the absence of a formal forum structure, weak coordination among business actors, an underdeveloped cooperative role, and limited collective production and marketing efforts. It aimed to strengthen the understanding of forum governance and collaboration, map shared needs across upstream, process, and downstream activities, clarify stakeholder roles, and formulate a follow-up mechanism. The expected contribution was not an immediate increase in sales but an institutional pathway through which the forum and cooperative could gradually support competitiveness and business independence. The Opening session of the MSME training and mentoring program is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Opening session of the MSME training and mentoring program

The program's novelty lies in shifting community service from individual capacity building to the institutionalization of collaboration. Rather than treating training as the final output, the intervention connected a shared problem map, an initial stakeholder role map, cooperative support and measurable follow-up targets. This design positions the MSME forum and the Merah Putih Cooperative as a long-term local mechanism for collective learning and business services while clearly distinguishing immediate qualitative achievements from outcomes that still require implementation and evaluation.

2. Research Methodology

The program used a participatory, practical, and sustainability-oriented approach to training. Participatory approaches recognize local actors as holders of contextual knowledge and engage them in identifying problems, analyzing needs, and planning action, rather than treating them only as recipients ([Chambers, 1994](#); [Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995](#)). This approach also reflects partnership principles that emphasize shared participation, co-learning, attention to local strengths, and continuation beyond a single intervention ([Israel et al., 1998](#)). In this program, MSME actors contributed business experience and determined collaboration needs; practical sessions connected organizational concepts with the problems reported by participants; and the village government and Merah Putih Cooperative were involved as institutions expected to continue the process after the university-led activity ended.

Training and mentoring were conducted on Monday, July 13, 2026, in Babakan Village, Kertajati District, Majalengka Regency. The main participants were household MSME actors in the culinary, snack, trade, vegetable, processed product, and simple service sectors. The activity also involved the Babakan Village Government, Village Consultative Body, Merah Putih Cooperative, village officials, lecturers, and students. The attendance list contained 23 signatures, including those of 19 business actors. These records were used as the basis for reporting participation without adding participants beyond the available evidence.



Figure 2. Implementation of MSME training and mentoring

The implementation team consisted of Dudung Abdullah as program leader, Masduki as a lecturer member and speaker, and Milasari as a student member. The speaker delivered the theme “Strengthening the Organization of Babakan Village MSME Actors through Collaboration to Improve

Competitiveness and Local Business Independence.” Student involvement included registration, participant facilitation, recording the discussion results, documentation, and technical support. Figure 2 shows the interactive implementation settings used for material delivery, discussion, and participant mentoring.

The implementation followed five linked stages. First, preparation comprised coordination and socialization with the village government and stakeholders, followed by the development of materials addressing four priority problems: an unformalized forum, weak business coordination, an underdeveloped cooperative role, and limited collective production and marketing. Second, interactive training used case examples to explain the governance of forums. Third, participatory mentoring mapped the upstream, process, and downstream needs. Fourth, the descriptive evaluation reviewed participation, discussion evidence, and target realization. Fifth, follow-up planning assigned continuity roles and sustainability indicators; this step was embedded in the evaluation stage, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Stages of program implementation

Stage	Main Activities	Immediate Outputs
Coordination	Agreement on the schedule, target participants, partner support, and material focus	Implementation readiness and initial stakeholder commitment
Material Preparation	Formulation of materials on organization, collaboration, cooperative roles, and competitiveness	Training materials aligned with priority problems
Training	Interactive lectures, case examples, and an explanation of tourism governance	Participants’ conceptual framework concerning community organization
Mentoring	Discussion, mapping of upstream-process-downstream problems, and follow-up ideas	A joint needs map and an alternative forum agenda
Evaluation	Observation of participation, attendance records, discussion notes, and review of proposal targets	Description of achievements, limitations, and sustainability recommendations

Learning methods included interactive lectures to provide a conceptual framework, participatory discussions to explore participant experience, case studies to connect the material with raw-material procurement, product quality, record-keeping, and marketing, needs mapping to group upstream, process, and downstream problems, and group mentoring to formulate role distribution and the working relationship between the forum and the cooperative.

Program outcomes were assessed descriptively using five indicators: participant reach, demonstrated understanding of forum governance, identification of shared business needs, clarification of stakeholder roles, and readiness for follow-up. Evidence comprised the signed attendance list, participation observations, facilitator notes, the upstream-process-downstream needs map, photographs and a target-realization review. Feedback was elicited by asking the participants to restate common problems, propose collective responses, and identify the institution responsible for each action. The team cross-checked the discussion notes, observations, documentation, and completed stages before interpreting the results.

Because no pre-test, post-test, satisfaction, or adoption instruments were available, knowledge gains and business performance changes were not quantified. Immediate results were limited to participation, qualitative indications of understanding, needs mapping and initial role clarification. Continuity was planned through monthly forum meetings, member data, and pilot service support by the cooperative, village government facilities, and quarterly university mentoring. These were follow-up targets and not completed outcomes.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Participation and Stakeholder Support

The attendance list contained 23 signatures, including 19 business actors. The participants represented diverse business fields, including processed foods, snacks, vegetables, grocery retail, beverages, and culinary products. This diversity indicates that the forum has a potential membership base across various business types. Although each enterprise has different needs, several problems overlap, including raw material availability, cost control, packaging, promotion, and access to information.

Stakeholder participation provides initial legitimacy, but sustainability requires differentiated functions. The discussion produced an initial role map: MSME actors would identify priorities and test joint activities; the cooperative would maintain member data and organize an initial service; village institutions would support recognition, facilities, and program integration; and the university would mentor and evaluate the program. A proposed routine of monthly forum meetings, an action log, and quarterly multi-stakeholder reviews translate the triple-helix framework from attendance into complementary responsibilities ([Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2018](#)). Because these roles and routines had not yet been formalized, they were reported as initiated coordination rather than completed institutional commitments.

3.2 Strengthening Understanding of Organization and Collaboration

The training presented forum governance as a practical means of coordinating interests, assigning roles, documenting decisions, and conducting activities that would be inefficient individually. The key elements were membership, management, task division, meeting schedules, communication rules, documentation, and work plans.

The evidence of learning was qualitative. Participants initially described raw material prices, cost control, packaging, promotion, and market access as individual problems. During mentoring, they regrouped them into upstream, process, and downstream needs and proposed supplier information sharing, record-keeping assistance, a shared product catalogue, and coordinated promotion. Connecting common problems with forum functions and stakeholder roles indicated stronger conceptual understanding, although the absence of pre- and post-test data prevents a quantified claim.

This reframing connects theory with practice: communication channels create structural ties, trust supports reciprocity, and the shared needs map provides a common reference ([Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998](#); [Putnam, 2000](#)). Regular problem-focused meetings can then make the forum a community of practice in which members compare methods, test solutions and document lessons ([Wenger, 1998](#)). Its sustainability depends on repeated interactions and visible mutual benefits, not merely an organizational name.

3.3 Mapping Upstream, Process, and Downstream Needs

Mentoring discussions were mapped to three groups of business problems. On the upstream side, participants faced needs related to raw materials, prices, quality, and supply continuity. At the process stage, attention is focused on production planning, quality consistency, cost control, inventory management, and business record-keeping. On the downstream side, the main needs included packaging, promotion, digital marketing, expansion of customer networks and collective marketing.

The mapping shifted the forum concept from merely a communication group to a problem-solving instrument. Information on prices and suppliers can be shared through the forum, demand for particular raw materials can be consolidated, quality practices can be learned collectively, and promotion can be conducted through a shared catalogue or collective social media. This pattern is consistent with [Liao and Welsch \(2005\)](#) finding that community support and local networks are important elements of rural entrepreneurial activity.

In record-keeping and digital marketing, the program remained in the awareness-strengthening stage rather than implementation and adoption measurement. A previous study in Majalengka Regency demonstrated the relevance of knowledge sharing and system adoption for MSME performance

(Masduki, Narimawati, & Syafe, 2024). OECD (2021); OECD (2024) also showed that technology can improve efficiency, resilience, and market reach, but these benefits require skills, mentoring, and direct links to operational problems. Therefore, the digital agenda should be implemented gradually after the forum has adequate management and member data to support it.

The proposed follow-up sequence is consistent with the comparable community service evidence. Bookkeeping assistance can make financial information more usable for village MSMEs when training is combined with direct mentoring (Fuadah, Dewi, Saftiana, & Kalsum, 2022). Business legality and ICT assistance also require continuity because short interventions may improve awareness without completing adoption (Maulana, Novalia, Yuliani, Bashir, & Putri, 2023). Programs on packaging and branding indicate that logos, product stories, packaging design, and social media communication should be developed as an integrated market proposition (Oktaviani, Niazi, Thoha, Anwar, & Prasetya, 2024), while local product development can connect agricultural resources with digital market access (Febriansyah, Oktavianus, & Nasrullah, 2023). Training in costing, packaging, and online marketing also becomes more actionable when it addresses the operating needs of specific village businesses (Sembiring, Azis, Lathifah, Khoirunissa, Fauzi, Ockta, Arienza, Hidayah, & Maulana, 2024). These comparisons reinforce the Babakan program's decision to treat record-keeping, branding, and digital promotion as a mentored implementation agenda rather than as outcomes already achieved.

3.4 Consolidation of the MSME Community Forum

This activity produced an initial shared understanding that the MSME community needed clearer arrangements. The participants gained an overview of a simple forum structure and its functions. This awareness was important because the previous program had created the beginnings of a knowledge-sharing community, while the 2026 activity was directed toward its institutionalization. Therefore, the intervention showed continuity from individual capacity building to strengthening the community system. Nevertheless, the available evidence did not show the establishment minutes, an approved membership list, a definitive management structure, operating rules, or a written work plan. Institutional achievement was therefore assessed as being at the initiation and early consolidation stages, rather than as a formally operating forum. This assessment is important to avoid over-claiming and provide a realistic direction for follow-up.

These limitations indicate that building an organization requires a social process, not merely a decision made during training. Member trust grows when the forum produces benefits that are quickly visible. Simple initial agendas, such as business data collection, supplier information sharing, or weekly promotion of a product, can serve as quick wins. After activity and trust increase, the forum can expand its agenda to joint procurement, collective record keeping, standardization, and market cooperation.

3.5 Optimizing the Role of the Merah Putih Cooperative

The discussion positioned the Merah Putih Cooperative as an umbrella institution and consolidation center for MSME services. Potential roles include providing meeting facilities, maintaining a database of business actors, procuring raw materials, recording transactions, promoting products, and connecting members with training, financing, and government programs. This position is relevant to cooperative empowerment and village cooperative acceleration policies (Government of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021; President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025).

The relationship between forums and cooperatives must be clearly differentiated. The forum functions as a space for communication, learning, and needs identification, while the cooperative provides economic services and institutional legitimacy. The village government supports facility and program integration, while the university provides knowledge and monitoring. This division of functions prevents overlap and reduces the risk that the forum will become only an organizational name without activities.

Cooperative optimization cannot yet be declared fully achieved because there is no evidence that new services were operated after training. The verifiable achievement was the formulation of a direction and a shared understanding of the cooperative's role. The next step should focus on one or two priority services suited to local capacity, such as a member database and product catalogue, before more complex services are developed.

3.6 Achievement against Program Targets

Table 2. Program achievements based on target indicators

Target	Implementation Findings	Achievement Status
Understanding of organization and collaboration	Materials, discussions, and case studies were implemented; participants obtained a framework for forum governance and its principles.	Qualitatively achieved
Stakeholder involvement	The village government, Village Consultative Body, cooperatives, village officials, implementation teams, and business actors were involved.	Achieved
Institutionalization of the MSME forum	Initial consolidation and a shared understanding were established; however, formal documents were not yet available.	Partially achieved
Data-based business management	Record-keeping, costs, and decision-making were discussed, but their application was not measured.	Awareness-strengthening stage
Collective production and marketing	Opportunities for cooperation in raw materials, quality, promotion, and markets were identified.	Initiation stage
Optimization of the cooperative	The cooperative's role as a service hub and institutional umbrella for the forum was established.	Initial coordination
Program sustainability	Follow-up directions covering formalization, regular meetings, data collection, and monitoring were conducted.	Requires implementation

Table 2 shows that the strongest immediate achievements were participant engagement, qualitative understanding, stakeholder support and needs mapping. Targets that depend on behavior or institutional operations, such as formal documents, sustained record-keeping, collective marketing, and cooperative services, were not yet measurable. The triple-helix contribution at this stage was, therefore, an initial division of responsibilities and a coordination agenda, not a demonstrated business outcome. This distinction keeps the claims evidence-based and defines what subsequent monitoring must test for.

The activity also provided a direct learning experience for the students. Students interacted with business actors, assisted with activity administration, and observed the empowerment dynamics. Their involvement strengthened experiential learning and implemented the university's community service mission. For lecturers, the activity opened opportunities to develop mentoring modules, conduct follow-up action research, and disseminate good practices grounded in the partner's needs.

3.7 Program Sustainability

At the end of the activity, the shared needs map, initial role clarification, and follow-up directions were initiated. Establishment minutes, an approved management structure, operating rules, a completed database, recurring meetings, and cooperative services have not yet been verified and are therefore future targets rather than program outcomes.

The measurable framework assigns responsibilities and time periods. Within one month, the village government and cooperative should facilitate the signing of establishment documents and a work plan. Within two months, the cooperative should record at least 19 participating businesses and compile an

initial product catalogue. The forum should hold one meeting each month, target at least 60% member attendance, and maintain minutes and an action log of the meeting. Within three months, the forum and cooperative should operate a pilot service and record its use. Every quarter, the university and local partners should review active membership, agenda realization, record-keeping adoption, and collectively promoted products to decide whether the pilot is continued, revised or expanded.

Overall, the program indicates a gradual shift from individual training to ecosystem building: the forum supports collective learning, the cooperative organizes services, the village government supplies legitimacy and facilities, and the university mentors and evaluates the process. Scheduled coordination, documented decisions, pilot services, and periodic reviews connect these functions. Figure 3 shows the participation this follow-up structure is intended to sustain.



Figure 3. Babakan Village officials, Merah Putih Cooperative management, community service team, and participants

4. Conclusions

4.1 Conclusion

The program's main contribution is a practical institutional pathway that links the MSME Forum, Merah Putih Cooperative, village institutions, and the university. Participants developed a shared map of upstream, process, and downstream needs and connected them with forum governance, cooperative services, and stakeholder responsibilities. The immediate institutional impact was stronger coordination and a clearer basis for collective action; however, the program did not demonstrate increased sales or business performance.

The practical implication is a staged route beyond one-off training: formalizing the forum, maintaining member data, holding monthly meetings, piloting one cooperative service, and reviewing progress quarterly. This mechanism turns social capital and peer learning into a documented routine. Formal documents, recurring activities, service use, and business practice adoption remain follow-up outcomes to be verified.

4.2 Research Limitations

The main limitations were the absence of pre-test, post-test, satisfaction, and adoption measures, and the lack of post-program evidence on formal documents, recurring meetings, or cooperative services. Future evaluations should collect a baseline, administer an immediate post-test and satisfaction survey, and repeat adoption checks after three and six months. Meeting minutes, database updates, record-keeping samples, service-use logs, and collective-promotion records should be used to verify whether understanding develops into sustained practice.

4.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Follow-up should prioritize the following three phases. First, the village government and cooperatives should formalize the forum, complete the initial member database, and establish monthly meetings. Second, the forum and cooperative should test one manageable service, such as supplier information sharing or a shared product catalogue, while the university provides mentoring. Third, after three and six months, partners should evaluate participation, adoption, and service use. Wider partnerships should be

pursued only after active management, documented routines, and functioning pilot services are evident.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the Babakan Village Government, the Village Consultative Body, the Merah Putih Cooperative, participating MSME actors, village officials, lecturers, and students for supporting the implementation and documentation of this community service program.

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