

## Assistance in the Development of Palm Tree-Based Creative Products as an Attraction for Agrotourism in Kekait Village

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### ABSTRACT

The village of Kekait in West Lombok Regency possesses significant potential for agro-tourism development through the utilization of sugar palm (*Arenga pinnata*) as its main commodity. However, this potential remains underdeveloped due to limited product innovation, inadequate packaging quality, and a lack of accompanying cultural narratives that can enhance product value. This community service activity aimed to increase the added value of palm-based products by facilitating design innovation and incorporating local wisdom-based storytelling. The method applied was a participatory empowerment approach, combining technical training with hands-on mentoring. Over two months, the program included practical sessions on packaging development, narrative creation, and product prototyping. The results show that the local community successfully adopted eco-friendly kraft paper packaging, designed with Sasak motifs, and implemented product labels that contained educational and cultural narratives. This intervention increased both product attractiveness and economic potential within the local tourism market. The activity concludes that culture-based empowerment can be a transformative strategy for supporting creative economies in rural areas. Further support is recommended in the form of institutional strengthening and access to digital marketing platforms to sustain and scale the initiatives.

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## Introduction

Local potential-based tourism is increasingly recognized as a strategic approach in sustainable development, especially in rural areas (Aslam et al., 2016; Md Sharif & Tuan Lonik, 2017). One of the emerging approaches is agrotourism, which integrates agricultural activities with educational tourism experiences. This model has been proven to be able to make a significant contribution to improving the local economy, preserving the environment, and empowering communities (Chase, 2019). According to the FAO report (2021), the integration of agriculture and tourism is the driving force for the village creative economy in various developing countries, with a direct impact on labor absorption and increasing the added value of agricultural products. In Indonesia, the potential for agrotourism is very large considering that 43.33% of the population lives in villages and the majority earn a living as farmers (Mansur et al., 2017; Pujiasmanto et al., 2021). However, the utilization of this potential has not been optimal due to low innovation, management skills, and product packaging that do not meet tourism industry standards.

One of the real portraits of this challenge can be seen in Kekait Village, Gunungsari District, West Lombok Regency. This village is known as one of the largest palm tree centers in the West Nusa Tenggara region, with a plantation area of more than 900 hectares and the dominance of palm plants that grow naturally and are cultivated by the community. Processed palm products such as ant sugar, tuak, kolang-kaling, and palm oil broom have long been the main livelihood of local residents. However, based on findings Haegara et al., (2025), palm-based agrotourism in this village is still not fully developed. The planned tourism activities had stalled even though they had been supported by infrastructure development worth more than 1.4 billion rupiah. Some of the main factors causing the stagnation include the limitation of product innovation, the absence of visually appealing packaging, and the lack of active role of the community in designing tour packages that are oriented towards education and tourist experiences.

Based on these problems, the gap between the great potential of Kekait Village and the realization of its acronym development is very striking. Although the community already has basic skills in processing palm trees into various products, there has been no systematic effort to develop added value through product innovation and strengthening the attraction of educational tourism. This is where the novelty of this activity lies, namely direct assistance to the community to develop creative product designs, improve packaging, raise the cultural and ecological narrative of palm trees, and integrate it in the concept of experiential tourism. This approach has never been applied comprehensively in Kekait Village, so it is an important breakthrough in encouraging the revival of local agro-tourism that was previously stagnant.

This service activity aims to provide assistance and training to the people of Kekait Village in developing creative products processed from palm trees that have tourist attractions and high selling value. The specific objectives include improving product quality and innovation, improving packaging, educational tourism narratives, and integrating products into agro-tourism packages. It is hoped that this activity will strengthen the position of Kekait Village as a leading agro-tourism destination, encourage community economic independence, and create a sustainable village economic cycle based on local potential and active participation of residents.

The main problems faced by partners are the low capacity to package products in an attractive and touristic manner, limited innovation in diversifying processed palm products, and the absence of an educational narrative that supports the agrotourism experience. In addition, local institutions such as BUMDes and community organizations have not been optimally functioned to support the promotion and management of destinations. Another challenge is the lack of integrated training that combines creative, educational, and entrepreneurial aspects. Therefore, interventions through PKM activities will be focused on improving product quality, packaging design training, tourism narrative packaging education, and the preparation of a prototype of palm tree-based tour packages, involving the community as the main actor.

## **Implementation Method**

To solve the problem of low innovation of processed palm products, weak attractiveness of packaging, and lack of integration of educational narratives in the concept of agrotourism in Kekait Village, this activity uses a participatory training-based community empowerment method combined with an experiential learning approach (Kolb, 2015). This method was chosen because it is effective in building the capacity of village communities who learn faster through direct experience rather than theoretical approaches. Participatory training-based empowerment allows residents to learn in groups, practice new skills collaboratively, and gradually form their own initiatives in developing processed palm products. In addition, this method refers to a community development approach that emphasizes social transformation through collaboration between academics, communities, and local stakeholders (Suharto, 2005).

The data collection techniques used in this activity include in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted with key figures such as palm farmers, home industry players, village officials, and BUMDes managers to delve deeper into the dynamics, needs, and potential of the community in agrotourism development. Observation is carried out actively by the service team during the training and mentoring process, aiming to observe the response, participation, and changes in community behavior to the technology and innovations introduced. Meanwhile, documentation studies are carried out on activity archives, photos,

production records, and relevant village reports. These techniques aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the local situation, not only from the technical aspects of production, but also the accompanying socio-cultural dimensions (Creswell, 2018).

The data obtained from the process was analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach, with a thematic analysis method. Each information is classified based on key themes such as product innovation, strengthening tourism narratives, and changing people's work patterns. This analysis is reflective and dialogical, where the results of the interpretation are relayed to the community through discussion forums and joint evaluations to ensure their validity and involvement in the learning process. This approach is relevant to the spirit of transformative learning, which is to make activities a two-way learning process between the companion and the community (Mezirow, 2000). The evaluation of the success of activities is not only seen from outputs such as new products, but also from the growth of community awareness and capacity to manage local potential independently and sustainably.

This activity was carried out in Kekait Village, Gunungsari District, West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, which is known as a palm tree center and a producer of traditional processed palm products. The implementation time of the activity starts from early August to the end of September 2025, with a total duration of two months. All activities are centered in community production areas, village halls, and MSME galleries that have been built by the local government. Activities are carried out every weekend and working holidays to adjust the productive time of the community, so that participation can be optimal. With a relatively time-intensive and contextual approach, this activity is expected to produce real changes in the short term and become the foundation for the development of stronger tourism villages in the future.

## **Results and Discussion**

Community service activities in Kekait Village produced several important findings that reveal limitations as well as great potential in the development of agro-tourism based on processed palm trees. One of the main findings is that the community already has strong traditional skills in processing derivative products from palm trees, such as ant sugar, sweet tuak, kolang-kaling, and palm oil broom. However, they face difficulties in packaging these products attractively and marketably in the context of modern tourism. The packaging that has been used so far is generally made of plain plastic, banana leaves, or recycling containers without labels, which are not only less visually appealing but also prone to damage and contamination. This condition is in accordance with the findings of Septivianti (2023) and Dwilestari (2025) who stated that packaging has an important role in shaping the perception of product value, especially in a competitive tourism market. Therefore, the focus of the activity is directed to the development of product packaging

innovations based on biodegradable kraft paper materials with visual designs that represent Kekait's local identity, such as Sasak weaving motifs and palm tree symbols.

In addition to packaging, another dimension found is the lack of narrative or story that accompanies the product. The majority of people only sell products as "palm sugar" or "tuak" without explaining the manufacturing process, the uniqueness of the culture, or the historical value that comes with it. In fact, in the context of agrotourism, tourists tend to look for an authentic experience with educational value. In this activity, the service team facilitated the community to design a product narrative through a storytelling approach, which is to explain how the product is produced, who produces it, and what cultural values are contained in it. This narrative is then expressed in product labels and simple promotional materials. These findings support the research results of Yodsurang et al (2022), Dahles (2015) and Ashworth (2003), who stated that local product narratives are an important differentiator in the community-based tourism industry because they create an emotional connection between tourists and producers.

As a service output, this activity results in increasing the capacity of the community in packaging and marketing products in a more attractive way, as well as a new understanding of the importance of building narratives as part of educational tourism strategies. Meanwhile, the output of the goods produced was in the form of a prototype of new packaging for ant sugar and kolang-kaling in the form of standing pouches in sizes of 250 and 500 grams, complete with a label that listed the product name, origin of the ingredient, date of production, and a QR link to a simple educational video. In terms of technical specifications, the packaging is designed to be moisture-resistant, eco-friendly, and resealable, making it suitable for tropical climatic conditions and meeting the preferences of modern travelers. This innovation not only improves the aesthetics of the product, but also boosts the selling value by 25–35% based on local market simulations. These findings are in line with the study of Azisi and Rosi (2025), which showed that small interventions in the product design aspect can have a significant economic impact on the scale of the village community.

However, this activity also revealed several important challenges. One of them is the limited public access to packaging materials and production tools, because most distributors are only available in big cities such as Mataram or Surabaya. In addition, the initial resistance of some citizens to the use of modern packaging became an obstacle in itself, as they considered it a "foreign" form that did not conform to tradition. To overcome this, the team carried out a cultural approach through visual-based dialogue and counseling, such as showing examples of packaging from other tourist villages that successfully combined tradition and innovation. This transformation of thinking took time and an empathetic approach, but it eventually yielded results in the gradual adoption of new packaging by local artisan groups. This condition supports Mezirow's (2000) view of

transformative learning, which is a change in people's mindset that occurs when they experience a dissonance between old habits and new realities that are more effective.

The difficulty level of implementing this activity lies in time constraints and limited manpower. The majority of the people of Kekait Village are active farmers who work from morning to evening, so training can only be carried out at night or on weekends. This requires flexibility from the implementation team, including in compiling a concise but concise training module. Another challenge is the involvement of the younger generation who tend to be more mobile and less interested in village-based activities. However, this is also a strategic opportunity to encourage the digitalization of village product promotion through the role of the younger generation, both those who still live in the village and those who are migrating. The Kekait Diaspora, especially students and youth outside the village, can be activated to support product branding through social media and simple digital platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp Business. These findings strengthen the argument of Adrevi et al (2025) that successful tourism village empowerment requires cross-generational integration and technology as the main lever.

Overall, this activity shows that simple interventions based on local contexts can result in real transformation at the community scale. The participatory empowerment model, combined with the strengthening of cultural narratives and product design innovations, has provided solutions that are not only technical, but also social and cultural. This success opens up opportunities for replication to other villages with similar local commodity potential, especially those that are in the process of becoming independent tourism villages. These findings are not only relevant in the context of agrotourism development, but also in strengthening the creative economy based on tradition and local identity.

## Conclusion

Community service activities carried out in Kekait Village have succeeded in achieving the target optimally, marked by increasing the capacity of the community to package, market, and build a narrative of processed palm tree products as part of the local agro-tourism development strategy. The main problems identified from the beginning, namely the low added value of products due to unsaleable packaging and the absence of cultural narratives, have been successfully answered through participatory empowerment methods based on contextual technical and educational training. This method has proven to be appropriate and in harmony with the needs and social characteristics of the local community, especially because it provides a flexible, applicative, and rooted learning space in local wisdom. The real impact of this activity can be seen in the formation of product prototypes with new packaging and narratives that are more attractive and have a higher selling value, as well as the growth of collective awareness of residents on the importance of product identity in supporting tourism



villages. As a recommendation for the next PKM activities, it is necessary to strengthen village economic institutions such as BUMDes and Pokdarwis as product and promotion managers, as well as expand the distribution network through the use of digital technology so that these creative palm tree-based products can penetrate a wider market in a sustainable manner

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