

## Community-Based Business Planning for Transgender Women's Economic Empowerment

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**Keywords:** Community Engagement; Economic Empowerment; Transgender Women; Sustainable Livelihoods.

**Abstract.** This community engagement program was implemented by a team of lecturers and students from Darma Cendika Catholic University in collaboration with PERWAKOS (the Surabaya Association of Transgender Women). The program aimed to promote economic empowerment among transgender women by identifying entrepreneurial potential, examining structural barriers, and formulating realistic recommendations for sustainable livelihood development. The findings indicate that all participants expressed strong interest in engaging in small-scale entrepreneurial activities, particularly in the beauty, retail, and culinary sectors. However, this interest was constrained by several challenges, including limited financial literacy, lack of prior business experience, low levels of intra-community trust, and persistent social stigma. The program produced several tangible outputs, including a documented needs assessment involving 20 community members, the identification of priority business sectors, and consensus-based recommendations for future capacity-building initiatives. Based on these findings, the program recommends that subsequent community engagement efforts prioritize basic financial management training, structured business plan development, and psychosocial support to enhance self-confidence and collective commitment. In addition, facilitating access to inclusive microfinance schemes and strengthening partnerships with supportive institutions are essential to addressing structural barriers. Overall, this program demonstrates that context-sensitive community engagement can serve as an effective foundation for fostering economic self-reliance and organizational strengthening within marginalized transgender communities.

**Katakunci:**  
Pemberdayaan  
Ekonomi; Keterlibatan  
Masyarakat;  
Perempuan  
Transgender;  
Penghidupan  
Berkelanjutan.

**Abstrak.** Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini dilaksanakan oleh tim dosen dan mahasiswa Universitas Katolik Darma Cendika bekerja sama dengan PERWAKOS (Perkumpulan Waria Kota Surabaya). Program ini bertujuan untuk mendorong pemberdayaan ekonomi perempuan transgender melalui identifikasi potensi kewirausahaan, pengkajian hambatan struktural, serta perumusan rekomendasi yang realistik untuk pengembangan penghidupan berkelanjutan. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa seluruh peserta

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memiliki minat yang tinggi untuk terlibat dalam usaha skala kecil, khususnya di sektor jasa kecantikan, usaha ritel, dan kuliner. Namun, minat tersebut masih dibatasi oleh berbagai kendala, antara lain rendahnya literasi keuangan, keterbatasan pengalaman berwirausaha, rendahnya tingkat kepercayaan di dalam komunitas, serta stigma sosial yang masih kuat. Program ini menghasilkan beberapa luaran konkret, yaitu dokumen asesmen kebutuhan yang melibatkan 20 anggota komunitas, identifikasi sektor usaha prioritas, serta rekomendasi berbasis konsensus untuk intervensi penguatan kapasitas di masa mendatang. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, program merekomendasikan agar kegiatan pengabdian selanjutnya memprioritaskan pelatihan dasar manajemen keuangan, penyusunan rencana bisnis secara terstruktur, serta dukungan psikososial guna meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dan komitmen kolektif. Selain itu, fasilitasi akses terhadap skema pembiayaan mikro yang inklusif dan penguatan kemitraan dengan institusi pendukung dinilai penting untuk mengurangi hambatan struktural. Secara keseluruhan, program ini menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan pengabdian masyarakat yang peka terhadap konteks dapat menjadi fondasi efektif dalam mendorong kemandirian ekonomi dan penguatan organisasi pada komunitas perempuan transgender yang terpinggirkan.

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## 1 Introduction

Transgender women, or *transpuan*, represent a segment of society that consistently faces complex, multilayered social, economic, and structural challenges (Wesp et al., 2019). In Indonesia, despite the emergence of various social movements advocating for inclusion and the rights of vulnerable groups, *transpuan* remain one of the most significantly socially excluded populations. Discrimination in access to formal education, decent employment, healthcare services, and civil rights continues to shape the structural vulnerabilities of this community (UNDP, 2024; Winter et al., 2016). As (Nasution et al., 2024) argue, sustainable development approaches must be grounded in participatory local empowerment, enabling communities to independently mobilize their assets and capacities(Fatih & Hakim, 2023).

PERWAKOS (*Persatuan Waria Kota Surabaya or Surabaya Association of Transgender Women*), a community-based organization of transgender women in Surabaya, serves as a space for solidarity and collective organizing among its members. However, in fulfilling its role as

a grassroots organization, PERWAKOS faces several critical challenges that hinder its effectiveness and outreach in promoting the economic and social empowerment of its members. (Utami et al., 2023). Recent empirical studies indicate that transgender women in Indonesia experience disproportionately high economic and social marginalization compared to other vulnerable populations. A national survey conducted by UNDP and USAID (2022) revealed that over 70% of transgender women in major urban centers do not possess stable income sources, and more than 60% lack access to formal employment due to identity-based discrimination. In East Java, a study by Kurniawan et al. (2023) found that transgender women are four times more likely to live below the regional poverty threshold and have limited access to public services such as healthcare and housing facilities. While previous research has primarily examined stigma, identity politics, or legal discrimination toward gender minority groups (Winter et al., 2016; Boellstorff, 2019), relatively few studies have explicitly focused on financial literacy, economic planning, and community-driven business development pathways for transgender communities in Indonesia. This creates a gap that the present community service program seeks to address, by exploring participatory economic empowerment strategies specifically tailored to PERWAKOS, a highly marginalized trans women community with distinct organizational characteristics and localized socio-economic realities.

The decision to conduct this community engagement program (PKM) with PERWAKOS was based on long-term academic and institutional collaboration between the research team and the community since 2024. During preliminary visits and informal consultations, community leaders expressed specific concerns related to economic survival and the lack of structured support in building sustainable livelihoods. This made PERWAKOS a relevant and urgent partner for a participatory economic empowerment initiative.

From an institutional perspective, PERWAKOS operates with extremely limited financial resources. The absence of stable funding and limited access to alternative financing mechanisms has resulted in a heavy reliance on ad hoc programs, social assistance, and volunteer-

based support (Benedicta et al., 2025). This financial fragility not only restricts the scope of empowerment initiatives but also affects the professionalism of organizational management, particularly in terms of long-term planning and institutional documentation systems. At the same time, members of the Surabaya Association of Transgender Women (PERWAKOS) navigate these structural constraints by developing varied survival strategies within the informal economy. Preliminary discussions reveal that informal work—such as salon services, street performance, or sex work—functions not solely as a constrained option due to economic necessity, but also as a form of social flexibility that allows members to negotiate identity, time, and safety in environments that remain hostile to transgender women. This duality highlights an important analytical distinction between choice and constraint: informal work becomes a livelihood strategy that provides immediate income and social autonomy, yet simultaneously reinforces long-term economic precarity by limiting access to capital, institutional support, and stable employment pathways. Incorporating this lens of adaptive agency provides a more critical understanding of how economic inequality intersects with gender identity, social stigma, and access to institutional resources in everyday life.

In terms of membership, most PERWAKOS members rely on precarious forms of informal employment such as sex work, street performance, or low-paid jobs in beauty salons. This dependence is not necessarily a matter of free choice but often stems from necessity, due to a lack of access to formal education, vocational skills, and socially recognized work experience. As noted by (Asadi et al., 2020), women's economic vulnerability in the informal sector is often exacerbated by social structures that exclude them from access to capital, training, and market networks.

Preliminary consultations with PERWAKOS leadership revealed that many members lack basic entrepreneurial and financial management skills. The majority have no savings, have never operated a business, and possess very limited experience with economic planning. To date, no recorded community engagement or academic program has specifically addressed financial literacy, business planning, or economic

management within PERWAKOS. Existing support has largely focused on social inclusion, health issues, or short-term welfare assistance. This presents a critical gap for intervention.

Moreover, PERWAKOS does not yet possess a strategic roadmap or long-term institutional plan. This underscores the novelty of the present PKM, which seeks not only to identify entrepreneurial potential but also to build a structured economic empowerment framework through interviews, focus group discussions, and business planning assistance.

Community engagement initiatives targeting marginalized groups such as transgender communities remain scarce within academic practice in Indonesia. Existing community service programs directed toward marginalized populations tend to adopt a top-down orientation, often focusing on short-term technical training with limited participatory processes and little to no structured sustainability planning (Mutriana et al., 2023; Sarmauli et al., 2024). Such approaches frequently fail to address the underlying issues experienced by these communities—such as social alienation, economic dependency, and the lack of recognition for their capacity to lead and effect change in their own lives (Handayani & Rahman, 2024).

In contrast, international literature has advanced various models of community empowerment based on active participation, including the Community Empowerment Approach (Coy et al., 2021) and Participatory Action Research (Cornish et al., 2023). These models position the community as the central actor in articulating needs, designing solutions, and evaluating the impact of interventions. However, the adoption of such approaches within the practice of community service in Indonesia—particularly in the context of transgender populations—remains rare and underrepresented in scholarly publications and official service reports.

This community engagement initiative introduces novelty on two key fronts. First, in terms of methodology, it applies a hybrid model combining in-depth qualitative interviewing and collective strategic reflection through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This approach enables a dynamic linkage between individual narratives and organizational-level decision-making. It responds to critiques of conventional community engagement practices that disproportionately

emphasize individual training without embedding findings into long-term institutional strategies (Shalowitz et al., 2009).

Second, in terms of target population and the role of academics, this initiative deliberately reconfigures the position of faculty and the university team—not merely as facilitators of training, but as co-investigators in interpreting the lived realities of the community. This reconceptualization promotes a more equitable power relationship between "providers" and "recipients" of intervention, aligning with the principles of mutual learning in empowerment efforts (Asadi et al., 2020). The community is encouraged not only to serve as subjects of the initiative, but also to become owners of the data, authors of the analysis, and agents of decision-making.

Additional novelty is evident in the locality and specificity of the issues addressed. The transpuan community in Surabaya, represented by PERWAKOS, occupies an intersection of socio-economic precarity, gender identity discrimination, and limited access to formal resources. This engagement project offers a contextually grounded good practice in designing needs-based interventions that not only deliver skills but also build a collective foundation for the community's long-term economic and social sustainability.

This community engagement initiative is led by a team comprising a permanent faculty member from the Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics, Universitas Katolik Darma Cendika (UKDC) Surabaya, who serves as the project leader. The faculty member possesses academic expertise in strategic management and community empowerment, and has extensive experience in designing and implementing participatory, community-based service programs. The initiative also involves one administrative staff member from the university and two students from the Management Study Program, who actively participate in all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Their involvement simultaneously contributes to achieving the university's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) 2—"students gaining experiential learning outside campus"—through socially recognized and program-relevant humanitarian activities (Nugroho et al., 2024).

This engagement also functions as a contextual learning platform for students to develop social competencies, empathy, and the application of management knowledge in complex real-world situations. Students do not merely act as technical executors but also serve as field companions who engage directly with the target community—specifically, the trans women group organized under PERWAKOS. Through this direct interaction, students are expected to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-economic dynamics of marginalized populations and to cultivate inclusive, solution-oriented perspectives in community empowerment contexts.

Substantively, this initiative carries significant strategic value in supporting the economic self-reliance of the PERWAKOS community. Through a needs-based approach grounded in qualitative data from in-depth interviews and FGDs, and through collaborative formulation of future business plans, this program aspires to establish a solid foundation for designing more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable economic empowerment strategies. The initiative aims not only to strengthen the economic standing of individual members but also to enhance PERWAKOS's institutional capacity, including in building external partnerships and designing a more structured organizational roadmap.

Thus, this community service project constitutes both a concrete contribution to capacity building and a transformational effort to create a safe, productive, and dignified space for trans women in the city of Surabaya. Through close collaboration between academia and grassroots community organizations, this initiative aspires to foster meaningful and long-term social change.

## 2 Method

This community engagement program employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, emphasizing active collaboration between the service team and the PERWAKOS community. The PAR framework adopted in this program refers to the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), which conceptualizes engagement as a cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This approach was selected to ensure that community members were

positioned not merely as beneficiaries, but as active partners and co-researchers who collectively shaped the direction and outcomes of the program.

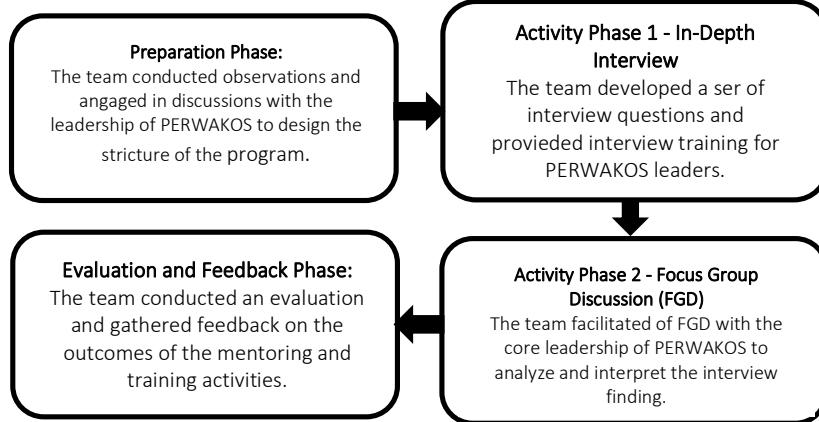


Figure 1. Stages of Community Service Activities

The PAR process was implemented through four interconnected stages: (1) participatory needs identification through in-depth interviews; (2) collective interpretation of findings through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD); (3) joint formulation of strategic actions and program priorities; and (4) reflective evaluation to inform subsequent cycles of engagement. These stages correspond directly to the core PAR cycle and enabled continuous learning, contextual adaptation, and shared decision-making throughout the program.

The preparation phase focused on realigning the program design through intensive communication with PERWAKOS leadership conducted via both online and offline meetings. This stage represented the planning phase of the initial PAR cycle, particularly after the original plan for online business mentoring was found to be misaligned with community interests and capacities. During this phase, the team developed a context-sensitive in-depth interview guide and prepared a conceptual framework for the FGD to facilitate collective analysis following data collection. Logistical planning and coordination with key community actors were also completed at this stage.

The first activity phase consisted of in-depth interviews with PERWAKOS members, conducted by the community's own leadership to

ensure trust and accessibility. Within the PAR framework, this phase encompassed the action and observation components of the cycle, in which data were generated through direct, community-led engagement. The service team provided brief guidance on gender-sensitive interviewing and supplied a standardized interview instrument to ensure consistency. The interviews explored members' entrepreneurial interests, perceived capacities, and structural barriers to economic participation, forming the basis for participatory needs mapping.

The second activity phase involved a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with PERWAKOS leadership, facilitated by the service team. This phase represented the reflection stage of the PAR cycle, where interview findings were collectively interpreted and translated into strategic directions. An Appreciative Inquiry approach was employed to emphasize community strengths, existing assets, and feasible opportunities rather than deficits alone. The FGD resulted in consensus-based recommendations regarding priority business sectors, basic management training needs, and initial sustainability strategies.

The final phase was designated as evaluation and follow-up planning, marking the completion of the first PAR cycle and providing direction for subsequent actions. Evaluation was conducted through an online reflective session with PERWAKOS leadership, complemented by short feedback questionnaires focusing on perceived benefits, participation levels, and methodological relevance. The outcomes of this phase identified two priority areas for the next cycle: basic financial management training and structured assistance in business plan development and access to inclusive microfinance schemes. The program was implemented over a four-month period (March–June 2025) with the participation of 20 PERWAKOS members and was carried out by a faculty member from the Management Study Program at Darma Cendika Catholic University, supported by two undergraduate management students, while positioning the community as the central actor in its own empowerment process.

### 3 Results

The Community Service Program implemented in collaboration with PERWAKOS (the Association of Trans Women in Surabaya) produced a number of concrete outcomes directly related to strengthening the community's economic capacity and internal organizational development. These outcomes were generated through a series of participatory activities that actively involved both community members and organizational leaders, ensuring that the findings reflect real conditions, actual needs, and existing potentials that can be developed sustainably.

Concretely, the program succeeded in mapping the business conditions of PERWAKOS members. Most members were found to have prior experience in micro-enterprises, either currently operating or previously undertaken, particularly in the fields of salon and beauty services, home-based food businesses, small grocery shops, and small-scale beverage and coffee stalls. This mapping demonstrates that the community does not start from a position of inexperience but possesses social capital and practical skills that can be further developed. However, the program also clearly identified that these businesses tend to operate informally, without financial record-keeping, medium-term business planning, or access to adequate capital, and are largely dependent on limited personal resources.

Table 1. Results of the PERWAKOS Community Service Program

Outcome Aspect	Key Findings (Concrete Results)	Implications for Empowerment
Member Business Mapping	Most members have experience in micro-enterprises (beauty services, food, small shops, coffee stalls), but operate informally	Basis for selecting realistic, experience-based priority sectors
Entrepreneurial Motivation	Strong motivation to achieve economic independence and social	Indicates readiness for further mentoring programs

		recognition through self-employment		
Financial Management Capacity	Low financial literacy, no bookkeeping, and no separation of personal and business finances	Confirms financial management training as a key intervention	basic	
Business Planning Skills	Limited ability to prepare written business plans and identify targets, risks, and capital needs	Justifies business mentoring	practical plan	
Social-Structural Challenges	Social stigma, limited business networks, and low trust in collective enterprises	Highlights the need for gradual and psychosocial empowerment	approaches	
Organizational Awareness	Increased awareness among PERWAKOS leaders of economic empowerment as an organizational agenda	Strengthens the organization's role as a driver of member empowerment		
Development Strategy Agreement	Agreement to prioritize individual businesses in familiar sectors	Reduces risks of conflict and business failure		
Program Evaluation	Participants perceived the program as relevant and beneficial	Provides legitimacy for program sustainability	social	
Follow-up Agenda	Two priority actions agreed: financial training and business planning assistance	Ensures clear, measurable, and sustainable follow-up	programs	

Another key outcome of the program was the identification of capacity gaps in business management. Community members generally lack sufficient understanding of basic financial management, including recording income and expenses, separating personal and business

finances, and managing cash flow. In addition, most members are not accustomed to preparing written business plans, which limits their ability to monitor business progress and access external sources of funding. These findings provide a strong empirical basis for designing practical and application-oriented training programs.



Figure 3. Preparation and Preliminary Meetings with PERWAKOS Core Team

At the organizational level, the program revealed an increased collective awareness among PERWAKOS leaders regarding the importance of the organization's role in supporting the economic independence of its members. Through focused group discussions, it became evident that previous economic empowerment efforts had been sporadic and not yet integrated into the organization's strategic agenda. The program encouraged community leaders to view economic strengthening as an integral part of organizational development rather than as a supplementary activity. This shift in perspective was reflected in the emergence of a commitment to design more structured and sustainable mentoring schemes for members who demonstrate interest and readiness to engage in entrepreneurship.

Another concrete outcome was the establishment of an internal consensus regarding the direction of community-based business development. Based on collective discussions and reflections, it was

agreed that business development efforts would focus on sectors already mastered by members and characterized by relatively stable market opportunities. It was also agreed that a gradual approach should be adopted, beginning with individual capacity strengthening before promoting collective enterprises, in order to minimize the risk of internal conflict and to build mutual trust among members. This consensus serves as an initial foundation for developing a more realistic and context-sensitive economic empowerment model.

The program also generated positive changes in terms of participation and a sense of community ownership. The active involvement of PERWAKOS members and leaders in data collection, problem analysis, and the formulation of follow-up actions fostered a shared sense of responsibility for program sustainability. The community no longer perceived the community service initiative merely as an external intervention, but rather as a collaborative process that they could continue and develop independently with appropriate facilitation.

The evaluation and feedback stage further reinforced the program's achievements by producing two operational follow-up agendas: (1) micro-enterprise financial management training focused on simple bookkeeping and cash flow management, and (2) mentoring in business plan development for members who already operate businesses or intend to start new ones. These agendas were jointly identified as the most urgent and realistic needs for improving business sustainability among members. Thus, the outcomes of the program extend beyond problem mapping to provide clear and actionable directions for subsequent community service initiatives.

Overall, the results of this Community Service Program demonstrate that a participatory approach can generate concrete and meaningful outcomes, ranging from mapping business potentials and challenges, enhancing organizational awareness, to formulating measurable empowerment agendas. The program serves as an important foundation for inclusive and sustainable economic strengthening within the PERWAKOS community, while simultaneously reinforcing the organization's role as a key actor in the empowerment of its members.

#### 4 Discussion

The findings of this Community Service Program demonstrate the critical importance of employing a participatory, community-centered approach when working with marginalized gender minority communities. Rather than merely documenting needs, the program progressively facilitated collaborative meaning-making between the service team and members of PERWAKOS (the Association of Trans Women in Surabaya). This approach aligns with the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR), which argues that solutions are most effective when knowledge production and decision-making authority are shared equitably between academics and community stakeholders (Shalowitz et al., 2009). The participatory structure—beginning with in-depth interviews followed by collective reflection through focus group discussion—enabled community members to articulate their priorities and to engage in early-stage planning for economic initiatives based on lived experience rather than externally imposed assumptions.

Furthermore, the cyclical nature of the intervention design reflects the logic of action research, where planning, action, observation, and reflection function as iterative steps aimed at continuous improvement and adaptive learning (Coy et al., 2021). This methodological choice is particularly salient in contexts such as PERWAKOS, where conditions of economic precarity, internal trust deficits, and social stigma require flexible and responsive programming. Rather than approaching the community with a fixed training model, the shift away from the initial plan for online business development toward identifying feasible offline business models illustrates a process of methodological adjustment grounded in empirical engagement. Thus, the results of this program provide evidence that participatory, adaptive, and iterative methods are not merely desirable, but necessary in supporting empowerment pathways among structurally marginalized populations.

#### Challenges, Constraints, and Strategic Responses

Throughout the implementation of the Community Engagement Program with the PERWAKOS transgender community, the project team

encountered a range of challenges reflecting the social, psychological, and structural complexities faced by the community.

The first major challenge was the low level of social cohesion and trust among community members. During in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, it became evident that there were significant barriers to building strong internal solidarity. Several participants expressed concerns about potential conflicts and a lack of experience in collaborative work. This lack of mutual trust emerged as a critical barrier to designing group-based training and mentoring programs. To address this issue, the project team adopted a strategy of forming small groups based on members' interests and demonstrated commitment (as identified during the interview phase). These groups were supported through reflective sessions and open dialogues aimed at fostering collective awareness and a stronger sense of ownership toward the program (Coy et al., 2021).

The second challenge was the low level of business literacy and financial management capacity among community members. While nearly all participants expressed an interest in launching microenterprises—such as beauty salons, coffee stalls, convenience shops, or culinary ventures—most lacked the foundational knowledge required for effective business operations, including financial planning, cash flow management, and daily business administration. To address this gap, the team designed a contextualized and hands-on training plan, using practice-based learning approaches and simple visual instructional materials tailored to the participants' literacy levels and learning styles (Nugroho et al., 2024).

The third and most fundamental challenge involved the persistent social stigma and discrimination experienced by the transgender community in Surabaya. This stigma limits their access to public facilities, government support schemes, and opportunities to secure business premises or financing from formal institutions. To mitigate these structural barriers, the team pursued strategic partnerships with inclusive entities such as community-based cooperatives, NGOs specializing in gender and social inclusion, and businesses with robust corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Additionally, the team

developed a public communication strategy that highlights the positive achievements of the PERWAKOS community to improve their societal image and expand public acceptance (Winter et al., 2016).

In addition to these substantive challenges, the program also encountered technical constraints, notably limited implementation time and human resources within the community engagement team. Given the program's relatively short duration and the community's broad geographic spread, not all members could participate in every session. To overcome this, the team implemented a participant selection strategy based on interest and readiness, while also nurturing community representatives to serve as internal change agents. This approach aimed to foster program sustainability beyond the formal mentoring period.

Overall, these challenges were not merely obstacles but also served as essential reference points for designing more relevant, adaptive, and sustainable intervention strategies. Upholding participatory principles and emphasizing local capacity building, the program was oriented toward generating long-term impact by enhancing the economic potential and strengthening the social position of the PERWAKOS community within the broader society (Muttiara et al., 2023).

### **Benefits of the Mentoring Program**

The mentoring activities conducted as part of the Community Engagement Program with the PERWAKOS transgender community have yielded significant benefits for both the target community and the implementing team. For the PERWAKOS community, the initiative served as both a reflective and productive space to explore their latent entrepreneurial potential, challenges, and opportunities—areas that had previously remained unaddressed in a systematic manner. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), community members gained a clearer understanding of their individual and collective capacities and began to envision realistic opportunities to establish micro-enterprises aligned with their interests and skills. This aligns with the concept of *community empowerment*, which emphasizes the importance of critical awareness and collective capability as foundations for social transformation (Asadi et al., 2020).

Another important benefit was the increased self-confidence and motivation among community members in envisioning a more independent economic future. Throughout the mentoring process, they received not only technical support—such as interview tools, FGD frameworks, and basic training modules in business management—but also psychosocial reinforcement through the presence and support of external actors who recognized and respected their dignity and personhood. This dimension is critical to social inclusion, as engagement in productive activities can restore self-worth and enhance the social standing of marginalized communities (Winter et al., 2016).

From the perspective of the implementation team, the mentoring program provided valuable insights into the importance of participatory approaches and the need for sensitivity to the socio-cultural context of the target population. The team experienced firsthand how program design must be flexible, responsive to field dynamics, and consistently grounded in the voices of the community at every stage of decision-making. This deepened the team's understanding of community engagement principles grounded in social justice and cross-sector collaboration (Winter et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the initiative reinforced the synergy between academia and society, demonstrating how management science and social empowerment strategies can converge in meaningful, real-world applications. The mentoring program stands as a concrete example of how academic expertise can directly address community needs while enriching scholarly discourse in the field of transformative, practice-based engagement. With tangible benefits experienced by both beneficiaries and implementers, this initiative is expected to serve as the foundation for a long-term, sustainable partnership with broader social impact.

## 5 Conclusion

This Community Engagement Program with PERWAKOS in Surabaya has demonstrated that participatory, context-responsive methods can effectively support early-stage economic empowerment among marginalized transgender communities. The mapping of

community needs through interviews and focus group discussions revealed strong entrepreneurial interest but limited managerial capacity, financial literacy, and intra-community trust. Based on these findings, the primary recommendation for the continuation of this program is to focus on targeted mentoring in two critical areas: (1) basic financial management training to build fundamental business competencies, and (2) structured guidance in business plan development to prepare members for accessing micro-financing schemes, cooperative funding, or inclusive banking services. Future activities should also prioritize psychosocial support mechanisms to strengthen self-confidence and internal social cohesion, as well as strategic partnership building with inclusive institutions to reduce stigma-related barriers. These measures are expected to create more sustainable pathways for economic independence and institutional strengthening for PERWAKOS, moving beyond preliminary community readiness toward actionable and long-term implementation.

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