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The Role of Academics as Agents of Change in Accelerating Rural Community Development

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Abstract

This community service activity aims to increase community participation in village development in Tabiku Village, Seruyan Raya District, Seruyan Regency, through program-based approaches such as community skills training in the agricultural sector, tourism potential development, and increasing health awareness. The implementation method applied in this service activity was Participatory Action Research (PAR), beginning with preparation, observation, training, and mentoring. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation methods. The results of the activity indicate a positive response and high active participation from the community in implementing the jointly designed programs. Although some activities were not carried out exactly as planned due to adjustments to village conditions, the programs were implemented smoothly and effectively. The conclusion of this community service activity is that collaboration with the village government has been quite effective in enhancing village development. The recommendation from this activity is the need for synergy among the village government, the private sector, and the local community to increase awareness and concern for sustainable village development.

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INTRODUCTION

As a higher education institution, UIN Palangka Raya has the responsibility to implement the *Tri Dharma of Higher Education*, which includes education and teaching, research, and community service. These responsibilities are carried out in various forms, one of which is community service (Agustina et al., 2021). Community service holds a unique and distinctive position in higher education because it has multiple roles and functions. It integrates all aspects of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education. Community service activities aim to implement theories and concepts learned in academic settings into real-life community contexts (Kurniasih, 2021).

This community service activity was motivated by issues occurring in Tabiku Village. It began with the low level of community awareness and participation in village development, as well as limited knowledge in managing existing natural resources. These challenges encouraged the service team to conduct community service activities.

In fact, Tabiku Village has abundant natural resource potential that could generate significant value if managed properly. With fertile land, a beautiful lake, and strong community networks, the village possesses considerable development potential. This

community service program aimed to stimulate the community through collaboration between lecturers and students, thereby contributing positively to the local community (Abadi et al., 2022). Since lecturers and students live and interact directly with the community, the implementation of service activities must provide tangible benefits (Oktavia & Yuniarti, 2022).

Community empowerment is an effort to increase community participation in meeting daily needs and solving local problems based on local wisdom and potential. It also involves improving skills through training in sustainable resource management (Misra & Sadikin, 2023). Community empowerment models have been widely implemented, including community-based approaches (Oktavia & Yuniarti, 2022). Synergy among village officials, students, and community members is one of the key factors for successful program implementation (Abadi et al., 2022). Higher education institutions serve as primary instruments in developing creative and innovative human resources. Through the Tri Dharma—education, research, and community service—knowledge development is framed and implemented through service activities (Hatibe et al., 2021)

In Tabiku Village, several private companies operate in the plantation industry. However, community awareness of village development remains relatively low. Given this situation, community service activities become a strategic and essential step (Achmad et al., 2022). Through these activities, higher education institutions act not only as academic institutions but also as agents of social change that support development based on real community needs.

Community service enables students to gain direct experience regarding social, economic, and cultural dynamics in rural areas, while also developing critical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and problem-solving skills (Krisnawati & Farid Ma'ruf, 2016). For the community and village officials, this activity provides opportunities for assistance in formulating and implementing development programs, fostering awareness and self-reliance, and increasing active participation in village development (Syukriah & Reston, 2025). For higher education institutions, community service serves as feedback to align curriculum and scientific development with real community needs, while strengthening synergy with other institutions (Piar et al., 2020). Thus, community service represents a tangible manifestation of higher education institutions' social responsibility in accelerating village development and improving community welfare (Anwar, 2021).

The main objective of this community service program was to increase community awareness in Tabiku Village regarding village development. The primary focus was to build a mindset that encourages active participation in development processes (Somantri et al., 2024). To address low community awareness, the service team introduced alternative programs aimed at broadening community perspectives on the importance of direct involvement in development. Key areas included optimizing plantation plasma and agricultural resources, improving tourism infrastructure, and conducting health education programs (Achmad et al., 2022).

METHOD

The community empowerment activities conducted in Tabiku Village in 2025 employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, beginning with preparation, observation, training, and mentoring (Boari et al., 2024). Preparation began with mapping and observing the village area, followed by determining training and mentoring programs that directly involved the community (Khasanah, 2024). The process consisted of four main stages: namely, experiencing (direct engagement in action), expressing (sharing impressions and findings), processing and analyzing (analyzing data derived from experiences), and concluding and applying (formulating sustainable solutions).

Evaluation considered strengths, weaknesses, and shortcomings of implemented actions, while ensuring sustainability through collective commitment (Khoiruddin et al., 2023). The activities included socialization programs, tourism potential development, and empowerment initiatives for village farmers. The program was conducted over three months, from July to September 2025. The main targets were community members and farmers in Tabiku Village.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tabiku Village is administratively part of Seruyan Regency, Seruyan Raya District. It borders Bangkal Village to the north, Sembuluh I and II Villages to the south, Lake Sembuluh to the west, and Pondok Damar to the east. The village covers an area of 102 square kilometers, characterized mainly by lowlands and swamp areas along the banks of Lake Sembuluh.

Most of the village area is controlled by large private oil palm plantations. The entire village territory is included in land-use rights (HGU) managed by three palm oil companies: Kerry Sawit Indonesia (KSI), PT Salonok Ladang Mas (PT SLM), and PT Hamparan Mas Bumi Persada.

In implementing empowerment activities, students and lecturers conducted mapping to identify development challenges in Tabiku Village. This involved environmental observation, discussions with community members, and field visits to various locations within the village. Based on collected data, the team determined three flagship programs: (1) seed planting initiatives, (2) maintenance of tourism areas, and (3) empowerment of health cadres. These programs were identified as priority needs based on data analysis results.

Most residents of Tabiku Village are farmers who utilize fertile land to plant corn and vegetables, as well as fruits such as watermelon. These agricultural activities contribute to community empowerment by utilizing local natural resources to improve economic conditions. The agricultural empowerment program implemented by UIN Palangka Raya included training on proper corn seed planting techniques, appropriate fertilization methods considering soil conditions, and distribution of polybags as planting media for seed cultivation. Figure 1 shows some activities with the farmers in Tabiku Village.

Figure 1 Agricultural empowerment activities with farmers in Tabiku Village

The planting activities carried out jointly by the service team and the community were perceived as beneficial, particularly for the farmers in Tabiku Village. However, during implementation, several challenges were encountered, such as relatively high rainfall. Various efforts were made to ensure that the activity provided tangible benefits to the community, and after several months, farmers were able to harvest their crops, although still on a limited scale. Activities such as this greatly assisted the community.

Furthermore, community empowerment in Tabiku Village was also carried out through tourism development to improve the local economy. The management of a tourism village based on local potential requires awareness and active community participation in continuously developing the village area in innovative and creative ways. Tabiku Village, Seruyan Regency, has the potential to become a tourist destination, providing economic benefits to the surrounding community while also improving human resource capacity in managing and developing village tourism potential.

The service team provided mentoring on how tourism potential could be optimally utilized. Although Tabiku Village is not a coastal area, it has significant natural potential in the form of a beautiful lake and reservoir. The service team and the community jointly conducted mapping to determine development priorities for tourism in Tabiku Village. Active community involvement brought positive momentum, and residents enthusiastically built dock facilities along the lakeside. Figure 2 shows tourism potential spots in Tabiku Village.

Figure 2 Tourism potential in Tabiku Village

If observed carefully, these potentials are highly advantageous because the presence of a lake, historical value, and other natural attractions designed for tourism activities can attract visitors to Tabiku Village (Syah, 2017). As part of community empowerment efforts, students involved in the community service program from UIN Palangka Raya implemented a social service program, beginning with repainting the dock in various attractive colors to draw tourists to visit Tabiku Village. Figure 3 is the community service team in the tourism area.

Figure 3 The community service team in the tourism area

The third program focused on empowering community health cadres. In the health cadre training program, the cadres themselves were selected by the community to handle local health issues, working in collaboration with health service providers. The service team initiated the idea that empowering health cadres is essential to support village development in the health sector. Tabiku Village has already implemented community empowerment activities through monthly Posyandu (Integrated Health Service Post) programs conducted once a month. These activities are usually organized by community health empowerment cadres through Posyandu services. In addition, health cadres provide education to the community regarding infants, toddlers, pregnant women, and women of reproductive age

Lecturers and students from UIN Palangka Raya actively participated in implementing community health empowerment activities, including assisting in Posyandu programs. Students directly helped prepare registration materials (record books, Growth Monitoring Cards/KMS, and educational aids) before Posyandu activities were conducted. Figure 4 shows the socialization activities.

Figure 4 Socialization activities of the health cadres

One of the crucial stages supported by UIN Palangka Raya students was Posyandu preparation management. Before services began, students ensured that data collection instruments were ready for use. Their specific tasks included: a) Registration and Record

Book Management: Preparing attendance lists and registration books to ensure that all attending residents were properly recorded. b) Preparation of KMS (Growth Monitoring Cards): Organizing KMS cards to facilitate access during child weighing sessions. KMS is vital as it functions as a growth monitoring chart for children. c) Provision of Educational Aids: Preparing educational materials (such as nutrition posters or examples of healthy food) to provide short counseling sessions to mothers while waiting for their turn.

The three community service activities began with improving knowledge and insight related to agricultural management, starting from understanding soil conditions, selecting superior seeds, and recognizing weather conditions (Patria et al., 2025). The second activity focused on optimizing natural resources for tourism development, particularly utilizing the lake as an integrated tourism area (Sunarti, 2018). The third activity involved empowering Posyandu cadres to enhance knowledge of sanitation awareness, maintaining health, and mitigating stunting among early childhood populations (Haryadi et al., 2023). The three pillars of community service activities were designed to improve welfare through the agricultural, tourism, and health sectors.

1. Science- and Precision-Based Agricultural Transformation
   This activity focused on strengthening upstream agricultural processes so that farmers would have a strong foundation before planting season began (Mendrofa et al., 2024).
   - Understanding Soil Conditions: Conducted through simple laboratory tests or soil sensors to determine pH levels, nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) content. This ensures efficient and targeted fertilizer use.
   - Selection of Superior Seeds: Education regarding pest-resistant and high-productivity seed varieties. Seed selection was adjusted to local soil characteristics to ensure optimal harvest results.
   - Weather and Climate Literacy: Providing understanding of modern planting calendars. Farmers were taught to read weather forecast data to determine appropriate planting times and avoid crop failure due to drought or extreme rainfall.
2. Optimization of the Lake as an Integrated Tourism Area
   This initiative aimed to create village economic independence through sustainable natural resource utilization (Saputra, 2023).
   - Tourism Zoning: Dividing the lake area into conservation zones (ecosystem protection), recreational zones (water attractions/photo spots), and economic zones (MSME areas).
   - Facility Integration: Building an integrated tourism ecosystem where the natural beauty of the lake is supported by adequate infrastructure and good accessibility for visitors.
   - Community-Based Management: Involving local residents in tourism management so that economic benefits are directly felt by the community while preserving the lake environment from pollution.
3. Empowerment of Posyandu Cadres and Stunting Mitigation
   The primary focus of this activity was investing in human resources by improving maternal and child health quality (Village et al., 2025).
   - Sanitation Awareness Education: Providing understanding that child health begins with a clean environment. Cadres were trained to socialize the importance of access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities to prevent infectious diseases.

- Healthy Lifestyle and Nutrition: Training cadres to provide counseling on balanced nutrition for pregnant women and toddlers using local food ingredients.
- Stunting Mitigation: Strengthening routine child growth monitoring functions. Cadres were trained to detect early signs of growth delay (stunting) through accurate height and weight measurements, enabling early intervention.

The three community service programs were key priorities for the service team. The success of these initiatives would not have been possible without support from village officials, the private sector, and the community itself. Nevertheless, these activities are still far from perfect. Therefore, community service must be conducted periodically and sustainably. Social change within the community remains a significant challenge in community service activities.

CONCLUSION

The community service activities in Tabiku Village have generally contributed to improving the living standards of the local community through mentoring programs for farmers, enhancement of tourism facilities, and health education activities through the activation of Posyandu programs. The presence of the community service program in Tabiku Village has been highly meaningful for village advancement. Through this platform, students and lecturers were able to actualize theoretical knowledge into practical implementation through direct service and mentoring to the community. Moreover, community service conducted by lecturers and students of UIN Palangka Raya has contributed to addressing and reducing community problems while serving as a medium for learning to build integrative relationships within the community. The programs were implemented as planned and carried out effectively according to the targets, beginning with preparation, followed by implementation and evaluation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

The first author contributed to drafting the abstract, introduction, and conclusion. The second author contributed to the discussion and references. The third to sixth authors were involved in data collection and general mentoring activities. Each author made significant contributions to the realization of this article.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The data were obtained purely from the community service activities conducted by the team of lecturers and students. However, we acknowledge that AI was used only to map the conceptual framework of the service activities to facilitate the service team’s work.

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