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Innovative Empowerment Strategies for Conical Hat (*Caping*) Craftsmen in Biraeng Village, Minasatene District, Pangkep Regency, South Sulawesi

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to obtain in-depth information about the quality of Conical Hat production (*Caping*) of the women's group of Conical Hat craftsmen is still low compared to the same production in the market, and the market share of Conical Hat handicrafts of the women's group is still limited to the local market. The type of research is descriptive qualitative with data analysis conducted in four stages; data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This research is also supported by data triangulation. The results showed that in improving the quality of production of Conical Hat (*Caping*), the group of housewives of Conical Hat craftsmen is still low compared to the same production in the market, so training and mentoring of Conical Hat craftsmen groups are needed to optimize production quality, to attract interest from consumers. Furthermore, the market share of Conical Hat crafted by women's groups is still limited to the local market by conducting techniques and assistance in marketing handicraft products.

INTRODUCTION

The effective empowerment of communities requires an innovative approach that embraces the enthusiasm of local people to improve their lives. According to Dushk & Ivlieva (2021), community enthusiasm plays an important role in the success of an empowerment program because, with enthusiasm, people will be committed to sustainably developing their skills and knowledge. An empowerment approach that encourages active community participation also allows for a collaborative role between the community and external parties, including government and private institutions, in building resilient and independent capacity. In many countries, empowerment programs are often implemented by giving local communities greater autonomy to determine their own development needs and priorities (Coy et al., 2021)

In Indonesia, Biraeng village in Minasatene sub-district, Pangkep district, South Sulawesi, is an example of a community that relies on local wisdom through traditional craft products for its economic sustainability. The main product of this community is the conical hat "*Caping*" or *Saraung* hat made from palm leaves and reinforced with woven bamboo, reflecting local identity and culture. This *caping* craft, which is commonly done by mothers in Biraeng, has become an integral part of their daily lives. However, they face significant challenges in terms of product quality, market access, and limited income. Without innovation in the production and marketing process, these products continue to only reach the local market with low-profit margins.

Various skills trainings have been facilitated by the government and non-profit organizations to improve the capacity of artisans in Biraeng, but the impact has not been optimal. The local community has started to open up to training aimed at improving their skills, but limited capital and infrastructure are still the main obstacles in applying the training results to daily production processes. This situation shows that, despite external support, there has been no significant change in the income and living standards of the *caping* artisans. Without product diversification and penetration into wider markets, the economic

potential of these crafts remains limited (Jha et al., 2021).

This limitation is further exacerbated by the reliance on one type of product that has limited market appeal, especially given the competition with craft products from other regions that may have more varied quality and design. Benito-Osorio et al., (2012) emphasize the importance of product diversification in the craft industry, which not only serves to improve competitiveness but also provides opportunities for communities to reach new market segments, such as tourists and collectors of traditional crafts. In Biraeng, product diversification based on local raw materials such as palm leaves can be a solution to increase the added value of products while developing more innovative product variants.

Technological innovation can also be a key factor in improving the production efficiency and quality of *caping* crafts. The application of simple technologies that support the drying, cutting, and finishing of products can increase production capacity and consistency in product quality, which will improve competitiveness in the market (Gao et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). These simple technologies need to be adapted to local wisdom and community capabilities to be effectively implemented. In addition, support from parties such as the government and non-governmental organizations in providing training and access to affordable technology will have a positive impact on the sustainability of the *caping* craft industry in Biraeng.

One other important aspect of empowering the artisan community in Biraeng is effective marketing support. According to Yadav et al. (2023), digital-based marketing strategies can help expand the market reach of traditional crafts outside the region or even abroad. Craftsmen in Biraeng who generally market their products in traditional markets need to be introduced to digital platforms so that they can reach a wider market. In addition, digital marketing also allows artisans to communicate directly with consumers, potentially increasing the added value of their products through strengthening local product branding (Nagrani et al., 2021).

Cooperation with external parties also plays an important role in creating synergies that support community empowerment in Biraeng. Various parties such as the local government, non-profit organizations, and the private sector are expected to contribute, whether in the form of funding, training, or facilitating market access (Hatcher & Hammond, 2018). This synergy is important to create a solid supply chain and a sustainable business model. In addition, the involvement of academic institutions can also assist in research and product development based on local raw materials such as nipa leaves, which have the potential to be developed into more varied and economically valuable products.

The importance of strengthening community capacity in the face of global competition cannot be ignored. According to research by Wu et al. (2024), empowerment programs that focus on improving entrepreneurial skills and digital marketing can help local communities compete in a wider market. In this context, entrepreneurship training for *caping* artisans in Biraeng can improve their managerial skills in managing production, marketing, and finance, so that they are better equipped to deal with increasingly complex market dynamics.

Besides the economic aspect, empowering the artisan community in Biraeng also has a significant social impact. A successful empowerment program can strengthen the solidarity and cultural identity of the local community, as traditional handicraft products such as *caping* are a reflection of cultural heritage that needs to be preserved (Izudin et al., 2024; Parameswara et al., 2021). Thus, these empowerment efforts not only provide economic benefits but also strengthen community solidarity with their cultural identity, which is an important part of sustainable development.

Therefore, empowering the *caping* artisan community in Biraeng requires a comprehensive and innovative strategy that includes skills capacity building, product diversification, access to technology, as well as effective marketing. The synergy between the government, private sector, non-profit organizations, and academia is needed to create a sustainable empowerment model that can improve people's lives (Berisha, 2022; Leigland, 2018). With the right approach, the community in Biraeng can develop into a self-reliant and competitive community, so that it can get out of the poverty cycle and contribute to the regional economy as a whole. It is on this basis that empowerment is important to improve product quality and market sharing.

METHODS

The implementation method in this service is used with training and mentoring methods, namely training mothers in making quality products with the guidance of experienced trainers. During the activity, assistance was provided. The first stage is the preparation stage. At this stage, the service group conducted a preliminary survey to see the conditions in the field regarding what had been produced by the *Saraung* Hat craftsmen group. At this stage, the problems faced by the group of craftswomen in improving the ability to produce professional development work are sought. The second stage is the stage of implementing service activities.

Training in making other products from the same basic ingredients. In the field of business management, training is conducted on how to develop a business, business management, and so on. The last stage is the evaluation stage. At this stage, an evaluation of the results achieved by the trainees is conducted. Feedback and further improvements can be made at this stage. Evaluation is given by collecting data obtained from the training activities. Data is obtained by summarizing the understanding of the mothers' group when assisted in making crafts. The results of the development of professional work in the form of scientific papers both research reports and scientific articles produced by groups of mothers as a result of training. The indicator of the achievement of the service objectives is that 80% of the mothers have understood product improvement.

According to Miles et al., (2014), data analysis is carried out in four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. In this study, data validity used source triangulation techniques. Source triangulation is a technique in which researchers collect data from various existing sources because similar data will have better results if extracted from different sources, for example, comparing observations with interviews and documentation. So, in this study, researchers elaborated data from observational research, interviews, and documentation between informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the empowerment of the women's group of conical hat craftsmen *Caping*/*Saraung* in Biraeng Village, Minasatene Sub-district, Pangkep Regency, still faces several important challenges. First, the production quality of *Saraung* hats produced by this group of artisans is generally below the standard of similar products in the wider market. This factor not only impacts the competitiveness of local products but also hampers the artisans' efforts in increasing the added value of their products, which is important in the context of traditional craft-based economic empowerment. This lower level of quality suggests the need for interventions in terms of production techniques and skills development to meet higher market quality standards.

Secondly, the results revealed that the market reach of *Saraung* hat products from this group of craftswomen is still limited to the local market. These products are generally marketed in the area around Pangkep, resulting in low exposure to wider market opportunities. This condition also indicates a reliance on traditional marketing methods that may not be able to reach consumers outside the local area. This limited market access, in turn, limits the opportunity for artisans to significantly increase their income and maximize the potential of traditional crafts that could become more nationally or even internationally recognized cultural icons. Therefore, improving production skills, supporting technology, as well as expanding marketing access through digital platforms and cooperation with other stakeholders are some of the approaches that can answer this challenge. With the right approach, *Saraung* hat products can have the potential to not only support the economy of the artisan community in Biraeng but also as a product of regional pride that can compete in a wider market.

The Quality Production of Conical Hats (*Caping*)

A portrait of the quality of conical hats (*Saraung*/*Caping*) products produced by a group of women artisans in Biraeng Village reveals significant challenges in improving the quality of traditional handicraft products. The nipa leaf-based hats require a long processing time to achieve the best quality, but facility constraints and limited access to technology pose barriers to achieving high-quality production. This low product quality results in limited competitiveness in the market, especially in the face of products produced with more advanced technology (Arellano, 2017; Tali et al, 2021). In line with research from Sarkar & Fu, (2022), quality improvement efforts are an urgent

need to maintain the appeal of traditional products while increasing consumer interest in the long term.

In addition to raw material quality issues, limited production facilities also play an important role in the limited competitiveness of local products. Interviews show that this group of craftswomen still relies on inefficient manual processes, resulting in suboptimal production capacity. This is exacerbated by the challenge of managing the drying time of nipa leaves, which requires certain conditions to avoid material damage. According to a study by Mazzarella et al. (2017), reliance on traditional techniques, while culturally valuable, often poses major challenges in improving production quality, especially if not supported by innovation and adequate equipment.

The training program initiated to improve the skills of this group of artisans is a positive effort to overcome their limitations. Sarina, one of the group members, stated that the training has helped them learn new techniques that are relevant in improving product quality, especially in terms of detail and durability. Furthermore, a study by Ibrahim et al. (2017) showed that effectively designed training can provide significant improvements in technical skills and quality control, which are important elements in presenting superior products in the wider market.

Limited market access is an additional challenge affecting the sustainability of *Saraung* hat production. To date, the marketing of this product is still limited to the local market, which means artisans have to rely on a limited local distribution chain that tends to be unstable. This limitation leads to low-profit margins due to dependence on intermediary traders (Raya et al., 2021). Research from Sulhaini (2021) supports the importance of innovative marketing as one of the effective ways to expand market access to local products to a wider area.

In addition to the production aspect, training that also targets digital marketing strategies can have a significant impact on this group of artisans. Training that provides digital marketing skills, especially in using e-commerce platforms and social media, will help artisans target a wider market and reduce dependence on local distributors (Upe, 2023). This marketing training program is in line with (Kurniawanto et al., 2024; Nahda & Setyaning, 2024) White and Marsh's (2021) study which found that marketing digitalization is very effective in opening up opportunities for small businesses to compete in regional and national markets.

Solutions and Targets for the *Saraung* Hat Craftswomen Group

The problems faced by craftsmen	**Solutions Offered**	**Output Target**	**Completion Target**
The quality of *Saraung* hat production by the women's group is still low compared to the same production in the market.	Conduct training and mentoring to groups of craftswomen on improving production quality.	90 percent of the *Saraung* Hat craftswomen group know how to improve production quality	Completion of this activity is targeted for 3 months.
The market share of *Saraung* hats made by the women's group is still limited to the local market.	Conduct training and mentoring on product marketing techniques.	*Saraung* hat marketing turnover increases	Completion of this activity is targeted for 3 months

Source: Primary data analysis results, 2024.

Through practice-based education, artisan group members not only acquire technical skills in production but also an understanding of quality standards accepted in the wider market. This is important because practical skills enable them to produce products that are more uniform and of reliable quality (Aparo et al., 2013). With practical learning methods, artisans are expected to be able to meet consumer expectations beyond the local market while strengthening the product's position in the view of consumers (Hasanah, 2023).

Thus, the success of this empowerment program also depends on support from the government and private sector in providing quality

facilities and raw materials. Without better access to raw materials and production equipment, the training program risks losing its long-term impact. Therefore, synergy between the artisan community, the government, and the private sector is key in supporting the economic sustainability of the artisan community, while improving product quality as a form of sustainable local economic development.

In the effort to empower artisans, several main factors play an important role in increasing the success of MSMEs, especially the *Saraung* Hat craft business. First, the provision of knowledge and education regarding the importance of skills and training becomes the foundation so that the creativity and potential of craftsmen can be maximized. Thus, in addition to improving technical skills, this training can shape a more innovative mindset, directing craftsmen to find new ways to generate income (Manfredi et al., 2018). Second, awareness of the availability of local value-added raw materials must be increased, so that artisans are better able to utilize the potential of existing resources to support efficient and environmentally friendly production (Dumasari et al., 2020).

Third, sustainable training involving technical skills in *Saraung* Topi making is essential, but not sufficient; it also requires the development of marketing strategies through social media networks that have great potential as a virtual world market share. This understanding allows local products to be more widely recognized, even in the global market (Safeer et al., 2022). Fourth, providing knowledge about entrepreneurship, including business opportunity analysis and business plan development, helps business partners anticipate and overcome risks so that their businesses have a stronger and more sustainable foundation (Galvão et al., 2020). Fifth, business partners need to gain motivation and confidence, so that they are ready to start and develop entrepreneurship both individually and in groups. This support, including conventional and digital marketing techniques, needs to be sustained so that business partners can respond to market dynamics more adaptively and confidently (Edeling et al., 2021).

The Market Share of Traditional Conical Hats (*Caping*)

A portrait of the market share of *Saraung* Hats produced by a group of craftswomen in Biraeng Village shows appreciation from the local community, although the marketing distribution is still limited. This was confirmed by an interview with Darmawati, the head of the artisan group, who highlighted the important role of the *PKK* group in expanding the market reach of this craft. She also hopes that through the Community Service Program (*PKM*) from Sawerigading University of Makassar, this product can be better known to surrounding areas such as Barru, Maros and Makassar, so that it can support the economy of the local community. According to Rahman & Hakim (2024), the development of market share for local products based on traditional wisdom has great potential to improve community welfare if supported by targeted empowerment strategies.

Furthermore, an interview with Sarina, a member of the artisan group, revealed the importance of utilizing local traditional markets as one of the marketing strategies. However, this method is not considered effective enough because sales results are not optimal and have little impact on improving their family's economy. Sarina welcomed the *PKM* initiative that provides marketing education, especially on digital marketing, which she said will be very helpful in expanding market access. Research by Kosasih & Sulaiman (2024) shows that digital marketing training can help local communities increase the accessibility of their products, particularly to reach wider consumers and improve product competitiveness.

Apart from limitations in marketing methods, the availability of raw materials is also a major challenge for the *Saraung* craftsmen. Murniasih, one of the artisan members, revealed that the limited availability of nipa leaves as the main ingredient hampered their production. However, the raw material assistance through the *PKM* program is a very helpful short-term solution. This kind of support is important in supporting the sustainability of traditional craft businesses, especially when the availability of raw materials depends on environmental and climatic conditions. The sustainability of local businesses requires consistent access to raw materials and external support that can ensure stability of supply, especially for small businesses focused on traditional crafts.

Community empowerment programs through *PKM* have a very significant impact in facing

increasingly complex economic challenges and high market competition. The program is important for developing economic independence and improving the welfare of artisans, as shown in a study by Sarjiyanto et al., (2022), which states that community-based empowerment is very effective in reducing poverty and promoting local economic growth. PKM activities play an important role in improving the knowledge and skills of artisans, which in turn will strengthen product competitiveness in the market.

The capacity of individuals to empower their groups also plays a key role in the success of craft businesses. In this context, there are five important competencies that craftsmen need to have, namely: motivation, interest or talent, self-concept, knowledge, and skills. These competencies are important in building a productive and adaptive work ethic in the face of market dynamics. With the mastery of this competence, individuals are expected to play a better role in increasing group productivity and supporting the achievement of common goals.

In addition to individual competence, a community structure that is adaptive to change is also important for the success of local economic empowerment. The function of social institutions in the community also plays a role in meeting the complex and dynamic needs of society. The existence of these social institutions can facilitate interaction between local communities and external parties, such as governments and non-profit organizations, which ultimately creates opportunities to strengthen markets and expand access to resources.

Likewise, entrepreneurship training and technological innovation are very important to increase productivity and economic development of the community. Increased knowledge and good management will support the sustainability of the *Saraung* Hat handicraft business in the future, especially in the face of an increasingly competitive market. Good managerial skills and the right innovation are key factors in ensuring the sustainability and competitiveness of MSMEs in the era of globalization.

CONCLUSION

To improve the quality of *Saraung* Hat production, the group of artisan women in Biraeng Village faces significant challenges stemming from the low quality of products compared to competitors in the market. Therefore, structured training and mentoring are indispensable to optimize their production skills and techniques. By improving quality, it is hoped that this product can attract more consumers, both local and regional. In addition, a more innovative approach to design and production processes will be a key factor in strengthening their position in the traditional craft market. These efforts will not only have a positive impact on business success but also contribute to improving the welfare of the local community.

Although currently the market share of Topi *Saraung* is still limited to the local area, there is great potential to expand the marketing reach of this product through various effective strategies. Marketing training targeting artisans, facilitated by academics, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations, will go a long way in educating them on how to take advantage of modern marketing platforms. Support from the Pangkep Regency Government in the form of policies and infrastructure that supports local economic development is also very important. With these collaborative measures, the group of Topi *Saraung* artisan mothers can reach a wider market and increase the competitiveness of their products. This overall initiative not only aims to increase sales but also to empower communities and sustainably lift the local economy.

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