Economic Transformation of Indonesian Migrant Workers Into Sustainable Independent Entrepreneurs

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Abstrak
Pekerja migran Indonesia memiliki kontribusi ekonomi yang signifikan melalui remitansi, namun banyak di antaranya menghadapi tantangan dalam mencapai kemandirian ekonomi yang berkelanjutan setelah masa migrasi berakhir. Kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk mendorong transformasi ekonomi pekerja migran Indonesia menuju wirausaha mandiri yang berkelanjutan melalui pendekatan partisipatif dan dialogis. Kegiatan dilaksanakan di Kuching, Malaysia, dengan melibatkan pekerja migran Indonesia melalui kunjungan dan diskusi langsung yang difasilitasi oleh tim pengabdian bekerja sama dengan Kedutaan Besar Republik Indonesia. Metode pelaksanaan meliputi diskusi interaktif, berbagi pengetahuan, dan refleksi pengalaman kerja migran yang diarahkan pada penguatan kesadaran kewirausahaan dan perencanaan ekonomi pasca-migrasi. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan adanya peningkatan pemahaman peserta mengenai pentingnya kewirausahaan berkelanjutan, perubahan pola pikir dari ketergantungan pada pendapatan jangka pendek menuju perencanaan ekonomi jangka panjang, serta meningkatnya motivasi untuk memanfaatkan keterampilan dan pengalaman kerja sebagai modal usaha. Kegiatan ini berkontribusi dalam memperkuat kesiapan ekonomi pekerja migran dan menawarkan model pengabdian berbasis komunitas yang dapat direplikasi di wilayah tujuan migrasi lainnya.

Kata kunci: Pekerja migran Indonesia, Transformasi ekonomi, Kewirausahaan berkelanjutan, Pengabdian kepada masyarakat, Pemberdayaan ekonomi.

Abstract
Indonesian migrant workers contribute significantly to household and national economies through remittances; however, many face challenges in achieving sustainable economic independence after migration. This community service activity aims to promote the economic transformation of Indonesian migrant workers into sustainable independent entrepreneurs through a participatory and dialogical approach. The program was conducted in Kuching, Malaysia, involving Indonesian migrant workers through direct visits and interactive discussions facilitated by the community service team in collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy. The implementation method included knowledge-sharing sessions, reflective dialogue, and experiential discussions focused on entrepreneurship awareness and post-migration economic planning. The results indicate an increased understanding among participants regarding sustainable entrepreneurship, a shift in mindset from short-term income dependency toward long-term economic planning, and enhanced motivation to utilize work experience and skills as entrepreneurial capital. This activity contributes to strengthening the economic readiness of Indonesian migrant workers and offers a replicable community-based empowerment model for similar initiatives in other migrant destination areas.

Keywords*: Indonesian migrant workers, economic transformation, sustainable entrepreneurship, community service, economic empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

International labor migration has long been a significant socio-economic phenomenon in Indonesia, particularly among workers seeking employment opportunities abroad due to limited domestic job availability and income disparities. Indonesian migrant workers contribute substantially to household welfare through remittances; however, their economic resilience after returning from migration remains a critical challenge. Many migrant workers return home without

sustainable income-generating skills, leaving them vulnerable to economic instability and repeated cycles of migration (Endris & Kassegn, 2022; Allcott & Keniston, 2018).

In Malaysia, including Kuching, Indonesian migrant workers constitute a large segment of the foreign labor force, particularly in low-skilled sectors. Despite their exposure to international labor markets and work experience, most migrant workers lack structured entrepreneurial knowledge and financial management skills that would enable them to transform their income into sustainable economic ventures. Previous studies highlight that without targeted empowerment programs, migrant workers often fail to transition from wage dependency to independent entrepreneurship, limiting their long-term economic mobility (Cueto et al., 2022; Love et al., 2024).

Economic transformation through entrepreneurship has been widely recognized as an effective pathway for empowering marginalized communities and promoting sustainable livelihoods. Entrepreneurship enables individuals to shift from labor-based income toward value creation, autonomy, and resilience. However, the success of entrepreneurial transformation depends heavily on capacity building, mentoring, and contextualized education rather than short-term training alone (Bullough et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2022). For migrant workers, this transformation requires not only technical business skills but also mindset change, financial literacy, and long-term planning aligned with sustainability principles.

Community-based empowerment programs implemented by higher education institutions play a crucial role in addressing this gap. Universities possess academic resources, practical expertise, and social responsibility mandates that position them as key actors in translating scientific knowledge into real-world solutions. Through community service initiatives, universities can facilitate structured guidance, mentoring, and strategic awareness among migrant workers, fostering inclusive economic growth and social reintegration (Johnson, 2020; Andaningsih et al., 2022).

This community service activity was conducted in Kuching, Malaysia, through an outreach program coordinated with the Indonesian Embassy, targeting Indonesian migrant workers. The activity aimed to provide direct guidance and strategic insights on economic transformation toward sustainable independent entrepreneurship. The program focused on raising awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities, strengthening economic self-reliance, and encouraging migrant workers to prepare for post-migration economic sustainability rather than short-term income consumption. The mentoring approach emphasized participatory dialogue, contextual problem identification, and practical knowledge sharing to ensure relevance to the migrant workers' socio-economic realities.

From a development perspective, empowering migrant workers to become sustainable entrepreneurs aligns with broader goals of poverty reduction, economic inclusion, and sustainable development. Entrepreneurship-based empowerment supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), by enabling migrant workers to create dignified livelihoods upon return to their home country (Harahap et al., 2023). Moreover, sustainable entrepreneurship emphasizes long-term viability, responsible resource management, and adaptability to economic changes, which are essential for post-migration economic resilience (Baumüller & Sopp, 2021).

Despite the growing discourse on migrant worker empowerment, many community service initiatives still focus on short-term social assistance or informational seminars without structured follow-up or sustainability orientation. There remains a limited number of community-based programs that specifically address the economic transformation of migrant workers into independent entrepreneurs through systematic mentoring and strategic capacity building. This gap highlights the need for targeted community service models that integrate economic education, entrepreneurial orientation, and sustainability principles tailored to migrant workers' contexts (Maris et al., 2022; Nugrahanti et al., 2023).

Therefore, this article aims to document and analyze a community service initiative designed to support the economic transformation of Indonesian migrant workers into sustainable independent entrepreneurs. Specifically, the objectives of this activity are: (1) to enhance migrant workers' understanding of entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic independence; (2) to provide strategic guidance for sustainable business development; and (3) to strengthen economic

self-reliance among Indonesian migrant workers through community-based mentoring. The findings of this article are expected to contribute both academically, by enriching the literature on migrant worker empowerment, and practically, by offering a replicable model for community service programs targeting migrant populations..

METHOD

This community service activity employed a participatory and dialogical approach, emphasizing direct engagement, knowledge sharing, and contextual understanding of the target community. The program was implemented through an international outreach visit to Kuching, Malaysia, in collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy, as part of an academic community service initiative aimed at empowering Indonesian migrant workers. The primary participants were Indonesian migrant workers residing and working in Kuching, representing diverse occupational backgrounds and migration experiences.

The method of implementation focused on face-to-face discussions and interactive knowledge-sharing sessions with Indonesian migrant workers. This approach was selected to ensure active participation and to create an open space for dialogue, where participants could express their experiences, challenges, and aspirations related to economic sustainability and post-migration life planning. Direct interaction enabled the facilitators to understand the socio-economic realities faced by migrant workers and to tailor the discussion to their specific needs and contexts, consistent with participatory community empowerment principles (Johnson, 2020; Maris et al., 2022).

The core activities of the program included introductory discussions, guided dialogue sessions, and knowledge dissemination related to the concept of *Economic Transformation of Indonesian Migrant Workers into Sustainable Independent Entrepreneurs*. The facilitators shared insights on entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic independence, emphasizing mindset transformation, opportunity identification, basic business planning, and sustainability-oriented thinking. Rather than delivering one-way lectures, the sessions were designed as two-way discussions, allowing participants to reflect on their migration experiences, existing skills, and potential business ideas upon returning to Indonesia.

To strengthen relevance and practical understanding, the discussion sessions incorporated contextual examples and real-life cases related to small-scale entrepreneurship, community-based businesses, and sustainable livelihood strategies. Participants were encouraged to identify personal competencies acquired during migration, such as technical skills, work discipline, and savings management, and to explore how these assets could be transformed into viable entrepreneurial ventures. This reflective process aimed to foster economic awareness and self-reliance among migrant workers, aligning with empowerment-oriented community service frameworks (Bullough et al., 2022; Endris & Kassegn, 2022).

Data and insights for this article were collected through observational notes, informal interviews, and documentation of discussion outcomes during the activities. Observations focused on participants' engagement levels, responses to the entrepreneurial concepts presented, and the dynamics of group discussions. Informal interviews were conducted to capture participants' perceptions of entrepreneurship, economic challenges, and future plans after migration. These qualitative data were analyzed descriptively to evaluate the effectiveness of the community service activity in raising awareness and strengthening economic orientation toward sustainable entrepreneurship.

Overall, this method emphasized direct interaction, participatory dialogue, and contextual knowledge transfer as key strategies for empowering Indonesian migrant workers. By conducting the activity in an international migrant destination setting and engaging participants through discussion-based methods, the program sought to provide meaningful and relevant guidance that supports long-term economic independence and sustainable post-migration livelihoods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

.The community service activity conducted in Kuching, Malaysia, yielded several significant outcomes related to participants' awareness, perspectives, and readiness for economic transformation toward sustainable independent entrepreneurship. The direct interaction and

participatory discussion approach enabled Indonesian migrant workers to actively engage in dialogue, share experiences, and reflect on their economic conditions both during and after migration.

Increased Awareness of Economic Transformation and Entrepreneurship

One of the most prominent results of the activity was the increased awareness among Indonesian migrant workers regarding the importance of long-term economic planning. Initially, many participants perceived migration primarily as a short-term income-generating strategy, with limited consideration for post-migration sustainability. Through the discussion sessions, participants began to recognize entrepreneurship as a viable pathway for transforming temporary migrant income into long-term economic independence. This shift in perspective aligns with empowerment theories that emphasize awareness as the first step toward sustainable livelihood transformation (Endris & Kassegn, 2022).

The discussions revealed that most participants possessed valuable skills acquired during their employment abroad, such as technical expertise, discipline, time management, and exposure to international work standards. However, these skills had not previously been viewed as potential entrepreneurial assets. By reframing these experiences within an entrepreneurial context, the program helped participants identify opportunities for small-scale and community-based businesses upon returning to Indonesia.



Figure 1. Discussion session with Indonesian migrant workers at Kuching, Malaysia.

Engagement and Participatory Dialogue Dynamics

Observational findings indicated a high level of engagement throughout the activity. Participants actively contributed to discussions by sharing personal migration stories, economic challenges, and future aspirations. The dialogical approach fostered a supportive learning environment where participants felt comfortable expressing concerns about business risks, capital limitations, and uncertainty after returning home. This interactive dynamic is consistent with participatory community service models that prioritize mutual learning and shared problem-solving (Johnson, 2020).

The exchange of ideas among participants also created peer learning opportunities. Migrant workers with prior entrepreneurial exposure shared insights with others, reinforcing collective learning and motivation. This social interaction strengthened participants' confidence and encouraged collaborative thinking, which is essential for sustainable community-based entrepreneurship (Maris et al., 2022).



Figure 2. Interactive dialogue and knowledge-sharing session during the activity.

Shift Toward Sustainable Entrepreneurial Mindset

Another important outcome was the emergence of a sustainability-oriented entrepreneurial mindset. Participants began to understand that entrepreneurship is not merely about starting a business, but about maintaining long-term viability through responsible financial management, adaptability, and continuous learning. The facilitators emphasized sustainable entrepreneurship principles, including prudent resource use, gradual business scaling, and resilience to economic shocks, which resonated strongly with participants' concerns about economic uncertainty after migration.

This mindset shift reflects findings from previous studies that highlight the role of mentoring and contextual education in fostering sustainable entrepreneurship among marginalized groups (Bullough et al., 2022; Baumüller & Sopp, 2021). Participants expressed increased motivation to prepare themselves before returning to Indonesia by saving more strategically, seeking entrepreneurial knowledge, and exploring local business opportunities in their home regions.



Figure 3. Facilitator delivering guidance on sustainable entrepreneurship concepts.

Social and Institutional Implications

From a broader perspective, the activity also demonstrated the strategic role of higher education institutions and diplomatic representations in migrant worker empowerment. The collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy provided legitimacy and trust, encouraging migrant workers to participate openly. This institutional support strengthened the impact of the community service activity and highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in addressing migrant workers' socio-economic challenges.

The outcomes of this program contribute to the discourse on migrant worker reintegration and economic empowerment. By focusing on entrepreneurship and sustainability, the activity supports broader development goals related to economic inclusion and poverty reduction. It also aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), by promoting productive economic activities and self-reliance among migrant workers (Harahap et al., 2023).



Figure 4. Group photo with Acting Consul General of the Republic of Indonesia.

Discussion

The findings indicate that direct, discussion-based community service activities conducted in migrant destination areas can effectively enhance awareness and readiness for economic transformation. Unlike conventional training programs that rely on one-way knowledge transfer, the participatory approach allowed migrant workers to contextualize entrepreneurship within their lived experiences. This reinforces experiential learning theory, which posits that learning is most effective when individuals actively reflect on real-life experiences (Kolb, 1984).

Furthermore, the results highlight that economic empowerment initiatives targeting migrant workers should prioritize mindset transformation alongside technical knowledge. Without a sustainability-oriented perspective, entrepreneurial efforts risk becoming short-lived or ineffective. Therefore, community service programs that integrate dialogue, reflection, and contextual guidance are more likely to produce meaningful and lasting impacts.

Overall, this community service activity demonstrates that empowering Indonesian migrant workers through participatory discussions on sustainable entrepreneurship can serve as a foundational step toward long-term economic independence. The approach presented in this article offers a replicable model for similar initiatives in other migrant destination regions, contributing to both academic discourse and practical community empowerment efforts.

CONCLUSION

This community service activity demonstrates that participatory, discussion-based engagement conducted directly with Indonesian migrant workers in destination areas can play a significant role in fostering economic awareness and readiness for sustainable entrepreneurship. The outreach program implemented in Kuching, Malaysia, provided Indonesian migrant workers with strategic insights into transforming migration-based income into long-term economic independence through entrepreneurship-oriented thinking.

The results indicate that direct dialogue and knowledge-sharing sessions effectively increased participants' understanding of entrepreneurship as a viable post-migration livelihood strategy. Through reflective discussions, migrant workers were able to identify personal skills, work experiences, and economic resources acquired during migration as potential entrepreneurial assets. This process contributed to a noticeable shift in mindset, from short-term income dependency toward sustainable and self-reliant economic planning.

Furthermore, the activity highlighted the importance of sustainability principles in entrepreneurial transformation. Participants gained awareness that sustainable entrepreneurship requires not only business initiation but also long-term planning, responsible financial management, and adaptability to economic challenges. The emphasis on sustainability strengthens the relevance of this community service program in supporting inclusive economic development and aligns with broader development agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals related to decent work and economic growth.

Despite these positive outcomes, this activity also faced limitations. The engagement was conducted within a limited timeframe and focused primarily on awareness-building rather than technical business training or long-term mentoring. As such, continued follow-up programs, capacity-building workshops, and collaboration with relevant institutions are necessary to ensure that the increased awareness translates into concrete entrepreneurial practices.

In conclusion, this community service initiative contributes both practically and academically by offering a replicable model for empowering Indonesian migrant workers through participatory economic guidance. By integrating direct engagement, contextual discussion, and sustainability-oriented perspectives, the program supports the economic transformation of migrant workers into sustainable independent entrepreneurs. Future community service activities are recommended to expand this model through sustained mentoring, business skill development, and stronger institutional collaboration to enhance long-term impact.

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