

Integrating Aquaculture and Culinary Tourism: Community based development of the Sriharjo culinary centre

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ABSTRACT

This community service programme was designed to strengthen local economic empowerment in Sriharjo Village through the integration of aquaculture and culinary tourism. Using a community-based participatory approach, the programme engaged the village government, Bumkal Sri Rejeki, the fish farmers' association (Pokdakan), youth, and women's groups. Activities included institutional visits, dialogue forums, coordination meetings, culinary competitions, and training on business management and digital promotion. Outcomes were evaluated using a one-group pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design with questionnaires, observation, and documentation. The results show significant improvements in participants' competencies. The greatest increase was recorded in product processing knowledge (+70.59%), followed by food processing and content knowledge (+47.06%). Moderate gains were achieved in raw materials management (+29.41%), fish freshness recognition (+29.42%), nutrition knowledge (+18%), and marketing strategies (+29.42%). Social media knowledge also improved (+23.53%), reflecting growing digital engagement. In contrast, paid advertising knowledge increased slightly (+5.89%), while digital marketing knowledge remained unchanged (0%), indicating a strong baseline but limited application. These findings demonstrate that stakeholder collaboration, participatory governance, and experiential training effectively build technical and managerial capacities. However, uneven outcomes across domains emphasise the need for more practice-oriented interventions, particularly in digital and financial literacy, to ensure long-term sustainability of community-based economic initiatives.

Keywords: Aquaculture; Community Empowerment; Culinary Tourism; Experiential Learning; Rural Development.

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1. Introduction

Tourism development in rural areas is increasingly recognised as a strategic avenue for enhancing community welfare and diversifying local economies. Sriharjo Village has been identified as a site with considerable potential for the development of a local economy based on nature and cultural tourism (Singarimbun, 2006; Damarina, 2022). This potential is evident not only in the abundance of natural resources but also in the diversity of community products and economic activities (Fitriana, et al., 2023; Riyadi, 2023). However, the challenge lies in transforming these latent resources into sustainable, community-driven initiatives that can withstand current economic pressures.

To address this, a two-year community service programme was initiated, integrating various aspects of development to enhance residents' capabilities and strengthen the community tourism ecosystem (Yuxi, et al., 2024). These activities were specifically designed to contribute to government programmes in building community capacity and empowering

the local economy (Setiawan & Hamid, 2014). Interventions include the improvement of community productive assets, the increase of residents' income and turnover, and the strengthening of the village government's economic contributions (Catyanadika, et al. 2023). Importantly, the programme also established a digital marketing system as a more extensive and efficient promotion strategy (Edison, et al. 2020).

In developing Sriharjo's tourism model, the project draws upon a management framework for wellness tourism destinations that leverages both cultural heritage and natural resources (Wardiyanta, et al. 2023; Iskandar, et al., 2024). This integrated model is positioned as an alternative solution for the sustainable development of community-based tourism (Wijayanti, 2020). Beyond serving as an intervention, the programme also operationalises the results of multidisciplinary research across the fields of food service business, public health science, and management. The outcomes are expected to generate research-based policy recommendations and social engineering applicable to comprehensive village development (Priambodo & Yudisetyanto, 2023).

The scope of the programme spans diverse sectors, they are social, economic, health, cultural, agricultural, food security, and environmental management, while ensuring that development respects and preserves the local identity and uniqueness of Sriharjo (Syafar & Ulumi, 2021; Indroyono & Junarsin, 2002). This multidimensional approach is particularly relevant given the prevailing economic conditions, which are marked by declining MSME performance, rising unemployment, and weakened growth at local and national levels (Hakim, et al., 2025). As such, the initiative is designed to act as a catalyst for economic recovery and resilience in rural communities.

The initial phase of the programme focused on capacity building for key community stakeholders, including managers of Bumkal Sri Rejeki, culinary entrepreneurs, artisans, and farmers. Training covered business management, marketing, financial management, and the provision of supporting facilities and infrastructure. One tangible output was the establishment of a restaurant specialising in traditional cuisine, which embodies Sriharjo's culinary heritage. Beyond culinary development, the programme also encompassed crafts and aquaculture, particularly the cultivation and processing of Nile tilapia, with the aim of increasing competitiveness and added value. This integration of aquaculture and culinary tourism represents a novel approach rarely explored in previous studies, offering both economic and branding benefits.

Furthermore, productivity improvements were implemented across the entire chain, from raw material management to product marketing. Optimising land use, whether village-owned or collectively managed, was also prioritised, transforming Sriharjo into an integrated recreational space that combines cuisine, crafts, agriculture, and education-based livestock farming (edutourism). The model is systematic, incorporating an information centre, educational tourism packages, and activity areas designed to preserve local values. To ensure sustainability, three partner groups were mobilised: (1) training partners focusing on farmers, artisans, livestock groups, youth organisations, and PKK; (2) production partners concentrating on food and craft businesses in line with quality and health standards; and (3) management partners focusing on institutional strengthening through Bumkal Sri Rejeki and Pokdarwis (Al Adiyat et al., 2014).

In summary, this study aims to present a community-based development model for the Sriharjo Culinary Centre that uniquely integrates aquaculture and culinary tourism. By situating this initiative within a multidisciplinary and participatory framework, it not only contributes to the improvement of local livelihoods but also provides insights into sustainable rural tourism development.

2. Methods

The community service programme in Kalurahan Sriharjo was carried out over a two-year period using a community-based participatory approach. The design followed a *one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental model* to measure the impact of training and mentoring activities on participants' competencies. This approach is consistent with community empowerment practices that emphasise collaboration between local stakeholders, village institutions, and academics (Setiawan & Hamid, 2014; Catyanadika, et al. 2023).

A total of 20 participants were involved, consisting of culinary entrepreneurs, members of the fish farmer group (Pokdakan), and managers of *Bumkal Sri Rejeki*. After data validation, 17 responses were analysed. Participants were selected purposively based on their active involvement in village economic activities and their potential contribution to the development of the Sriharjo Culinary Centre. This purposive involvement reflects best practices in community empowerment, which prioritise strategic actors for sustainable outcomes (Edison, et al. 2020).

The programme was implemented in three sequential phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The preparation stage involved focus group discussions and needs assessments to identify priority issues and areas requiring intervention (Wardiyanta, et al. 2023). The implementation stage included capacity-building sessions on fish processing, raw material management, nutrition and food safety, business management, and financial literacy. Demonstrations and culinary competitions were also conducted to stimulate creativity and promote the use of local aquaculture products, particularly Nile tilapia, in traditional cuisine (Priambodo & Yudisetyanto, 2023). Finally, the evaluation and reporting stage focused on assessing outcomes and documenting the programme in line with the initial community service proposal, while also strengthening institutions such as Bumkal Sri Rejeki and Pokdarwis and introducing digital marketing strategies as innovative promotion tools (Ridzal, et al., 2025). The sequence of these stages is illustrated in Figure 1.

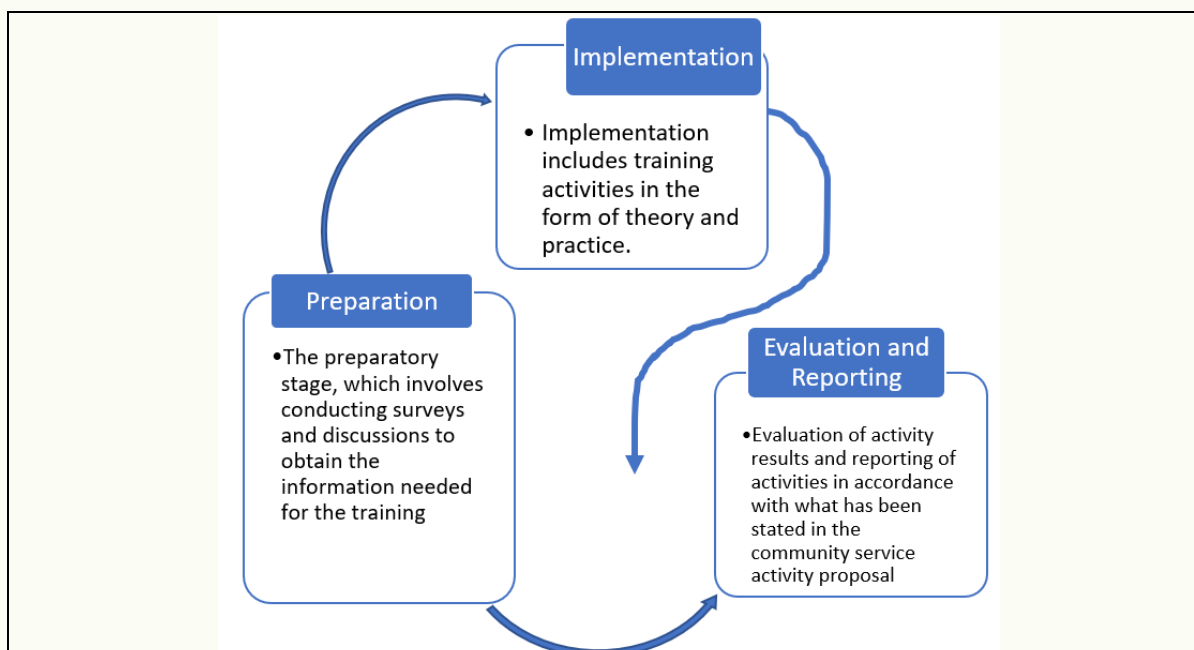


Figure 1. Stages of the Sriharjo Culinary Centre community-based programme, consisting of preparation, implementation, and evaluation

As shown in Figure 1, the cycle of preparation, implementation, and evaluation ensured that the programme was systematically designed to address community needs while also providing room for reflection and improvement. The preparation phase ensured that training materials were tailored to actual needs, the implementation phase provided both theoretical and practical knowledge, and the evaluation phase generated insights for sustainability and policy recommendations (Slamet, et al., 2025).

Data collection employed a structured questionnaire administered before and after the interventions. The instrument measured six domains: knowledge of fish processing, raw material management, nutrition and food safety, marketing strategies, social media utilisation, and paid advertising. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was validated by experts in culinary, public health, and management, and internal consistency was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha above 0.70.

Data analysis combined descriptive and inferential statistics. Pre-post scores were compared using paired t-tests for normally distributed variables and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests for non-parametric data, with effect sizes calculated to indicate the magnitude of change (Yuxi, et al., 2024). Qualitative findings from focus group discussions, field observations, and participant testimonials were thematically analysed to triangulate the quantitative results (Wijayanti, 2020).

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the programme. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, their identities were kept confidential, and the entire process was conducted in a way that respected and preserved the local identity and uniqueness of Sriharjo Village (Syafar & Ulumi, 2021; Indroyono & Junarsin, 2002).

3. Results

3.1 Initial Visit and Institutional Gathering

The implementation of the community service programme in Sriharjo Village began with a series of preliminary activities aimed at building institutional relations and establishing a shared commitment between the academic team and the village government. The initial visit functioned not only as a formal introduction but also as a symbolic gesture of collaboration, laying the foundation for trust and alignment of objectives between stakeholders.

On 15 December 2024, the Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD) Community Service Team conducted a courtesy visit to the Sriharjo Village Office in Imogiri, Bantul. The visit was received by the Village Head together with the village officials. During this occasion, a strategic discussion was carried out concerning the village government's aspiration to develop a fish-based restaurant as a driver of local economic empowerment.

Following the meeting, the community service team proceeded to a site visit at the proposed location for the Sriharjo Culinary Centre. The selected area is situated in Mojohuro, which is characterised by its open landscape and potential as a culinary and tourism hub.



As illustrated in Figure 2, the area provides a conducive environment for the establishment of a culinary centre. The natural surroundings and accessible location offer opportunities to integrate community activities with culinary and tourism development, thereby supporting the long-term vision of enhancing the local economy through community-based initiatives.

3.2 Follow-up Discussion and Community Empowerment Planning

After the initial institutional meeting, the programme entered a follow-up stage that emphasised dialogue, agreement, and joint planning with the community. This stage was crucial for ensuring that the aspirations of the local government could be translated into concrete actions involving multiple stakeholders. By facilitating discussions and collective decision-making, the programme sought to build a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among community members.

The first follow-up discussion was conducted on 8 January 2025. The meeting focused on identifying potential restaurant managers from the local community who would later operate under the supervision of Bumkal Sri Rejeki. During this session, agreements were reached that the UAD Community Service Team would provide training and continuous mentoring to these prospective managers to equip them with the necessary skills to run the restaurant professionally and sustainably. It was also agreed that the operational costs related to meetings and training activities would be supported by the programme team.

A week later, on 15 January 2025, a broader forum was organised to involve a wider range of community actors. Participants included representatives from Bumkal Sri Rejeki, the fish farmers’ association (Pokdakan), youth organisations, PKK members, and local leaders. The focus of this forum was the preparation for the inauguration of a fish-based restaurant, which was positioned as part of the village’s long-term economic empowerment strategy. The discussions highlighted not only the operational aspects of the planned restaurant but also the importance of mobilising local resources and strengthening collaboration across sectors.



As illustrated in Figure 3, both activities highlight the participatory nature of the programme and the gradual consolidation of commitments among stakeholders. In Figure 3 (a), the meeting on 8 January 2025 focused on identifying potential restaurant managers from the local community, during which responsibilities were discussed, and agreements were reached regarding managerial training and financial support for preparatory activities. Meanwhile, Figure 3 (b) captures the broader forum held on 15 January 2025, which brought together diverse community groups including Bumkal Sri Rejeki, Pokdakan, youth organisations, PKK members, and local leaders. This forum served as a platform to prepare for the inauguration of the fish-based restaurant, ensuring that the initiative was not only technically feasible but also socially inclusive. Together, these two meetings demonstrate how dialogue and shared decision-making formed the foundation for the subsequent implementation of the Sriharjo Culinary Centre.

3.3 Restaurant management through information sharing and empowerment practices

The third stage of the programme focused on strengthening restaurant management through coordination, training, and the application of practices designed to empower community members. This stage emphasised collaboration among multiple stakeholders and highlighted the distribution of responsibilities to ensure the sustainability of the planned fish-based restaurant.

A coordination meeting was held on 13 February 2025 with prospective restaurant managers involving representatives from Bumkal Sri Rejeki, Pokdakan, youth organisations, and PKK members. The meeting resulted in a consensus that the village government would allocate funds for restaurant development, the implementation team would be responsible for operational management, and the university team would provide continuous empowerment and training for restaurant managers. This meeting is documented in Figure 4, which shows community members and facilitators after reaching agreement on their respective roles.



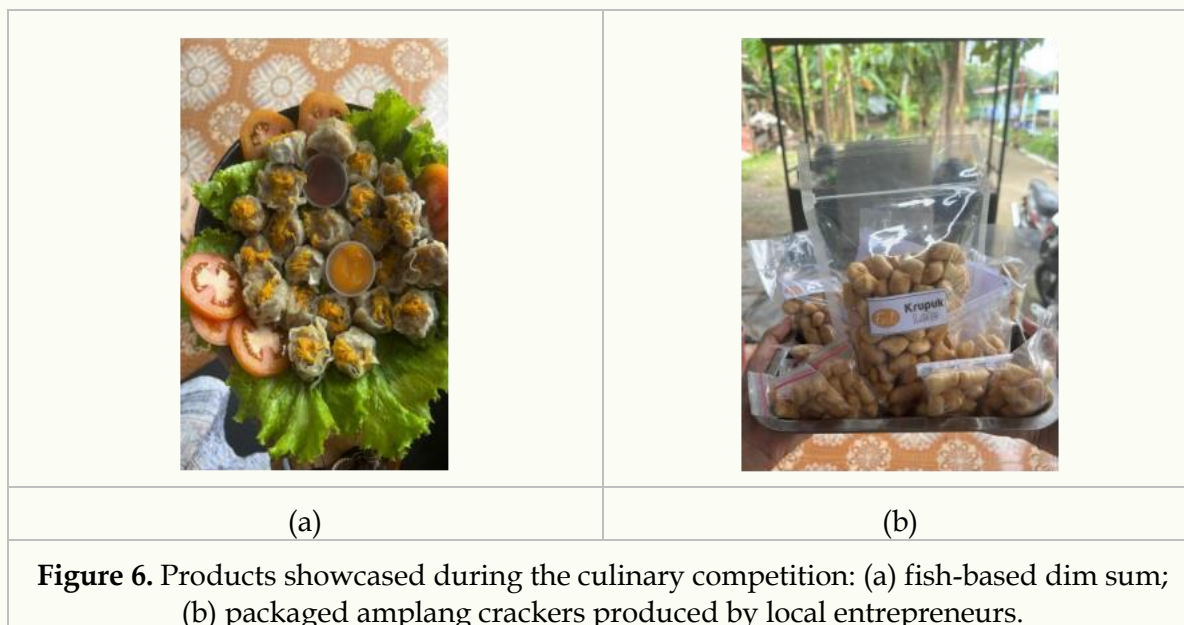
Figure 4. Coordination meeting with prospective restaurant managers, 13 February 2025.

A follow-up activity was organised on 20 February 2025, focusing on the dissemination of technical information to Pokdakan, youth, and PKK members regarding preparations for the culinary business site in Mojohuro. The session provided practical knowledge on business preparation, management, and the systematic allocation of tasks for long-term sustainability. As illustrated in Figure 5, the activity was attended by women's groups and local leaders, who demonstrated strong enthusiasm by bringing samples of food products and discussing potential innovations.



Figure 5. Technical forum with Pokdakan, youth, and PKK members, 20 February 2025.

To further enhance creativity and promote fish-based products, the programme culminated in a culinary competition held on 17 May 2025. The event brought together local food entrepreneurs who showcased a variety of innovative menus using fish as the main ingredient. Examples of the products include dim sum enriched with fish meat and amplang crackers branded as local culinary products (Figure 6). These initiatives not only demonstrated culinary skills but also strengthened the branding of fish-based dishes as potential economic assets of Sriharjo Village.



Alongside the competition, participants also attended a presentation session on marketing strategies and digital promotion methods aimed at supporting small-scale food businesses. The training encouraged participants to adopt community-based approaches to marketing and to integrate digital tools for product promotion. Figure 7 illustrates the training atmosphere, where participants actively followed the presentation while engaging in discussion about practical marketing strategies.



Together, these activities highlight how empowerment practices were implemented through both managerial coordination and culinary innovation. The strong participation from local groups demonstrated the community's readiness to engage in business management, product innovation, and market expansion. This stage served as a bridge between planning and practical implementation, ensuring that the Sriharjo Culinary Centre would be grounded in local ownership and supported by relevant technical competencies.

3.4 Summarizing of pre-test and post-test results

The evaluation of training outcomes was carried out using a structured pre-test and post-test administered to 17 participants. The assessments aimed to measure changes in knowledge and skills across ten domains relevant to culinary business development, ranging from technical aspects of fish processing to digital marketing practices. This approach provided quantitative evidence of the impact of the community service programme on participants' competencies.

Table 1. Summary of Pre- and Post-Test Results of Training Participants (n = 17)

Domain	Pre-Test (%)	Post-Test (%)	Increase (%)
Processing Knowledge	52.9	100.0	47.06
Raw Materials Knowledge	64.7	94.1	29.41
Product Processing Knowledge	29.4	100.0	70.59
Nutrition Knowledge	82.4	100.0	18.00
Fishy Smell Knowledge	70.6	100.0	29.42
Content Knowledge	52.9	100.0	47.06
Marketing Strategies Knowledge	70.6	100.0	29.42
Social Media Knowledge	76.5	100.0	23.53
Paid Advertising Knowledge	94.1	100.0	5.89
Digital Marketing Knowledge	88.2	88.2	0.00

The results show that the training had a significant impact on most domains of knowledge and skills. The largest improvement was observed in product processing knowledge, which increased by 70.59%. This was followed by processing knowledge and content knowledge, both of which recorded increases of 47.06%. These findings highlight the effectiveness of the hands-on training sessions in enhancing participants' technical abilities.

Moderate improvements were found in several other areas, including raw materials knowledge (+29.41%), fishy smell recognition (+29.42%), and marketing strategies (+29.42%). Gains in social media knowledge were also evident (+23.53%), reflecting the growing familiarity of participants with online platforms as tools for business promotion.

By contrast, the smallest improvement was recorded in paid advertising knowledge, with only a 5.89% increase. Meanwhile, digital marketing knowledge showed no increase (0%), remaining constant at 88.2%. This result suggests that participants already possessed a relatively high baseline competency in digital marketing, which limited the observable improvement. However, it may also indicate that while participants were familiar with digital platforms, they had not yet fully translated this knowledge into practical applications for business development. This highlights the need for more advanced and practice-oriented training modules in digital marketing to ensure participants can leverage technology more effectively in promoting their culinary products.

4. Discussion

The findings of this programme reaffirm the importance of institutional collaboration and participatory governance in strengthening rural community empowerment. The initial visits and institutional gatherings in Sriharjo built the trust and mutual understanding that are essential for community-based tourism development. Such trust-building processes are consistent with Damarina (2022), who underscores that clear regulatory frameworks and participatory mechanisms are crucial for people-based tourism villages. In the Sriharjo case, the institutional dialogue went beyond formality; it provided a foundation for strategic planning that aligned the aspirations of the village government, local enterprises, and academic facilitators.

The follow-up discussions and planning forums further illustrate how inclusive dialogue nurtures collective ownership of the programme. As Wardiyanta et al. (2023) note, community participation in planning is a determining factor in the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations, particularly when communities are involved in operational and managerial roles. In Sriharjo, the identification of local restaurant managers and the consensus on shared responsibilities reflect this participatory model. Such approaches echo

Thelma (2024), who links service learning with civic engagement, emphasising that empowerment occurs when local actors actively co-create solutions rather than receiving externally imposed interventions.

The coordination meetings and empowerment practices highlight the importance of distributing roles across multiple stakeholders. Evidence from Catyanadika et al. (2023) shows that strategic branding initiatives in community tourism require cooperation between village-owned enterprises, creative communities, and academic partners to produce sustainable impacts. The Sriharjo programme mirrored this model by mobilising resources from the village government for financing, from Bumkal Sri Rejeki for management, and from the university team for continuous mentoring. Culinary competitions and product showcases reinforced these efforts by enhancing creativity and innovation, as also reported by Warsidah, et al. (2024), who demonstrated that fish-processing training not only strengthens technical skills but also increases community income.

The outcomes of the pre- and post-test further validate the effectiveness of experiential and practice-oriented training. The largest gain was recorded in product processing knowledge (+70.59%), supported by culinary competitions that allowed participants to experiment with new fish-based recipes. This is consistent with Riyadi et al. (2023), who argue that the preservation and innovation of local gastronomy contribute not only to identity formation but also to sustainable tourism. Similarly, Wijayanti (2020) confirms that culinary tourism can strengthen urban and rural destinations by diversifying products and increasing attractiveness. In Sriharjo, such innovation has positioned fish-based products as both economic and cultural assets.

However, the results also reveal uneven improvements across domains. Moderate gains in raw materials, nutrition, and marketing strategies indicate incremental adoption, while digital-related competencies remain a challenge. Social media knowledge improved (+23.53%), which aligns with Setiawan and Hamid (2014), who stress that promotional strategies in local tourism must adapt to digital platforms to expand market reach. Yet the very limited gain in paid advertising (+5.89%) and stagnant digital marketing knowledge (0%) suggest structural barriers, including financial limitations and low confidence in applying advanced tools. Similar findings were noted by Priambodo and Yudisetyanto (2023), who found that dissemination of visual literacy in rural communities requires not only knowledge transfer but also accessible infrastructure and continuous practice.

The environmental and sustainability dimensions should also be noted. As Yuxi, Ling-en, and Linsheng (2024) argue, community tourism must be measured against its ecological impacts to ensure long-term conservation benefits. In Sriharjo, the integration of aquaculture and culinary tourism carries ecological risks but also opportunities for green development. Syafar and Ulumi (2021) demonstrate that transforming community capital into sustainable livelihoods requires balancing economic empowerment with environmental stewardship, a principle highly relevant to aquaculture-based tourism.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that the Sriharjo Culinary Centre initiative validates recent perspectives on sustainable tourism and community empowerment. The programme shows that institutional synergy (Damarina, 2022), participatory governance (Wardiyanta et al., 2023), and creative branding (Catyanadika et al., 2023) are key drivers of success. At the same time, challenges in digital competencies and resource accessibility confirm that differentiated strategies are needed: practice-oriented technical training yields rapid gains, but digital and financial literacy require sustained, resource-supported interventions. Ultimately, the integration of aquaculture and culinary tourism not only enhances local economic resilience but also contributes to sustainable rural development,

aligning with contemporary scholarship on gastronomy-based tourism (Riyadi et al., 2023; Wijayanti, 2020) and green livelihoods (Syafar & Ulumi, 2021).

5. Conclusion

The implementation of the community service programme in Sriharjo Village demonstrates that a combination of institutional collaboration, participatory planning, and experiential training can effectively strengthen local culinary-based economic empowerment. The early stages of institutional visits and follow-up forums-built trust and alignment among stakeholders, ensuring that the initiative was grounded in community ownership. This foundation was further reinforced through coordination meetings, culinary competitions, and technical training, which enhanced both managerial capacity and product innovation.

The pre- and post-test results confirmed significant improvements in participants' competencies, particularly in technical domains such as product processing (+70.59%), food processing, and content knowledge (+47.06%). These gains affirm that hands-on, practice-oriented learning is highly effective for skill development in rural entrepreneurship. Moderate improvements in raw materials, nutrition, and marketing strategies indicate successful but incremental adoption, while limited progress in paid advertising (+5.89%) and the absence of growth in digital marketing (0%) highlight structural and motivational barriers. Taken together, these findings illustrate that community-based programmes can function as effective mechanisms for empowering rural entrepreneurs by enhancing both technical and managerial competencies. However, the uneven outcomes across domains underscore the need for differentiated interventions: short-term training to build immediate technical skills, and sustained, resource-supported approaches to strengthen digital and financial literacy.

In broader terms, the Sriharjo Culinary Centre case confirms the theoretical assumptions of stakeholder collaboration, experiential learning, and critical pedagogy, while extending their application to the integration of aquaculture and culinary tourism. This integration provides a novel and sustainable pathway for local economic development, demonstrating that rural communities can be empowered not only through capacity building but also through strategic innovation and institutional synergy.

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