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## Stitching Identity: The Role of Handicrafts in Cultural Protection by Ikatn Wanita BRI (IWABRI) in Blora

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**ABSTRACT :** *This community service project aims to highlight the significant role of handicrafts in preserving cultural identity, particularly in the context of Blora. Ikatn Wanita BRI (IWABRI) has been actively involved in promoting traditional handicrafts as a means of empowering women and revitalizing local communities. By providing training and resources, IWABRI help artisans to create unique and sustainable products that reflect the rich cultural heritage of Blora. The methodology employed in this community service initiative was Participatory Action Research (PAR), a strategic framework designed to foster learning and address community needs concurrently. This approach encompassed five stages: understanding, planning, acting, changing, and knowing. A total of 21 individuals participated in the program. The initiative successfully enabled participants to conceptualize and produce handicraft designs from inception to completion. However, the quality of the final products varied due to individual skill disparities.*

**Keyword:** *handicrafts; cultural identity; IWABRI*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

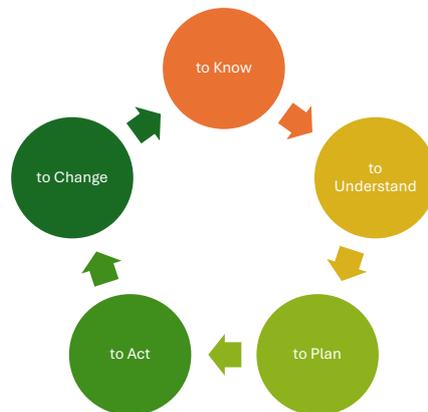
Admst the relentless tide of globalization and modernization, traditional handicrafts have become increasingly marginalized. This decline poses a significant threat, not merely to the loss of unique products, but also to the erosion of cultural identity and ancestral heritage (Nahak, 2019). his phenomenon is evident in regions worldwide, including Blora, Central Java, Indonesia. Contemporary youth often face numerous distractions and demands that foster a sense of passivity and reduced productivity. In this technologically advanced and information-saturated era, it has become increasingly easy to adopt a passive and unproductive mindset. This has detrimental consequences, as young people are more inclined to follow foreign fashion trends that prioritize mass-produced goods over handmade items. There is a prevailing notion that foreign products are superior in quality, rendering local products less appealing. Moreover, imported goods are often perceived as more prestigious and expensive, making them the preferred choice for many young consumers (Redaksi, 2024). Hafsah (2018) Beyond individual consumer choices, these trends have broader economic implications. The growth of local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is hindered, and there is an increased reliance on imported goods, exacerbating economic dependence on foreign nations. Consequently, the SME sector reliant on handicrafts may experience decline, impacting regional economies.

The primary objective of this community service activity is to address the aforementioned issue by preserving traditional handicrafts. This initiative aims to foster awareness and appreciation of cultural identity and ancestral heritage through the involvement of the Blora

chapter of the Ikatan Wanita BRI (IWABRI). IWABRI, an independent and effective organization comprised of spouses of PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia (Persero) Tbk employees, is dedicated to implementing programs that benefit its members in the areas of education, economics, and socio-culture (*Profil IWABRI*, n.d.). In alignment with its objectives, IWABRI members have participated in handicraft training, specializing in hair accessories, brooches, and embroidery.

## 2. METHODS

This method utilizes Participatory Action Research (PAR), an approach designed to foster learning while simultaneously addressing community needs and challenges. It also aims to generate new knowledge and develop relevant programs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009). The stages of community service using the PAR approach are as follows:



Gambar 1. The stages of community service

1. to know: this phase involves a process of inculturation, building trust through immersion within the community. The informal community group for this service is the IWABRI Blora..
2. to understand: this stage aims to identify the core community issues. A focus group discussion (FGD) was employed to conduct a joint analysis with the community. This phase is also referred to as the decodification stage, where social problems are systematically identified.
3. to Plan: this phase focuses on developing solutions to address the identified community issues. A Logical Framework Approach (LFA) was utilized for program planning. LFA systematically identifies objectives, inputs, outputs, and expected results (Humaedi et al., 2023). The program planning matrix is presented as follows:
  - a. Overall Goal: To preserve traditional handicrafts in Blora and foster a sense of cultural identity among the community.

b. Purpose: 1) To empower local artisans and promote the appreciation of traditional handicrafts; 2) To contribute to the sustainable development of the community through cultural tourism and economic diversification.

c. Objectives

1) Outputs:

- Increase in the number of artisans trained in traditional handicraft techniques.

2) Outcomes: a) Revitalization of traditional handicrafts in Blora; b) Increased income for artisans; c) Enhanced cultural pride and identity among the community.

3) Impacts: a) Preservation of cultural heritage; b) Contribution to sustainable economic development.

d. Assumptions: The community is interested in preserving their cultural heritage.

e. Indicators

1) Outputs: a) Number of participants; b) Number of members in the community-based organization.

2) Outcomes: a) Increase in the number of artisans practicing traditional crafts; b) Increase in household income of artisans; c) Results of a community survey on cultural pride.

3) Impacts: increase in local government support for cultural initiatives.

4. to act: this stage involves the implementation of the program as outlined in the preceding phase.

5. to change: this stage necessitates a reflective process to evaluate the program's outcomes. Through this reflection, lessons learned are identified to ensure the program's sustainability.

### **3. RESULT**

The community service initiative has yielded substantial progress in preserving traditional handicrafts. Since its implementation, there has been a notable increase in the number of participants trained in traditional craft techniques. This outcome underscores the effectiveness of the "to know" and "to plan" phases within the PAR methodology, characterized by intensive and comprehensive training for participants.

FGD activities conducted during the "to understand" phase successfully identified key challenges confronting the community, such as the precarious sustainability of craft-based enterprises. In response, the program prioritized raising awareness about the significance of handicrafts, with a particular emphasis on hair accessories, brooches, and embroidery. FGD activities are depicted in Figure 2.



Figure 2. FGD activities

During the "to act" phase, training was conducted on creating hair accessory handicrafts. This initiative aimed to cultivate a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage by engaging participants in the intricate and time-consuming process of handicraft production. The training is illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Handicrafts Training

Results of the products from the training activities are displayed in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Handicrafts Product

This program underscores the efficacy of a participatory approach in safeguarding cultural heritage. Through PAR, IWABRI not only addressed immediate artisan concerns but also fortified social and economic networks within the community. This has cultivated a heightened sense of cultural pride and identity, as evidenced by the community survey indicating a substantial increase in cultural pride post-program. The results of the community service activities are presented in the following table 1.

Table 1. Training Outcome Indicators

Skill Improvement	Improvement Indicators	Number of Participants	Percentage
Design Knowledge	Participants understand basic design principles: form, function, aesthetics, safety, durability, and market value	21 participants	100 %
Craft Technique Knowledge	cutting and shaping, embroidery, hoop usage, design and pattern creation, and color and gradient adjustment.	21 participants	80 %
Tool Knowledge	Participants are familiar with and can operate necessary tools such as scissors, pliers, brooches, needles, etc.	21 participants	100%
Finishing Knowledge	Participants know how to finish products, paying attention to quality, durability, and how good it looks.	21 participants	80%

Nevertheless, challenges persist. While training and skills development have improved, expanding market reach and ensuring long-term business viability remain obstacles. Furthermore, sustaining community enthusiasm requires ongoing innovation and consistent support from governmental and organizational stakeholders.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings of the Community Service activities indicate that all participants successfully completed the program. Participants demonstrated the ability to produce handicrafts from initial design to final finishing. However, the quality of the finished products varied due to individual skill levels. While some participants possessed foundational skills, others were novices and produced less refined products. The situational analysis suggests that these handicrafts have the potential to develop into a creative industry. Key factors for this development include the availability of raw materials, a skilled and motivated workforce, and government support, particularly from the Village and Community Empowerment Agency (DPMD), which can facilitate community empowerment.

This program represents a promising initial step in preserving Blora's handicraft heritage. Its model can be adapted to similar contexts. However, achieving a broader and more sustainable impact necessitates a comprehensive strategy encompassing product innovation, digital marketing, and strategic cross-sector partnerships.

## **5. RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the community service program has been successful in empowering community. To build upon this success, several recommendations can be made. First, the program should be expanded to include a wider range of participants, particularly young people. Second, there is a need for ongoing support and mentorship to help participants develop their businesses. Finally, the local government should consider investing in infrastructure development to support the growth of the handicraft industry.

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