

Community Service as a Driving Force for MSME Empowerment in a Sustainable Economic Ecosystem

Bambang Irawan^{1*}, Suherlan², Valentino Aris³

¹*Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Manajemen STIAMI, Indonesia, bbgirw7980@gmail.com*

²*Universitas Subang, Indonesia*

³*Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia*

Abstract

Community service is one of the strategic pillars of the higher education Tri Dharma that holds significant potential in promoting the empowerment of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) as the foundation of a sustainable economic ecosystem. This study aims to expand and enrich scholarly references on community service by examining its role as a driving force for MSME empowerment within the framework of sustainable economic development. The research employs a literature review method using a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis. Data were collected from Google Scholar and selected credible websites, covering publications from 2014 to 2026. Of the 50 articles initially identified, a rigorous selection process based on relevance, methodological quality, and source credibility resulted in 31 articles being analyzed further. The findings indicate that community service significantly contributes to enhancing MSME capacity through the strengthening of human capital, social capital, business innovation, and the integration of economic, social, and environmental sustainability principles. This study confirms that community service functions as a strategic instrument in building an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable MSME ecosystem.

Keywords: Community Service, MSME Empowerment, Sustainable Economy, MSME Ecosystem

Pengabdian Masyarakat sebagai Motor Pemberdayaan UMKM dalam Ekosistem Ekonomi Berkelanjutan

Abstrak

Pengabdian masyarakat merupakan salah satu pilar strategis tridarma perguruan tinggi yang memiliki potensi besar dalam mendorong pemberdayaan Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah (UMKM) sebagai fondasi ekosistem ekonomi berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menambah dan memperkaya referensi ilmiah terkait pengabdian masyarakat dengan mengkaji perannya sebagai motor pemberdayaan UMKM dalam kerangka pembangunan ekonomi berkelanjutan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah tinjauan pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis deskriptif. Data diperoleh dari Google Scholar dan website kredibel tertentu dengan rentang publikasi tahun 2014–2026. Dari 50 artikel yang teridentifikasi pada tahap awal, dilakukan seleksi ketat berdasarkan relevansi, kualitas metodologi, dan kredibilitas sumber, sehingga diperoleh 31 artikel untuk dianalisis lebih lanjut. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pengabdian masyarakat berkontribusi signifikan terhadap peningkatan kapasitas UMKM melalui penguatan modal manusia, modal sosial, inovasi usaha, serta integrasi prinsip keberlanjutan ekonomi, sosial, dan lingkungan. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pengabdian masyarakat berfungsi sebagai instrumen strategis dalam membangun ekosistem UMKM yang inklusif, resilien, dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Pengabdian Masyarakat, Pemberdayaan UMKM, Ekonomi Berkelanjutan, Ekosistem UMKM

INTRODUCTION

Community service is one of the core pillars in the implementation of the Tri Dharma of higher education and plays a strategic role in promoting community-based economic development. In the national economic context, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) serve as the backbone of the economy due to their contributions to job creation, income distribution, and local economic resilience. However, numerous studies indicate that MSMEs continue to face structural challenges, including limited access to capital, low managerial capacity, and insufficient digital literacy and business sustainability (Septiana, 2025). Community service is therefore viewed as an intervention instrument capable of bridging MSME capacity gaps through participatory, educational, and contextual approaches oriented toward the sustainable strengthening of local potential.

From a theoretical perspective, MSME empowerment is closely linked to the concept of sustainable economic development, which emphasizes a balance between economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental preservation. The sustainable development literature emphasizes that economic sustainability is measured by the ability of business actors to survive, adapt, and grow over the long term (Matondang et al., 2025). Empowered MSMEs are key actors in creating a resilient and inclusive economic ecosystem. In this context, community service serves as a driving force that transfers knowledge, technology, and sustainability values to MSMEs, enabling them to integrate green and social economic principles into their business practices.

A number of previous studies demonstrate that systematically designed community service programs are capable of enhancing MSME entrepreneurial capacity in terms of production, marketing, and business governance. Training-based, mentoring, and business incubation approaches have proven effective in improving MSME competencies and strengthening the competitiveness of local products (Ikhsani et al., 2025). Furthermore, the involvement of academics in community service enables the transfer of research-based knowledge that is practical and responsive to field needs (Qorib, 2024; Solichah et al., 2023). This underscores that community service constitutes a sustainable empowerment process oriented toward strengthening MSME economic independence.

Within a sustainable economic ecosystem, collaboration among actors is a key determinant of MSME empowerment success. The entrepreneurial ecosystem literature highlights the importance of synergy among higher education institutions, government, the private sector, and local communities in creating a conducive business environment. Community service functions as a connecting node that aligns academic interests with the practical needs of grassroots-level MSMEs (Saraswati et al., 2025). Through such collaboration, MSMEs gain access to market networks, policy information, and institutional support that reinforce long-term business sustainability.

Innovation is also a critical element in MSME empowerment toward a sustainable economy. Recent studies emphasize that innovation in products, processes, and business models is a primary determinant of MSME competitiveness amid global market dynamics and economic digitalization. Innovation-oriented community service programs are able to encourage MSMEs to adopt appropriate technologies, digital marketing strategies, and

environmentally friendly production practices (Gustalika et al., 2024; Hastuti et al., 2025). Community service thus plays a role in building MSMEs' innovative capacity in alignment with sustainability principles and modern market demands.

Beyond innovation, the social dimension is inseparable from MSME empowerment within the sustainable economic framework. Social capital literature indicates that trust, social networks, and community cooperation significantly contribute to the success of small enterprises. Community-based community service approaches are able to strengthen MSME social capital through the formation of business groups, cooperatives, or collective marketing networks (Indrawan et al., 2025). This strengthening of social capital fosters solidarity and social resilience that support the sustainability of local business ecosystems.

From a public policy perspective, community service can function as a supporting instrument for the implementation of MSME empowerment policies. Various studies highlight the existence of gaps between macro-level policies and their implementation at the micro level (Amarodin, 2014; Ulia et al., 2024). In this context, community service serves as a mechanism for translating policy into practical actions that align with local MSME characteristics. Through direct assistance, community service programs help MSMEs understand regulations, access government programs, and improve compliance with business and sustainability standards.

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that community service plays a strategic role as a driving force for MSME empowerment within a sustainable economic ecosystem. Community service contributes to enhancing the individual capacity of MSME actors while strengthening inclusive, innovative, and resilient local economic systems. Therefore, research on community service as a driver of MSME empowerment is both relevant and essential to enrich academic discourse and to provide practical recommendations for the future development of sustainable MSME empowerment programs.

Community Service

Community service refers to academic activities aimed at transferring knowledge, technology, and social values to the community through participatory approaches (Purba et al., 2026). In this study, community service is positioned as a strategic instrument for enhancing MSME capacity, not merely as a social activity, but as an empowerment process oriented toward business sustainability and self-reliance.

MSME Empowerment

MSME empowerment refers to the process of improving the capacity of micro, small, and medium enterprise actors to manage resources, make decisions, and develop their businesses independently (Br Surbakti & Perkasa, 2023). This concept encompasses the strengthening of human capital, social capital, and innovative capabilities that enable MSMEs to enhance competitiveness and long-term business resilience.

Sustainable Economy

A sustainable economy is a development approach that balances economic growth with social equity and environmental preservation (Putra et al., 2025). Within the context of this study, a sustainable economy serves as a conceptual framework for analyzing how community service encourages MSMEs to orient their business practices toward sustainability and socio-environmental responsibility.

MSME Ecosystem

The MSME ecosystem refers to a network of actors, institutions, policies, and resources that interact to support the sustainability and growth of MSMEs (Arjang et al., 2025). This study views community service as an integral component of the MSME ecosystem, functioning to strengthen synergy among higher education institutions, government, the private sector, and local communities in creating an inclusive and sustainable economic system.

METHOD

This study employs a literature review method with a qualitative approach to systematically examine scholarly works that discuss community service as a driving force for MSME empowerment within a sustainable economic ecosystem. This approach was selected with the primary objective of expanding and enriching academic references related to community service, particularly those highlighting its strategic role in enhancing MSME capacity and promoting sustainable economic development. Through the literature review, this study seeks to synthesize previous findings to build a comprehensive conceptual understanding that is relevant to the future development of community service studies.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive analysis by systematically describing, categorizing, and interpreting the content of the literature without performing statistical hypothesis testing. Each article was analyzed based on its research focus, community service approach, forms of MSME empowerment, and relevance to sustainable economic concepts. The results of the analysis are presented in descriptive narrative form to illustrate patterns, trends, and existing research gaps within the study of community service.

The data sources for this study were obtained from Google Scholar and selected credible websites, including national and international scientific journals, official institutional reports, and publications from relevant academic institutions. The publication period ranged from 2014 to 2026 to ensure that the analyzed references were current and contextualized within recent developments in community service and MSME empowerment. In the initial stage, the literature search yielded 50 articles relevant to keywords related to community service, MSMEs, and sustainable economy.

Subsequently, a rigorous selection process was conducted by applying inclusion and exclusion criteria such as topic relevance, methodological clarity, source credibility, and contribution to the advancement of community service studies. Through this selection process, 31 articles were identified as the most relevant and of high quality for further

analysis. These selected articles constitute the analytical foundation of this study in expanding references and enriching the literature on community service as a strategic instrument for MSME empowerment and sustainable economic development.

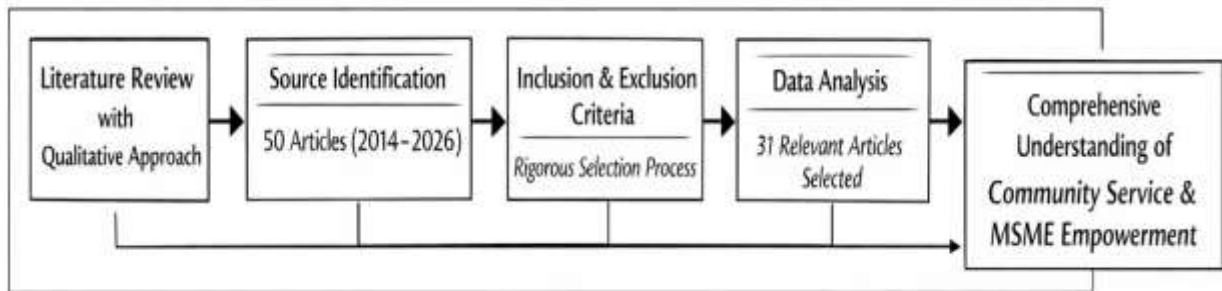


Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Community service in the context of MSME empowerment can be comprehensively analyzed through the perspective of empowerment theory, which emphasizes the process of enhancing individual and group capacities to independently and sustainably access, manage, and control economic resources. This theory asserts that empowerment is not merely the provision of material assistance, but rather a process of structural transformation that enables MSME actors to attain stronger bargaining positions within the economic system (Hidayat et al., 2025). Accordingly, MSME actors are positioned as active subjects of development, possessing agency and playing a decisive role in determining the direction of their own business development. In community service practices, participatory approaches become a crucial element, as they facilitate two-way dialogue between academics and MSME actors, ensuring that the transfer of knowledge and skills occurs in a contextual manner aligned with real needs in the field. This approach is consistent with the sustainable development paradigm, which emphasizes capacity building and self-reliance rather than dependency on external assistance. Community service thus functions as an initial driving force that activates long-term empowerment processes through the strengthening of MSMEs' internal capabilities.

From the perspective of human capital theory, the quality of human resources is a key determinant of MSME productivity, innovation, and business sustainability (Srijani & Ardiyani, 2025). Education, training, and targeted mentoring are viewed as long-term investments capable of enhancing entrepreneurial and managerial competencies among MSME actors. Numerous previous studies consistently indicate that limited financial management skills, weak marketing capabilities, and inadequate business planning remain major obstacles for MSMEs, particularly in developing countries (Rahmadhani & Kusumastuti, 2025). In this context, community service plays a strategic role in bridging these capacity gaps through interventions grounded in scientific knowledge, best practices, and adult learning approaches. When MSME actors acquire relevant and applicable skills, they become more adaptive to market changes, technological dynamics, and competitive

pressures. Community service therefore directly contributes to strengthening MSMEs' human capital as the primary foundation of economic sustainability.

Beyond human capital, social capital theory provides an important analytical framework for understanding the effectiveness of community service in MSME empowerment. Social capital encompasses elements of trust, shared norms, and social networks that facilitate cooperation and economic coordination among business actors. Empirical literature shows that MSMEs with strong social networks tend to have greater access to information, markets, and resources, and demonstrate higher resilience to economic shocks (Supriadin, 2025). Community service programs that encourage the formation of business groups, cooperatives, or collective marketing networks have proven effective in strengthening this form of social capital. Through collective and collaborative interactions, MSME actors gain social support that enhances confidence and solidarity. In this regard, community service helps build a supportive social ecosystem that underpins business sustainability and strengthens local economic resilience.

Findings from previous studies consistently indicate that community service has a positive impact on improving MSME performance, including productivity, product quality, and market access. Empirical research reveals that MSMEs participating in community service-based mentoring programs experience improvements in financial management, marketing strategies, product innovation, and compliance with quality standards (Novianti et al., 2023; Silvia et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that community service functions as an effective non-formal learning mechanism, particularly for MSME actors with limited access to formal education. Nevertheless, the literature also emphasizes that the effectiveness of community service is highly dependent on program continuity, the quality of mentoring, and the alignment of training materials with the actual needs of MSMEs. Without careful planning and sustained follow-up, the impact of community service tends to be temporary and insufficient to drive long-term business transformation (Faridah, 2026).

Within the context of a sustainable economy, sustainable development theory serves as a critical conceptual foundation for analyzing the role of community service in MSME empowerment. This theory underscores the necessity of balancing economic, social, and environmental dimensions in all development activities to ensure long-term benefits (Hapsoro & Bangun, 2020). Community service initiatives oriented toward sustainable MSMEs seek to internalize environmentally friendly production practices and social responsibility within business operations. Previous literature indicates that MSMEs guided in applying sustainability principles tend to exhibit higher environmental awareness, stronger business reputations, and more robust relationships with consumers and local communities (Hasanah & Wardianto, 2025). Community service thus acts as an educational instrument that bridges sustainable development concepts with practical MSME activities at the grassroots level, thereby enhancing long-term competitiveness.

Concrete implementation of sustainability-oriented community service can be observed in MSME empowerment programs for batik producers in Pekalongan, Central Java, which focus on improving production quality while adopting environmentally

friendly natural dyes. In this program, universities actively serve as mentors by transferring knowledge related to sustainable production techniques, waste management, and product quality improvement (Admin, 2025; Binus University, 2024). This intensive mentoring process fosters collective awareness of the environmental impacts of batik production activities. As a result, batik MSMEs are able to produce higher value-added products, meet the preferences of increasingly environmentally conscious consumers, and expand their market reach. This case demonstrates that community service can act as a catalyst for MSME transformation from conventional production practices toward business models aligned with sustainable economic principles.

Another relevant case study is the community service program targeting processed food MSMEs in Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, which focuses on marketing digitalization and strengthening local brands. This program was designed to address challenges related to limited market access and low utilization of digital technology among MSME actors (Utari, 2022; Wardhani et al., 2024). Through structured mentoring, MSMEs are guided to utilize digital platforms, social media, and online marketplaces as tools for product promotion and distribution. Program evaluations indicate significant improvements in consumer reach, brand visibility, and income stability following the mentoring process. This case highlights that community service can effectively facilitate MSME digital transformation, provided that programs are designed to be adaptive, contextual, and aligned with the capacities of business actors.

Despite these positive outcomes, the literature also identifies several challenges in the implementation of community service programs, particularly concerning sustainability and effectiveness. Many community service initiatives remain short-term in nature, lack systematic impact evaluation mechanisms, and provide minimal follow-up mentoring after the main activities conclude (Wahib et al., 2024). In some cases, community service is limited to one-way training sessions without sustained mentoring processes, resulting in limited structural change in MSME management practices (Nurjanah et al., 2024). This condition reflects a gap between the normative objectives of community service as an empowerment instrument and its practical implementation in the field. Consequently, there is a need for more systematic program designs that emphasize long-term orientation and integration with the real needs of MSMEs and broader empowerment policies.

In response to these limitations, the integration of community service with a sustainable mentoring model is essential, emphasizing program continuity, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and periodic outcome-based evaluation. This model views MSME mentoring as a dynamic, long-term process rather than a one-off activity, allowing for gradual and sustained capacity building. Through consistent mentoring, MSMEs not only receive solutions to short-term problems but are also equipped with the skills needed to identify opportunities and manage business risks independently. Furthermore, collaboration among universities, local governments, and the private sector is crucial for strengthening resources, funding, and market networks. Under this approach, community service evolves from an incidental or ceremonial activity into an integral component of a structured, adaptive, and sustainability-oriented MSME empowerment ecosystem.

Within the framework of public policy, community service can also be positioned as an implementative instrument that bridges MSME empowerment policies with on-the-ground practices. Numerous policy studies indicate that many MSMEs struggle to access government programs due to information constraints, low regulatory literacy, and limited administrative capacity (Hulu et al., 2025). In this context, community service provides opportunities for academics to act as facilitators and mediators, assisting MSMEs in understanding regulations, utilizing fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, and complying with established business standards. This role not only increases MSME participation in government programs but also enhances compliance and governance quality. Consequently, community service directly contributes to improving policy effectiveness while strengthening MSMEs' positions within an inclusive and responsive sustainable economic ecosystem.

Overall, this discussion confirms that community service constitutes a crucial driving force in the empowerment of MSMEs toward the formation of a sustainable economic ecosystem. Through approaches grounded in empowerment theory, human capital theory, and social capital theory, community service is capable of enhancing MSME capacity in a holistic manner, encompassing economic, social, and institutional dimensions. Evidence from previous studies and supporting case studies demonstrates the significant potential of community service to drive structural transformation among MSMEs, from vulnerable small-scale enterprises into more independent and competitive economic entities. Therefore, strengthening program design, ensuring mentoring continuity, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration are key factors in ensuring that community service genuinely contributes to sustainable, inclusive, and long-term MSME empowerment.

Table 1. Key Findings and Discussion on Community Service in Sustainable MSME Empowerment

Aspect of Findings	Theoretical Foundation	Key Findings	Discussion Implications
Role of community service in MSME empowerment	Empowerment Theory	Community service functions as a structural transformation process that enhances MSMEs' capacity and bargaining position, rather than merely providing material assistance	MSMEs are positioned as active development agents capable of determining their own business direction in a sustainable manner
Participatory approach in community service	Empowerment Theory & Sustainable Development	Participatory approaches enable contextual knowledge and skill transfer aligned with MSMEs' real needs	Increases program effectiveness and promotes MSME self-reliance and sustainability
Strengthening MSME human capital	Human Capital Theory	Education, training, and mentoring improve managerial competence, entrepreneurship, and technological adaptability	Community service serves as a long-term investment instrument for MSME economic sustainability
Role of social capital in MSME	Social Capital Theory	Strong networks, trust, and shared norms enhance	Community service builds a supportive

performance		MSMEs' access to markets, information, and resilience to economic shocks	social ecosystem that strengthens local economic sustainability
Impact of community service on MSME performance	Non-formal Learning Perspective	MSMEs experience improvements in productivity, product quality, innovation, and market access	Program effectiveness depends on continuity, mentoring quality, and alignment with MSMEs' needs
Integration of sustainability principles	Sustainable Development Theory	MSMEs adopting environmentally friendly practices and social responsibility demonstrate stronger competitiveness and reputation	Community service facilitates the internalization of economic, social, and environmental sustainability values
Case study of batik MSMEs in Pekalongan	Sustainable Community Service Practices	Sustainability-oriented mentoring increases product value-added and market reach	Demonstrates community service as a catalyst for transformation toward sustainable business models
Case study of processed food MSMEs in Sleman	Digitalization & Branding	Digital marketing mentoring improves brand visibility, consumer reach, and income stability	Community service effectively supports MSME digital transformation when adaptive and contextual
Challenges in community service implementation	Program Evaluation Perspective	Many programs are short-term and lack systematic impact evaluation	Highlights the need for long-term, outcome-oriented community service program design
Sustainable mentoring model	Ecosystem-Based Empowerment	Continuous mentoring and multi-stakeholder collaboration enhance empowerment effectiveness	Community service should be integrated into MSME empowerment ecosystems and public policies
Community service in public policy implementation	Policy Implementation Theory	Academics act as facilitators in improving MSMEs' access to policies and regulatory compliance	Community service enhances policy effectiveness and supports inclusive, sustainable economic ecosystems

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review and qualitative descriptive analysis, this study concludes that community service plays a strategic role as a driving force for MSME empowerment in building a sustainable economic ecosystem. Community service contributes significantly to enhancing the capacity of MSME actors through the strengthening of human capital, social capital, and innovative capabilities. Participatory and contextual approaches in community service enable the effective transfer of knowledge and skills that are aligned with the real needs of MSMEs, thereby fostering

business independence and competitiveness. Moreover, community service also plays an important role in integrating economic, social, and environmental sustainability principles into MSME business practices.

The theoretical implications of this study lie in reinforcing the position of community service as a key instrument within the frameworks of empowerment theory, human capital theory, and sustainable development theory. The findings enrich the existing literature by emphasizing that community service functions not only as a component of the university's tri-dharma mandate, but also as a strategic mechanism for community-based economic development. From a practical perspective, the results provide implications for universities and community service practitioners to design programs oriented toward sustainability, long-term mentoring, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. For policymakers, this study indicates that community service can be utilized as an effective and adaptive instrument for implementing MSME empowerment policies at the local level.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research adopts a literature review approach and therefore does not involve the direct collection of empirical data from MSME actors or community service practitioners. Second, the data sources are limited to publications available through Google Scholar and selected credible websites, which may result in the exclusion of other relevant studies. Third, although the literature time frame spans from 2014 to 2026, the specific dynamics of local and sectoral MSME contexts are not fully captured. These limitations may affect the generalizability of the research findings.

In light of these limitations, future research is recommended to combine literature review methods with empirical approaches, such as field-based case studies, in-depth interviews, or surveys involving MSME actors and community service implementers. Future studies may also expand data sources by incorporating reputable international databases to enrich global perspectives. Furthermore, more sector-specific or region-specific studies are suggested to obtain a more contextualized understanding of MSME empowerment. For practitioners and policymakers, it is recommended that community service programs be designed in a sustainable manner, integrated with MSME empowerment policies, and supported by systematic impact evaluation mechanisms.

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