

Sustaining Traditional Food Microenterprises: A Case Study of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya

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Abstract.

This study explores the dynamics of traditional food microenterprises through a case study of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya, a women-led initiative in Bantul, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The enterprise specialises in producing sago-based snacks using inherited recipes and locally sourced raw materials, representing a unique intersection of cultural preservation, grassroots entrepreneurship, and rural livelihood development. Despite its cultural and economic significance, the business faces persistent challenges such as limited access to technology, irregular raw material supply, lack of certification, and inadequate marketing skills—barriers common among informal microenterprises in rural Southeast Asia. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on field observations and in-depth interviews with stakeholders to examine the enterprise's operations, community involvement, and adaptation strategies. The findings reveal that strong community participation, particularly among local women, underpins the enterprise's resilience and capacity for innovation. Community service interventions—ranging from food safety training to packaging and financial literacy—played a catalytic role in enhancing product quality, operational efficiency, and knowledge transfer, especially to younger generations. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable rural development and women's economic empowerment by proposing a conceptual framework that integrates cultural capital, gendered labour, and institutional support. The study underscores the need for sustained mentoring, digital literacy, and structural support to enable traditional microenterprises to transition from survival-based models to sustainable, market-ready ventures. The case of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya illustrates how culturally rooted enterprises can evolve into viable models for inclusive, place-based development when supported through participatory and context-sensitive approaches.

Keywords: *Woman entrepreneurship; Traditional food; Microenterprise; community development; Sustainability.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional food microenterprises play a vital role in preserving culinary heritage, promoting local economic development, and providing livelihood opportunities, especially in rural areas (Putra & Suharto, 2023). Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya exemplifies a community-based initiative rooted in local tradition, producing handmade sago chips using inherited recipes and locally sourced materials. Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya is a home-based microenterprise in Imogiri, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, that specialises in the production of traditional sago chips using indigenous recipes and locally sourced raw materials. This business not only preserves culinary heritage but also sustains the livelihoods of women in the surrounding community. Its importance lies in its embodiment of grassroots entrepreneurship that intertwines economic survival with cultural preservation, a theme increasingly significant in discussions on sustainable development and rural innovation

This research is unique in its context-specific approach, relying on empirical observations and stakeholder engagement to explore the dynamics of survival, innovation, and cultural continuity within a micro-scale traditional business. It contributes to academic and policy debates by framing traditional microenterprises as part of a wider ecosystem involving informal networks, cultural knowledge, and institutional gaps

This research addresses pressing challenges faced by the community, including limited access to production technology, inconsistent raw material supply, lack of formal certification, and inadequate marketing skills. These barriers hinder the growth and long-term sustainability of traditional food microenterprises.

Therefore, the study aims to:

- Explore the role of traditional food microenterprises in promoting sustainable rural livelihoods.
- Examine the contributions of women-led enterprises to economic empowerment and cultural preservation.
- Identify the key challenges and support mechanisms affecting microenterprise sustainability and growth.
- Develop a conceptual framework that integrates cultural capital, women's empowerment, and institutional support to explain the operation and resilience of such enterprises.

Despite growing interest in microenterprise development, there remains limited scholarly attention to ventures based on lesser-known traditional products such as sago chips. The case of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya addresses this gap by offering a focused examination of a rural, women-led microenterprise engaged in the production of sago-based snacks—an area that is significantly underrepresented in existing literature.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Microenterprises, especially those rooted in traditional food production, are widely recognised for their contributions to community livelihoods, cultural identity preservation, and women's empowerment (Dewi et al., 2022; Putra & Suharto, 2023). Handayani and Suryani (2023) highlight that female-led food businesses in rural areas not only supplement household income but also play a vital role in transmitting traditional knowledge across generations and fostering local pride. Furthermore, Ardiansyah and Fatimah (2023) underscore the critical role of institutional

support in enabling microenterprises to access markets, obtain certifications, and adopt sustainable business practices

Recent studies emphasise the vital role of traditional food microenterprises in promoting inclusive economic growth and preserving culinary traditions. Dewi et al. (2022) found that women-led food enterprises in Yogyakarta significantly contribute to family income while reinforcing local identity and cultural practices. Similarly, Handayani and Suryani (2023) highlight that gendered entrepreneurship in the informal food sector often emerges from necessity and evolves into a sustainable livelihood

From a policy perspective, Ardiansyah and Fatimah (2023) argue that institutional synergy and community-based support systems are crucial for enabling rural microenterprises to access resources, training, and certification. Putra and Suharto (2023) propose a cultural-enterprise model, suggesting that heritage-based business models not only sustain local economies but also create unique market niches.

Based on this literature, the conceptual framework for this study incorporates three core dimensions:

1. Cultural Capital and Product Differentiation
2. Women's Empowerment and Economic Agency
3. Institutional Support and Market Access

These dimensions collectively illustrate how traditional food microenterprises like Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya operate within an ecosystem of informal networks, cultural preservation, and gradual market integration. The framework supports the case study's investigation into the sustainability and challenges of such enterprises in rural Indonesia

The success of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya is deeply rooted in strong community participation and localised interaction. As a women-led microenterprise, it operates on a community-based production model, where neighbouring women are actively engaged in various stages of the business; from sago starch processing to chip frying, packaging, and local distribution. This participatory structure enables shared economic benefits and fosters a sense of ownership among community members.

Before the implementation of the community engagement initiatives, the operational structure of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya reflected many of the challenges typically faced by informal microenterprises in rural Indonesia. The business was operated on a small scale, with limited production capacity and no formal workflow. The use of rudimentary tools and traditional manual techniques resulted in inconsistent product quality and low efficiency. Packaging was minimal, lacking both branding and food safety indicators, which confined sales to local markets and made it difficult to attract new customers.

A major challenge faced by the enterprise was the unstable and seasonal supply of sago, the core raw material. The procurement of sago was informal and often disrupted by local agricultural conditions, making it difficult to maintain production schedules. Additionally, the business lacked adequate packaging and branding. The chips were sold in basic, unlabelled plastic wraps, reducing their shelf appeal and preventing access to regulated markets such as supermarkets or online platforms.

Another significant issue was the lack of formal financial management practices. The enterprise did not maintain any structured bookkeeping or inventory records, making it difficult to

monitor costs, profits, or growth potential. This also hindered their ability to apply for microfinancing or participate in government support programs that required financial documentation.

From a marketing perspective, the enterprise had limited outreach beyond the immediate community. Sales were mostly conducted through informal word-of-mouth, village markets, or seasonal festivals. The founder and team members had not received formal training in business development, branding, or digital marketing. Moreover, the product had not undergone any food safety certification processes, such as halal certification, restricting its credibility and access to larger distribution networks.

Given these initial conditions, the study and associated community service activities aimed to produce several key outcomes. First, it was anticipated that the enterprise would improve its operational efficiency through exposure to enhanced production methods, basic equipment upgrades, and structured workflows. With the support of training sessions, the team would also be introduced to food safety practices and more attractive, market-friendly packaging solutions, leading to an improvement in overall product quality.

In terms of skills development, the program aimed to build the entrepreneurial capacity of the women involved, particularly in financial literacy, simple accounting, pricing strategies, and supply chain coordination. These enhancements would empower the founder and workers to manage their business more strategically and pursue sustainable growth.

Another major expected outcome was the increased involvement of community members—particularly local women and youth—in production and marketing activities. By creating a collaborative and inclusive environment, the enterprise could serve as a model for community-based empowerment through traditional food entrepreneurship.

The study also sought to support initial steps toward formal certification by guiding the application processes for food safety and halal status. Additionally, the introduction of digital marketing tools and simple e-commerce strategies would help the enterprise expand its customer base beyond the local market. The anticipated outcomes were designed to align with both the research objectives and the practical needs of the community. The intention was to generate both academic insights and tangible social impact, enhancing the resilience, visibility, and economic potential of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya within the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Community service activities have played a catalytic role in enhancing this participation. Through collaborative programs initiated by local universities, NGOs, and extension agents, the owner and her team have received training in food hygiene, product packaging, and simple financial management, helping them to improve product quality and prepare for formal certification.

Furthermore, the enterprise serves as a learning hub for knowledge transfer, particularly among younger women in the village, who are trained in both traditional food preparation techniques and basic entrepreneurial skills. This intergenerational engagement promotes cultural continuity and skill sustainability.

Overall, community involvement is not just supportive but integral to the enterprise's identity and growth. The program reflects a bottom-up development model where empowerment, collaboration, and cultural pride are embedded in daily practice.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the operations, challenges, and community engagement in the Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya microenterprise.

The following methods were used to address the research objectives and community challenges:

- 1) Field observations were conducted as a key method for understanding the real-life context in which Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya operates. An observational visit was made to the home-based production site in Imogiri, Bantul Regency. During the visit, researchers recorded observations on production practices, worker interactions, hygiene and safety measures, packaging processes, and the layout of the work environment. Observations also included how tasks were divided among workers, how decisions were made during production, and how raw materials were sourced and managed. These on-site visits provided rich contextual data that allowed the researchers to grasp not only technical processes but also the social dynamics and cultural practices embedded within the enterprise.
- 2) In-depth interviews were carried out to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and motivations in greater detail. A semi-structured interview approach was adopted to balance consistency across interviews with flexibility to probe into emerging topics. Interviews were conducted with ten key stakeholders: the business owner and two women workers actively involved in the day-to-day operations. The interviews covered a wide range of topics, including the origin and development of the business, roles and responsibilities of each team member, challenges in sourcing materials and marketing products, perceptions of empowerment, and expectations for the future. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure comfort and clarity for participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and later transcribed for analysis.

These in-depth interviews provided nuanced insights into the motivations and lived realities of rural women entrepreneurs. They also revealed the informal strategies employed to sustain the business amidst limited resources, fluctuating supply chains, and market uncertainty. Importantly, the interviews highlighted how social capital, and cultural knowledge played a central role in the enterprise's survival and gradual growth. The combination of field observations and interviews allowed the researchers to build a well-rounded understanding of both the structural and human elements of this microenterprise, reinforcing the value of qualitative inquiry in community-based research.

Data Collection Techniques

The research and community service activities were conducted in Imogiri Village, located in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Imogiri is a rural area known for its cultural richness and traditional food practices, making it a suitable site for studying microenterprises engaged in local culinary production. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique suitable for qualitative research where information-rich cases are deliberately chosen. The selection criteria included direct involvement in the enterprise, familiarity with business processes, and willingness to participate in interviews. This ensured that participants had sufficient knowledge and experience to provide meaningful insights relevant to the research questions.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments, the interview protocol was reviewed by two qualitative research experts before fieldwork. Instruments were piloted and refined to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with research objectives. Triangulation of data sources—interviews and observations—was used to increase validity, while member-checking was employed to confirm the accuracy of key findings with selected participants. Additionally, the consistent use of interview guides and thematic coding procedures helped enhance the reliability and transparency of the research process.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected in this study were analysed using a thematic analysis approach, which is appropriate for identifying patterns and recurring meanings in qualitative data. This technique allowed the researchers to systematically examine the experiences, perceptions, and insights shared by participants concerning the operations, challenges, and community impact of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya. The process began with the transcription of all recorded interviews. Transcripts were prepared verbatim in Bahasa Indonesia to preserve accuracy, and selected key segments were translated into English for reporting and analytical purposes.

Following transcription, the data were subjected to initial open coding using NVivo 14 software. Codes were developed both inductively—from the actual language and content of participants—and deductively, based on the study's research objectives such as empowerment, sustainability, and community involvement. These codes were then organised into categories that formed the basis of broader thematic constructs.

Thematic development involved identifying meaningful patterns that cut across multiple data sources. Major themes that emerged included economic empowerment of women, traditional knowledge transfer, resource constraints, and institutional support gaps. The research team engaged in iterative coding sessions to refine these themes and ensure consistency.

To enhance the validity of the findings, the study employed data triangulation by comparing and cross-verifying insights gathered from interviews and observations. Furthermore, a process of member-checking was conducted with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretation and the relevance of the emerging themes.

This structured and multi-step approach to data analysis ensured that the findings were both grounded in participant experiences and aligned with the conceptual framework developed from the literature. It also enhanced the credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability of the study, making it suitable for informing both academic inquiry and practical interventions in similar microenterprise settings.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the fieldwork reveal that Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya plays a significant role in supporting the economic resilience of rural women in Imogiri Village. The enterprise not only serves as a source of supplemental income for women who are traditionally homemakers but also functions as a social and cultural space where knowledge of traditional food preparation is preserved and passed on. Many of the women involved expressed that their participation allowed them to gain confidence, feel productive, and contribute to household finances without having to

leave their community. This aligns with previous studies indicating that women's engagement in microenterprises strengthens both familial and communal bonds (Dewi et al., 2022).

Despite its grassroots impact, the business faces several structural and operational challenges. A key issue identified was the limited access to consistent and high-quality sago raw materials. The owner reported difficulties in sourcing sufficient quantities during the off-season, which interrupted production and delayed orders. In addition, there was no formal arrangement with suppliers, leaving the business vulnerable to price volatility and inconsistent quality. This finding underscores the need for stronger supply chain management and formalised procurement systems, which are a common limitation among informal microenterprises in rural settings (Ardiansyah & Fatimah, 2023).

Another major challenge was the lack of formal certification and branding. Although the chips were popular among local consumers, the absence of BPOM (food safety) and halal certification limited the ability to expand into broader retail and digital markets. Observations revealed that packaging was simple and lacked product labelling, nutritional information, or contact details—factors that could hinder trust and consumer reach beyond the village. On the other hand, the study also found a strong sense of ownership and community solidarity among the women working in the business. The production process was highly collaborative, with tasks such as kneading dough, frying, and packaging done collectively. This sense of shared responsibility and mutual support reinforced a model of community-based entrepreneurship. It also reflected an informal but effective structure that enabled the business to survive with limited resources. The women were not only contributors of labour but also informal problem-solvers, often suggesting improvements in processing techniques or scheduling work around family duties.

In summary, the results demonstrate that Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya exemplifies how traditional knowledge and women's agency can be harnessed for economic empowerment. However, to move from survival to sustainability, the enterprise requires targeted support in areas such as supply chain development, certification processes, marketing, and digital skills. The discussion highlights the broader implication that microenterprises in similar contexts can benefit from integrated interventions that combine cultural preservation with capacity building and policy support.

Additionally, there was a general absence of business literacy among the workers. Financial records were not maintained, and pricing decisions were made intuitively rather than based on cost analysis. The owner and her team had limited access to formal training, digital tools, or external networks that could support the growth of the enterprise. These conditions made it difficult to scale the business, attract institutional buyers, or apply for financial aid. Socially, while the women were active in production, their roles were often confined to labour rather than leadership or strategic planning.

The results of this study demonstrate that traditional microenterprises like Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya are not only economic entities but also cultural institutions that sustain community identity and intergenerational knowledge. This finding is consistent with prior research emphasising that informal, women-led food businesses in rural settings contribute significantly to social cohesion and economic survival (Handayani & Suryani, 2023; Dewi et al., 2022). However, this study contributes a new perspective by showing how such enterprises can also serve as platforms

for adaptive learning, skill transfer, and grassroots innovation when community engagement is structured and sustained.

One of the key insights emerging from this study is that while microenterprises often operate informally, they possess a high degree of resilience and adaptability. The women involved in the enterprise were found to be resourceful in managing production constraints, balancing family responsibilities, and improvising with limited resources. This finding supports the notion that microentrepreneurs—especially women in rural contexts—exhibit what scholars refer to as “embedded agency,” whereby they use their cultural and social knowledge to make strategic decisions within structural limitations (Putra & Suharto, 2023).

Another important contribution of this study lies in the practical effects of community engagement activities. The training sessions provide not only improved technical capabilities but also shift the participants’ perception of themselves from informal workers to micro-entrepreneurs. This psychological and identity shift has been underexplored in past studies. While prior literature has often focused on economic outcomes such as increased income or sales, this study highlights the softer, yet equally critical outcomes of empowerment, recognition, and strategic thinking among rural women.

The findings also highlight how packaging and certification are perceived as gateways to market legitimacy. This aligns with Ardiansyah and Fatimah’s (2023) conclusion that small food producers must navigate institutional structures—such as food safety laws and halal regulations—to access formal market channels. However, this study contributes further by revealing that participants are aware of these structural demands but are often excluded due to procedural complexity, cost, or lack of information. This suggests that interventions must go beyond technical training to include facilitation and advocacy to help bridge informal entrepreneurs into formal systems.

It is important to state that the study assumes participants’ responses are sincere and that the data collected reflect their actual experiences and perceptions. As a qualitative case study, the findings are not intended to be generalised statistically but to offer transferable insights applicable to similar community-based enterprises in rural Southeast Asia.

A final assumption underlying the discussion is that capacity building, when delivered through participatory and culturally sensitive approaches, can effectively empower rural women. However, the study also recognises that such empowerment is not linear. Continued mentoring, access to networks, and follow-up support are essential to sustaining improvements made during short-term interventions. This reflects the broader literature that cautions against “project-based empowerment” that lacks continuity (Yusof & Ismail, 2021).

Overall, the discussion places the case of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya within the broader discourse of informal entrepreneurship, women’s empowerment, and rural development. It offers new insights into how traditional knowledge and community engagement can be integrated to create viable, sustainable microenterprises. The study affirms that real transformation occurs not only through external input but through the activation of existing community assets when guided by inclusive, respectful, and responsive approaches.

Table 1: Community participation in the Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya microenterprise

Aspect	Description
Level of Community Participation	High – Women from the local community were actively involved in all stages of production: raw material processing, cooking, packaging, and selling. Participation extended to training sessions and focus group discussions, indicating shared ownership and strong engagement.
Nature of Participation	Primarily collective and informal. Community members worked together as a team with shared responsibilities and decision-making, fostering mutual support and empowerment. The business also provided opportunities for younger women to learn and contribute.
Impact on Economic Empowerment	Positive – Women reported increased household income and greater financial independence. The business created alternative employment for housewives and part-time earners. Several participants expressed improved self-confidence and willingness to participate in other income-generating activities.
Impact on Social Cohesion	Strong – The enterprise strengthened social ties through collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and collective problem-solving. It became a social space for women to gather, exchange ideas, and support one another beyond just economic activity.
Cultural Impact	Significant – The business preserved local food heritage by continuing the production of traditional sago-based snacks. Knowledge transfer from older to younger generations helped sustain intangible cultural assets.
Adoption of Innovations	Partial – Participants adopted new packaging techniques (sealed, labeled bags), improved hygiene practices, and simple bookkeeping methods. While digital marketing was introduced, adoption remained low due to limited digital literacy and infrastructure.
Barriers to Further Innovation	Limited access to technology, low confidence in using digital tools, and lack of internet infrastructure. Some hesitation to change existing traditions without full understanding of long-term benefits.
Recommendations for Strengthening Participation and Innovation	Continued mentoring and training, tailored digital literacy programs, improved access to technology, and institutional partnerships to support certification and broader market access. Engagement of youth in digital aspects may support sustainability.

As summarised in Table 1, community participation in the Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya microenterprise was notably high, particularly among local women who were actively involved in various stages of the production process, from raw material preparation to packaging and sales. The nature of this participation was largely collective and informal, fostering a strong sense of shared responsibility and social cohesion. Beyond economic benefits, such engagement contributed to meaningful social impacts, including enhanced community solidarity and the preservation of

traditional food knowledge. Economically, the initiative empowered women by providing a supplemental income source and increasing their confidence to participate in household financial decision-making. Culturally, the enterprise played a significant role in sustaining the heritage of sago-based snacks, with knowledge being transferred between generations. The community also showed partial adoption of innovations introduced through the program. Improvements were evident in hygiene practices, packaging quality, and basic financial record-keeping. However, the uptake of digital marketing tools remained limited, primarily due to technological constraints and low digital literacy. These findings suggest that while innovation adoption is possible, it must be supported by sustained training, infrastructure access, and youth involvement to ensure long-term viability. The case thus highlights the importance of integrating community participation with gradual and culturally sensitive innovation to promote sustainable microenterprise development.

V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya is a compelling example of how traditional microenterprises, when supported through structured community engagement, can evolve into sustainable sources of economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and social development. The findings reveal that before the intervention, the business operated informally with limited capacity, minimal branding, and no exposure to external markets. Through community-based interventions—including training on packaging, hygiene, bookkeeping, and marketing—the enterprise demonstrated a tangible shift toward more structured, resilient, and market-responsive operations.

The community empowerment activities produced multidimensional impacts. Economically, women in the community gained access to consistent income and increased confidence in managing micro-business operations. Socially, the initiative strengthened local solidarity by promoting collaboration and knowledge-sharing among women of different age groups. Culturally, the preservation of traditional sago chip-making not only reinforced local identity but also presented opportunities for heritage-based entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the enterprise began to adopt basic innovations, such as improved packaging and record-keeping, indicating readiness for gradual transformation. These benefits illustrate the potential of participatory, place-based empowerment approaches in enhancing the capacity of rural communities to manage and scale their traditional businesses.

Based on the outcomes of this study, several recommendations are proposed for future community empowerment initiatives. First, sustained mentorship should accompany initial interventions to ensure continuity, especially in areas such as digital marketing and certification processes. Second, empowerment programs should consider involving younger community members, particularly in the digital and promotional aspects of the business, to ensure intergenerational learning and technological adoption. Third, partnerships with local institutions and government agencies should be strengthened to improve access to raw materials, facilitate access to microcredit, and streamline regulatory support for certification and branding. Tailored digital literacy programs and community-based technology hubs may also be explored to overcome current barriers in digital transformation.

In terms of new insights, this study proposes a community-embedded empowerment model that integrates traditional knowledge, gendered labor, and incremental innovation. The model emphasizes that empowerment in rural enterprises is not a singular outcome but a dynamic process that evolves through participation, reflection, and support. A key postulate derived from this research is that sustainable microenterprise growth among rural women is contingent not solely on financial capital or technology, but on culturally grounded trust, social cohesion, and adaptive learning. This suggests that development frameworks must be flexible and responsive to the community's pace, values, and lived realities. Furthermore, the study contributes to emerging discourse by demonstrating how informal businesses can serve as prototypes of community-driven innovation, where micro-level changes—such as packaging improvements or bookkeeping practices—can catalyze broader shifts in enterprise development and community resilience.

In conclusion, the case of Keripik Sagu Imogiri Jaya affirms that traditional food microenterprises, when supported through participatory, respectful, and locally grounded engagement, can serve as powerful vehicles for inclusive development. The lessons drawn from this initiative offer practical and theoretical contributions for future community empowerment programs, particularly in rural and culturally rich contexts.

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