



## Sustainable Livelihoods through Natural and Environmental Resource Empowerment: A Case Study of Afdeling II Bukit Village, Birem Bayeun, East Aceh, Indonesia

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Received: 15 November 2025  
Filled Out by the Editor

Accepted: 00 November 2025  
Filled Out by the Editor

Published: 00 November 2025  
Filled Out by the Editor

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**Abstract:** This community service program was conducted in Afdeling II Bukit Village, Birem Bayeun District, East Aceh Regency, aiming to empower the community through the *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD) approach. The main issue identified was the underutilization of natural and environmental resources as productive economic assets. The activities were carried out through several stages, including local asset mapping, training on processing palm fronds into value-added products, training on utilizing family medicinal plants into herbal drinks, *Focus Group Discussions* (FGDs), and continuous mentoring. The implementation emphasized community participation, collaboration with village authorities, and the application of simple digital technologies to enhance product marketing. The results showed an increase in community skills in managing local resources, the formation of asset-based business groups, and greater awareness of economic independence based on local potential. In conclusion, the ABCD approach proved effective in fostering rural economic self-reliance through the strengthening of local assets and continuous mentoring integrated with digital innovation.

**Keywords:** Community empowerment, *Asset-Based Community Development*, local potential, economic self-reliance, digital innovation.

**Abstrak:** Program pengabdian masyarakat ini dilaksanakan di Gampong Afdeling II Bukit, Kecamatan Birem Bayeun, Kabupaten Aceh Timur dengan tujuan untuk memberdayakan masyarakat melalui pendekatan *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD). Permasalahan utama yang dihadapi masyarakat adalah belum optimalnya pemanfaatan sumber daya alam dan lingkungan sekitar sebagai aset ekonomi produktif. Kegiatan ini dilakukan melalui beberapa tahapan, yaitu pemetaan aset lokal, pelatihan pengolahan pelepah sawit menjadi produk bernilai ekonomi, pelatihan pemanfaatan tanaman obat keluarga menjadi minuman herbal, diskusi kelompok terarah



(*Focus Group Discussion*), dan pendampingan berkelanjutan. Metode pelaksanaan mengedepankan partisipasi aktif masyarakat, kolaborasi dengan perangkat desa, serta penerapan teknologi digital sederhana untuk memperluas pemasaran produk. Hasil pengabdian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan keterampilan masyarakat dalam mengelola potensi lokal, tumbuhnya kelompok usaha berbasis aset desa, serta meningkatnya kesadaran terhadap pentingnya kemandirian ekonomi berbasis sumber daya lokal. Kesimpulannya, pendekatan ABCD terbukti efektif mendorong kemandirian ekonomi masyarakat pedesaan melalui penguatan aset lokal dan pendampingan berkelanjutan yang terintegrasi dengan inovasi digital.

Kata Kunci: Pemberdayaan masyarakat, *Asset-Based Community Development*, potensi lokal, kemandirian ekonomi, inovasi digital.

## Introduction

Community empowerment in rural areas is one of the key strategies to enhance quality of life and promote economic self-reliance, particularly among communities whose livelihoods depend on natural and environmental resources. The abundant availability of natural resources should ideally be utilized in a productive and sustainable manner to generate added value for community welfare. However, in practice, many of these natural potentials remain underutilized due to limited knowledge, lack of technological access, weak marketing networks, and low levels of household business diversification (Rachmawatie et al., 2024).

This condition is evident in Afdeling II Bukit Village, Birem Bayeun Subdistrict, East Aceh Regency, where the majority of residents rely on rubber plantations, non-timber forest product collection, and small-scale agriculture as their primary sources of income. Dependence on a single income source makes the community economically vulnerable, particularly when the price of main commodities declines in global markets. In fact, the village possesses various alternative natural resources—such as bamboo, herbal plants, palm fronds, small rattan, and home yards—that could be developed into economically valuable products through innovation and creative processing ((Asni, S., Fitriani et al., 2024).

In this context, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach is relevant to be implemented, as it focuses on strengthening community capacity by utilizing existing local assets and potentials. The ABCD approach emphasizes community asset mapping, participatory collaboration, and empowerment based on inherent community strengths rather than dependence on external assistance (Al-Kautsari, 2019). This approach has been proven effective in fostering economic independence, enhancing collective self-confidence, and strengthening social networks that serve as the community's social capital (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, field observations reveal that most residents of Afdeling II Bukit Village still face challenges in transforming natural resources into value-added products. In addition, the lack of entrepreneurship training, limited business innovation, and the absence of marketing partnerships have become obstacles to the

development of the local economy. These conditions have led to a low level of sustainable optimization of the village's economic potential (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

Based on the foregoing, the main issue addressed in this community engagement activity is the suboptimal utilization of local natural resources as a sustainable source of livelihood to improve household income. This problem arises from limited production skills, a lack of product innovation, and the absence of a business partnership system. Therefore, this program aims to strengthen community capacity through the ABCD approach by emphasizing active community participation in identifying, managing, and developing village assets toward achieving sustainable livelihoods in Afdeling II Bukit Village, Birem Bayeun Subdistrict, East Aceh Regency.

## Method

This community engagement activity employed the *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD) approach, emphasizing local strengths, resources, and community assets as the foundation for sustainable economic empowerment (Wajdi et al., 2024). Unlike deficit-based models, the ABCD framework focuses on endogenous potential and participatory collaboration rather than dependency on external assistance (Fatimah et al., 2022). This approach aligns with rural contexts such as Afdeling II Bukit Village, where abundant natural and social assets can drive community-based economic transformation (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

The initial phase involved field observation and semi-structured interviews to identify and map community assets such as bamboo, palm sticks, herbal plants, small rattan, and productive home gardens. Asset mapping was conducted collaboratively through *focus group discussions* (FGDs), enabling community members to recognize local opportunities and strengthen their sense of ownership (Wajdi et al., 2024).

The next stage focused on participatory dialogue between the community and facilitators to design shared visions and develop eco-friendly and gender-inclusive business plans. Local working groups were established, and training programs were designed to enhance product innovation such as herbal processing, palm broom production, and rubber-based crafts (Fatimah et al., 2022).

Capacity-building programs were implemented through *demonstration plots*, *coaching*, and *mentoring*, prioritizing women and youth as key actors in sustainable entrepreneurship. This phase aimed to enhance local production skills, strengthen micro-enterprise resilience, and promote circular economy practices at the village level (Chaiechi & Wood, 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2024).

Monitoring and evaluation were carried out using mixed methods involving questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and reflective sessions. Key indicators included improved skills, diversified income sources, and enhanced community self-reliance. The evaluation process also emphasized social learning and sustainability outcomes, contributing to collective empowerment (Green & Haines, 2023; Russell & Smeaton, 2021).

## Results & Discussion

The community service program in Afdeling II Bukit Village, Birem Bayeun District, East Aceh Regency, focused on the empowerment of natural and environmental resources through the *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD) approach. This approach positions local potential as the main strength in building the community's economic independence. Through systematic stages from asset mapping to continuous mentoring the program encouraged active participation of the community in identifying, managing, and developing their local resources (Green & Haines, 2023; Rialny & Anugrahini, 2022).

The initial stage began with community asset mapping, covering physical, social, and economic assets. Field observations and *Focus Group Discussions* (FGDs) were conducted together with village officials and residents to identify untapped local potentials. The mapping revealed that the community possesses abundant natural resources such as palm fronds, bamboo, and family medicinal plants that had not yet been utilized as income sources. This process demonstrated that recognizing local assets is a crucial first step to building the community's sense of ownership toward their village's potential (Haerana, 2023).



Figure 1. Field observation and village asset mapping.

The second stage involved training in processing palm fronds into economically valuable products, such as brooms and decorative crafts. This activity was attended by women's groups and village youth. The training process covered technical guidance on production, cost calculation, and pricing strategies. Through this training, participants gained not only practical skills but also an understanding of the basic principles of entrepreneurship based on local resources. This approach is consistent with (Satria et al., 2022), who emphasized that asset-based community training enhances small business productivity and strengthens the economic resilience of rural communities.


 **Figure 2.** Training session on making palm broom products by housewives and village youth.



Figure 2. Training on palm-broom production.

The next stage focused on processing family medicinal plants into herbal health drinks. This training provided knowledge on identifying medicinal plants, hygienic processing techniques, and simple packaging methods to increase market value. Beyond supporting household health and food security, this initiative also opened opportunities for the emergence of microenterprises in the herbal sector. This finding supports (Nugraha et al., 2022), who stated that community-based development strategies require continuous innovation for communities to adapt to new economic opportunities in the post-pandemic era.



Figure 3. Herbal drink processing and packaging training.

Subsequently, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted to formulate long-term business development strategies. The FGD results highlighted the importance of establishing *Joint Business Groups* (*Kelompok Usaha Bersama* or KUB) as collective institutions for production, marketing, and business management. This institutional approach helps prevent inequality among individuals and strengthens collaboration among community members (Rahman, 2024). During the FGD, participants also developed annual work plans and transparent profit-sharing mechanisms.





Figure 4. FGD on community institutional development.

The final stage involved continuous mentoring and strengthening of digital-based marketing. Facilitators provided basic training on the use of social media for product promotion and simple digital applications for transaction recording. This technological approach broadened marketing networks, increased competitiveness, and improved production efficiency. In line with the concept of *transformative economies* (Chaiechi & Wood, 2022), digitalization of microenterprises in rural areas is a crucial factor for achieving economic independence and social sustainability.

Overall, the activity yielded three key findings:

1. The village possesses abundant natural resources that have not been optimally utilized.
2. Asset-based empowerment is proven to be more effective than needs-based approaches.
3. Continuous mentoring and integration of simple technology are key to ensuring community business sustainability.

This analysis also confirms that the success of empowerment is not only measured by economic outcomes but also by the increased confidence and participation of the community in decision-making processes. The collaborative approach between the community, academics, and village government has created a dynamic social learning environment in which citizens become active agents of change.

Thus, this program not only enhanced the technical skills and economic opportunities of the people in Afdeling II Bukit Village but also strengthened the social ecosystem based on *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and sustainable innovation, making it an inspiring model for the development of other villages in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

Community empowerment activities in Afdeling II Bukit Village through the *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD) approach demonstrate that local asset mapping, skill training, and continuous mentoring are strategic steps in fostering economic independence based on local resources. The utilization of palm frond sticks into brooms and the processing of family medicinal plants into herbal beverages have

created real added value for previously underutilized natural assets. These initiatives not only improve the community's economic welfare but also strengthen collective awareness of the importance of managing local resources sustainably.

Active community participation in every stage of the program has been the key to building a strong sense of ownership toward the outcomes achieved. Furthermore, the establishment of Joint Business Groups (*Kelompok Usaha Bersama* or KUB) has served as an effective platform for developing production activities and expanding community-based marketing networks. Continuous mentoring from academics, village authorities, and partner institutions has played a vital role in maintaining product quality consistency and ensuring the sustainability of community enterprises.

Thus, community empowerment activities through the ABCD approach not only strengthen the village's economic capacity but also serve as a replicable model that can be applied in other regions with similar resource characteristics. Therefore, it is recommended that village governments, educational institutions, and relevant agencies continue to enhance their support through the provision of production facilities, advanced training, and sustainable digital marketing assistance. This effort is expected to broaden the economic and social impact of empowerment programs while promoting inclusive and equitable rural development.

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