

Improving the Economy of the Village Community Along the Jalin River Through Water Rafting and Tubing

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Abstract

This community service project aims to enhance the economic capacity of local communities in Jalin Village, Aceh Besar, by developing river-based tourism through rafting and tubing activities. The program addresses key challenges, including limited technical skills of guides, weak financial management, and ineffective marketing strategies. A participatory empowerment approach was employed, including training workshops on financial literacy, digital marketing, and business model development, as well as technical guidance on rafting safety and operations, in collaboration with the Indonesian Rafting Federation. The results indicate improved managerial and technical competencies among participants, reflected in the formulation of a structured business model, enhanced safety practices, and increased promotional exposure through media engagement. Additionally, the program helped strengthen local tourism branding and expand market reach. Despite these improvements, challenges such as limited equipment and seasonal river conditions remain. This community service highlights the importance of integrated capacity-building and community-based tourism development in fostering sustainable local economic growth. The findings have practical implications for policymakers and community service practitioners seeking to optimize rural tourism potential.

Keywords: rafting; tubing; Jalin River; community service

INTRODUCTION

Aceh is a province on the island of Sumatra with a population of 5,372,000 people. Aceh Province has 23 Regencies. Aceh's poverty is still very high in Sumatra Island (Chaira et al., 2020). This is in stark contrast to its natural potential. Given Aceh's relatively small population compared to other provinces on the island of Java, its natural potential should help raise the economic level and welfare of the Acehnese population. In Aceh itself, natural potential comprises resources from the sea, mountains, forests, and plantations. These sectors have been a source of livelihood for the people of Aceh for quite some time. Natural processing originating from the sea, namely fisheries and marine products. Meanwhile, from agriculture, namely wood, coffee, spices, fruit, vegetables, cocoa, patchouli, areca nut, coconut, corn, rice, candlenuts, nutmeg, rubber, palm oil, etc. Mining, industry, and energy also contribute significantly to regional income, primarily through oil and gas and other mining activities.

The sector to prioritize at this time is tourism, which contributes to Indonesia's GDP (Aida et al., 2024). Nationally, this sector has contributed 5.24 percent to Indonesia's GDP. Indonesia's tourism potential is quite high, with the number of tourists visiting Indonesia in 2019, before the Covid 19 pandemic, amounting to 1.3 million. The number of foreign tourists to Aceh is predominantly from

Malaysia, Asia, Australia, and Western Europe, and has exceeded 35 thousand in recent years. Not to be left behind, local tourists are also very interested in visiting Aceh, particularly from Aceh itself, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, and Bali.

One of the tourism areas that is off topic but has great potential in Aceh Province is marine and river tourism. River tourism still needs greater attention for exploration, such as water rafting and tubing. Water rafting and tubing are among the least explored tourist attractions in Aceh Besar Regency. In fact, Aceh Besar Regency's natural potential is quite promising. Only three districts in Aceh have explored this water sport tourism, namely the Central Aceh District, Gayo Lues District, and Pidie District in the Geumpang area. In fact, in Aceh Besar, there are many rivers with potential for water rafting and tubing tourism. One area is in Jalin village, Jantho City District, Aceh Besar Regency. From Banda Aceh City (the capital of Aceh) to this village takes 1.5 hours by car or motorbike. The Jalin River flows through the very beautiful green hills of Jalin Hill. The ripples on the braided river are very suitable for water rafting and tubing because the ripples are safe enough for families and rafting lovers to enjoy.

Water rafting on the Jalin River is a tourist activity that involves sailing a grade 3 (low) river section in rubber boats, with life jackets, helmets, and paddles, for 5-6 participants and 1 certified professional guide. Meanwhile, the tubing activity involves riding an inner tube down the river, using a 1-meter-diameter inner tube, a helmet, and a float.

The people of Jalin village have realized that this water rafting tourism is interesting, so they have formed two community-based businesses called "Jalin Rafting" and "Jantho Linot". Jalin Rafting and Fajar Lestari are two natural tourism groups in the Jantho city sub-district, engaged in local tourism on the Jalin River. Jalin Rafting is in Jalin village, while Fajar Lestari Group is in Jantho Lama village. These two groups were formed following local sports competitions held in Jalin Village in November 2018. At that time, the committee's head suggested that local youth form a water rafting tourism group. After being formed, the Jalin Rafting group received a grant of boats and rafting equipment from the Aceh Besar Dispora. The Jalin and Fajar Lestari tourism groups have 4-6 members.

Fajar Lestari is a group actively carrying out linot bee breeding. Seeing good opportunities in the river, they have also ventured into water rafting tourism. Currently, Fajar Lestari still rents water rafting equipment from the Water Rafting Federation and the Nature Lovers Group whenever they receive a water rafting order. So, their costs are higher than Jalin Rafting's. Although Jalin Rafting already has 2 boats and other equipment, they still need to rent out if they get a lot of orders. The average monthly gross income is only Rp. 500,000 – Rp. 3,000,000, which they then distributed equally to the team.

Through these community service activities, we want to answer the following questions: 1. How to utilize the potential of a natural river in Jalin village; 2. How to increase the income of the community near Jalin village; 3. How to improve the management performance of a water rafting business. This activity aims to empower the community to improve its economic welfare. By leveraging the natural river potential of the Jalin River through activities such as Rafting and Tubing, the community may derive economic benefits. The expected output from this activity is: strengthening the management of professional rafting and tubing tourism services on the Jalin River, which are managed by local village community tourism groups. The benefits of this activity include entrepreneurial activities based on business management that generate more profits than before. There is utilization of river-based natural potential in Jalin village. There are new business opportunities for the local community from this activity, such as operating a camping ground, providing food during the activity, selling snacks, collecting fees, etc.

Community-based tourism (CBT) has been widely recognized as an effective approach to empower local communities by placing local communities at the centre of tourist development (Jackson, 2026) and utilizing local resources while ensuring sustainable economic development. CBT emphasizes active participation of local residents in planning, managing, and benefiting from tourism

activities, thereby strengthening local ownership and economic resilience. Previous studies indicate that community-based tourism development programs in rural areas can significantly contribute to income diversification, poverty reduction, and well-being (Suyatna et al., 2024), particularly when supported by adequate managerial capabilities and market access. However, limited attention has been paid to the outcomes of capacity-building interventions in CBT initiatives (Imbaya et al., 2019). In addition, capacity building plays a crucial role in improving the performance of community-based enterprises. Training in financial literacy, digital marketing, and business model development enables local actors to manage resources more efficiently and respond to changing market dynamics (Hasyim & Bakri, 2025). Without such capabilities, many local tourism initiatives fail to sustain growth despite having strong natural potential.

However, many rural tourism initiatives face challenges related to limited skills, weak institutional support, and a lack of integrated development strategies. Therefore, this community service program aims to address these gaps by providing comprehensive interventions that combine technical training, managerial capacity building, and promotional activities.

SOLUTIONS AND OUTCOMES TARGET

River tourism is quite interesting, offering a chance to see the natural beauty of the Jalin River, supported by the Jalin hills, which are very beautiful to climb and admire. The rafting and tubing tourism activities will greatly optimize the use of the river, further increasing the income of the surrounding community.

This community service activity began with a visit to the Jalin area. Once there, we discussed the water rafting management teams and discussed how the community could get involved in this activity. We also highlighted the problems they were currently facing. In the discussion, we also offered solutions to improve their business.

The solutions offered by the community service team, such as 1. Integrated Management Workshop consisting of Financial Literacy training, Digital Marketing training for Water Rafting and Tubing businesses. We also provide a workshop for tourist village concepts. These workshops were led by experts in the respective fields. 2. A technical guide for rafting guides conducted by the Indonesian Rafting Federation (FAJI). And 3. Fun rafting event with the Aceh Besar Tourism Department, Tourism Ambassadors, and Social Media Influencers to increase brand awareness of Jalin River Rafting and tubing tourism. And also strengthening networking and marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2014) with local media.

METHOD

This community service program adopted a participatory empowerment approach, involving local community groups as active partners throughout the process. The implementation consisted of four main stages.

First, problem identification was conducted through field observations and discussions with local rafting groups to understand key constraints in technical skills, financial management, and marketing practices. We believe that community capacity refers to the collective knowledge and capabilities within a community that are used to identify problems and determine possible solutions (Moscardo, 2008). Second, program design was developed based on identified needs, focusing on capacity building in business management, financial literacy, digital marketing, and technical rafting skills. Third, program implementation included a series of integrated activities: (1) business management and tourism village workshops, (2) technical training for rafting guides in collaboration with certified professionals, and (3) brand awareness activities involving media and influencers to enhance market exposure. Finally, evaluation was conducted through observation, interviews, and participant feedback to assess

improvements in knowledge, skills, and business practices. This approach ensures that the intervention is not only solution-oriented but also sustainable and aligned with local community needs.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Participatory Needs Assessment

This initial stage aimed to identify key problems and needs faced by the local rafting community. Identification was conducted through direct field observations and in-depth discussions with local rafting groups. The assessment focused on understanding constraints related to technical skills, financial management, and marketing practices. This stage ensured the program design aligned with the community's actual needs.

From discussions with the groups, several priority issues were determined to be resolved through this community service program, namely: 1) Insufficient technical guidance for guides due to high training costs. 2) The rafting business management is still very traditional due to a lack of business management knowledge. 3) Business income is very low. In certain months, no income due to a lack of marketing and financial strategies; 4) Marketing strategy is very minimal, and the brand is almost unknown to the public.



Figure 1. Focus group discussion with local people and team

2. Program Design and Development

Based on the identified needs, the program was systematically designed to address the main challenges. The intervention focused on capacity building in business management, financial literacy, digital marketing, and technical rafting skills. The program design also incorporated collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including professional trainers and tourism institutions, to ensure the quality and relevance of the activities.

3. Program Implementation

The program implementation stage consisted of a series of integrated activities aimed at strengthening the local community's managerial and technical capacities. The implementation took place over two days in Jalin Village, Aceh Besar, involving local rafting groups, village officials, and external experts.

a. Capacity-Building Workshops

Capacity-building workshops were conducted to enhance participants' knowledge in business management, financial literacy, digital marketing, business model formulation, and tourism village development. These workshops provided practical insights into managing tourism-based businesses more professionally, including developing a business model canvas and basic financial planning. Workshops on rafting business management are essential to build a more professional, focused business in the water sports industry. The workshop material covered water-sport business management, financial literacy, and digital marketing. In addition, we added the Tourist Village

Concept, led by Mrs. Rubama, the founder of Nusa Tourist Village. The workshop took place on Saturday, 2 September 2023, at the local village office. 20 participants of the workshop were 5 invited speakers, 3 village officials, 2 students, and 10 Jalin Rafting and Fajar Lestari rafting groups. From the workshops, participants have formalized some business models using the Business Model Canvas (Murray & Scuotto, 2015).



Figure 3. Capacity building workshop

b. Technical Guidance of the Water Rafting Guide

Technical training was delivered to improve rafting guides' skills and safety awareness. This activity was facilitated by certified instructors and focused on equipment handling, paddling techniques, and rescue procedures. The training aimed to ensure that participants met basic safety standards required in water-based tourism activities.

Technical guidance on rafting guards was provided for 1 day by a certified member of the Water Rafting Federation at the Jalin River. The program included both technical and field training to improve rafting safety and operational skills, involving 10 rafting guards from Jalin Rafting and the Fajar Lestari. After the training, participants showed improved rafting skills and were able to perform safety and rescue procedures. The session also developed rafting and tubing procedures for the Jalin River, with some adaptations from Outdoor Leadership. Rafting and tubing activities are guided by trained staff, including local residents, and participants are required to wear helmets, life jackets, and first-aid kits, and to use a pick-up truck for support. Activities are conducted in two daily shifts (9–11 am and 2–4 pm), and all participants must follow the guide instructions and complete stretching before starting.

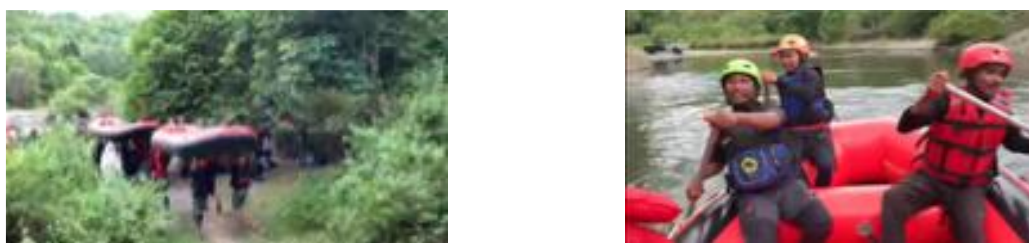


Figure 4. Technical Guidance of the Water Rafting Guide

c. Jalin Jantho Water Rafting Brand Awareness Activities

To increase public interest in this water rafting business, it is necessary to hold activities that promote it. Brand awareness activities are an example of marketing management (Stephen & ROBBINS, 2025). Brand awareness and promotional activities were organized by involving media representatives, influencers, and local tourism stakeholders. This activity aimed to increase the visibility of Jalin River rafting and tubing tourism, expand market reach, and strengthen the destination's branding. This activity was carried out the next day after the completion of the Rafting Guide activities and the Integrated Business Management and Marketing Workshops. This activity was done on 3 September 2023 at Jalin River. There were around 50 participants in this event. It started at 8 am. There were 3

boats and 5 river tubs. Before the groups started rafting, the head of the committee provided safety procedures. The rafting took around 3 hours. After that, the participants had lunch together at the finish point in Jalin Rafting camp.



Figure 6. Jalin Jantho Water Rafting Brand Awareness Activities

4. Evaluation of Program Implementation and Program Sustainability

Evaluation of program implementation will be conducted monthly to assess the outcomes of technical guidance and integrated management workshops. Evaluation will also be carried out after brand awareness and digital marketing events. The evaluation is expected to assess the extent to which the community service program is effective in improving the performance and finances of rafting groups. Apart from that, evaluation can also identify the obstacles that remain after training and events have been implemented. The evaluation will use interview methods, observation, and monthly questionnaires completed by the tour group. Furthermore, it is hoped that this activity will continue with the presence of potential customers and new consumers, thereby generating additional *revenue streams*. To ensure the project's sustainability, the service team will continue to collaborate and create opportunities for consultation on future problems partners face. It is hoped that this collaboration will continue to help partners solve the business management problems they face. Not to forget, the service will continue to build a network for partners and related parties to create stronger synergy to increase regional income and support local village communities. Moreover, this activity will increase job satisfaction among employees in the water rafting sector because their work is meaningful in improving the community's economy.

RESULTS

This community service activity was conducted in Jalin Village, Jantho. The activities carried out over 2 days, 2 - 3 September 2023, included workshops on rafting management business concepts, workshops for tourist villages, technical guidance for rafting guides, and a brand awareness event. From the workshops, teams have composed rafting business plans and articles. The workshops were attended by 10 participants from two village groups, namely Jalin Rafting and Fajar Lestari. The workshop began with an opening by the Village Apparatus, and its main activities were guided by external speakers, Ms. Rubama and Mr. Zulfan Monika. For technical water rafting training guided by the FAJI Aceh Besar. A map of the Jalin River rafting route was also created for community use. And finally, the brand awareness rafting event was attended by the media and influencers, who enthusiastically took part in the activity. From this activity, the media then promoted water rafting and businesses in Jalin and Jantho Lama Villages. Some of the media presentations were in Serambi Indonesia and Waspada Aceh online newspaper.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this community service program highlight that integrated capacity-building interventions play a crucial role in strengthening the performance of community-based tourism initiatives. The observed improvements in participants' managerial understanding, technical skills, and

promotional efforts indicate that targeted training can enhance local communities' readiness to manage tourism businesses more professionally. The improvement in participants' managerial and technical skills indicates that training in financial literacy, digital marketing, and operational safety is critical to strengthening local business capabilities. This supports the view that capacity building is a fundamental component in community empowerment and local economic development. This is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that capacity building is a key determinant of sustainability in community-based tourism (Naranjo Lluport, 2022).

Furthermore, the development of a structured business model and marketing strategy reflects the importance of strategic planning in transforming informal community businesses into more professional and competitive enterprises (Imbaya et al, 2019). The development of a more structured business approach, including basic financial planning and business model formulation, reflects a shift from informal to more organized business practices. This transformation is essential for increasing competitiveness, particularly in rural tourism contexts where many enterprises operate without a clear strategic direction. The incorporation of digital marketing and media engagement further demonstrates the growing importance of technology in expanding market reach and attracting broader customer segments (Isibor et al., 2021). The involvement of media and influencers in the brand awareness activities also contributed to expanding market reach, highlighting the relevance of digital promotion in rural tourism development.

However, the results also reveal that improvements in knowledge and skills alone are not sufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. The program also revealed several structural challenges, including limited infrastructure, dependence on seasonal river conditions, and insufficient equipment. Furthermore, there were few business administration documents, so it was quite difficult to dig deeper into the information to develop a business plan. Furthermore, the dry season reduces water flow, leading to water rafting activities that are often dominated by tubing. Also, the number of tubers is still small, and they have to be rented, so the combined cost of training and rafting is high. These constraints suggest that community empowerment alone is insufficient without continuous institutional support from the local government and other stakeholders. These challenges are mostly found in the Research Frontiers of Community-Based Tourism, as identified by Nguyen & Nguyen (2026). In addition, the active involvement of local stakeholders, including tourism offices, media, and community members, contributed positively to program outcomes. This indicates that collaborative approaches are critical in enhancing the effectiveness of community-based tourism development initiatives. Overall, this program demonstrates that a combination of managerial training, technical skill development, and promotional strategies can have a meaningful impact on local economic activity. Nevertheless, sustained efforts, continuous mentoring, and institutional support are required to ensure the long-term viability and scalability of such initiatives.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This community service was carried out in Jalin Village, Jantho, on September 2 - 3, 2025. The activities carried out were the Water Rafting and Tubing Business Management Workshop and Tourism Village Management. Next, there are Basic Water Rafting Training activities for Water Rafting and Tubing guides, as well as Water Rafting with Media and Influencers. From this activity, outputs included a business plan and concepts for Water Rafting and Tubing Business Management and Tourism Village Management. There is also promotion of Jalin Village water rafting activities through mass and social media. In this activity, it is hoped that Jalin and Jantho Lama Villages will continue to consistently expand their water rafting and tubing businesses. For the Jantho and Aceh Besar City Governments, it is suggested that they provide adequate facilities for village groups and other forms of support to improve the management of water rafting and tubing businesses. Lastly, for the community service

teams, Jalin Village is one of the leading villages in Aceh Besar Regency, so the opportunity for the Tourism Village concept in this area is very high. For this reason, it is recommended that the community services team take advantage of opportunities for community service activities, such as managing tourism concepts, to improve the economic well-being of the people of Jalin Village, Jantho City.

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