



Strengthening Mutual Cooperation through Community Service: Evidence from Parmompang Village

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ABSTRACT

Mutual cooperation (gotong royong) is a noble Indonesian value that has begun to erode amidst modernization and individualism. The Community Service Program (KKN) is a strategic tool for revitalizing these shared values, particularly through a socio-cultural approach that aligns with the character of the local community. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the socio-cultural-based KKN program in fostering the spirit of mutual cooperation in Parmompang Village, East Panyabungan. The research method used was a qualitative approach with participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that community participation in collective activities increased by approximately 45% compared to the pre-program period, particularly in village clean-up initiatives and customary events. In addition, culture-based legal education sessions attracted over 60% of households, demonstrating broader intergenerational engagement. The revitalization of local customs also strengthened social cohesion, as reflected in the active role of youth and traditional leaders in joint decision-making forums. This study concludes that socio-cultural integration within KKN not only reinforces the practice of mutual cooperation but also provides measurable evidence of enhanced participation and collective action. It therefore recommends the structured involvement of traditional leaders and youth in social program planning as a sustainable strategy for preserving gotong royong in the modern era.



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INTRODUCTION

Mutual cooperation, or gotong royong, is one of the fundamental pillars of social life in Indonesia (Di Vaio & Varriale, 2020; Wu et al., 2021). For generations, it has served as a tangible expression of solidarity, togetherness, and collective responsibility, passed down from ancestors as part of the nation's cultural heritage. This value is not merely a tradition but also forms the foundation of social interaction and harmony within communities. In many areas, especially rural villages, gotong royong functions as the glue that binds individuals and communities together, fostering unity and mutual care.

More than just a cultural inheritance, gotong royong reflects the very identity of the Indonesian people (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025). In practice, it involves working together to achieve common goals, such as building public facilities, helping neighbors in need, or preserving the environment. This collective culture nurtures a strong sense of belonging and social responsibility. However, as times change, these noble values are increasingly facing significant challenges that threaten their continuity in daily life.

The rapid pace of globalization and societal transformation has brought profound changes to people's mindsets and behaviors (Nejad & Eslami, 2022; Omidi & Roustaei, 2024). Younger

generations, in particular, have become more familiar with individualistic lifestyles influenced by technology, modern living, and social media. Their focus on personal freedom, career ambitions, and self-fulfillment often leads to lower participation in collective activities. As a result, the meaning of gotong royong has gradually shifted and, in many cases, has become marginalized within contemporary society.

Modernization, while beneficial in many ways, has had ambivalent effects on social cohesion. On one hand, technological advancements provide convenience, efficiency, and instant access to information (Bhagwat & Rogachev, 2023; Lin, 2023). On the other hand, modernization subtly erodes traditional values that once served as the foundation of social unity. Cultural transitions within traditional communities often occur when new value systems are introduced and clash with long-standing local norms, resulting in a redefinition of social priorities and behaviors.

This shift in values has led to a noticeable decline in community participation in various social activities (Karpenko & Sebestov, 2023; Rustan & Abduh, 2020). Events such as collective environmental clean-ups, communal construction projects, village meetings, and traditional celebrations are no longer embraced with the same enthusiasm as before. This phenomenon signals an emerging crisis of togetherness that calls for strategic, innovative, and sustainable efforts to revitalize community solidarity in modern society.

One promising initiative for restoring the spirit of gotong royong is the Community Service Program (KKN), a form of student engagement in community development (Hamiru et al., 2019; Shelotkar & Borage, 2019). As part of higher education's tridharma, KKN provides students with opportunities to immerse themselves directly within communities, enabling them to interact with local residents, understand social challenges, and contribute meaningfully to grassroots development based on local potential and wisdom.

KKN serves not merely as an annual academic agenda but also as a strategic platform for fostering social change (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024). Students act as agents of transformation, bridging the gap between traditional values and modern challenges. By employing socio-cultural approaches rooted in local wisdom, KKN facilitates a synergy between academic knowledge, technological advancement, and cultural preservation. This integrated approach makes KKN highly relevant in efforts to restore and sustain the spirit of solidarity within communities.

An exemplary case of KKN's strategic role can be observed in Parmompang Village, located in the Panyabungan Timur District. This village is renowned for maintaining strong cultural roots, with residents upholding their traditional customs, norms, and the spirit of mutual cooperation as a core part of their identity. Such deeply embedded social and cultural capital serves as a vital resource for sustaining communal harmony and fostering collective resilience in the face of ongoing changes.

Nevertheless, challenges inevitably arise alongside modernization (van der Merwe & Morelli, 2022; Vuorenmaa, 2024). The influence of technological advancement and global connectivity has gradually affected the perspectives and lifestyles of younger generations in Parmompang. While access to information and modern opportunities brings significant benefits, it also poses a potential threat to the preservation of long-standing traditions. In this context, KKN students play a crucial role in helping the community adapt to social transformation without losing their cultural identity.

With the right strategies, KKN can become a driving force in revitalizing the value of gotong royong amid the pressures of globalization (Muhajir, 2022; Suroso & Rohmadi, 2020). Through education, collaboration, and empowerment, students can help communities strengthen their collective spirit while aligning it with contemporary needs. Mutual cooperation must not remain a nostalgic memory of the past; instead, it should be continuously nurtured as a vital social asset to build an inclusive, harmonious, and competitive society for the future.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the revitalization of mutual cooperation values through the socio-cultural-based Community Service Program (KKN) in Parmompang Village, Panyabungan Timur District (Clair, 2003; Fenton & Baxter, 2016). The qualitative approach was chosen because it captures social meanings, cultural values, and the dynamics of community participation contextually and holistically.

The research location was purposively determined, namely Parmompang Village, considering that this village still maintains elements of local culture but has begun to experience a shift in values due to the influence of modernization (Daly, 2007; Murphy & Dingwall, 2017). Informants in this study consisted of traditional leaders, community leaders, village youth, village officials, and student community service program participants. The number of key informants reached 18 people, and they were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was justified to capture actors directly involved in cultural and social activities, while snowball sampling was applied to reach individuals recommended by initial informants to ensure representation across different age groups and community roles.

Data collection was carried out using three techniques, namely: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted systematically during community activities such as village clean-up programs, customary events, and legal education sessions (Longhofer et al., 2012). Field notes were used to record participation levels, frequency of involvement, and interaction patterns among villagers. Semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol consisting of 12 core questions and several probing questions, focusing on perceptions of gotong royong, changes in participation, and the role of local customs. Each interview lasted between 45–90 minutes and was conducted in participants' homes or community gathering places to create a natural conversational atmosphere. Documentation included photographs, village archives, and program reports to triangulate primary data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Community Service Program (KKN) implemented in Parmompang Village has played a significant role in revitalizing the spirit of mutual cooperation in a community that has been eroded by individualism and modernization. Through a local social and cultural approach, the KKN program has successfully bridged students and the community, fostering collective awareness of the importance of togetherness, cooperation, and mutual assistance.

One concrete result of this program's implementation is increased community participation in joint activities, such as community service activities cleaning the village environment (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025), repairing public facilities like footpaths and the village hall, and actively participating in outreach and training activities. Prior to the Community Service Program (KKN), community cooperation activities tended to be limited to certain groups and were sporadic. However, after the initiation and mentoring of KKN students, community participation increased by 70% in the final weeks of the program.

Revitalizing Community Cooperation



Furthermore, educational activities such as village legal counseling, cultural literacy, and entrepreneurship training have strengthened social ties among residents (Astari et al., 2025; Malović & Vujica, 2021). These activities focus not only on physical aspects or construction, but also on instilling the values of social solidarity that underlie the spirit of mutual cooperation. In focus groups with community leaders and village youth, the majority stated that the presence of students provided moral encouragement and renewed enthusiasm to re-establish the tradition of mutual cooperation as part of the village's identity.

Other results indicate that programs designed with a participatory approach are more easily accepted and implemented by the community (Kalantari & Kavianifar, 2020; Simbar & Rahimi, 2021). KKN students not only act as facilitators but also directly participate in each activity, fostering a sense of community and narrowing the gap between external parties and local residents. This demonstrates that an inclusive approach is highly effective in rebuilding fading social values.

In terms of challenges, obstacles remain, such as a lack of awareness among the younger generation about the importance of mutual cooperation and a preoccupation with individual economic activities (Hu et al., 2023; Ridwan & In'am, 2021). However, through a sustainable approach and alignment of KKN activities with the real needs of the community, these obstacles are slowly being overcome.

Overall, the KKN program in Parmompang Village has succeeded in proving that the spirit of mutual cooperation can still be fostered in the modern era (Mukhlis, 2025b; Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023), as long as the approach used is... contextual, participatory, and down-to-earth. Students' active involvement as agents of social change has a positive impact not only on the community but also on the students themselves, helping them understand local social and cultural dynamics firsthand.

CONCLUSION

The Community Service Program (KKN) in Parmompang Village has made a significant contribution to reviving the spirit of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) within a community that has begun to be influenced by individualistic lifestyles. Through participatory social, cultural, and educational activities, the community has become more active and enthusiastic in various collective activities. Increased community participation in joint activities, the involvement of the younger generation, and the creation of harmonious relationships between students and the community demonstrate that the values of mutual cooperation remain relevant and can be revitalized in the modern era. This success is inextricably linked to the approach used by the KKN students, who tailored the program to local needs and characteristics. Effective collaboration between students, community leaders, and residents is key to reviving the values of togetherness, mutual assistance, and social solidarity amidst the

challenges of the times. Beyond its practical contributions, this study provides theoretical insights into how socio-cultural community engagement can function as a mechanism for strengthening social capital in rural societies. It demonstrates that revitalizing traditional values is not only a cultural preservation effort but also a strategy for enhancing collective resilience against modernization pressures. Future research should explore comparative studies across different villages or regions to examine how varying cultural settings influence the effectiveness of KKN programs. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to assess the sustainability of revitalized gotong royong practices over time. Such directions will enrich theoretical discussions on the interplay between modernization and local wisdom while providing evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and higher education institutions in designing community-based programs.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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