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## Strengthening Cooperative Competitiveness Through Capacity Building: A Community Service Program on Business Plan Development for Cooperative Managers in Semarang Regency

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**Abstract:** Cooperatives play an essential role in supporting local economic development, yet many struggle with limited managerial competence and the absence of structured business planning. This community service program was conducted to enhance the capacity of cooperative managers in Semarang Regency through a three-day intensive training on business plan development. Hosted at The Wujil Resort & Conventions from May 22–24, 2023, the program involved 30 participants representing various cooperatives. The training combined interactive lectures, workshops, group discussions, and hands-on business plan drafting. Results indicate significant improvement in participants' understanding of business planning, strategic thinking, financial projection, and market analysis. Participants also produced draft business plans tailored to their cooperative units. The program contributes to strengthening local cooperative governance and offers a replicable model for capacity building in community-based economic institutions.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Cooperatives are widely recognized as vital pillars of community-based economic development, particularly in emerging economies where collective enterprise models help democratize access to resources, strengthen market participation, and enhance local livelihoods. Despite their strategic role, many cooperatives in Indonesia continue to face managerial shortcomings, weak strategic planning, and limited capacity to adapt to changing market dynamics. The absence of structured business planning is among the most pressing challenges, as it undermines organizational direction, financial sustainability, and strategic decision-making. International and regional studies highlight that insufficient managerial capacity is a key factor contributing to poor cooperative performance and vulnerability to market pressures (Paraschou et al., 2025; Shen & Badulescu, 2025; Wang et al., 2025).

In practice, cooperative managers in local contexts often lack exposure to strategic management tools such as market analysis, risk assessment, financial forecasting, and competitive positioning. These gaps reduce their ability to develop viable business units,

attract financing, or implement innovation. Global evidence also suggests that targeted training in entrepreneurship, planning, and management can substantially improve the operational capacity of cooperatives and small community-based enterprises, particularly when the training incorporates experiential learning and practical exercises (Hanoum et al., 2025; Ngo, 2023). Strengthening managerial competence is therefore critical for improving governance, ensuring accountability, and fostering long-term sustainability within cooperatives.

The urgency of this program arises from the increasing expectation for local cooperatives to operate more competitively amid growing economic pressure and regulatory demands. Cooperatives in Semarang Regency, like many others across Indonesia, are expected to serve not only as savings-and-loan institutions but also as dynamic business entities capable of diversifying economic activities. Without a robust business plan, these organizations struggle to access external funding, formulate strategic initiatives, or structure their operational processes effectively (Suhardianto et al., 2025). Consequently, a systematic intervention was needed to strengthen their capacity to create, evaluate, and implement business plans.

The primary objective of this community service initiative was to enhance the understanding and skills of cooperative managers in developing comprehensive business plans. The program aimed to equip participants with practical knowledge on market analysis, organizational structure, operational planning, financial projections, and strategy formulation. Additionally, the program sought to facilitate the actual drafting of business plans that could be adopted and contextualized within each cooperative.

Beyond its practical objectives, this initiative contributes to broader academic and policy discussions by offering empirical evidence on capacity-building models for cooperatives. It demonstrates how structured training grounded in adult learning principles can support local economic institutions in improving their internal governance and business operations. As such, the program enriches the literature on cooperative development, community-based enterprise empowerment, and participatory training methodologies.

## **2. METHOD**

This community service program employed a participatory, practice-oriented training approach designed to enhance the managerial competence of cooperative managers in Semarang Regency. The training was conducted over three days, from May 22 to 24, 2023, at

The Wujil Resort & Conventions in Bergas, Semarang Regency. A total of 30 participants representing various cooperatives attended the program.

The training design integrated several complementary methods to ensure effective learning. First, structured lectures were used to introduce foundational concepts related to business planning, including market analysis, financial forecasting, value proposition development, and strategic planning. These sessions provided a theoretical foundation aligned with global best practices and current research on cooperative and small enterprise management.

Second, interactive discussions and question-and-answer sessions were incorporated to encourage participants to share experiences, identify challenges faced by their cooperatives, and explore potential solutions collectively. This method allowed participants to contextualize the concepts and relate them to their own organizational realities.

Third, hands-on workshops formed the core component of the program. Participants were guided step-by-step to draft key elements of a business plan based on templates provided by the facilitators. This included constructing a business model, conducting SWOT analysis, outlining operational strategies, and preparing financial projections. The use of real cooperative data helped ensure relevance and practicality.

Fourth, group work and peer review sessions were used to refine participants' business plan drafts. These sessions enabled mutual learning, fostered collaboration among cooperatives, and encouraged constructive feedback. Facilitators provided ongoing mentoring throughout the drafting process. The final stage of the training involved a presentation of each group's business plan draft, followed by feedback from facilitators. This mechanism served both as evaluation and reinforcement, ensuring that participants understood the core components of effective business planning.

### **3. RESULT**

The three-day community service program, held from 22 to 24 May 2023 at The Wujil Resort & Conventions in Semarang Regency, was attended by 30 cooperative managers and administrators. Attendance remained consistently high throughout the program, with all participants completing the full training sequence. This strong attendance reflects the perceived relevance of the topic and the participants' motivation to improve their managerial

and planning competencies.

The delivery of material included lectures, case-based discussions, group work, and guided development of business plan components. Participants worked actively in small groups and individually to produce draft business plan elements based on the template provided. By the end of the program, all participants had successfully completed preliminary drafts that included an executive summary, market description, operational plan, marketing strategy, and simplified financial projections. These drafts varied in depth and clarity depending on the starting capacity of each cooperative.



Figure 1: Business plan material presentation



Figure 2: Discussion session

Participant feedback collected through a short satisfaction survey revealed high levels of satisfaction with the relevance of the materials, the interactive learning methods, and the clarity of facilitation. Qualitative comments emphasized the value of the hands-on practice, particularly the simplified financial projection exercises. Participants expressed a strong interest in follow-up mentoring, especially in areas of market analysis, financial planning, and accessing cooperative-friendly financing schemes.

The observable outcomes of the training also included improvements in participants' ability to articulate organizational goals, identify market opportunities, and understand the structure of a comprehensive business plan. Although no formal pre-post quantitative assessment instruments were administered, facilitator observations indicated a noticeable increase in participants' comprehension and confidence in drafting business plan components.

Here is some feedback provided by several participants: "Before this training, I only wrote

our cooperative's business plans in a very simple way. Now I understand how to analyze market needs, calculate costs properly, and set more realistic targets. This training makes me feel more confident in managing our business unit." (Participant 1, Chair of a Women's Cooperative). "The practical exercises helped me the most. The facilitators didn't just explain the theory, but guided us step-by-step to complete each section of the business plan. I can immediately apply this format to propose new programs to our members." (Participant 2)

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The results of the program demonstrate that short-term intensive training can significantly improve foundational knowledge and practical skills related to business planning among cooperative managers. This aligns with findings in the broader literature that well-structured business training programs tend to enhance managerial competence, although the magnitude of impact varies depending on program design and contextual support (Shen & Badulescu, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). The active learning components embedded in this program case-based practice, guided drafting, and iterative feedback were particularly effective in supporting comprehension and application of concepts, which is consistent with evidence that experiential and participatory learning generates stronger outcomes in community-based enterprises (Hidayat & Putra, 2020; Yani & Ausat, 2024).

However, as emphasized by several meta-analyses, improvements in knowledge and planning skills do not automatically translate into measurable business performance outcomes such as revenue growth or profitability. Achieving such outcomes depends heavily on follow-up support mechanisms, including coaching, mentoring, access to markets, and linkage to financial institutions (Wang et al., 2025). The participants' requests for follow-up mentoring reinforce this pattern and highlight that cooperatives often need longer-term assistance to operationalize their business plans effectively.

In the context of Indonesian cooperatives, the need for continuous capacity building is well documented. Strengthening governance, improving managerial accountability, and developing market-oriented strategies are essential for enhancing cooperative competitiveness and sustainability (Ali et al., 2021; Budiyah & Suyono, 2020; Jamaluddin et al., 2023). The present program contributes to these needs by providing a structured foundation for planning and strategic thinking. Still, without institutionalized systems for monitoring implementation

and providing ongoing support, the business plans drafted during the workshop risk remaining unimplemented documents.

Another important implication relates to the role of local government and cooperative offices in sustaining these capacity-building efforts. Research indicates that cooperative performance is strongly influenced by the enabling ecosystem, including regulatory support, training continuity, and integration with local economic development programs (Rostami & Salehi, 2024; Siregar et al., 2025). Partnerships between universities, local government, and cooperative associations can therefore play a significant role in reinforcing the program's long-term impact. Through such collaboration, cooperatives could gain better access to resources, technical assistance, and networking opportunities.

Furthermore, the training highlights the importance of contextualized content. Many participants struggled initially with market analysis and financial projections, demonstrating that cooperative managers may lack exposure to practical tools commonly used in business development. Tailoring training materials to local economic conditions, local market dynamics, and the specific challenges faced by rural or semi-urban cooperatives may enhance program effectiveness. The adoption of localized examples during the workshop proved particularly helpful for increasing understanding, corroborating findings that contextual relevance strengthens training outcomes in community-based economic organizations (Hidayat & Putra, 2020; Yani & Ausat, 2024).

Finally, the discussion underscores the need for future research and program evaluation. The absence of pre-post quantitative measurement limited the ability to assess learning gains or predict long-term changes in cooperative performance. Incorporating structured assessment tools, longitudinal tracking, and detailed documentation of implementation challenges would greatly improve the evidence base for cooperative capacity-building interventions. Continued research could also explore which components of business plan training such as financial literacy, market analysis, or strategic planning have the strongest influence on cooperative outcomes.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This community service program successfully strengthened the managerial capacity of cooperative managers in Semarang Regency through structured training on business plan

development. Over three days of intensive learning, participants gained a solid understanding of strategic planning, market analysis, financial forecasting, and practical business model development. The creation of draft business plans marks a significant step toward improving cooperative professionalism and sustainability.

The initiative contributes to the body of knowledge and practice on cooperative capacity building, demonstrating that participatory and experiential training can enhance competence and organizational readiness. It offers a replicable model for similar interventions aimed at empowering community-based economic institutions. Further follow-up support is recommended to ensure effective implementation of the drafted business plans and to sustain the long-term impact of the training.

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