



Integrating Halal Nutraceutical Product Development with Religious Mentoring in a Convert-dominant Farming Community

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Abstract

In a convert-dominant Muslim community surrounded by a Christian majority in rural East Java, Indonesia, organic vegetable farmers face two intersecting challenges: low economic value from unprocessed produce and weak religious mentoring due to economic pressures. This community empowerment study aimed to integrate halal nutraceutical product training with Islamic religious mentoring to enhance both entrepreneurial skills and religious participation among 10 female farmers from the "Ngudi Rahayu" organic farming group. Using a group-based participatory action research design over three months (June–August 2021), the intervention included socialization, production training for organic vegetable chips, packaging and marketing under Islamic principles, and weekly religious mentoring. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with community and religious leaders, and documentation of program outputs. Results showed that all 10 participants developed entrepreneurial competencies, successfully produced halal-certifiable vegetable chips, and actively engaged in religious activities with support from local mosque leaders and the district office of religious affairs. Stakeholders, including the village head and youth organization leader, reported high enthusiasm and perceived improvements in both economic and religious resilience. The study concludes that simultaneously addressing economic and religious needs is feasible and effective for convert communities. The implication is a novel integrative empowerment model the Halal Empowerment Model for Convert Communities (HEMCC)—that combines halal nutraceutical entrepreneurship with sustained religious mentoring. This model offers a replicable framework for community development programs in minority-religion contexts.

Keywords: Community empowerment, halal nutraceutical, organic processing, participatory research, religious mentoring.



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INTRODUCTION

The global expansion of the halal industry has evolved from a niche religious market into a multidimensional economic system encompassing food, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and lifestyle services, driven by increasing Muslim consumer awareness and the institutionalization of halal standards across international markets. Contemporary scholarship positions halal not merely as a compliance mechanism but as a value-based ecosystem integrating ethical production, supply chain transparency, and socio-religious legitimacy (halal industry studies). The rapid growth of halal nutraceuticals, in particular, reflects a convergence between health-conscious consumption patterns and religious adherence, where organic agricultural inputs are increasingly valorized due to their perceived purity and absence of harmful residues. This trajectory is reinforced by the emergence of digital ecosystems and global value chain integration strategies that enhance competitiveness and traceability in halal markets (Sani et al., 2025; Ismail et al., 2026).

Within this evolving landscape, rural agricultural communities are positioned as critical upstream actors, yet their participation remains structurally constrained by limited technological capacity and fragmented institutional support. Existing research has generated important insights into the operationalization of halal value chains and the socio-economic dynamics underpinning halal product development, though these contributions often remain segmented across disciplinary boundaries. Studies on halal industry policy frameworks emphasize the importance of regulatory coherence and institutional alignment in fostering industry growth (Siregar & Ruslan, 2025), while others highlight

the role of academic and governmental initiatives in strengthening halal product assurance systems (Fitri et al.).

Parallel investigations into halal marketing ethics underscore the integration of sharia values as a determinant of consumer trust and market differentiation (Sani et al., 2025). At the community level, research on halal certification facilitation reveals the significance of mentoring and institutional assistance in enabling small enterprises to navigate complex regulatory requirements (Zuchrillah et al., 2022; Sudirman, 2024). Despite these advances, the literature tends to treat production, certification, and marketing as discrete processes, thereby overlooking the interdependence between socio-religious formation and economic agency in grassroots contexts. A critical examination of prior studies reveals persistent conceptual and empirical limitations, particularly in relation to the integration of economic empowerment and religious mentoring within marginalized Muslim communities.

While research on religious outreach highlights the role of Islamic counselors in promoting halal awareness and religious moderation (AYIP, 2023; Uswatusolihah & Saputro, 2024), these interventions are frequently designed as normative or doctrinal programs detached from the material realities of participants. Conversely, studies on community-based economic development and agro-processing innovation often prioritize technical skill enhancement without adequately addressing the socio-religious dimensions that shape participation and sustainability. This fragmentation produces an analytical blind spot in which the lived experiences of convert (muallaf) populations who simultaneously navigate economic vulnerability and identity reconstruction are insufficiently theorized within integrated development frameworks.

The urgency of addressing this gap becomes particularly evident in rural contexts characterized by both high agricultural potential and socio-religious transformation, where economic precarity directly undermines the capacity for sustained religious engagement. Empirical evidence suggests that halal ecosystem development requires not only infrastructural and technological interventions but also the cultivation of value-based practices embedded within community life (Fawaid, 2022). In such settings, the absence of value-added processing capabilities limits income generation, reinforcing cycles of dependency that hinder both economic resilience and religious participation. The lack of integrated models that simultaneously address these dimensions constrains the scalability of halal-based community empowerment initiatives, thereby necessitating a more holistic analytical approach capable of capturing the reciprocal relationship between livelihood strategies and religious mentoring.

This study positions itself within an emerging interdisciplinary nexus that seeks to bridge the divide between halal economic development and socio-religious empowerment by conceptualizing nutraceutical product innovation as both an economic and a pedagogical intervention. Unlike prevailing approaches that treat halal compliance as a downstream certification issue, this research foregrounds the upstream processes of production, knowledge transfer, and community engagement as sites of value formation. By situating halal nutraceutical development within a participatory framework that incorporates religious mentoring, the study advances a relational perspective in which economic practices are understood as embedded within moral and spiritual trajectories, particularly for convert-dominant communities navigating minority status.

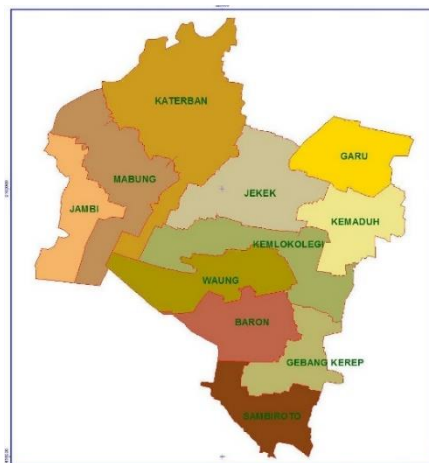


Figure 1 Map of Baron Sub-district at coordinates: 7°35'6"S 112°3'30"E

The empirical context of Desa Katerban exemplifies the intersection of structural economic underutilization and complex socio-religious dynamics, where abundant organic agricultural output coexists with limited value addition and significant underemployment. The predominance of raw commodity sales exposes farmers to market volatility and post-harvest losses, while the presence of a substantial muallaf population introduces additional layers of vulnerability related to religious adaptation and social integration. Prior findings indicate that religious mentoring plays a crucial role in supporting convert communities, particularly when combined with practical assistance that addresses immediate livelihood needs, suggesting that economic and religious interventions function most effectively when implemented in tandem rather than isolation (AYIP, 2023; Uswatusolihah & Saputro, 2024; Zuchrillah et al., 2022).

Such conditions underscore the necessity of designing interventions that are simultaneously economically productive and socially transformative. The present study aims to develop and evaluate an integrated model that combines halal nutraceutical product development with structured religious mentoring for women farmers in a convert-dominant agricultural community. It seeks to contribute theoretically by advancing an integrated framework that reconceptualizes halal economic practices as inherently linked to processes of religious formation, and methodologically by employing participatory action research to generate context-sensitive, community-driven insights. The research aspires to demonstrate that the alignment of economic empowerment and religious mentoring can produce mutually reinforcing outcomes, offering a replicable model for similar rural contexts where livelihood challenges and socio-religious transformation intersect.

METHODS

This study adopted a participatory action research (PAR) design, an approach particularly suited to community-based interventions that seek to integrate economic empowerment with socio-religious transformation through iterative and collaborative processes rather than top-down implementation. The PAR framework was operationalized through cyclical stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection, allowing participants to progressively internalize both technical competencies in halal nutraceutical production and the normative dimensions of religious mentoring, while researchers functioned as facilitators who continuously adapted intervention strategies in response to emergent community dynamics. Such an approach was methodologically justified given the complex socio-religious configuration of Desa Katerban, where a convert-dominant Muslim minority coexists within a broader non-Muslim social environment, thereby necessitating a flexible and context-sensitive research design capable of accommodating local knowledge systems and lived experiences. The intervention was conducted from June to August 2021 following a preparatory phase in March 2021, and involved ten purposively selected women farmers from the “Ngudi Rahayu” organic farming group, whose demographic composition predominantly muallaf with limited formal education and constrained economic opportunities reflected the broader structural vulnerabilities under investigation (Cornish et al., 2023; Siswadi & Syaifuddin, 2024).

The implementation of the research followed a structured four-phase PAR cycle encompassing socialization, technical training, business implementation, and participatory evaluation, each phase designed to elicit active community engagement while simultaneously generating empirical data on behavioral change and capacity development. Data collection employed methodological triangulation through structured observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation analysis, ensuring both depth and validity of findings across multiple data sources. Analytical procedures were guided by thematic analysis, involving systematic coding, theme development, and interpretative synthesis to capture patterns of transformation in both economic practices and religious engagement among participants. Reliability was strengthened through inter-coder agreement and member checking, while descriptive analysis of observational and transactional data provided complementary quantitative insights into program outcomes. Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained through informed consent procedures, confidentiality safeguards, and institutional approval, ensuring that the research adhered to established standards of academic integrity and participant protection throughout all stages of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The integrated community empowerment program produced several significant outcomes across entrepreneurial development, nutraceutical product creation, religious mentoring engagement, and multi-stakeholder support, reflecting the complex interplay between economic agency and socio-religious transformation in a minority Muslim rural setting. These findings are presented thematically, followed by a critical discussion that situates the results within broader scholarly debates on halal value chains, community empowerment, and religious formation in marginalized contexts.

Entrepreneurial and Nutraceutical Product Outcomes

The integrated community empowerment program demonstrated a structured progression of entrepreneurial capacity building among the ten women farmers involved, reflecting a gradual internalization of both technical and managerial competencies. The socialization phase functioned not merely as an introductory stage but as a critical moment of cognitive transformation, where participants began to reinterpret their agricultural activities as potential business ventures. This shift in mindset is particularly significant in rural economies where farming is often perceived as subsistence-oriented rather than market-driven. The active involvement of community leaders during this phase contributed to the legitimacy of the program and increased participant commitment. Such dynamics are consistent with findings that local leadership endorsement plays a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial motivation in community-based interventions (Basyariah, 2022; Jalaludin et al., 2023).

The training phase further translated this initial motivation into practical competencies, particularly in the domain of organic vegetable processing. Participants engaged in repeated demonstration-based learning, which proved effective given their relatively low levels of formal education. The emphasis on hands-on practice enabled participants to overcome initial apprehension toward unfamiliar processing techniques. Over time, they developed confidence in handling equipment, managing ingredients, and maintaining production consistency. This iterative learning process reflects pedagogical approaches that prioritize experiential knowledge over theoretical instruction in rural settings. Such approaches have been widely recognized as effective in enhancing skill acquisition among grassroots communities (Permana et al., 2022; Nufaisa et al., 2024).

During the implementation phase, participants began to operationalize their newly acquired skills in real production settings, marking a transition from learning to application. This stage revealed varying levels of adaptability among participants, with some demonstrating rapid proficiency while others required continued guidance. The collaborative nature of the group facilitated peer-to-peer learning, which helped mitigate individual skill gaps. Participants also began experimenting with product variations, indicating the emergence of creative entrepreneurial behavior. This phase highlights the importance of sustained mentoring beyond initial training to ensure the consolidation of competencies. The monitoring and evaluation phase introduced participants to basic principles of business sustainability, including record-keeping and performance assessment.

This stage encouraged participants to critically reflect on their production processes and identify areas for improvement. Joint evaluation sessions between researchers and participants fostered a sense of shared responsibility for program outcomes. Participants began to recognize the importance of consistency, quality control, and customer feedback in maintaining market competitiveness. These findings suggest that monitoring activities are not merely evaluative but also educational in nature. The successful production of organic vegetable chips as halal nutraceutical products represents a key tangible outcome of the program. Participants demonstrated the ability to transform raw agricultural inputs into value-added products with extended shelf life and higher market value. This transition is particularly important in addressing post-harvest losses and price volatility commonly experienced in rural farming communities.

The incorporation of multiple vegetable types allowed for diversification, reducing dependence on a single commodity. Such diversification strategies are essential for enhancing economic resilience in agricultural systems. The integration of halal principles into the production process added an additional layer of value to the products. Participants were trained to ensure cleanliness, ingredient traceability, and avoidance of contamination, aligning with established halal assurance standards. This not only improved product quality but also increased consumer trust, particularly among Muslim markets. The ability to articulate halal compliance further strengthened participants' confidence in

marketing their products. These findings align with research emphasizing the role of halal assurance in enhancing product credibility and competitiveness (Ibrahim & Masruhen, 2024; Utami, 2011).

Beyond technical production, participants also developed basic marketing skills, including packaging design and pricing strategies. The introduction of simple yet attractive packaging enhanced the perceived value of the products. Participants learned to consider cost structures and profit margins in setting prices, reflecting an emerging understanding of business management principles. These competencies are critical for ensuring the sustainability of small-scale enterprises. The ability to market products effectively determines whether production activities translate into actual income generation. The entrepreneurial outcomes observed in this study also highlight the role of gender in community empowerment. As women farmers, participants often had limited access to economic opportunities prior to the intervention (Muslim, 2022; Susanti, 2022).

The program provided a platform for them to engage in income-generating activities without leaving their domestic responsibilities. This dual role of economic participation and household management underscores the importance of designing gender-sensitive interventions. Empowering women economically has broader implications for household welfare and community development. Another significant outcome is the shift in participants' perception of their agricultural resources. Organic vegetables, previously sold as raw commodities, began to be viewed as inputs for higher-value products. This cognitive transformation is essential for fostering innovation in rural economies. Participants started to explore possibilities for expanding their product range beyond chips. Such forward-looking perspectives indicate the potential for long-term entrepreneurial growth (Rosyidah, 2024).

The entrepreneurial and nutraceutical outcomes of the program demonstrate that integrated training and mentoring can effectively enhance both skills and mindset among rural women farmers. The combination of technical, managerial, and value-based learning created a holistic development process. Participants not only acquired practical competencies but also developed confidence in their ability to engage in business activities. These findings reinforce the importance of comprehensive approaches in community empowerment initiatives. The results contribute to a growing body of literature emphasizing the role of integrated interventions in rural economic development.

Religious Mentoring and Muallaf Engagement Outcomes

The religious mentoring component of the program addressed the unique socio-religious context of Desa Katerban, where muallaf participants navigate their identities within a predominantly non-Muslim environment. At the outset, participants exhibited varying levels of religious knowledge and practice, reflecting their diverse conversion histories. Many reported challenges in maintaining consistent religious engagement due to economic pressures and limited access to structured learning opportunities. This condition illustrates the intersection between material constraints and spiritual development. Such dynamics are characteristic of minority Muslim communities undergoing processes of religious adaptation (Amrinsyah, 2025).

The baseline findings revealed that economic insecurity significantly influenced participants' ability to engage in religious activities. Daily livelihood concerns often took precedence over participation in study sessions or communal worship. This prioritization reflects a pragmatic response to immediate needs rather than a lack of religious commitment. Participants expressed a desire to deepen their understanding of Islam but lacked the necessary support structures. These findings highlight the importance of addressing economic barriers in designing religious mentoring programs. Following the intervention, participants demonstrated a marked increase in religious engagement, particularly in attending weekly mentoring sessions. The structured nature of these sessions provided a consistent platform for learning and reflection. Participants reported feeling more confident in performing basic religious practices (Permana et al., 2022; Nufaisa et al., 2024).

This improvement suggests that regular and accessible mentoring can significantly enhance religious participation. The group-based format also fostered a sense of community among participants. The integration of economic activities with religious mentoring played a crucial role in sustaining participant engagement. As participants began to experience economic benefits from the program, their motivation to attend mentoring sessions increased. This relationship indicates that economic stability can create enabling conditions for spiritual growth. Participants no longer perceived religious activities as competing with their economic responsibilities. Instead, the two domains became mutually

reinforcing. Another important outcome is the development of peer support networks among participants. The shared experience of learning and practicing together created a supportive environment for religious growth (Ibrahim & Masruhen, 2024).

Participants were able to discuss challenges and share insights with one another. This collective learning process enhanced the effectiveness of the mentoring program. Peer support is particularly important for muallaf who may lack familial or social support for their religious practices. The program also facilitated the dissemination of religious knowledge beyond direct participants. Some participants began teaching basic Islamic practices to family members, indicating a ripple effect within households. This diffusion of knowledge contributes to broader community transformation. It also reflects participants' increasing confidence in their religious understanding. Such outcomes demonstrate the potential of community-based mentoring programs to generate wider social impact. The involvement of local religious leaders further strengthened the mentoring component. Their participation provided credibility and ensured that the content was contextually appropriate. Participants expressed trust in the guidance provided by these leaders (Jalaludin et al., 2023).

This trust is essential for effective religious education. The collaboration between researchers and local leaders highlights the importance of culturally embedded approaches. The mentoring sessions also addressed issues of religious identity and belonging. Participants explored what it means to be Muslim in a minority context. This exploration helped them navigate social interactions with non-Muslim community members. The program thus contributed to both individual and collective identity formation. Such processes are critical for the long-term integration of muallaf into Muslim communities. Despite these positive outcomes, some challenges remain in sustaining religious engagement beyond the program period. Participants expressed concerns about maintaining consistency without ongoing support. This highlights the need for institutionalization of mentoring activities within local structures. Long-term sustainability requires continuous facilitation and resource allocation. Future programs should consider mechanisms for maintaining engagement.

The religious mentoring outcomes demonstrate that integrated approaches can effectively address both spiritual and material needs of muallaf communities. The program created a supportive environment for learning, practice, and identity formation. Participants showed significant improvements in both engagement and confidence. These findings contribute to the understanding of how religious mentoring can be effectively integrated into community development initiatives. The results underscore the importance of holistic approaches in addressing complex socio-religious challenges.

Community Responses and Multi-Stakeholder Support

Documented community responses revealed strong support across multiple stakeholder groups. As shown in Figure, community engagement during nutraceutical product training sessions showed participants actively involved in hands-on practice with university facilitators. Interview data confirmed endorsement from religious leaders (Bapak Maksum as mosque caretaker), community leaders (Bapak Samsudin as village head), education leaders (Ibu Wahyuni as school principal), youth leaders (Imam Syafii as Karang Taruna chairman), and general community members (Bapak Zainuri). The village head explicitly expressed gratitude to the university for conducting the program, noting that the training addressed a long-recognized gap in local economic development. The youth leader stated that the program provided much-needed positive activities for community members who previously had few constructive outlets. The general community member reported that the religious study sessions helped community members learn more effectively.



Figure 2. Group photograph of participants and university facilitators during the community empowerment program at Desa Katerban

This multi-sectoral endorsement confirms Hirohito et al. (2025), who identified that product innovation for organic farming sustainability requires coordination across community stakeholders. The implication is that community empowerment programs cannot succeed through direct participant engagement alone; they must also cultivate supportive environments through engagement with formal and informal leaders who shape local norms and resource allocation. The participatory action research approach proved effective for this context, consistent with Cornish et al. (2023) and Siswadi & Syaifuddin (2024), who argue that participatory methods are particularly valuable when working with communities that have historically been marginalized or overlooked by external development programs. Several theoretical implications emerge from these findings.

First, the results support an integrated framework where economic and religious dimensions of community empowerment are treated as simultaneous rather than sequential. Existing literature has largely separated these domains, with economic empowerment studies focused narrowly on income generation and religious mentoring studies focused on worship practice without economic context. For convert communities facing compound vulnerabilities, these dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Second, halal compliance need not be an external certification burden but can be integrated into production training as a value-adding feature. Third, the participatory action research approach enabled continuous adjustment to participant needs, which would have been impossible with a fixed, expert-driven curriculum.

Practical implications for community development practitioners include that programs targeting muallaf communities should allocate resources equally to economic capacity building and religious mentoring, recognizing that neither can be effectively delivered without the other. Training content should embed halal principles within technical instruction rather than treating religious compliance as a separate certification step. Multi-stakeholder engagement should be planned from program inception. Several limitations must be acknowledged: the study duration was short (three months), precluding assessment of long-term sustainability; the sample size was small (ten participants from a single village), limiting generalizability; the absence of a control group means observed changes cannot be definitively attributed to the intervention. Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal designs with extended follow-up periods, multi-site replication with larger and more diverse samples, and independent evaluation teams.

CONCLUSION

This community empowerment study successfully developed and evaluated an integrated mentoring program combining halal nutraceutical product training with Islamic religious mentoring for organic vegetable farmers in a convert-dominant Muslim minority community in Desa Katerban, Nganjuk, East Java. The three-month intervention using participatory action research with ten women farmers from the Ngudi Rahayu group produced three significant outcomes. First, all participants developed entrepreneurial competencies including production costing, profit target setting, and marketing strategies, successfully producing marketable organic vegetable chips as halal nutraceutical products. Second, the eight muallaf participants demonstrated increased consistency in attending weekly religious mentoring sessions, with five attending additional congregational prayers and three

teaching Islamic practices to non-convert family members. Third, strong multi-stakeholder support from religious leaders, village government, education and youth sectors enabled program success.

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