



Community Service Activities on Developing Instant *holat* Spice Products for Housewife Groups in Medan Johor and Medan Tuntungan, Medan City

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ABSTRACT

This community service aimed to assist housewife groups in Medan Johor and Medan Tuntungan, Medan City, in developing instant *holat* spice products. *Holat*, a traditional Mandailing dish, holds cultural significance but is time-intensive and difficult to prepare, as well as the raw materials are difficult to find in urban areas. The initiative sought to preserve local culinary traditions while providing an economic opportunity for the target group. Activities included training sessions on ingredient selection, production techniques, food safety, packaging, and marketing strategies. Through these efforts, participants gained skills to produce instant *holat* spices and market them effectively. The program successfully empowered the participants by fostering entrepreneurship and promoting traditional cuisine spices in a modern way, contributing to both cultural preservation and economic improvement.

Keyword: Economic Opportunity, Local Culinary, Modern, Traditional Mandailing

ABSTRAK

Pengabdian masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk membantu kelompok ibu rumah tangga di Medan Johor dan Medan Tuntungan, Kota Medan, dalam mengembangkan produk bumbu *holat* instan. *Holat*, hidangan tradisional Batak, memiliki makna budaya tetapi membutuhkan waktu yang lama dan sulit untuk menyiapkannya, serta bahan bakunya sulit ditemukan di daerah perkotaan. Inisiatif ini bertujuan untuk melestarikan tradisi kuliner lokal sekaligus memberikan peluang ekonomi bagi kelompok sasaran. Kegiatan yang dilakukan meliputi sesi pelatihan tentang pemilihan bahan, teknik produksi, keamanan pangan, pengemasan, dan strategi pemasaran. Melalui upaya ini, para peserta memperoleh keterampilan untuk memproduksi bumbu *holat* instan dan memasarkannya secara efektif. Program ini berhasil memberdayakan para peserta dengan menumbuhkan kewirausahaan dan mempromosikan bumbu masakan tradisional secara modern, yang berkontribusi pada pelestarian budaya dan peningkatan ekonomi.

Keyword: Kuliner Lokal, Modern, Peluang Ekonomi, Tradisional Mandailing

1. Introduction

Holat is a traditional side dish from Padang Lawas (Mandailing), South Tapanuli. It is made using the extract of Balangka tree bark (pronounced *balakka*) [1]. The preferred part of the tree for this dish is the thick, young bark. To prepare *holat*, the outermost layer of the *balakka* bark is removed, and the inner bark is shaved carefully without cutting too deep into the wood [2]. Ginger and onions are sliced and mixed with the shaved

balakka bark. Once softened, the mixture is pounded finely and filtered. A pinch of salt is added, and then boiling water is poured over the mixture (it should not be boiled over direct heat). The mixture is stirred well until fully combined, and then grilled carp or roasted chicken is added [3].

Although the dish seems simple, making *holat* is quite challenging. If prepared incorrectly, it can taste bitter or completely bland. The order in which the ingredients are mixed is crucial, as the water temperature significantly affects the flavor. Due to its difficulty, only a few people can make *holat* properly, and those skilled in its preparation are called *pangholati* [4]. Although *balakka* bark can be obtained from suppliers in the Mandailing region, it is not commonly available in local markets in Medan, making it difficult for urban households to prepare *holat*. Therefore, producing sachet-packaged instant *holat* spices could facilitate the preparation of this traditional dish and improve its accessibility for consumers in urban areas. Additionally, since making *holat* spices requires expertise, developing instant *holat* spices presents a promising business opportunity.

Recognizing this potential, this community service aimed to help groups of housewives in Medan Johor and Medan Tuntungan, Medan City, in developing instant *holat* spices products. These women were not yet economically productive but had a strong desire to become entrepreneurs. Through this community service program, they would be empowered by gaining knowledge in ingredient selection, production techniques, food safety, packaging, and marketing strategies, ultimately improving their family's economic conditions. In a broader sense, this initiative would also enhance the appeal of instant *holat* spices as a flagship product, actively contributed to preserving the cultural heritage of *holat*, and accelerated the diffusion of packaging technology, particularly among housewives. This community service aimed to assist housewife groups in Medan Johor and Medan Tuntungan, Medan City, in developing instant *holat* spice products.

2. Methods

The field visit was conducted in the first month, material preparation took place from the first to the second month, and the trial production of instant *holat* spices was carried out from the second to the fifth month. This activity was held at Karya Jaya, Gang Eka Jaya 2 No. 17, Kelurahan Gedung Johor, Medan Johor, as well as at Jalan Bunga Ncole IV, Medan Tuntungan, Kota Medan.

The required ingredients included *balakka* bark, ginger, shallots, garlic, lemongrass, green onions, celery, salt, cooking oil, and water. The necessary equipment consisted of a stove, oven, electricity, wok, blender, basin, knife, strainer, extension cord, spatula, stirring spoon, gas cylinder, small bowls, basins, small spoons, glasses, paper, pens, printer, and sachet packaging.

The community service team, consisting of two faculty members from the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Cultural Sciences at USU, carried out a series of activities, including:

1. Field Visit. This activity was conducted through an educational session on material selection, production techniques, food safety, packaging, and marketing strategies, which were expected to be effectively implemented.
2. Material Preparation. The preparation phase involved gathering the necessary ingredients for making instant *holat* spices. Additionally, coordination was carried out with partners for the procurement and placement of the required equipment.
3. Trial Production of Instant Holat Seasoning. The trial production was conducted in four stages: formulating the instant *holat* spices, producing the spices, performing sensory testing. The formulation process involved determining the appropriate ingredient proportions and the oven drying temperature to ensure the seasoning's taste, aroma, and color met consumer preferences. The formulation and production process were adjusted based on discussions with the housewives who participated as partners in this community service initiative.
4. Packaging and Marketing Training. Participants received training on product packaging and marketing strategies to enhance the commercial value of instant *holat* spices. The packaging training covered the selection of appropriate packaging materials, storage instructions, and product presentation.

5. **Monitoring and Mentoring.** Monitoring and mentoring activities were conducted after the training sessions to evaluate participants' understanding and implementation of the acquired knowledge and skills. Continuous assistance was provided to help participants overcome challenges related to production, packaging, and marketing activities. Feedback from participants was collected and used to assess the effectiveness of the program and identify opportunities for further improvement.

Participant knowledge was evaluated using a simple pre-test and post-test questionnaire covering three aspects: *holat* processing, packaging, and marketing. The percentage values were presented represent the proportion of participants who achieved satisfactory scores in each knowledge category.

The preparation process began with cleaning shallots, garlic, ginger, green onions, celery, and lemongrass, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. After being cleaned, the ingredients were weighed as follows: 50 g of shallots, 23 g of garlic, 4 g of ginger, 10 g of green onions, 10 g of celery, and 7 g of lemongrass. The shallots were then blended separately, while the garlic, ginger, and lemongrass were blended together. Next, the green onions and celery were finely chopped.



Figure 1. Ingredient preparation by housewives in Medan Johor.



Figure 2. Ingredient preparation by housewives in Medan Tuntungan.

The trial production of instant *holat* spices was conducted through the following process: First, the blended shallots were sautéed in 5 ml of cooking oil until fragrant. Then, 400 ml of water was added, along with garlic, ginger, and lemongrass. While waiting for it to boil, the *holat* was shaved using a knife until 25 g of shavings were obtained. The method for shaving the *balakka* stem is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. The process of shaving the *balakka* stem.

After the mixture reached a boil, the *balakka* shavings and 4 g of salt were added and cooked for 5 minutes. Then, the spices were dried using an oven dryer at 60°C for 18 hours. The drying process in this community service is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. The spices drying process using an oven dryer.

After drying, the spices were then packaged. The instant *holat* spices was packed in 36 g portions. The produced instant *holat* spices is shown in Figure 5. The shelf life of the instant *holat* spices was not evaluated during this community service program. Therefore, further studies are needed to determine product stability, packaging performance, and storage duration under different environmental conditions. One pack can be brewed with 400 mL of water and cooked with 500 g of fish or chicken. The spices were tested by cooking it with Nile tilapia, resulting in good sensory attributes in terms of taste, aroma, and color, as shown in Figure 6. The sensory evaluation was conducted using 10 untrained panelists consisting of the participating housewives from Medan Johor and Medan Tuntungan.

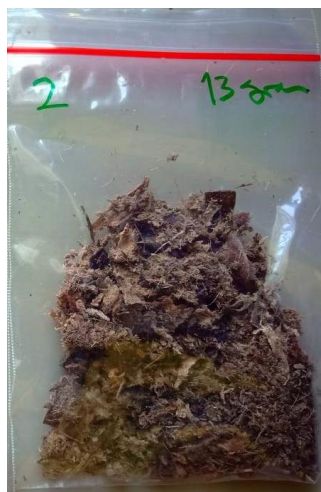


Figure 5. The instant *holat* spices.



Figure 6. Preparation of Nile tilapia *holat* using the instant *holat* spices.

3. Result and Discussion

The field visit, material preparation, and trial production of instant *holat* spices have been completed. Field visits conducted through educational sessions on material selection, production techniques, food safety, packaging, and marketing strategies are shown in Figure 7. Participants actively participated in the discussions by asking questions related to raw material selection, processing techniques, food safety, packaging, and marketing. The positive response demonstrated their interest in applying the acquired knowledge for developing instant *holat* spice products. The material preparation process involved selecting *balakka* stems and other fresh spices, as shown in Figure 8.



Figure 7. Field visit activity.



(a)

(b)

Figure 8. (a) *balakka* stems; (b) fresh spices.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the community service program, participants' knowledge regarding *holat* processing, packaging, and marketing was assessed before and after the training activities. The results are presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Improvement of Participants' Knowledge on *Holat* Processing, Packaging, and Marketing Following the Community Service Program

Indicator	Before (%)	After (%)
Knowledge of <i>holat</i> processing	10	100
Packaging knowledge	20	90
Marketing knowledge	40	90

The findings showed substantial improvements in all evaluated aspects. Knowledge of *holat* processing increased from 10% before training to 100% after training. Similarly, knowledge of packaging increased from 20% to 90%, while marketing knowledge increased from 40% to 90%. These results indicate that the training activities successfully enhanced participants' understanding of both technical and entrepreneurial aspects of instant *holat* spice production. Participants responded positively throughout the program. During educational sessions and practical demonstrations, they actively engaged in discussions, asked questions related to raw material selection, food safety, packaging, and marketing strategies, and participated directly in the production process. Furthermore, participants expressed interest in applying the acquired knowledge to develop home-based businesses involving instant *holat* spice products.

The substantial increase in participants' knowledge is consistent with findings reported by Suvedi et al. [5], who demonstrated that participatory training programs combining theoretical and practical learning significantly improve participants' competencies. Therefore, the present community service program not only improved participants' knowledge and skills but also strengthened their readiness to engage in small-scale entrepreneurial activities. The increase in packaging knowledge is particularly important because attractive and functional packaging contributes to product quality preservation and consumer acceptance. Effective packaging has been recognized as a key factor influencing the competitiveness of small-scale food products in local markets [6]. Through the training activities, participants gained a better understanding of packaging selection, product labeling, and presentation techniques. Moreover, proper packaging and labeling not only protect product quality but also increase consumer confidence and purchasing decisions, particularly for value-added food products produced by small and medium enterprises [7].

Similarly, the improvement in marketing knowledge demonstrates that participants became more aware of strategies for promoting and selling their products. Marketing training is essential for empowering small-scale entrepreneurs because it helps them identify potential customers, establish product value, and expand market reach [8]. During the discussions, participants expressed strong interest in applying the acquired knowledge to develop home-based businesses centered on instant *holat* spices. In addition to improving technical knowledge, the training stimulated participants' interest in entrepreneurship. During discussions and practical sessions, participants expressed enthusiasm for producing and marketing instant *holat* spices as a potential home-based business. This positive response suggests that the program contributed to strengthening entrepreneurial awareness among the participants. Entrepreneurship education and business-oriented training have been shown to enhance entrepreneurial intention, self-efficacy, and the likelihood of establishing sustainable micro-enterprises, particularly in rural and community-based settings [9].

Overall, the results indicate that the community service program successfully increased participants' knowledge and readiness to produce, package, and market instant *holat* spices. These outcomes support the program's objective of preserving traditional Mandailing culinary heritage while creating economic opportunities for housewife groups in Medan Johor and Medan Tuntungan.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Community Service Program successfully improved the knowledge and skills of housewife groups in Medan Johor and Medan Tuntungan, Medan City, regarding the production of instant *holat* spices. The participants gained practical knowledge related to ingredient selection, production techniques, food safety, packaging, and marketing. Evaluation results showed substantial improvements in participants' knowledge of *holat* processing, packaging, and marketing after the training activities. Participants also responded positively to the program and actively engaged in both the educational sessions and practical demonstrations. Furthermore, the training increased participants' awareness of the potential for developing instant *holat* spices as a home-based business opportunity. Therefore, this program contributed to the preservation of Mandailing culinary heritage while creating potential economic opportunities for the community.

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