



Financial Training for Women Microentrepreneurs in PNM Mekaar Bahagia

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a community financial management program delivered in 2021 to women microentrepreneurs in the PNM Mekaar Bahagia group in Titi Rantai, Medan, Indonesia, and reflects on follow-up observations made in 2026. The program addressed the separation of household and business funds, basic bookkeeping, cost calculation, and responsibilities associated with group-based borrowing. Preparatory visits and coordination with the group informed the training content. Sessions combined explanations, discussion, and financial recording exercises based on participants' business activities. Program documentation, training field notes, and follow-up observations were examined descriptively to consider business continuity and financial practices. The follow-up account describes continuing activities in small food retail and vegetable trading, greater awareness of financial management, and uneven use of financial records. These observations document participants' circumstances but do not establish that the training caused business survival or greater economic independence. The absence of participant counts, standardized baseline and follow-up measures, and a comparison group limits assessment of change. The experience supports a practical focus for subsequent community activities: repeated bookkeeping practice and mentoring that address participants' daily transactions. Future evaluation should document participation and follow-up coverage and distinguish financial knowledge, sustained recordkeeping, and business outcomes.

Keywords: *community service; women's empowerment; microenterprises; financial training; bookkeeping*

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INTRODUCTION

Women running microenterprises often manage business transactions alongside household expenditure. In this setting, separating funds and recording costs can help clarify whether sales revenue is available for replenishing stock or has already been used for domestic needs. The PNM Mekaar Bahagia group in Titi Rantai provided the setting for a community service program addressing these everyday financial management tasks. Recordkeeping and financial planning are among the practices examined in research on small-firm performance (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2017).

Financial knowledge and financial behavior are related but distinct. Lusardi and Mitchell (2014) discuss the role of financial knowledge in economic decision-making. Research has also examined whether financial education translates into subsequent behavior (Fernandes et al., 2014; Kaiser et al., 2022). A local training program therefore needs to distinguish the delivery of information from the sustained use of financial routines.

The program was delivered in 2021 in response to difficulties reported in the source account, including mixed household and business funds, limited financial planning, and inconsistent bookkeeping. Its content covered simple transaction records, basic cost calculation, and responsibilities within the borrowing group. Follow-up observations in 2026 provided an opportunity to revisit participants' businesses beyond the training period. Studies of training among microfinance clients and women entrepreneurs provide relevant comparisons for program design (de Mel et al., 2014; Karlan & Valdivia, 2011).

This article aims to describe the delivery of the program and interpret the subsequent observations in relation to financial practices and business continuity. It is a descriptive community service account, not an impact evaluation. Its contribution is the documentation of a local training experience and the identification of practical issues requiring continued support. The discussion separates the circumstances observed in 2026 from claims about changes attributable to the intervention.

METHODS

The activity involved women microentrepreneurs belonging to PNM Mekaar Bahagia in Titi Rantai, Medan City, Indonesia. Training took place in 2021, with follow-up observations reported for 2026. The account uses program documentation, field notes from the training sessions, and follow-up observations to describe implementation and participants' subsequent business activities.

Preparatory field visits examined participants' business circumstances and financial management practices. The facilitators coordinated with the group leader and members to identify problems and select material relevant to daily transactions. Topics included separating personal and business funds, simple bookkeeping, and calculating costs. The program also addressed financial responsibility under the group's joint-liability arrangement, locally termed *tanggung renteng*.

Training combined explanations and discussion with guided recording exercises. Participants practiced recording transactions associated with their own businesses. This approach was intended to make the material understandable within informal trading settings. Basic food assistance was distributed during the program as a separate support activity; it was not a measure of learning or business performance.

The descriptive analysis considered the initial circumstances described in the 2021 records alongside the business activities and financial practices reported in 2026. Attention was given to continued operation, the use of financial records, and participants' economic roles. Photographs illustrate the reported activities and business settings. They do not provide independent measurements of income, profitability, or changes in financial behavior.

The available documentation does not specify the number of trainees, the number reached at follow-up, the selection process, session duration, or a standardized observation instrument. It also provides no quantitative baseline and follow-up scores or comparison

group. Consequently, the analysis does not estimate an effect size, a business survival rate, or the causal contribution of training. The findings should be read as a descriptive reflection on the documented cases.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Initial engagement focused on understanding participants' financial management difficulties and creating opportunities to discuss them with the facilitators. Figure 1 documents the training setting. The photograph illustrates face-to-face delivery but cannot establish attendance totals, learning gains, or the consistency of subsequent practice.



Figure 1. Financial management training with PNM Mekaar Bahagia participants

The sessions addressed fund separation, simple records, and basic cost calculation, including the production-cost concept known locally as *harga pokok produksi* (HPP). Guidance on joint responsibility accompanied these topics. The practical exercises linked the material to participants' transactions, so that concepts could be discussed in the context of their own enterprises. This emphasis is consistent with the simplified instruction evaluated by Drexler et al. (2014), whose findings support considering accessible financial rules for entrepreneurs with limited initial skills. In an Indonesian community service setting, Aryanti (2023) likewise described bookkeeping instruction that combined explanation and practical exercises. These comparisons support the choice of delivery format, but do not verify outcomes for PNM Mekaar Bahagia.

The program account describes improved awareness of financial management and greater confidence in handling income. These are qualitative observations without a reported scoring instrument. They should not be treated as measured increases in financial literacy. The uneven continuation of recordkeeping is particularly relevant because knowing how to record transactions and maintaining that practice over time are different outcomes.

The distinction between awareness and routine practice is consistent with the mixed evidence on financial education. Fernandes et al. (2014) questioned the persistence of behavioral effects, whereas Kaiser and Menkhoff (2017) found positive average effects with substantial variation across interventions and participants. Such differences make the

timing and intensity of follow-up relevant to interpretation. The present documentation cannot determine how often participants used the recording methods after training.

Figure 2 documents the distribution of basic food assistance during the program. This activity accompanied the training and was intended to support engagement with participants. The available evidence does not isolate its effect on participation or trust. Any interpretation of the program must therefore recognize that educational and material support occurred together.



Figure 2. Distribution of basic food assistance during the program

The follow-up account reports that several participants continued to operate small businesses in 2026. Figure 3 illustrates a small retail stall and a vegetable trading activity. These examples document ongoing economic activity in the cases shown. The number of businesses observed and the number no longer operating are not reported, so a continuation rate cannot be calculated.



Figure 3. Examples of participants' business activities documented in 2026

Continued operation is relevant to household livelihoods, but the photographs and narrative do not establish a change in profit, sales, income stability, or control over household decisions. Other influences over the intervening period, including financing, family support, and market conditions, were not assessed. Business continuity therefore cannot be attributed to the 2021 training on the evidence presented.

Evidence on microcredit also cautions against equating financial access with broad improvements in welfare. Banerjee, Karlan, and Zinman (2015) summarized modest and heterogeneous effects across randomized evaluations. The Hyderabad evaluation found no clear improvement in women's empowerment despite changes in some business outcomes (Banerjee, Duflo, et al., 2015). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, increased self-employment did not establish an increase in total household income (Augsburg et al., 2015). These findings concern different interventions and settings, but clarify why continued trading alone is an insufficient indicator of economic independence.

The group's joint-liability arrangement is another contextual feature. Attanasio et al. (2015) examined group and individual lending in Mongolia and found different outcomes across lending arrangements. Research also addresses the institutional context of gender and microfinance performance (Boehe & Barin Cruz, 2013). The PNM Mekaar Bahagia account does not report repayment records, loan terms, or comparison across lending arrangements, so it cannot assess whether joint liability improved financial discipline.

Participants' financial recording practices reportedly remained inconsistent. This limits the conclusions that can be drawn about sustained application of the training. The account nevertheless identifies a practical priority for follow-up activities: supporting routines that participants can maintain within their daily work. Short, repeated exercises and review of actual transaction records could be considered in subsequent mentoring, with their usefulness assessed rather than assumed.

Future evaluation should distinguish attendance, learning, routine use of records, and business outcomes. Participant counts and follow-up coverage would make the scope of the evidence clear. Documented baseline and follow-up observations could then show whether practices changed among the same participants. Measures of decision-making would be needed before interpreting business activity as evidence of increased empowerment.

Business training evaluations distinguish the effects of instruction from the conditions under which firms operate (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2014). McKenzie (2021) revisited this evidence and discussed adaptations involving mentoring, simpler rules, and psychological approaches. Campos et al. (2017) evaluated personal initiative training, while Bruhn et al. (2018) examined extended management consulting. These interventions differ substantially from the activity described here. They offer directions for designing future support, not evidence that equivalent gains occurred in this group.

Interpreting the observations as empowerment would require additional evidence. Kabeer (1999) distinguishes resources, agency, and achievements when considering women's ability to make choices. Continued sales activity addresses only part of this account and does not reveal who controls earnings or household decisions. The methodological reassessment of microcredit evidence by Roodman and Morduch (2014) also places the

identification of effects at the center of evaluation. For this program, explicit measures and a documented follow-up process are needed before moving beyond descriptive claims.

CONCLUSION

The PNM Mekaar Bahagia program provides a descriptive example of financial management training organized around women microentrepreneurs' daily activities. Follow-up observations indicate continued business activity in the documented cases and uneven use of financial records. These findings identify continued bookkeeping support as a practical priority, but they do not demonstrate a causal effect on business survival or economic independence.

Subsequent activities should combine feasible recording exercises with scheduled mentoring and documented follow-up. Evaluation needs clear participant information and comparable measures of financial practices and business outcomes. This would allow the program's educational contribution to be assessed separately from wider influences on participants' livelihoods.

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