

## REVITALIZING *GOTONG ROYONG* (MUTUAL COOPERATION) THROUGH THE 80TH INDONESIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY GATE DECORATION CONTEST IN RT 02/RW 08, EAST LABUH BARU DISTRICT, PEKANBARU

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### ***Abstract***

We carried out this community service project in RT 02/RW 08 of East Labuh Baru District, Pekanbaru, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Indonesian Independence in 2025. The program combined a gate decoration contest with various traditional community games (e.g., tug-of-war, sack races, and pole climbing) and special children's competitions. These activities served as a vital mechanism for promoting social participation and citizen unity. Our main goal was to strengthen the community's spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), enhance social solidarity, and instill a deeper sense of nationalism. We used a participatory approach for implementation, involving residents in every stage, from initial planning to final evaluation. The results demonstrated significant success: resident participation reached 95%, the neighborhood became noticeably cleaner and more attractive, and the RT 02/RW 08 residents even secured third place in the District-Level Gate Decoration Contest. This project proves that combining art, sport, and mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) through community service effectively strengthens social cohesion and actively fosters a more harmonious character among urban residents.

**Keywords:** *Gotong Royong, Community Empowerment, Gate, Social Solidarity, Citizen Participation.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Indonesian Independence Day celebrations offer a crucial opportunity for communities to reinforce core national values, including unity and mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*). Activities like the gate decoration contest and traditional games are much more than mere entertainment; they provide a vital social platform that strengthens the relationships between neighbors. This is particularly important in urban areas like East Labuh Baru District, where these events create an effective space for social interaction, directly countering the isolating trend of modern, individualistic life. Through this community service program with the RT 02/RW 08 residents, lecturers of the Islamic University of Riau, and community members served as active facilitators, successfully helping the neighborhood revive its spirit of *gotong royong* and creativity.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The primary goals of this community service project were to:

1. Increase residents' spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and social solidarity.
2. Encourage community creativity in decorating the neighborhood with independence-themed designs.
3. Reintroduce traditional community games as a means to foster inter-resident social bonding (*silaturahmi*).

4. Cultivate the values of nationalism and social responsibility within the urban environment.

### 3. METHODS

We utilized the participatory action research (PAR) method, positioning the community as the primary agents (actors) throughout the entire project process. This process involved three distinct phases, as follows.

#### a. Preparation Phase

- We conducted activities to socialize the program and established a joint committee responsible for managing the gate contest and the traditional games.
- We collected design ideas for the decorative gate and finalized the list of traditional games for all age groups (children, teenagers, and adults).
- Residents independently gathered and supplied materials, paint, and other resources voluntarily.

#### b. Implementation Phase

We carried out the core activities on August 17, 2025. This phase included the following.

- Teams competed in decorating the main gate under the theme “*Bersatu Berdaulat, Rakyat Sejahtera, Indonesia Maju*” (English: United and Sovereign, Prosperous People, Advancing Indonesia).
- Residents participated in massive mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) to clean the neighborhood and install decorations.
- We hosted several popular games, including tug-of-war, sack races, the cracker-eating contest, and pole climbing.
- The day concluded with a communal exercise session and a prayer ceremony for independence.

#### c. Evaluation Phase

Evaluation involved the RT 02/RW 08 Head, the committee, community leaders, and the District Office staff. We focused our assessment on three key aspects: creativity, unity, and the spirit of nationalism.



Figure 1. RT 02/RW 08 Advisor with the *Babinsa* (District Military Officer) and the RW 08 Head



Figure 2. RT 02/RW 08 Head with Community Members



**Figure 3. RT 02/RW 08 Residents Watching the Competitions**



**Figure 4. RT 02/RW 08 Residents Participating in the Cracker-Eating Contest**





**Figure 5. RT 02/RW 08 Residents Participating in the Pole Climbing Contest**



**Figure 6. The Decorated RT 02/RW 08 Community Gate**



**Figure 7. The Certificate of Appreciation from the Municipal Government Presented to the RT 02/RW 08 Residents**

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The community service project yielded significant results, strengthening social cohesion and visibly improving the physical environment. Based on observational data and participatory evaluation, the overall achievements fall into three main categories: social, environmental, and academic.

##### **1. Increased Participation and Social Solidarity**

Active participation from 95% of all households demonstrates a high degree of social involvement and civic responsibility. Sociologically, this outcome reflects the successful formation of a collective consciousness, a concept articulated by Émile Durkheim (1984) in his theory of social solidarity. In this specific context, resident participation was not merely instrumental; it was highly expressive. Citizens viewed the activities as central to their shared identity and as a visible expression of ownership over their community. The frequent interactions during the mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) efforts, the gate construction, and the traditional games strongly reinforced social networks (social bonding). This process effectively generated essential social capital for sustainable community-based development. As Putnam (1993) argues, social capital is a key prerequisite for effective local governance and community well-being because it reinforces trust and norms of reciprocity.

##### **2. Environmental Impact and Social Aesthetics**

Environmentally, the project successfully created a tangible physical transformation: the neighborhood became cleaner, more organized, and visibly vibrant with the Indonesian flag adorning every corner. This enhanced visual quality of the neighborhood correlates positively with residents' psychological well-being; a clean and beautiful environment demonstrably increases their sense of comfort and pride in their home. This finding aligns with Newman's (1972) concept of defensible space, which posits that resident involvement in maintaining the environment generates a collective sense of responsibility, thereby minimizing the potential for social conflict and public space degradation.

### 3. Mutual Cooperation as a Sociocultural Mechanism

Cross-generational involvement, spanning children, teenagers, and older adults, demonstrates the project's success in reviving the value of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), a local wisdom that has long served as the moral foundation of the Indonesian nation. Mutual cooperation functions as a social mechanism that maintains the balance between individual interests and the common good (communitarian ethics). From a social anthropology perspective, collective activities like these reflect a modern form of social ritual, through which the community expresses its cultural identity and reinforces symbolic solidarity. The Independence Gate decoration and traditional games are not merely symbolic celebrations; they serve as a powerful means to articulate national values and the spirit of community unity.

### 4. Synergy Between Academia and Community

The collaboration between the university academics and the community became a vital dimension of this project. Academics acted as facilitators and catalysts, guiding the activities to ensure a sustainable social impact. This concept strongly aligns with the community-based research (CBR) paradigm, which emphasizes integrating scientific knowledge and local wisdom to achieve true community empowerment. Using this participatory approach, residents did not function merely as the object of the project; instead, they became active subjects throughout the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Ultimately, this activity successfully implemented the third principle of the *Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi*: community service grounded in scientific knowledge and technology.

### 5. Social Transformation and Sustainability

Overall, this project demonstrates that community service initiatives rooted in local wisdom can effectively serve as an agent of change, successfully building solidarity and improving residents' quality of life. As Freire (1970) stated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, authentic empowerment occurs when the community recognizes its potential and actively participates in social change. Consequently, this project did not just physically beautify the neighborhood; it also reinforced critical social values like caring, responsibility, and patriotism. In the context of sustainable community development, this initiative provides a replicable model for other regions, as it harmoniously integrates social, cultural, and academic aspects.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The gate decoration contest and traditional games held in RT 02/RW 08, East Labuh Baru District, Pekanbaru, successfully strengthened residents' spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and social solidarity. This community service program clearly demonstrates that simple initiatives, executed with a sincere focus on unity, can produce meaningful social change.

- The community should adopt similar activities as an annual agenda to continually reinforce inter-resident social interaction.
- Universities can serve as key accompanying partners for future community-based activities.
- We advise the District Government to establish incentives or awards for high-achieving residents to sustain motivation.

### Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank the head of RT 002, the head of RW 08, the advisor of RW 008, the lecturers of the Islamic University of Riau, *Babinsa* (District Military Officer), the head of East Labuh Baru Village, the head of Payung Sekaki District, and all residents who actively participated in this initiative. We also recognize the lecturers of the Islamic University of Riau for their substantial contribution in guiding and supporting the project.

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