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# Implementing Upcycle Products To Improve Sustainable Business Practice

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**Abstract**

This community service article describes an upcycling awareness and mentoring programme involving Indonesian migrant community participants in Penang, Malaysia. The activity responded to the challenge of introducing resource-conscious business ideas to small-enterprise operators in a migrant community setting. Drawing on circular economy principles, community empowerment theory, and the triple bottom line, the article presents a programme framework linking partner coordination, training, and mentoring with learning opportunities and potential business, social, and environmental benefits. The reported activities comprised programme design, module preparation, venue and partner coordination, dissemination, mentoring, reporting, and observation. The original activity account describes an enthusiastic reception among participants, including small-business owners and PERMAI members, and identifies product adaptation as a possible route to more flexible business offerings. The available evidence does not include standardised learning assessments, verified sales changes, or quantified waste reduction. Consequently, these effects are treated as potential outcomes rather than established programme impacts. Future activities should document recruitment procedures, preserve attendance records, apply learning assessments, and conduct post-training follow-up to evaluate whether upcycling awareness translates into responsible business practices and community welfare gains.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesian migrant workers who operate micro- and small-scale businesses in Malaysia must navigate business continuity, customer expectations, and locally applicable commercial requirements. For entrepreneurs with limited resources, maintaining product relevance while managing materials and inventory may pose

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practical challenges. Studies on Malaysian small and micro-enterprises have examined business-development challenges and entrepreneurial training (Ahmad et al., 2010; Jamak et al., 2014; Omar & Wel, 2014). Lim (2022) provides additional context on key workers in Malaysia. Previous community-engagement programmes involving Indonesian migrant communities in Pulau Pinang have emphasised capacity building and competencies for business sustainability (Marlapa et al., 2024; Nawangsari et al., 2024). These studies provide a relevant setting for community-based support, although they do not establish the effectiveness of an upcycling intervention.

Upcycling offers one possible route to more resource-conscious entrepreneurship. Within a circular economy, retaining the usefulness and value of existing products or materials can complement approaches aimed at reducing resource loss (Bocken et al., 2016; Kirchherr et al., 2017). For micro-entrepreneurs, upcycling may be explored through the redesign or adaptation of suitable materials into offerings that retain commercial or practical value. The applicability of these practices depends on product quality, safety, consumer acceptance, and the entrepreneur's capacity to implement them.

The community-engagement gap addressed in this programme is the limited description of how circular-economy ideas can be translated into accessible business learning activities for Indonesian migrant entrepreneurs in the Penang community setting. Although related literature also addresses digital marketing and social media for SMEs (Jumbulingam et al., 2024; Schroeder, 2024; Thaha et al., 2021), it does not directly document the effects of upcycling instruction in this community. Whereas broader work discusses SME competencies and sustainability, the practical sequence linking awareness, mentoring, product adaptation, and prospective community welfare outcomes remains insufficiently articulated for this outreach context. This is a programme-design and documentation gap, not a claim that upcycling has been proven to improve migrants' incomes.

Accordingly, this community service article aims to describe the implementation of upcycling socialisation and mentoring among Indonesian migrant entrepreneurs in Penang, explain a conceptual programme pathway linking learning activities to potential business and environmental benefits, and critically assess what can be concluded from the available descriptive evidence. The programme is relevant to social welfare and community development because it seeks to expand entrepreneurial choices and sustainability awareness. Its intended contribution also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, particularly support for entrepreneurship and small enterprises, and SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production (United Nations, 2015).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Circular Economy and Upcycling

A circular economy seeks to reduce the reliance on linear patterns of extraction, production, consumption, and disposal by retaining resource value through strategies that include reduction, reuse, recovery, and other forms of circular design (Kirchherr et al., 2017). Bocken et al. (2016) distinguish strategies for slowing, closing, and narrowing resource loops, providing a useful basis for considering products that can remain useful for longer. Upcycling is treated here as the creative transformation or adaptation of suitable existing products or materials into products with renewed or potentially enhanced

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functional or commercial value. This is not synonymous with all forms of recycling, nor does it guarantee environmental benefits in every setting.

At the enterprise level, opportunities for upcycling may arise in fashion and food-related activities, as noted in the original programme. In fashion, the redesign of usable textiles can support renewed product utility within circular design approaches (Niinimäki, 2018). In food-related enterprises, a distinction must be made between safe, edible surplus ingredients that can lawfully be repurposed and food that is spoiled or unsafe. The feasibility of any adaptation should be assessed against applicable hygiene and consumer-protection requirements; upcycling is not a justification for using unsafe materials.

**Triple Bottom Line and Social Welfare**

The triple bottom line framework emphasises the simultaneous consideration of economic, environmental, and social dimensions of business performance (Elkington, 1997). In this programme, the economic dimension concerns prospective product diversification and resource efficiency; the environmental dimension concerns prospective avoidance of usable-material disposal; and the social dimension concerns accessible business learning and participation by migrant entrepreneurs. These are dimensions for evaluating programme relevance, not measured improvements in profit, waste generation, or social wellbeing.

**Community Empowerment**

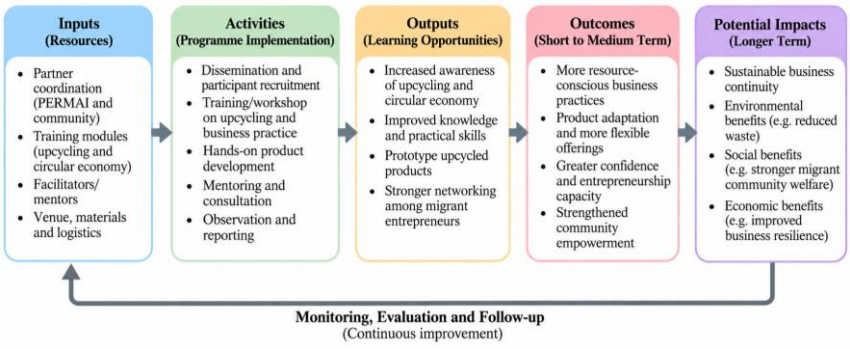
Empowerment perspectives emphasise opportunities for participation, learning, control, and capacity development within a community context (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Applied to the Penang programme, partner coordination, training modules, on-site mentoring, and observation can be understood as engagement mechanisms that may help participants identify feasible business adaptations. Such mechanisms offer a rationale for the programme's design; whether participants subsequently adopt new practices requires additional, direct evidence.

**Conceptual Integration**

The proposed programme logic links the community setting and participants' business needs to training and mentoring inputs, the immediate learning opportunities offered during programme delivery, and potential longer-term economic, social, and environmental outcomes. It connects the circular-economy lens (how resources may be used differently) with the empowerment lens (how participants may acquire the capacity to act) and the triple bottom line (which outcomes would matter). Figure 1 presents this framework as an intended sequence rather than an empirically tested causal model.

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Figure 1. Proposed Upcycling-Based Community Empowerment Programme Framework




## METHODS

### Programme Design and Setting

The community service programme was conducted on 13 February 2025 in Penang, Malaysia, and addressed Indonesian migrant community members, including micro- and small-business operators and members of PERMAI. The programme followed eight stages: (1) programme design, (2) training-module preparation, (3) venue preparation, (4) on-site partner and student coordination, (5) activity dissemination, (6) mentoring and implementation, (7) reporting and publication, and (8) observation. Table 1 summarises these stages and their intended outputs. The specific venue address was not recorded in the manuscript materials examined.

### Participants and Recruitment

The activity involved 35 participants, according to the information confirmed by the authors for the event on 13 February 2025. The intended group comprised Indonesian migrant entrepreneurs or prospective entrepreneurs who could benefit from introductory upcycling education. Recruitment and participation were coordinated with community partners through dissemination of programme information. Although the original programme narrative identifies small-business owners and PERMAI members among the audience, it does not supply a reliable numerical breakdown by entrepreneurial status, gender, or community membership. Formal eligibility criteria and a probability-based recruitment procedure were not documented.

### Programme implementation

The educational component introduced the principles and examples of product upcycling and their possible relevance to small enterprises, with an emphasis on materials, product ideas, and responsible business considerations. The mentoring component was designed to create opportunities for interaction and discussion of implementation challenges. The original activity report does not document verified details of hands-on demonstrations, completed product prototypes, training duration, or specific teaching materials.

### Evaluation and Analysis

The programme was assessed descriptively using the activity account of supervision, interaction, mentoring, documentation, and observation. The authors

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reported 35 participants and a programme date of 13 February 2025; supporting administrative records should be retained to corroborate these details if requested during editorial assessment. The original account reports positive audience reception but does not provide participant-level pre-test and post-test scores, systematically coded interviews, documented product outputs, or quantified economic and environmental indicators. Consequently, the analysis describes reported activities and plausible applications without estimating training effectiveness or causal impact. Table 2 differentiates participation information and narrative observations from indicators that would require further evidence.

Table 1. Summary of community service activities

| No. | Activities | Evaluation | Output |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Design the community service activity program | Supervise the program | The program would cover technicalities and schedule of the activity. |
| 2. | Determine the training modul. | Determine the training modul | The Modul would cover supervising arrangements and continuous counseling. |
| 3. | Training premise preparation | Supervise the premise | Training facility is ready to use. |
| 4. | On-site coordination | Involve partner and students | Ensuring the audience will attend the training session. |
| 5. | Circulate the program. | Distribute the flyer to the partner. | Both trainers and the audience benefit from the activity |
| 6. | Mentoring and implementation | Interact with the audience | Determine, analyze, and provide solutions during the mentoring and implementation stage. |
| 7. | Report and publication | Activity documentation | • Activity report<br>• Publish in print media/online media<br>• Activity recording |
| 8. | Observation | Observe the audiences' progress | Maintain implementation consistency |

Table 2. Proposed indicators and evidence availability for programme evaluation

| Dimension | Indicator if Measured | Required Evidence / Status |
|---|---|---|
| Participation and selection | Number attending, participation profile, and recruitment route | 35 participants on 13 February 2025 (author-reported); attendance register and participant-category breakdown not provided for review |

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| Dimension | Indicator if Measured | Required Evidence / Status |
|---|---|---|
| Immediate knowledge | Pre/post understanding of upcycling and product safety | Dated questionnaires or equivalent records; not documented |
| Implementation or feasibility | Product ideas or prototypes and feasibility comments | Worksheets, dated photos, mentoring notes; not documented |
| Resource and business outcomes | Reusable material volume, cost, selling price or sales | Original production records and follow-up data; not documented |
| Participant reception | Qualitative interest and questions during the session | Narrative enthusiasm is reported; systematic coding or quotations not documented |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

### Reported Programme Reception

On 13 February 2025, the Penang upcycling programme involved 35 participants. The original activity account describes the socialisation of upcycling as enthusiastically received by an audience including small-business owners and PERMAI members. This observation provides descriptive information on participants' reception of the session; it is not a systematically scored satisfaction measure. The available documentation does not report individual responses, attendance by participant category, or pre-test and post-test learning scores. Therefore, changes in participant knowledge or competence cannot be quantified from the existing evidence.

### Potential Business Applications

The activities introduced upcycling as an approach through which entrepreneurs might reconsider existing materials or product offerings, including examples associated with food and fashion enterprises. Such adaptations could, where feasible, offer greater variety in product design or use of usable inventory. The present report does not include before-and-after inventory costs, selling prices, sales, or profits. Accordingly, claims that the programme reduced costs, increased earnings, or improved business performance would exceed the available evidence. Those outcomes remain plausible targets for future assessment, not demonstrated impacts of this programme.

### Discussion

### Interpretation through the proposed framework

The circular-economy lens helps explain why reusing or transforming suitable materials could be relevant to resource efficiency (Bocken et al., 2016; Kirchherr et al., 2017). The empowerment lens explains why a community-based training and mentoring format is appropriate for introducing new business choices (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Through the triple bottom line, the programme's intended value can be discussed across economic opportunity, participant learning, and responsible resource use (Elkington, 1997). The intervention establishes an educational opportunity, but the available descriptive account does not verify the longer-term outcomes in Figure 1.

### Community Development and Regulatory Considerations

The programme's significance lies in adapting sustainability ideas to the circumstances of migrant entrepreneurs in a local partner network. It can therefore be

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interpreted as a small-scale community development initiative rather than a test of economic or environmental effectiveness. Any business recommendations in the Malaysian setting should be evaluated against the relevant and currently applicable product safety, labelling, environmental, and business requirements. As the programme report does not identify specific regulatory provisions or compliance assessments, verified regulatory compliance cannot be established.

**Implications for Subsequent Activities**

Future implementations can move beyond socialisation by documenting participation and baseline business needs, recording whether participants develop feasible upcycled product concepts, and following up on actual adoption. Practical indicators could include the number of eligible participants, documented learning assessments, product prototypes, material quantities reused, associated costs, and customer responses. These indicators should be analysed only when corresponding records are available and should distinguish short-term learning outcomes from sustained business or welfare effects.

## CONCLUSION

This community service programme, conducted on 13 February 2025 with 35 participants in Penang, Malaysia, introduced upcycling as a possible approach to more sustainable business practices among Indonesian migrant entrepreneurs. The original account documents favourable participant reception and describes a programme sequence of coordination, training, mentoring, and observation. Conceptually, the intervention connects circular-economy thinking with community empowerment: learning opportunities may help entrepreneurs identify ways to adapt suitable materials and diversify products while considering environmental and customer responsibilities. The triple bottom line and SDGs 8 and 12 provide a broader account of its potential relevance to business sustainability, social welfare, and community development.

The evidence available for evaluation remains primarily descriptive. Although the activity date and participant total have been supplied by the authors, the source documents supporting attendance and the specific venue were not available for independent review. The study does not establish changes in participant competence, sales, income, inventory expenditure, or waste generation. The absence of systematically reported selection criteria, standardised evaluation instruments, and longitudinal follow-up limits assessment of programme effectiveness and transferability. Future activities should retain an auditable attendance register, document baseline business needs, prospectively administer learning assessments, record feasible product adaptations and safety considerations, and monitor practice adoption with community partners.

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