



From Policy to Practice: Evaluating the Impact of Entrepreneurial Support Programs on MSME Growth

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyse the implementation of the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) empowerment program and identify factors that inhibit its implementation. The study used a qualitative case study approach, with data collection through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. The results indicate that the program has been implemented based on a clear legal basis. Core programs include business management training, the development of new entrepreneurs, and the facilitation of halal certification. Obstacles encountered include budget constraints, low community participation, minimal marketing support, and product legality issues. This study recommends increasing cross-sector collaboration, strengthening post-training mentoring, and optimising digital technology to expand the market for MSMEs. This study offers implications for the importance of integrating practical entrepreneurship into the curriculum, strengthening post-training mentoring, and incorporating digital technology into learning. Vocational education needs to collaborate with the industrial sector and government to create relevant programs that prepare MSMEs to face the challenges of the global market.

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INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a highly strategic role in the Indonesian economy, serving as major contributors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing employment opportunities (Saputra et al., 2023; Sinha et al., 2023; Saharani & Diana, 2024). According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, this sector employs more than 97% of Indonesia's workforce. However, despite the significant potential of MSMEs, many still face challenges in developing their businesses. In the context of Lima Puluh Kota Regency, despite the implementation of various MSME empowerment programs, unemployment remains a serious problem. This

creates an urgent need to enhance the effectiveness of existing MSME empowerment programs, thereby further contributing to reducing unemployment and boosting the regional economy.

People, especially young people in Lima Pulu Kota Regency, tend to prefer seeking formal employment over starting their businesses. This phenomenon is influenced by social perceptions that civil service employment is more prestigious and stable. The lack of a culture of entrepreneurship and independence is a significant obstacle to encouraging people to become MSME entrepreneurs. According to Aryadi and Rizwan (2022), this view remains dominant, even among the younger generation, who should be more open to business opportunities. Coupled with a lack of skills aligned with market needs, this further exacerbates job creation opportunities through the MSME sector.

Based on data obtained from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Lima Pulu Kota Regency, the workforce in 2024 was recorded at 229,727 people, with 765 of them registered as job seekers.

Table 1. Registered Job Seekers in 2024 by Education Level

No	Level of education	Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
1	Elementary School	0	1	1
2	Junior High School	1	4	5
3	Senior High School and Vocational School	264	357	621
4	Diploma I/II/III/Academy	21	19	40
5	University	57	41	98
	Total	343	422	765

This data shows that although the workforce continues to increase, adequate job growth has not kept pace. The majority of job seekers are high school/vocational school graduates who lack the skills to compete in the formal sector. The Lima Pulu Kota Regency Government has attempted to address this issue by implementing programs to empower MSMEs. However, various challenges, such as budget constraints and low business participation, continue to hamper the effectiveness of these programs.

Several previous studies have examined the significance of empowering MSMEs in enhancing regional economic capacity. Silalahi (2023) and Dahliah et al. (2023) stated that the MSME sector has significant potential to reduce unemployment, but existing empowerment programs have not optimally addressed this issue. Amornkitvikai et al. (2022) and Utomo (2024) also found that social and cultural factors hinder MSME development, particularly among the younger generation. However, despite the extensive research in this area, many have not yet addressed in detail external factors such as global market

competition and technology adoption, which can improve MSME competitiveness, particularly in underdeveloped regions like Lima Puluh Kota Regency.

Several studies have emphasised the importance of MSME digitalisation as a solution to increase competitiveness. Hidayat and Sari (2023) found that many MSMEs struggle to adapt to digital-based marketing, such as e-commerce and social media. However, although digital technology adoption can increase MSME turnover by up to 30%, many businesses still lack adequate support. Previous research generally focuses less on the integration of conventional MSME empowerment and digitalisation, even though these two complement each other to encourage more inclusive and sustainable MSME growth. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by analysing the inhibiting factors faced by MSMEs in Lima Puluh Kota Regency and providing more comprehensive solutions.

This study presents a more comprehensive approach to analysing MSME empowerment in Lima Puluh Kota Regency, focusing on two main aspects: first, identifying internal inhibiting factors of a social, cultural, and economic nature, and second, integrating digital technology into empowerment strategies. Through this study, the research aims to provide a clearer picture of the challenges faced by MSMEs and how digital technology can serve as an empowerment tool to accelerate the transformation of this sector. This is crucial for promoting the sustainability of MSMEs, which in turn can reduce unemployment and strengthen the local economy.

Based on the identified problems, this research focuses on the impact of implementing MSME empowerment programs on employment absorption and strengthening the regional economy in Lima Puluh Kota Regency. This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of the MSME empowerment programs implemented by the Lima Puluh Kota Regency Government in enhancing economic independence and reducing unemployment. The primary argument in this research is that, although MSME empowerment programs are already underway, the external and internal challenges faced by MSMEs require more serious attention, particularly in optimising the use of digital technology. Therefore, this research will provide policy recommendations to improve the effectiveness of MSME empowerment in Lima Puluh Kota Regency.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of MSME empowerment policies in Lima Puluh Kota Regency. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives, which focus on a contextual analysis of the policies

implemented by the Lima Puluh Kota Regency Trade, Cooperatives, and SMEs Office and their impact on MSMEs in the area. Case studies are considered an appropriate method because they can directly explore the social, economic, and cultural dynamics that influence the implementation of these policies on the ground, and provide more comprehensive insights into the challenges faced by MSMEs in utilising empowerment programs.

This research was conducted at the Lima Puluh Kota Regency Trade, Cooperatives, and SMEs Office, the primary agency responsible for empowering MSMEs. In addition, research was conducted with several fostered MSMEs that are beneficiaries of the agency's empowerment programs. This location was selected based on the importance of Lima Puluh Kota Regency as part of an area with potential for MSME development, yet still facing significant challenges in reducing unemployment and increasing business competitiveness. Furthermore, the existence of various MSME empowerment programs implemented by local governments provides a relevant context for understanding the effectiveness of these policies.

The data used in this study comprises primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants selected using purposive sampling. These included the Head of the Cooperative and Micro Enterprise Empowerment and Development Division, two staff members from the MSME empowerment unit, and five MSME beneficiaries. Field observations were also conducted to directly observe policy implementation in the field. Secondary data were obtained from official government documents, activity reports, and related literature to support an understanding of the research topic. This data collection technique aims to gather relevant information from various perspectives that can enrich the research results.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles & Huberman interactive model, which includes four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. During the data collection stage, researchers gathered information through interviews and observations. The collected data were then analysed and reduced to identify key themes emerging from informant responses. The reduced data was then presented in narrative or diagram form for ease of understanding. Finally, conclusions are drawn by combining all findings to answer the research questions and provide recommendations. This process is iterative, meaning that each step of the analysis interacts with the others to produce more in-depth and detailed findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementation of MSME Empowerment

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) empowerment program in Lima Pulu Kota Regency is implemented by the Department of Trade, Cooperatives, and SMEs, based primarily on Regional Regulation No. 3 of 2018 concerning the Empowerment of Cooperatives and Micro Enterprises. It refers to national laws governing MSME empowerment (interview, July 28, 2025). This program aims to enhance the capacity, independence, and competitiveness of MSMEs through a range of activities, including business management training, fostering new entrepreneurs, facilitating licensing, providing assistance with halal certification, facilitating access to financing, and developing marketing networks.

Referring to Matland's (1995) evaluation framework, the implementation of MSME empowerment in Lima Pulu Kota Regency is analysed using four indicators: policy accuracy, implementation accuracy, target accuracy, and environmental accuracy.

Policy Accuracy

The accuracy of MSME empowerment policies in Lima Pulu Kota Regency is reflected in the clarity of the legal basis and the program's alignment with the needs of local micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Policy development is carried out in a participatory manner through the 2021–2026 Strategic Plan (Renstra), which includes medium-term goals for gradually increasing MSME empowerment from 5% in 2021 to 35% in 2026.

Table 2. Medium-Term Goals and Targets for 2021–2026

No	Goal	Medium Term Goals	2021 Target	2026 Target
1	Increasing the capacity and competitiveness of MSMEs	Percentage of MSMEs receiving empowerment facilities	5%	35%
2	Strengthening cooperative and MSME institutions	Number of registered and active cooperatives and MSMEs	75%	95%
3	Improving access to capital and legality	Percentage of MSMEs with business legality (NIB, PIRT, halal)	15%	60%
4	Expanding the MSME market	Percentage of MSMEs marketing products outside the region	10%	40%

The process of developing this Strategic Plan involved relevant regional officials, MSMEs, and public consultation forums. Primary data from field surveys was used to map the potential and challenges of MSMEs, ensuring that the formulated targets were considered sufficiently representative.

In an interview, the Head of the Empowerment and Development Division of Cooperatives and Micro-Enterprises stated, "We designed this Strategic Plan to accommodate real-world conditions. However, we recognize that the challenge lies in the Regional Regulation, which serves as the primary legal framework, being in place since 2018. There are many new dynamics, such as online marketing trends, that have not been regulated in detail there" (interview, July 28, 2025).

This statement was reinforced by a staff member in the empowerment division: "The targets are clear in the Strategic Plan, but implementation requires adaptation. Moreover, MSMEs now need digital marketing guidance, not just management training" (interview, July 28, 2025).

Despite its strong legitimacy, this policy does require substantial updates to accommodate recent developments, such as digitalisation, export product certification, and the integration of MSMEs into large-scale industrial supply chains.

Accuracy of Implementation

Program implementation is carried out by established strategic objectives, including: first, increasing the capacity of MSMEs through business management training, developing new entrepreneurs, and providing information and assistance for halal certification. Second, strengthening business accessibility through NIB facilitation, halal certification, marketing assistance (bazaars), financing assistance, and institutional strengthening.

Data from 2024 shows varying levels of participation in each activity. Halal certification facilitation recorded the highest number of participants (180), followed by NIB issuance (204), and PIRT facilitation and MSME branding (192). These high numbers demonstrate the positive response of MSMEs to business legalisation, which is often a significant obstacle in accessing modern markets.

Program implementation also complies with technical regulations, such as Law No. 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Assurance and Government Regulation No. 39 of 2021. The agency acts as a liaison between business actors and the BPJPH or LPH, facilitating the halal certification process to make it faster and less burdensome for MSMEs (interview, July 28, 2025).

However, budget limitations and the number of personnel implementing the plan pose challenges. Core personnel consist only of PLUT KUMKM consultants, policy analysts, and cooperative supervisors, who also have duties outside the empowerment program. This situation limits the program's reach, especially for intensive mentoring in remote areas.

Targeting Accuracy

The inclusive approach used allows all registered MSMEs the opportunity to participate in the program, without strict selection based on specific criteria. This facilitates equal opportunity, but can potentially reduce focus if resources are inadequate.

For MSMEs already involved, the program's benefits are tangible, particularly in facilitating business legality. As Mrs Suhaini stated, "With my MSME letter, I feel helped. Now my MSME can enter supermarkets and minimarkets" (interview, July 29, 2025). However, technical needs such as improving product durability and packaging have not been fully addressed. Several non-culinary businesses also stated that they need capital support more than legality (interview, July 28–30, 2025).

Environmental Appropriateness

The social and political environment also influences the program's effectiveness. From a social perspective, some MSMEs feel satisfied with existing business conditions and lack the incentive to expand. From a political perspective, the Regional People's Representative Council's (DPRD) main ideas (pokir) mechanism influences the determination of program targets, which sometimes do not fully align with the Agency's planning (interview, July 28, 2025).

Nevertheless, a friendly and open public service approach has successfully changed the perception of some residents, who were previously reluctant to visit agency offices due to perceived bureaucracy, to become more active in seeking program information.

Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of MSME Empowerment

Obstacles to the implementation of MSME empowerment programs in Lima Puluh Kota Regency can be mapped using Matland's (1995) four indicators: policy accuracy, implementation accuracy, target accuracy, and environmental accuracy. Each indicator presents interrelated challenges, including regulatory, implementer capacity, and external conditions on the ground.

Policy Accuracy

One of the main obstacles lies in the failure to update the Regional Regulation (Perda) Number 3 of 2018 to reflect current developments and the needs of MSMEs. This regional regulation, which is more than five years old, has not fully addressed new issues, such as digital marketing, export product certification, and intellectual property protection for local businesses (interview, July 28, 2025).

Furthermore, the agency has not yet provided specific technical training designed to improve the capacity of program implementers. Staff handling MSME empowerment are largely self-taught or through field experience, resulting in limited understanding of new regulations or current business trends. This situation can impact service effectiveness, particularly in addressing challenges such as digital halal certification procedures or online trademark registration.

Implementation Accuracy

Obstacles at the implementation stage are primarily related to budget and personnel limitations. The budget allocation for MSME empowerment is still partial and competes with other programs within the agency, limiting the number of activities that can be implemented each year.

The limited number of personnel also limits the program's reach. PLUT KUMKM consultants, policy analysts, and cooperative supervisors often work concurrently in other areas, reducing time for direct mentoring. Consequently, providing intensive mentoring in remote areas or villages is challenging to do regularly.

At the village level, there is no formal institutional structure for MSME empowerment. Consequently, the program's success depends heavily on the support of community leaders or village officials who care about the local economy. While this support is positive, it is not institutionally tied, making the program's sustainability vulnerable if there is a change in leadership or a shift in priorities.

Targeting Accuracy

Although the program's targets are inclusive and open to all registered MSMEs, obstacles arise due to the lack of program outreach. Many businesses, especially those in remote areas or with limited access to information, are unaware of the schedule and types of activities available.

Furthermore, the diverse needs of MSMEs are often not fully accommodated. For example, businesses in the culinary sector tend to require increased product durability and modern packaging, while craft businesses require more promotion and market access. Several micro-entrepreneurs also stated that business capital support is a pressing need compared to legal facilitation (interview, July 28–30, 2025). This mismatch has the potential to reduce program effectiveness because the activities implemented do not fully address participants' priority needs.

Environmental Appropriateness

The socio-cultural environment in Lima Pulu Kota Regency influences the effectiveness of MSME empowerment. Some entrepreneurs still have low internal motivation to grow, tend to be quickly satisfied with current income, and are reluctant to take risks to expand their businesses. This attitude is rooted in the view that micro-enterprises are merely supplementary, not a primary source of livelihood.

Furthermore, limited digital literacy poses a significant obstacle, especially in the face of the increasingly dominant demands of online marketing and digital transactions. Many MSMEs are unfamiliar with e-commerce platforms, social media for promotion, or digital payment systems, resulting in underutilization of digital market opportunities.

From a political perspective, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD)'s (DPRD) Main Thoughts (Pokir) mechanism also influences program targeting. While this mechanism can expand the reach of beneficiaries, the priorities proposed through Pokir sometimes differ from the agency's strategic planning. This can lead to a mismatch between long-term program objectives and the activities carried out in the field.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of MSME empowerment in Lima Pulu Kota Regency, despite being carried out through various activities by the Department of Trade, Cooperatives, and SMEs' Strategic Plan (Renstra), still faces several significant challenges. One key finding is that although policies have been formulated with the participation of various parties, including MSMEs, the Regional Regulations (Perda) that serve as the primary legal basis have not yet accommodated new developments such as digitalisation and export product certification, which have been the primary focus of previous literature. Kumari (2025) emphasise that the success of MSME empowerment is significantly influenced by the speed of policy adaptation to current business trends, such as online marketing and the adoption of digital technologies. This finding is consistent with the aforementioned research, which suggests that MSMEs require support to transition into digital markets and enhance their competitiveness.

However, striking differences were found in program implementation. In this study, although training and mentoring programs aimed at strengthening MSME capacity exist, budget and personnel limitations were the main obstacles. This aligns with research by Ismail (2021), which found that although various empowerment policies exist, supporting factors such as limited budgets and human resources often hinder effective implementation. Meanwhile, Sulistyani,

set al. (2024) emphasized that the success of MSMEs is highly dependent on an intensive mentoring system, particularly during the digitalization phase, which in the context of Lima Pulu Kota Regency has not yet been fully realized due to limited human resources and budget.

The theoretical implication of these findings is that the application of MSME empowerment theory, particularly those focused on participation-based and inclusive policies, must consider the speed of adaptation to global trends and new technologies. This research demonstrates that while participatory policy-based empowerment theory is highly relevant, rapid and responsive policy updates to global market dynamics and digitalisation are equally crucial. Therefore, this research makes an important contribution to developing MSME empowerment theory by incorporating technological adaptation as a key factor in achieving MSME business sustainability.

In terms of practical implications, this research provides important insights for local governments in designing policies that are more responsive to technological developments and market needs. Regional regulation updates are needed to accommodate key elements such as digital marketing, export product certification, and more comprehensive intellectual property protection. Furthermore, increasing the capacity and number of personnel involved in MSME empowerment programs is crucial for more effective implementation, particularly in regions with limited resources. This study also highlights the importance of collaboration among local governments, the private sector, and educational institutions in creating a more supportive ecosystem for MSMEs.

Overall, the results of this study provide a clear picture that MSME empowerment in Lima Pulu Kota Regency requires a more holistic approach, encompassing not only technical aspects such as business management training but also the need for policy updates, human resource development, and adaptation to technological changes. Therefore, to strengthen MSME competitiveness, not only must policies be updated, but their implementation must also be more effective, involving various parties and ensuring that available resources are optimally utilised to achieve the desired goals.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that although the MSME empowerment policy in Lima Pulu Kota Regency has strong legitimacy and program implementation has demonstrated some success, several challenges remain that need to be addressed. Budgetary and personnel limitations, as well as imperfections in policy updates to adapt to technological developments and market dynamics, are key obstacles to improving program effectiveness. Lessons

learned from this study highlight the importance of policy updates that are responsive to the changing and evolving needs of MSMEs, as well as the need for more inclusive and affordable empowerment strategies for all MSMEs, particularly in terms of digital literacy and broader market access. This lesson demonstrates that the implementation of empowerment policies relies not only on existing regulations but also on rapid adaptation to changing market and technological conditions.

This study's scientific contribution lies in its analysis of the implementation of MSME empowerment policies using Matland's theoretical framework, which combines legality, implementation, and the external environment within the context of a developing region. This research enriches the literature on MSME empowerment by identifying more in-depth inhibiting factors, such as the motivations of MSMEs and the influence of socio-political factors on program implementation. However, this study also has limitations, particularly in terms of geographic reach and the limited time available to assess the program's long-term impact. Therefore, future research could focus on a more in-depth evaluation of the policy's long-term effectiveness and its impact on the sustainability of MSMEs, as well as the potential role of the private sector in supporting MSME empowerment.

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