



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Empowering MSMEs to Support Local Economic Development: Case Study of Processed Mangrove Fruit Products

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<b>ARTICLE INFO</b>	<b>ABSTRACT</b>
Received: Oct 12, 2024 Accepted: Nov 20, 2024	<p>This study aims to explore the contribution of La Male Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to economic development in IKN, especially Mentawir. This study is a qualitative type with a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Data sources using primary and secondary approaches. First, primary data was collected through interviews with owners and employees of La Male MSME. Interviews were conducted directly to map the problem. Then, compiled and tabulated. Second, secondary data was identified based on the area of Mentawir Subdistrict, population, workforce aspects at La Male MSME, and the public facilities currently provided. Referring to field investigations, the majority of people there have awareness about tourism sustainability, so they formed the Tourism Awareness Group (POKDARWIS) of Tiram Tambun. As is known, for a long time the Mentawir people have been preserving mangrove forests while protecting the environment and exploiting the prospects of mangrove fruit which has economic value. However, the capacity of La Male MSME in producing coffee and syrup is still not optimal due to limitations in terms of capital and the impact on labor absorption. Also, there are several obstacles in La Male MSME, such as partnerships to get funding support, marketing which still relies on conventional methods, and workforce knowledge. Based on secondary data through literature study, the general problem faced by MSMEs with an orientation towards processing, producing and selling similar products in Mentawir is legalization, such as halal certification and distribution permits from the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (BPOM) which determine preferences, insight, and people's interest in buying. The main implication of the study output is that digitalization of marketing is able to encourage marketing of coffee and syrup products more quickly when compared to conventional marketing. Despite the business weaknesses found, the coffee and mangrove syrup products produced by La Male MSME have become the hallmark of Mentawir Subdistrict and can contribute to local prosperity in the surrounding environment. Based on secondary data through literature study, the general problem faced by MSMEs with an orientation towards processing, producing and selling similar products in Mentawir is legalization, such as halal certification and distribution permits from the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (BPOM) which determine preferences, insight, and people's interest in buying. The main implication of the study output is that digitalization of marketing is able to encourage marketing of coffee and syrup products more quickly when compared to conventional marketing. Despite the business weaknesses found, the coffee and mangrove syrup products produced by La Male MSME have become the</p>
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hallmark of Mentawir Subdistrict and can contribute to local prosperity in the surrounding environment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has quite a large coastline, one of which is located in Mentawir Subdistrict (right under the administration of Sepaku District, North Penajam Paser Regency, East Kalimantan). Apart from mangrove forests, Mentawir has beautiful coastlines and is a tourist destination (Kristiningrum et al., 2022; Riana et al., 2024). Mentawir is of concern to the Indonesian government, because geographically it is also part of the scope of the Indonesian Capital City (IKN). With the abundant coastal wealth in Mentawir, mangrove fruit has a lot of potential to be developed into food and beverage products. Two commercial products that are simply processed from mangrove fruit are coffee and syrup (Tobing, 2023). Some MSMEs in Mentawir use this fruit to process and sell it into mangrove coffee and mangrove syrup, one of which is the La Male MSME. With the development of information technology, La Male MSME offers these two products to be marketed at the national level.

The existence of IKN is an encouragement for MSME players, especially for POKDARWIS "Tiram Tambun" in Mentawir which forms the La Male MSME. La Male is the chairman and owner of La Male MSME who coordinates local communities to protect the Mentawir marine environment, including caring for forest plants in the coastal sea area which have natural advantages through cultivating and processing mangrove fruit. The fruit can be extracted into various value-added processed products, for example syrup, dodol, cold pupur, and coffee. La Male together with POKDARWIS have managed MSMEs that rely on mangrove fruit to be fermented and marketed as superior IKN products. Because La Male was the first originator, this MSME was given the name La Male MSME so that it would be easily recognized and remembered by many parties. The aim of establishing La Male MSME is to be able to participate in local economic development, especially in the community environment in Mentawir Subdistrict.

MSMEs as a support for the country's economy are highlighted, where this is reviewed by many cases such as in Indonesia (Anatan & Nur, 2023; Nursini, 2020; Prasetyo, 2021; Suhaili & Sugiharsono, 2019), in India (Boateng et al., 2019; Negi, 2021; Pandey & Chaudhary, 2024; Shelly et al., 2020; Verma et al., 2020), in the Philippines (Adviento et al., 2022; Khatibi, 2021; Tadeo et al., 2023), in Sub-Saharan Africa (Endris & Kassegn, 2022; Ussif & Salifu, 2020), and in Austria (Pedraza, 2021). These findings are relevant to Miswaty et al. (2023) and Uma & Anbuselvi (2023) who stated that MSMEs also have an impact on economic development based on various elements such as competitive market orientation, job creation, capacity building, and stimulating technological innovation.

The readiness of La Male MSME to encourage local economic growth begins with legalization factors, such as having a Trading Business License (SIUP) and halal certification from the Indonesian Government. Unfortunately, the legal strength of the two legal attributes in the MSME group is not followed by one important stage, namely meeting health standards, where permission from health is also a vital key to ensuring that the distribution of products from La Male MSME can be trusted by consumers. Even though the products sold are physically safe, La Male MSME have not received BPOM permission. Technically, BPOM will issue a permit if the product is tested in a laboratory. Other obstacles faced by La Male MSME are funding, human resources, marketing and product certification from the health sector. Erdin & Ozkaya (2020) and Haddad et al. (2020) revealed that the performance of MSMEs is related to finance, human resources, operations, administration and organizational management. The competitiveness of MSMEs is essential for successful economic growth. In a universal context, MSMEs encourage job creation and grow the global economy (Iaroslav et al., 2021; Suhaili & Sugiharsono, 2019; Tambunan, 2019). Overall, Hubballi & Shyam (2023) mapped out the main polemics of the sustainability of MSMEs including lack of credit schemes, weak

market relations, limited access to training, suboptimal human resource skills, dependence on government, fluctuations in government policies, as well as market strategies and bad product competency.

During field investigations, the obstacles to the development of La Male MSME found by the authors were funding, labor administration, marketing, technology adoption, and the BPOM label. In other words, the policy that can be highlighted is according to the characteristics of La Male MSME so that the food and beverage products sold are officially licensed by the government which explains the composition of the main ingredients in coffee and syrup products, including nutritional content.

The reason this study is directed at La Male MSME is because it has been empirically proven to be resilient in facing situations, including the monetary crisis and its effect in growing the income of the Mentawir community (e.g. Sianipar et al., 2024). Through this study, La Male MSME are able to have practical implications in creating jobs, absorbing labor, reducing unemployment and poverty in Mentawir Subdistrict, so that in the end they can contribute to economic progress in IKN. Specifically, the output of this study is also able to expand knowledge by focusing on qualitative models and literature.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Alternatives in solving problems can be adapted to the conditions of La Male MSME via a literature study approach to discuss what strategies can stimulate marketing and employment. Amadasun & Mutezo (2022) suggest that the policy that the government should implement to increase MSME income through sales is to organize training that focuses on online marketing, entrepreneurship, management, product quality and business efficiency. Modifying marketing in the form of product and service creativity, business process flow, and sales innovation, the competitiveness of MSMEs can increase (Hermanto et al., 2024).

According to Wijaya et al. (2023), stability in economic development can be seen from the role of MSMEs in creating jobs, increasing income, alleviating poverty, contributing to the economy at various levels, stimulating the entrepreneurial climate, marketing opportunities, connectivity opportunities, financial resources, dynamics, social continuity, and landscape. policy. Yet, within the scope of La Male MSME, this study examines the use of labor, how marketing is carried out, and strategies for obtaining distribution permits through BPOM. Publications from previous editions partly highlighted the relationship between labor, marketing and licensing variables on MSME performance (Andriyansah et al., 2024; Lim & Kesumahati, 2023; Praptitorini et al., 2022; Rokhman et al., 2023).

The difference between this study and previous researchers is that it uses case studies on local MSMEs which highlight local potential. In this case, the business scale in question is the La Male MSME which uses mangrove fruit to make syrup and coffee commodities with high selling value. It is hoped that the presence of La Male MSME in Mentawir Subdistrict will be able to absorb local workers and become part of the growth center in the new IKN. The advantage of La Male MSME is that they are innovative products with a wide market segmentation, but at the same time they are also struggling to face internal and external obstacles. Nowadays, with increasing competitiveness amidst digitalization, as well as advances in product and service innovation, an MSME is expected to be able to answer existing challenges, especially by paying attention to marketing and sales dimensions (Haddad et al., 2020; Larios-Francia & Ferasso, 2023). The dimensions mentioned above must be relevant to the profile of MSMEs, so that the instruments that can be implemented for La Male MSME refer to strengthening funding, marketing, workforce and legality of product health. Specifically for the legality of product health, the main difficulty faced by La Male MSME is the lengthy document processing procedure. Therefore, this study also opens new avenues for La Male MSME through assistance and empowerment to obtain health permits from authorized agencies.

## STUDY METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups give to social dynamics. In its application, the FGD technique is carried out by involving questions and procedures collected in the participant environment, where data analysis is built inductively from a case. After finding the root of the problem, the study output makes an interpretation. Thus, the output has a flexible structure according to phenomena in the field. The data material is primarily obtained from direct interviews and secondary data comes from literature reviews. The study time allocation will be held in 2024.

A qualitative approach combined with socialization. The socialization technique is set to offer an alternative breakthrough by designing five strategies that support the success of La Male MSME. First, funding. La Male MSME need an injection of funds to increase production capacity, especially in terms of workforce. With extra funds in the form of capital, the partnership with the banking sector will facilitate access to funding for La Male MSME. Second, marketing. The urgency of the marketing aspect determines business continuity. Through intense mentoring and training, La Male MSME are able to market their production using technology. Third, workforce. Apart from labor units, employees drawn from the community around Mentawir also need comprehensive skills. Fourth, health certification. Basically, legality is not only limited to business permits, but also health permits. Here, La Male MSME need help in meeting the standards for applying for a health permit from BPOM. Fifth, economic pillar. If all strategies are fulfilled, then the superior products made by La Male MSME can continue to grow and develop for economic development in the surrounding area.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile of La Male MSME

The history of the founding of La Male MSME cannot be separated from La Male himself who is known as an inspirational figure. La Male MSME was formed in 2010. In short, the existence of La Male MSME continues until now. The two most popular MSME products are coffee and syrup. To produce coffee and syrup, La Male MSME rely on forest plants that grow naturally along the coast of Mentawir Beach, namely mangroves. The mangrove fruit that is harvested is ripe fruit with a brownish red or purplish color. After drying, the mangrove fruit is selected again to determine whether it still contains water or whether it is completely dry. Figure 1 and Figure 2 explain the processing process of dried mangrove fruit to be extracted into coffee and syrup products.



**Figure 1: Processing dried mangrove fruit**

Source: Study documentation.

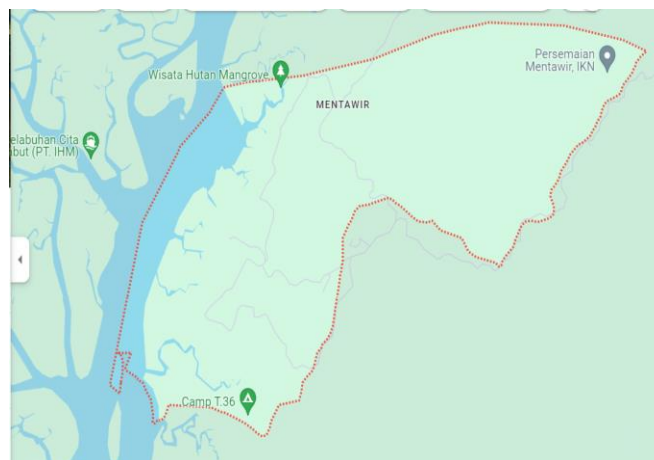
Since the last decade, local wisdom in Mentawir Subdistrict has become the government's attention in maintaining, developing and preserving natural wealth originating from the coast. This is the basis for implementing government regulations, rules, sanctions, and upholding local traditional values. Ritsakulchai (2024) argues that the preservation of cultural traditions will gradually gain popularity among tourists. Sooner or later, the tourism sector increasingly embraces the concept of sustainability. The dimensions of this concept focus on management that considers the carrying capacity of nature, society, customs and tourist destinations. In turn, sustainability can also present an opportunity to create a unique tourism brand.



**Figure 2: Finished product from mangrove fruit extraction**

Source: Study documentation.

In general, tourism products can be called unique because they fit into the unique category of a region which prioritizes the concept of sustainability. One follow-up to the sustainable concept in the context of welfare is for local communities to form independent businesses, for example MSMEs. In connection with this study, researchers obtained information that apart from being the owner of La Male MSME, Mr. La Male is also trusted as the chairman of MSMEs in Mentawir. La Male was able to motivate the people of Mentawir to use mangrove fruit for added value. The abundant mangrove fruit around Mentawir Beach is used to be processed into products with economic value. La Male MSME products are labeled "Made in La Male" to make it easier for consumers and customers to remember the iconic Mentawir. The object of this study is La Male MSME whose area is located in Mentawir (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Map of Mentawir Subdistrict**

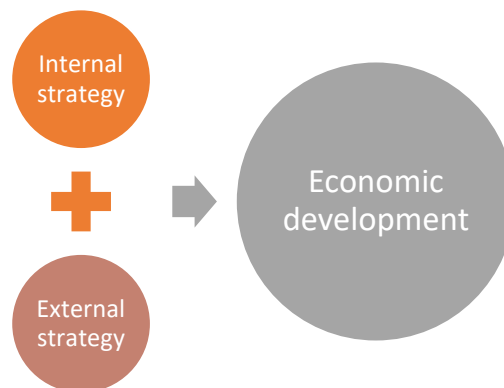
Source: Anonymous (2024).



So far, the socio-economic and cultural activities of the Mentawir community have been bridged by a high awareness of existing local wisdom such as the potential of their tourist area. Apart from coastal beauty, Mentawir Beach also has extensive mangrove forests. Mangrove syrup and coffee products are known. The expansion of these two products was developed by POKDARWIS Mentawir as part of their duty to maintain, protect and preserve mangrove forests under the guidance of PT Inhutani. PT Inhutani distributes Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) grants to local communities as part of programs and projects that care for the environment. One of the groups empowered by PT Inhutani is La Male MSME. La Male MSME were chosen as CSR recipients because they have become an inspiration for other MSMEs in Mentawir to innovate. However, CSR grants are not only focused on capital matters for business units, but also real actions towards the environment such as planting mangrove trees on Mentawir Beach. Because the CSR pattern is limited, the majority of MSMEs under the guidance of PT Inhutani still experience problems in production input, especially capital.

### Strategy Actualization

The benefits of business in the MSME sector are increased productivity of services and goods produced domestically (Susanti et al., 2023). Existing products will not only penetrate the domestic market, but will also be able to compete in the international market. The success or failure of an MSME really depends on certain benchmarks, including the La Male MSME. As mentioned in the previous chapter, five parameters can determine the fate of La Male MSME, namely funding, marketing, labor and licensing. The most basic planning strategies are aimed at strengthening funding, marketing and workforce. After all three have been implemented properly, what needs to be implemented is the mechanism for obtaining health certification from BPOM. In summary, Figure 4 presents the La Male MSME empowerment framework by adopting a scientific manuscript written by Fafurida et al. (2024) and Rauf et al. (2023) as follows:



**Figure 4: La Male MSME empowerment framework**

Source: Own elaboration.

In reality, after the FGD was implemented in the field. The research team mapped crucial points to answer the main problems in La Male MSME. The team's knowledge obtained from the literature review was channeled to La Male MSME through outreach. Structurally, the two ideas being socialized include internal and external strategies. Under the two steps above, the internal strategy that needs to be fulfilled includes funding, workforce and marketing. Talking about these three landscapes, unfortunately they have not been operated optimally. Since its start, La Male MSME have still depended on CSR grants. For this reason, they need to think of other ways so as not to depend on just one contemporary source of funding, but instead need funding schemes from other partners such as banks with low interest rates. With limited capital, the second strategy also requires improving workforce skills through training. Then, this study encourages the expansion of marketing using digitalization methods. By utilizing information and technology (IT) developments wisely and

in a measured manner, market opportunities are wide open. The final external strategy or key to growing La Male MSME is to encourage the commitment of owners and employees to collaborate with government institutions that issue circulars. In practice, they have to build complex networks between various stakeholders to gain trust about what components are used in processing and making coffee and syrup. Apart from that, La Male MSME do not rely on sales alone, but also promote product health and dare to take responsibility if there are consumer complaints about product side effects through open services. The synergy of internal strategies and external strategies makes it possible to create integrated local economic development.

The first internal strategy is funding. The role of funding for MSMEs cannot be doubted, where funding variables have a big impact on MSME performance. Lin et al. (2022) concluded that in reality there is a level of gap in MSME financing between the same economic development class or different economic development classes between countries. In the case of Indonesia, MSMEs generally still face obstacles such as lack of capital and limited access to financing or credit from the banking sector for business development (Nair & Gopal, 2024; Nugroho et al., 2023; Rita et al., 2022).

The second internal strategy is workforce. Labor as a determining variable in the success of an MSME. The topic that links labor to the sustainability of MSMEs is a debate that must be reviewed (Maheshwari et al., 2020). In the operation of MSMEs, for example in the La Male MSME context, this MSME has a flexible HR management system in recruiting workers. La Male MSME tend to be oriented towards using local workers, especially from POKDARWIS Mentawir. They are empowered to fill employee positions. La Male MSME continue to do concrete things to empower local workers. Besides employees being equipped with a good understanding of the surrounding environment, they also have the instinct to adapt quickly to how La Male MSME work (starting from production, distribution, marketing, to sales). Referring to previous studies, researchers found that currently La Male MSME have not reopened and accepted workers. This is triggered by production capacity which is still limited and needs to be adjusted to the supply of products ready for sale. If the level of demand is high, the number of employees will increase. The products marketed are conventional, where the promotion is carried out by word of mouth through stories and experiences of previous buyers.

The third and final internal strategy is marketing. Marketing variables are seen as the main driving force in the success of MSMEs (Al-Shaikh & Hanaysha, 2023; Molina-Sánchez et al., 2022). The marketing pattern implemented by La Male MSME is traditional, relying on tourist visits in Mentawir. During this time, tourists visit La Male MSME to buy coffee or syrup products as souvenirs to share with their families and relatives. According to existing observations, there are several MSMEs in Mentawir that offer similar products, but the one that has the most popular reputation is La Male MSME because the business is a precursor to the others. The marketing style above is less effective for the development and sustainability of La Male MSME products. To form strong branding, modernization in marketing is needed. Conventional marketing methods applied by La Male MSME tend to be inefficient, so it is recommended to use digital marketing to increase sales volume. The foundation for strengthening transformative marketing is through the use of IT, for example with e-commerce. In Indonesia, the e-commerce applications that consumers often use are Shopee, Tokopedia, and Lazada. Apart from e-commerce, digital marketing to support the development of La Male MSME can also pay attention to digital marketing via social media.

Next, the external strategy is BPOM's distribution permit. This strategy is the last and most constructive technique as an effort to overcome the problem of health licensing under BPOM authority (Rohmah et al., 2023). Researchers are trying to assist with distribution permits for La Male MSME products by holding two-way interactions with BPOM directly. The distribution permit variable is the last priority, where La Male MSME can find out what conditions must be met according to BPOM guidelines. Based on the results of discussions with BPOM, La Male MSME must have standards that must be met. First, the production house is separate from the entrepreneur's main

house. Coffee and syrup production houses cannot be in the same production area, so adjustments need to be made to separate production sites. Second, the halal certification held by La Male MSME is still valid today and can provide consumer health security. Halal certification can support the process and serve as a preference in processing marketing permits. The determination to have a BPOM distribution permit by BPOM regulation Number 27 of 2017 concerning processed food registration is approval of the results of the assessment of processed food issued by the head of the agency in the context of processing processed food.

After holding FGDs and outreach in the field, it can be evaluated that La Male MSME are able to be motivated to take risks by implementing internal strategies to change the situation for the better. Compared to previous times, the condition of La Male MSME is now supported by competent workforce skills according to their respective job descriptions and maximum marketing performance. Gradually, it was confirmed that there was a positive signal, where the research team was also able to mediate for La Male MSME to meet directly with BPOM with the aim of administering the product health requirements. Currently, La Male MSME are waiting for the queue process to get a distribution permit.

Even though the performance of Indonesian MSMEs is far behind compared to business entities in India, the Philippines and Austria, Indonesian MSMEs are superior in terms of numbers. As with other developing markets, with the advantage of quantity, MSMEs in Indonesia have proven to be resilient in any shock. As an example from yesterday, such as the collapse of the Indonesian economy due to the monetary crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. With the risk that at any time it could collapse the economy, the MSME cluster has proven to remain resilient and be a transformative force in providing opportunities and absorbing employment opportunities or inclusive and sustainable development. MSMEs have played a vital role in the economies of many countries. From the past to the present and even in the future, MSMEs are predicted to continue to move rapidly, which has implications for alleviating social polemics such as poverty and unemployment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on observations and outreach activities in the field using the FGD method and literature review, La Male MSME has two superior products extracted from natural ingredients, namely mangrove forests. These products are mangrove coffee and mangrove syrup. Forest plants such as mangroves are often found and available in Mentawir. Initially, this type of plant was ignored by society. But, because mangroves are protected by the government and function to resist seawater abrasion, the community there is slowly starting to increase their ability to exploit the existing potential. At the same time, the government continues to prohibit the use of mangrove trees as firewood commodities. For these two reasons, the people of Mentawir took the initiative to process mangrove fruit into products that can be consumed, i.e syrup and coffee. One of the most popular coffee and mangrove syrup producers in Mentawir is called La Male MSME.

A common problem in La Male MSME is the availability of capital, which hinders marketing and employment. Because these three are the main foundation in production input, they have an impact on sales. In its management, La Male MSME still operate marketing using conventional methods, so their market reach is relatively small. In principle, the lack of adequate IT access also has a positive effect on financial support, labor and marketing. The consequence of this is a weak production volume due to a production model that is carried out in an old or simple way, which puts at risk the ability of employees to be involved and understand the production process. This is also related to empowering the Mentawir community to be employed as La Male MSME employees.

This study emphasizes scenarios that La Male MSME can implement to take two key strategies that will enable the coffee and mangrove syrup business to continue to grow. Additionally, the results of the study also succeeded in helping La Male MSME to apply for and obtain a BPOM distribution permit



so that in the future they could produce more coffee and mangrove syrup products. La Male MSME really care about the halal label and BPOM distribution permits. The relationship between internal strategy and external strategy is two-way, where causality is interrelated. If an internal strategy is built, La Male MSME products will become increasingly known and trusted. On the one hand, if the external strategy is fulfilled, then La Male MSME products have guaranteed quality. Through an official health permit, it is possible for La Male MSME to obtain sponsorship (capital). Adequate funding support will make it easier for La Male MSME to add more workforce and marketing levels.

MSMEs also have risks because they are vulnerable to global changes which trigger a lot of uncertainty, but the government needs to accompany their business continuity. In fact, local MSMEs (in this case La Male) need the attention of the local government to improve the livelihoods of MSMEs which are increasingly dependent on the business environment. Apart from internal and external strategies, La Male MSME also need easy regulations so that their products can be accepted on the international market. In the future, follow-up studies will need to consider fresher theoretical and methodological perspectives.

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