

Culinary MSME Development for Employment Generation and Local Economic Growth: A Qualitative Case Study in Sorong City

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Abstract: Unemployment remains a major problem in many developing regions, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, where local economic potential has not been fully transformed into sustainable employment. This study examines the role of culinary micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in promoting economic growth and reducing unemployment in Sorong City. This research applies a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation of five purposively selected culinary MSMEs based on business sustainability, local labor involvement, and use of local resources. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with the Miles and Huberman model. The findings show that culinary MSMEs function not only as economic units but also as social agents that create community-based employment, particularly for housewives, youth, and individuals with limited access to the formal sector. Key strategies include product differentiation based on local culture, use of local raw materials, gradual production capacity improvement, early digital marketing adoption, and capacity building through training and self-learning. However, MSMEs still face challenges such as limited capital, weak managerial capacity, low digital literacy, restricted access to formal financing, regulatory complexity, and limited institutional support. Overall, culinary MSMEs are important instruments for inclusive and sustainable local economic development.

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment remains a fundamental problem in economic development, especially in developing countries where the workforce is growing faster than job creation. In Indonesia, the high number of people of productive age who are not optimally absorbed into the workforce causes ongoing social and economic problems. This situation is further complicated by the fact that unemployment is high among secondary school graduates, who should be the most employable group. The city of Sorong, as the center of economic growth in the Southwest Papua

region, also faces a similar phenomenon, despite its potential resources and growing economic activity. Data from the BPS-Statistics Indonesia shows that high school graduates are the highest contributors to unemployment in Sorong City, with a total of 9,929 people, reflecting the mismatch between graduates' skills and labor market needs as well as limited job opportunities (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2024). This phenomenon indicates a mismatch between the education system, labor market needs, and local economic capacity.

Various studies show that Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in absorbing labor and reducing unemployment rates. Ilmi (2021) shows that MSMEs have made a strategic contribution to employment absorption during periods of crisis, including during the pandemic (Ilmi, 2021). Harahap, Nawawi, and Syahputra (2023) emphasize that the role of MSMEs is not only economic but also social in creating distributive justice and equitable welfare (Kaswinata, Harahap, Nawawi, & Syahputra, 2023). In the context of development, development is understood as a multidimensional process that includes structural change, human resource capacity building, and strengthening economic competitiveness (Todaro & Smith, 2015). In line with this, MSME development is directed at increasing business effectiveness through training, continuous coaching, and strategies based on local potential and needs to create added value and strengthen business competitiveness (Suyatno & Suryani, 2024).

Government structural support through the development of local-based business centers has proven to be effective in expanding employment opportunities and strengthening the sustainability of MSMEs (Fadhillah, Yuliana, & Perkasa, 2024). In addition, the empowerment of MSMEs through training, mentoring, and access to capital has significantly reduced unemployment rates (Rahma, 2025). In the culinary sector, the use of digital marketing also contributes to increased production capacity and the creation of new jobs (Winedar, Tyas, & Suprijati, 2022). In line with these findings, various local initiatives such as the 2025 Ramadan Culinary Festival encourage MSME growth and increased business income (Lensapapua.com, 2023).

Although the contribution of MSMEs to employment has been empirically proven, most of these studies have been conducted in large urban areas in western Indonesia (Idrus & Rastina, 2025). The local context of eastern Indonesia, particularly the city of Sorong, has been relatively understudied (Muzwardi & Nurhayati, 2025). Sorong has distinct social, cultural, and economic characteristics, as well as rapidly growing potential for culinary MSMEs (Muzwardi & Nurhayati, 2025). The high unemployment rate among high school graduates amid the growth of MSMEs indicates a structural problem that has not been fully addressed by previous studies (Suwardi & Rizal Kurniawan, 2022). In addition, there have been few studies that qualitatively examine how the development of culinary MSMEs contributes directly to local employment (Wulandari & Hutabarat, 2025). This situation creates a gap between general empirical findings and specific local realities.

The gap between the economic potential of culinary MSMEs and the high unemployment rate in Sorong City indicates the need for a more contextual and in-depth study (Hasbiah, Saifuloh, Sutomo, Horas, & Awaluddin, 2025). The growth in the number of MSMEs does not necessarily go hand in hand with the optimization of their role in creating jobs (Salim et al., 2022). Differences in business capacity, development strategies, and resource constraints are factors that influence the contribution of MSMEs to labor absorption (Aisyah, Suharto, Jiuhardi, & Amalia, 2025). In addition, the internal and external challenges faced by MSME players are often not systematically documented (Septyan Budi Cahya, Waspodo Tjipto Subroto, & Norida Canda Sakti, 2025). As a result, the potential of culinary MSMEs as a solution to unemployment

has not been fully utilized (Maulana, 2024). Therefore, research is needed to reveal the dynamics of MSME development in a more comprehensive manner.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to understand the real role of culinary MSMEs in driving local economic growth and reducing unemployment rates in a sustainable manner. The city of Sorong has a wealth of local food resources, cultural diversity, and a strategic position as the gateway to Southwest Papua. Without evidence-based understanding of MSME development strategies, economic development policies risk being misguided. Furthermore, this research is important to provide an empirical picture of the challenges faced by culinary SMEs in increasing business capacity and labor absorption. Thus, the results of this study are expected to support the formulation of more adaptive and inclusive local economic policies.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to qualitatively examine the development of culinary MSMEs as a strategy to drive economic growth and reduce unemployment in Sorong City. The focus of the study is on identifying business development strategies implemented by culinary MSME players to increase capacity and labor absorption. In addition, this study also aims to analyze the various internal and external challenges faced by MSME actors in the process of developing their businesses. Using a case study approach, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of culinary MSMEs in the context of local economic development. The results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for strengthening evidence-based economic development policies at the regional level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature shows that MSMEs play a strategic role in job creation and strengthening the local economy, especially in developing regions. Situmorang (2018) and Kasmir (2019) emphasize that the flexible and labor-intensive characteristics of MSMEs enable this sector to significantly absorb informal labor (Kasmir, 2019; Situmorang, 2018). From a local economic development perspective, Blakely and Leigh (2013) state that developing businesses based on regional potential can drive inclusive growth and strengthen regional economic resilience (Blakely & Leigh, 2013). In line with this, Todaro and Smith (2015) explain that reducing unemployment depends not only on macroeconomic growth, but also on the ability of local productive sectors to create sustainable employment opportunities (Todaro & Smith, 2015). Meanwhile, Joseph Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship asserts that innovations produced by entrepreneurs can create "creative destruction" that opens up new job opportunities (Schumpeter, 1934), while Israel Kirzner emphasizes the vigilance of business actors in seizing market opportunities as a mechanism for creating economic value and employment (Kirzner, 1973). Thus, theoretically, there is a causal relationship between MSME development, entrepreneurial dynamics, and employment absorption, which has implications for reducing unemployment rates.

Previous empirical research reinforces this argument. Ilmi (2021) shows the contribution of MSMEs in absorbing labor during crises (Ilmi, 2021), while Harahap et al. (2023) emphasizes the socio-economic function of MSMEs in equitable welfare (Kaswinata et al., 2023). Fadhillah et al. (2024) and Rahma (2025) prove that structural support and empowerment increase labor absorption (Fadhillah et al., 2024; Rahma, 2025). However, most research has been conducted in western Indonesia and has not yet explored in depth the dynamics of culinary MSMEs in the eastern region, particularly Sorong. This gap highlights the need for contextual case study-based research to understand the development strategies and challenges of culinary MSMEs in reducing local unemployment.

Although the literature affirms the role of MSMEs in reducing unemployment, there is

still limited research that contextually describes how culinary MSME development strategies in Sorong City contribute to labor absorption and how internal and external challenges affect this process. Based on this gap, this study formulates the following research questions: How do culinary SMEs develop to increase business capacity and employment? What are the challenges faced in developing culinary SMEs in Sorong City, both internally and externally?

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study applies a qualitative approach because it aims to describe and deeply understand a social phenomenon, namely the contribution of culinary MSMEs in reducing unemployment rates (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The type of research used is field research with a case study approach, which involves an intensive examination of the role of culinary MSMEs in the city of Sorong (Yin, 2018).

Research Location, Population, and Sample

The research was conducted in Sorong City, West Papua Province, which was chosen because it is the economic center of eastern Indonesia with rapid growth in culinary MSMEs. The research population included all culinary MSMEs actively operating in Sorong City and Sorong Regency. The research sample was determined using purposive sampling based on the principle of information-rich cases, which is to select subjects who are considered capable of providing in-depth information relevant to the research objectives (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Five culinary MSMEs were selected as units of analysis based on the following criteria: business sustainability, involvement of local workers, uniqueness of products based on local culture or resources, direct involvement in business decision-making, willingness to participate in research, and business context variation (small, family, and medium). This selection aims to represent the diversity of culinary business contexts in Sorong City qualitatively.

Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with MSME owners or managers to explore their experiences, business development strategies, labor absorption processes, and internal and external challenges faced (Abu Bakar, Wan Zakaria, & Ismail, 2021; Sugiyono, 2019). Participatory observation was conducted at the business location to directly observe operational activities, work interactions, and business environmental conditions (da Costa, de Almeida Fonseca Rosa, & Diogo, 2024). Observations were conducted non-interventionally so as not to interfere with business activities (Moleong, 2017). Documentation studies are used as supporting data through the collection of business documents, photos of activities, menus, and secondary data from relevant agencies (Morgan, 2022; Sugiyono, 2019). The three techniques are used triangulatively to improve the accuracy and depth of the data (Moleong, 2017).

Research Procedures

The research procedure began with preliminary observations to map the conditions of culinary MSMEs and determine research subjects that met the criteria. The next stage was field data collection through interviews and direct observations with MSME actors. During the research process, researchers were actively present in the field to build trust with informants and obtain contextual data. The data obtained is then recorded, transcribed, and classified according to the research focus. The research process is carried out iteratively, where researchers can return to the field if there is a need for further data collection.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative thematic analysis approach based on the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the data reduction stage, researchers filtered and organized raw data into thematic categories such as business development strategies, labor absorption, and challenges in MSME development (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The reduced data was then presented in the form of analytical narratives, thematic matrices, and direct quotes from informants to facilitate interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Conclusions were drawn gradually through a verification process involving triangulation of sources and methods. Analysis was repeated until consistent and meaningful themes emerged (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Validity and Reproducibility

Data validity is maintained by applying four criteria of trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved through triangulation of techniques and member checking with informants (de Loyola González-Salgado, Rivera-Navarro, Gutiérrez-Sastre, Conde, & Franco, 2024). Transferability is supported by the presentation of thick descriptions (Younas et al., 2023). Reliability is maintained through systematic recording of the research process (audit trail), while confirmability is maintained by ensuring that each finding is supported by clear field data evidence (Ahmed, 2024). This effort was made to increase transparency and enable procedural replication of the research in similar contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The results of the study indicate that the development of culinary MSMEs in Sorong City and Regency is carried out through adaptive strategies that are oriented towards the local market and limited business resources. From the five MSMEs that were studied, it was found that business actors not only emphasized increasing sales, but also building product identity and expanding operational capacity to maintain business sustainability. The strategies that emerged were contextual, influenced by customer characteristics, business location, and access to training and technology. The findings also show that culinary MSMEs serve as providers of micro-employment, especially for local workers and vulnerable groups such as housewives and young people who did not continue their education. In general, the contribution of MSMEs to employment absorption occurs through operational expansion, family/community-based work distribution, and increased market demand. This pattern strengthens the position of culinary MSMEs as instruments of the local economy as well as social reinforcement at the community level.

Product Differentiation as a Competitive Strategy

The results of the study show that product differentiation is the main strategy of culinary MSMEs in building competitive advantage, not only through menu variety, but also through strengthening cultural identity, authenticity of taste, and emotional concepts. Grandma's Food Stall consistently presents Papuan specialties based on family recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. An informant said:

"We deliberately serve Sorong specialties because many migrants here miss the authentic flavors of home." (Owner of Grandma's Food Stall)

A similar approach is applied by Old-Fashioned Food Stall through its concept of nostalgic food and a home-cooked atmosphere supported by simple interiors. The owner of the

restaurant said:

"We want people who eat here to feel like they are eating their mother's cooking at home."
 (Owner of the Old-Fashioned Food Stall)

In addition, Abba Parman's Yellow Rice develops differentiation based on Manado specialties by maintaining consistency in taste and presentation. These findings show that differentiation based on local culture and emotional experiences plays an important role in increasing customer loyalty.

Utilization of Local Resources for Business Sustainability

Utilization of local resources as a strategy for economic and social sustainability. Gentari Seafood works with local fishermen to obtain key ingredients such as snapper, squid, and fresh shrimp. The business owner said:

"We believe that local ingredients are much fresher and more cost-effective. In addition, this is also our way of helping the local economy." (Owner of Gentari Seafood)

This strategy maintains the quality of raw materials, reduces distribution costs, and involves other local actors in the supply chain. From a marketing perspective, the identity of local seafood is highlighted through Papua's signature dishes. These findings show that the utilization of local resources strengthens the operational efficiency and social sustainability of MSMEs.

Increased Production Capacity and Operational Expansion

Increasing production capacity is an adaptive strategy in response to rising demand. Sari Nanana Restaurant has added kitchen and service staff to speed up the production process. The business owner explains:

"Initially, we only had two people in the kitchen, but now we have five." (Owner of Sari Nanana Restaurant)

In addition, operating hours have been extended to accommodate evening customers and online services. Abba Parman's Yellow Rice has implemented a shift system and added daily workers.

"We added morning and evening staff because we now have many orders." (Owner of Abba Parman's Yellow Rice)

This strategy has improved service efficiency, customer satisfaction, and local employment.

Gradual Digitization of Promotion and Sales

Digitalization has begun to be adopted by culinary MSMEs, albeit in a simple form. c Old-Fashioned Food Stall uses WhatsApp and Facebook for promotion and ordering. The business owner said:

"We usually post photos of food early in the morning, so customers can order directly via WhatsApp." (Owner of the Old-Fashioned Food Stall)

Grandma's Food Stall uses a WhatsApp group for regular customers, while Abba Parman's Yellow Rice is exploring delivery platforms and Instagram. The main challenges faced are limited human resources and digital literacy. Nevertheless, these steps indicate the initial adaptation of SMEs to changes in consumer behavior.

Training and Independent Learning for MSME Actors

Training and independent learning are important supporting factors in developing the capacity of MSME actors. The owner of Grandma's Food Stall participated in training from the Sorong Regency Cooperative and MSME Office.

"From the training, I learned how to organize capital, calculate operational costs, and keep food hygienic. Previously, we just cooked whatever we had, but now we understand the importance of

hygiene standards." (Owner of Grandma's Food Stall)

In addition to formal training, MSME entrepreneurs utilize digital media such as YouTube and TikTok as learning resources. These findings demonstrate an awareness of the importance of improving competencies to maintain professionalism and business sustainability.

Community-Based Local Employment Absorption

Local employment is the most tangible social contribution of culinary MSMEs in Sorong. All MSMEs studied tend to recruit workers from their immediate surroundings, such as family, neighbors, housewives, and school dropouts. Community-based recruitment is chosen because it facilitates coordination, reduces costs, and builds trust. Gentari Seafood even opens up job opportunities for young people who do not continue their formal education by providing basic job training. This strategy makes MSMEs an inclusive economic space for groups that have difficulty accessing the formal job market. Thus, culinary MSMEs serve as a pillar of the people's economy that contributes directly to reducing local unemployment.

Discussion

Analysis of Culinary MSME Development Strategies in Increasing Business Capacity and Employment Absorption

The results of the study show that culinary MSMEs in Sorong City and Regency play a significant role in increasing business capacity while expanding local employment through the implementation of various business development strategies. The findings of the study identify six main strategies implemented by MSME actors, namely product differentiation, utilization of local resources, increased production capacity, digitization of promotion and sales, training and independent learning, and local employment. These strategies have been proven to contribute to business sustainability and reduce unemployment rates in the research area.

These findings are consistent with the SME literature, which states that small businesses have an adaptive advantage in local markets (Kasmir, 2019), particularly through product differentiation based on local flavors and culture. In addition, the utilization of local resources as practiced by Gentari Seafood supports the concept of local economic development according to Blakely & Leigh (2013), which emphasizes the importance of the relationship between economic activity and regional potential (Blakely & Leigh, 2013). The increase in production capacity and labor absorption is also consistent with Situmorang's (2018) view that MSMEs tend to absorb large numbers of informal workers due to their operational flexibility (Situmorang, 2018). On the other hand, early adoption of digital promotion supports the findings of Nainggolan and Heryenzus (2025) regarding the importance of digital transformation, although the level of implementation is still limited (Nainggolan & Heryenzus, 2025). Findings regarding human resource training and local labor absorption are also consistent with human resource capacity development theory and unemployment theory (Arifin, 2020; Todaro & Smith, 2015).

Although in line with various previous studies, this study offers advantages over previous studies because it provides a contextual empirical description of culinary MSME practices in eastern Indonesia, particularly in the city and regency of Sorong. Unlike studies that generally focus on large urban areas or quantitative approaches, this study reveals the strategies of MSMEs in depth through the perspective of business actors, including the role of local culture, community relations, and labor absorption based on the immediate social environment.

The findings of this study are important because they confirm that culinary MSMEs function not only as economic units but also as instruments of local social and economic development. Differentiation strategies and the utilization of local resources strengthen business

identity and regional economic resilience, while strategies for absorbing local labor have a direct impact on reducing unemployment, especially for groups that have difficulty accessing the formal sector.

In terms of implications, scientifically, this study enriches the literature on entrepreneurship and local economic development by adding empirical evidence from the context of non-metropolitan areas in eastern Indonesia. Practically, the findings of this study have implications for local governments and stakeholders in designing MSME development policies that are oriented towards strengthening business capacity, empowering local resources, and creating community-based employment.

Analysis of Internal and External Challenges in the Development of Culinary MSMEs in Sorong City

The results of the study show that the development of culinary MSMEs in Sorong City is not only influenced by the internal strategies of business actors, but also faces various challenges originating from within and outside the business. The research findings classify these challenges into two main categories, namely internal challenges related to limited resources and managerial capacity, and external challenges related to the policy environment, access to financing, and market support. The identification of these two types of challenges provides a comprehensive picture of the adaptive capacity and resilience of MSMEs in facing local economic dynamics.

In terms of internal challenges, the study found that limited business capital is the main obstacle faced by most culinary MSMEs in Sorong. Limited business capital makes it difficult for MSMEs to expand their businesses, procure new equipment, or improve the quality of their production facilities. This finding is in line with the results of Arifin's (2020) study, which states that limited access to capital is a structural problem commonly experienced by MSMEs (Arifin, 2020). However, this study provides additional insight by showing that capital constraints not only hinder business growth, but also limit the ability of MSMEs to increase production capacity and labor absorption.

In addition to capital, weak managerial capabilities are also a significant internal challenge. Research shows that some MSME players still manage their businesses informally without systematic financial records and long-term planning. This intuitive business management practice reflects limited managerial capacity as stated in Kirzner's (1973) theory of entrepreneurship, which emphasizes the importance of business players' ability to recognize and take advantage of market opportunities (Kirzner, 1973). The strength of this study lies in its empirical disclosure of MSME managerial practices, which are often overlooked in studies that focus on macro or policy aspects.

Another internal challenge is the low level of understanding of digital technology and innovation. Although some MSME players have utilized simple social media for promotion, research finds that their understanding of the potential of digitalization in scaling up their businesses is still limited. This finding is consistent with Schumpeter's (1934) view, which places innovation as a key factor in business growth (Schumpeter, 1934). However, this study highlights the gap between the demands for innovation in theory and the reality of micro MSME capacity in the regions, thereby providing a more contextual perspective on innovation adoption.

In terms of external challenges, the study found that access to financing from formal financial institutions remains a major obstacle for culinary MSMEs in Sorong. The lack of collateral, formal financial records, and business legality makes it difficult for MSME players to access bank credit. This finding is in line with Blakely & Leigh's (2013) concept of local economic development, which emphasizes the importance of an inclusive financing system

(Blakely & Leigh, 2013). The strength of this study lies in its ability to reveal the direct impact of limited access to financing on the sustainability of micro-scale MSMEs.

In addition, the lack of promotional support and market access also poses significant external challenges. MSME players still largely rely on word-of-mouth promotion and regular customers, with relatively limited involvement from the government and private sector. Joeliaty (2024) found that limited market access and promotion significantly hamper the resilience and sustainability of small businesses in Indonesia, especially those that are not yet digitally integrated (Joeliaty, 2024). In line with this, Tambunan (2024) emphasizes that MSMEs that are not part of industrial clusters and do not utilize digital technology tend to have difficulty expanding their markets and innovating (Tambunan, 2024). This finding is important because it shows that market limitations are a major obstacle to business expansion, especially in geographically isolated areas such as Sorong.

Another external challenge is regulatory uncertainty and licensing costs. Research has found that MSME players are confused about licensing procedures and concerned about inspections and regulatory changes. This situation adds to the psychological and financial burden on micro MSME players. Khakim and Firmansyah (2023) show that weak regulations and inconsistent policies between agencies create legal uncertainty for MSMEs (Khakim & Firmansyah, 2023). Meanwhile, Zia et al. (2025) assert that complicated and inefficient licensing procedures increase the financial burden and anxiety of business actors regarding regulatory changes and inspections (Ahmad Zia, Achmad, Lukman, & Kawuryan, 2025). The strength of this study lies in its disclosure of non-economic aspects in the form of regulatory uncertainty, which has rarely been discussed in depth in previous MSME studies.

Overall, the findings of this study are important because they show that the challenges faced by culinary MSMEs are multidimensional and interrelated between internal and external factors. Scientifically, this study enriches the MSME literature with a holistic approach that integrates managerial, innovation, financing, and regulatory aspects in the context of eastern Indonesia. Practically, these findings imply that SME development policies need to be designed in an integrated manner, focusing not only on improving the internal capacity of business actors, but also on improving the SME support ecosystem.

Based on the results and discussion of the research, the objectives of this study can be said to have been comprehensively achieved. The study successfully identified culinary MSME development strategies that contribute to increasing business capacity and employment in Sorong City and Regency. In addition, the study was also able to map the internal and external challenges that affect the resilience and adaptive capacity of MSMEs in the context of the local economy. The qualitative approach through in-depth interviews allowed researchers to gain a complete understanding of business dynamics from the perspective of MSME actors. The research findings are not only descriptive but also analytical because they are linked to entrepreneurship and local economic development theories. Thus, the research objectives were achieved both empirically and conceptually.

This study fills a gap in research that is still limited in relation to culinary MSMEs in eastern Indonesia with a contextual and experience-based approach. Most previous studies have focused more on large urban areas and emphasized quantitative aspects or the financial performance of MSMEs. In contrast to this approach, this study integrates economic, social, and institutional dimensions simultaneously. This study also highlights the role of MSMEs as agents of social development through the absorption of local labor and the strengthening of community

relations. Thus, this study broadens the understanding of the contribution of MSMEs beyond purely economic aspects. This contribution is relevant to enriching the literature on MSMEs in the context of non-metropolitan areas.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research should use quantitative or mixed methods approaches to measure the impact of MSME strategies on business performance and worker welfare more objectively. Longitudinal studies are also needed to assess the sustainability of strategies and the dynamics of MSME challenges in the long term. Future research can expand the scope of study through comparative studies between regions to identify variations in MSME strategies and challenges in different contexts. In addition, an in-depth study of the effectiveness of digitization and human resource training on MSME growth needs to be developed. This approach is expected to improve the generalization of findings and strengthen policy implications. Thus, further research can make a broader contribution to MSME development.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the development of culinary MSMEs in Sorong City contributes significantly to local economic growth and unemployment reduction, particularly in the informal sector. The adaptive strategies implemented include product differentiation based on local flavors, utilization of local resources, and increased production capacity through additional working hours and labor. These strategies increase business competitiveness while expanding employment opportunities for the surrounding community. Collaboration with local fishermen and farmers also strengthens an inclusive and sustainable economic value chain. Although digitization is still limited, the use of social media shows potential in expanding market reach.

However, optimizing the role of culinary MSMEs still faces various challenges. Internally, limited capital, low managerial capacity, and minimal digital literacy are the main obstacles. Meanwhile, external factors such as difficult access to formal financing, limited government promotional support, and complex regulations and licensing also hamper business growth. These conditions underscore the need to strengthen the capacity of MSME players, balanced with improvements in the policy environment. Synergy among stakeholders is an important factor for the sustainability of the MSME sector.

Based on these findings, MSME actors are advised to improve their managerial and digital marketing competencies through training and optimization of e-commerce platforms. Local governments are expected to simplify licensing, provide inclusive financing, and strengthen the promotion of local cuisine. Further research is recommended using quantitative and longitudinal approaches to measure the impact of MSMEs on employment and evaluate the effectiveness of digitization programs.

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