

Innovation of the Integrated Business Service Center at the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office in Increasing the Competitiveness of MSMEs

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Abstract. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play an important role in the Indonesian economy, especially in South Sulawesi Province. However, the competitiveness of MSMEs is often constrained by limited access to information, technology, financing, and markets. To answer these challenges, the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office developed the Integrated Business Service Center (PLUT) as a public service innovation that aims to support the development of MSMEs as a whole. This research aims to analyze various forms of innovation applied in PLUT, measure their impact on the competitiveness of MSMEs, and identify the challenges faced in its implementation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews with PLUT managers, MSME actors, and strategic partners; observation of PLUT's operational process; as well as analysis of policy documents and annual reports. The results of the study show that innovation at PLUT South Sulawesi focuses on three main aspects: digitization of services, strengthening the capacity of human resources (HR) of MSMEs, and developing market access. The digitization of services includes the development of an online platform for business consulting, training, and promotion of MSME products through e-catalogs. This approach allows MSME actors in remote areas to access services more easily, although its implementation is still constrained by limited technological infrastructure. This study concludes that innovation in PLUT South Sulawesi makes a significant contribution to increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs, although it still needs further improvement and support to overcome existing challenges. The recommendations submitted include strengthening digital infrastructure, increasing human resource capacity at PLUT, expanding synergy with the private sector, and strengthening regulations to support the sustainability of service innovation. This finding can be an important reference for policy development in the MSME sector, especially for areas with similar characteristics.

Keywords: Innovation, Integrated Business Service Center (PLUT), MSMEs, Competitiveness, Digitalization, South Sulawesi.

Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have long been the backbone of Indonesia's economy. With a contribution of 60.51% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the provision of more than 97% of national employment, MSMEs have a strategic role in creating economic stability and community welfare. In South Sulawesi, MSMEs play a significant role as a driver of the local economy, especially in the trade, handicrafts, and agribusiness sectors. However, the competitiveness of MSMEs in this region is still far from optimal, especially in facing the challenges of globalization and digitalization.

Various fundamental problems are still faced by MSMEs, ranging from low access to information and technology, limited business capital, lack of financial literacy and management, to difficulties in penetrating the national and international markets. In addition, the dynamics of the increasingly competitive global market require MSME actors to be more innovative in producing goods and services. Unpreparedness to face these changes often makes MSMEs vulnerable to economic fluctuations and difficult to compete with products from outside the region or abroad.

In an effort to answer these challenges, the government through the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office presents public service innovations through the Integrated Business Service Center (PLUT). PLUT is designed as an integrated solution to support the development of MSMEs by providing various services, such as training, business consulting, access to financing, to marketing and export facilitation. PLUT is expected to be an instrument that is able to empower MSMEs while increasing their competitiveness in the local, national, and international markets.

The innovations implemented at PLUT include service digitization, training based on market needs, and market access development. Digitalization allows MSME actors in remote areas to access services online, while training helps improve their competence and innovation power. In addition, the expansion of market access is carried out through collaboration with e-commerce platforms, exhibitions, and export facilitation programs. With this holistic approach, PLUT South Sulawesi strives to become the main driver of MSME transformation in the digital era.

MSMEs have unique characteristics, namely operational flexibility and closeness to the local community. However, the great potential of MSMEs is often not balanced with adequate competitiveness. In South Sulawesi, the main challenges for MSMEs include low product quality, limited capital, lack of access to technology, and lack of knowledge about market standards. This problem is exacerbated by infrastructure inequality in remote areas, which hampers product distribution and information dissemination. The presence of PLUT as part of government policy is a strategic step to overcome these problems. PLUT offers a comprehensive approach that not only

provides technical assistance to MSMEs, but also seeks to create a business ecosystem that supports the sustainability of small and medium enterprises. For example, PLUT South Sulawesi has implemented a number of innovations such as digital platforms for consultation and training, e-catalogs for product promotion, and strategic partnerships with various parties to expand market access.

These innovations are expected to be able to answer the fundamental problems faced by MSMEs. For example, the digitization of services allows business actors from remote areas to stay connected to the market and get guidance from PLUT consultants. Meanwhile, needs-based training provides MSME actors with skills that are relevant to market demands. In addition, partnerships with e-commerce platforms open up new opportunities for MSMEs to market their products more widely and efficiently. However, the implementation of this innovation is also faced with various challenges. Among them are resistance to change from some MSME actors, limited budgets and competent consultants at PLUT, as well as uneven technological infrastructure. Therefore, it is important to conduct an in-depth study of how this innovation is implemented, its impact on the competitiveness of MSMEs, as well as the obstacles and opportunities for its development.

Through this research, it is hoped that the key factors for success and challenges in the implementation of innovation in PLUT South Sulawesi can be identified. The results of this research not only contribute to the development of academic literature in the field of public service and MSME development, but also provide practical recommendations for the government and other stakeholders in designing more effective and sustainable policies.

This study is very relevant, considering the importance of MSMEs in creating inclusive and sustainable economic growth, especially in areas such as South Sulawesi which has great potential but still faces significant challenges in increasing the competitiveness of their business actors.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyze innovations implemented in the Integrated Business Service Center (PLUT) by the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office in increasing the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). This method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth the process, implementation, and impact of innovation on MSME actors, as well as understand the social, cultural, and economic context behind it. This research is descriptive-exploratory, focusing on the analysis of the phenomenon of public service innovation in PLUT South Sulawesi. This study not only describes the form of innovation implemented, but also identifies the challenges, successes, and impacts of these innovations on MSMEs. This study uses data triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

The research location is focused on the PLUT of the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office located in Makassar, and involves fostered MSMEs from various districts/cities in South Sulawesi. The selection of this location is based on PLUT's strategic role as a center for public service innovation for MSMEs in the region.

This research uses primary and secondary data obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and focus group discussions (FGD) and obtained from policy documents, annual reports of PLUT, official publications of the Cooperative and SME Office, and academic literature related to public service innovation and MSME development.

The research subjects include, among others, PLUT Staff and Consultants as implementers of service innovation. Fostered MSME actors as beneficiaries of PLUT services. Strategic Partners: Including e-commerce platforms, financing institutions, and academics who collaborate with PLUT. Other Stakeholders: Such as local government officials involved in policymaking. The research instruments used include semi-structured interview guidelines, observation lists, and FGD guidelines. This instrument is designed to explore aspects of innovation, such as digital technology, training, market access, and its impact on MSMEs.

Results and Discussion

This study aims to explore various innovations implemented in the Integrated Business Service Center (PLUT) of the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office and analyze their impact on increasing the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the region. Based on the results of data analysis obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies, some of the main findings that describe the impact and challenges of innovation implementation in PLUT can be detailed as follows:

1. Digital Service Innovation: Access and Efficiency

One of the main innovations implemented at PLUT South Sulawesi is the digitization of services. PLUT has developed a digital platform to provide various services online, such as business consulting, training, and promotion of MSME products. This platform allows MSME actors, especially those in remote areas, to access information and guidance without having to come directly to PLUT. This is very helpful in overcoming geographical and infrastructure limitations that are often obstacles for MSMEs in out-of-town areas.

Based on interviews with MSME actors, most of them feel very helped by the existence of this online platform because they can access services anytime and from anywhere. MSME actors stated that they gained broader insights into digital marketing techniques, financial management, and access to financing, which were previously difficult to obtain without

technology. However, the obstacles faced are related to the problem of unstable internet connections in some areas, which hinders the optimization of the use of this digital platform.

2. Training and Capacity Development of MSME Human Resources

The next innovation implemented at PLUT is training based on market needs and relevant skills. PLUT routinely organizes training for MSME actors in various topics, such as business management, product development, digital marketing, as well as financial literacy and financing training. This training program aims to increase the human resource capacity of MSME actors so that they can meet market standards and compete in local, national, and international markets.

The results of interviews with several MSME actors show that the training provided is very useful, especially in terms of financial management and product development. MSME actors who previously had no knowledge of bookkeeping management and marketing strategies are now more organized in running their businesses. Business actors also feel more confident in facing competition, because they gain knowledge on how to identify market trends and adjust products to market demand.

However, some MSME actors revealed that although the training is quite useful, not all business actors have the time to take part in intensive training, considering the limited manpower and time they have. Therefore, there is a demand for more frequent training in a more flexible format, for example by presenting online modules or short trainings that are more accessible.

3. Market Access Facilitation: Marketing and Export

PLUT also innovates in terms of facilitating the marketing and export of MSME products. One of the strategies implemented is partnerships with various e-commerce platforms and the organization of MSME product exhibitions. Through collaboration with platforms such as Tokopedia and Bukalapak, MSME players are given the opportunity to market their products in a wider market without having to have large capital to open a physical store. In addition, PLUT also organizes product exhibitions and opens access to international markets through export programs.

From the results of interviews with MSME actors who have participated in this program, most of them find it easier to reach a wider market, both domestically and abroad. They revealed that the existence of PLUT as a liaison with e-commerce platforms and the organization of exhibitions is very helpful in introducing their products to larger consumers. MSME actors who previously only sold products in the local market are now starting to receive orders from outside the region and even abroad, which significantly increases their

sales volume.

However, the obstacle faced is that there is still uncertainty in terms of export and logistics costs, which sometimes makes MSME players hesitant to develop their markets abroad. Some actors also complained of limitations in terms of the ability to meet international market demand related to product quality and packaging.

4. Impact on MSME Competitiveness

Overall, the implementation of innovations carried out by PLUT South Sulawesi shows a positive impact on increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. Some of the MSME actors involved in this study reported significant improvements in terms of managerial capacity, marketing, and product quality. With access to training, technical guidance, and ease of marketing products through digital platforms, MSMEs in South Sulawesi are now more competitive in facing a wider market.

This increase in competitiveness can be seen in the increase in the number of orders, both in the local and international markets, as well as a decrease in the rate of business failure. MSME actors who previously had difficulties in managing their businesses are now more skilled in planning business strategies and utilizing technology to expand market reach. This reflects that the innovations carried out by PLUT South Sulawesi can strengthen the position of MSMEs in an increasingly competitive market.

5. Challenges in Innovation Implementation

Although the innovations implemented in PLUT South Sulawesi have a positive impact, there are still a number of challenges that need to be overcome. The main challenges found in this study are:

- a. Uneven Digital Infrastructure: Some areas, especially those more remote, still face obstacles in terms of stable internet connectivity. This makes it difficult for MSME actors in the area to access the digital platform provided by PLUT.
- b. Limited Budget and Resources: Limited budget and experts available at PLUT are obstacles in expanding the scope of services. PLUT needs more skilled human resources and a larger budget to develop more programs and address capacity issues.
- c. Resistance to Change: Some of the more traditional MSME actors still show resistance to change, especially in terms of the adoption of digital technology and modern marketing methods. This requires a more persuasive and educational approach to change their mindset.

Innovations carried out by PLUT Cooperatives and SMEs Office of South Sulawesi Province in the form of digitization of services, training based on market needs, and

facilitation of market access have made a significant contribution to increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs in the region. Nonetheless, challenges related to digital infrastructure, budgets, and resistance to change need to be addressed to ensure sustainability and amplify the impact of these innovations. By improving these aspects, PLUT can continue to strengthen MSMEs in South Sulawesi and become an effective public service model in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs at the national and international levels.

Discussion

This study has shown that the innovations implemented at the Integrated Business Service Center (PLUT) of the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office have a significant impact in increasing the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the region. Several innovations implemented by PLUT, such as service digitization, market needs-based training, and market access facilitation, have been key factors in strengthening the position of MSMEs in an increasingly competitive market. However, the challenges in the implementation of this innovation still need attention, especially in overcoming infrastructure and organizational culture constraints. This discussion will further elaborate on the impact of each innovation as well as the challenges and opportunities that exist.

1. Digitizing Services: Improving Accessibility and Efficiency

One of the most prominent innovations implemented by PLUT South Sulawesi is the digitization of services, which allows MSME actors to access various services that were previously limited by geographical and time constraints. Through the digital platform developed by PLUT, MSME actors, especially those in remote areas, can now access business consultations, training, and information related to products and markets online.

The digitization of this service has a significant positive impact in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. For example, MSME players who previously only relied on local marketing can now use social media and e-commerce platforms to expand their markets. With access to online training, MSME actors can gain knowledge about market trends, digital marketing techniques, and financial management without having to leave their place of business. This provides flexibility for MSMEs to manage their time more efficiently, so they can focus more on business development.

However, although digitalization provides many benefits, some MSME actors in remote areas still face difficulties in accessing these services due to limited technological infrastructure, such as unstable internet networks. This shows that to achieve optimal results, digitalization needs to be supported by the provision of more equitable infrastructure, both in terms of

connectivity and adequate technological devices.

2. Market Needs-Based Training: Capacity Building and Competency of MSME Human Resources

The training organized by PLUT South Sulawesi aims to increase the capacity of MSME actors so that they can manage their businesses more professionally and face market challenges effectively. The training provided focuses on aspects that are directly related to market needs, such as product marketing, product innovation, and good financial management. One of the trainings that is widely appreciated by MSMEs is digital marketing training, which allows them to utilize online platforms to promote their products and expand the market.

The results of interviews with MSME actors show that the training held is very relevant to their needs, especially in terms of financial management and more modern marketing strategies. For example, MSME actors who previously did not have knowledge of how to record books and manage business cash flow are now more organized and able to make better business decisions. In addition, the training also provides MSME actors with the knowledge to recognize market opportunities and develop products in accordance with existing trends.

However, there are several obstacles found related to this training. Some MSME actors complain that the training time is quite long and inflexible, so they have to sacrifice time to run a business. In addition, although the training has provided many benefits, there is a need to ensure that the training can continue in the form of more in-depth mentoring, especially after the training is completed. This aims to enable MSME actors to implement the knowledge gained more effectively in their business operations.

3. Market Access Facilitation: Increasing Marketing and Exports

Another significant innovation in increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs is the facilitation of market access carried out by PLUT. Through partnerships with various e-commerce platforms and exhibitions, PLUT has succeeded in introducing MSME products to a wider market. Partnership programs with e-commerce platforms, such as Tokopedia, Bukalapak, and Shopee, have opened up opportunities for MSMEs to sell their products online, even without large capital to open a physical store.

MSME actors involved in this study revealed that they felt very helped by this partnership, because they can now reach customers from outside the region and even abroad. One of the MSME actors who has successfully utilized the e-commerce platform said that they are now able to sell their products to various cities in Indonesia, even some of their products have been accepted in the international market. This shows that wider market access can directly increase sales volume and business growth potential.

However, some MSME actors also face obstacles related to the shipping and logistics

process, especially for shipping abroad. In addition, there are still many MSME actors who are not fully ready to meet the product quality standards required for the international market. Therefore, PLUT needs to strengthen assistance in terms of packaging, product certification, and logistics processes so that MSMEs can take advantage of export opportunities more optimally.

4. Challenges in Innovation Implementation

Although the innovations carried out by PLUT have a positive impact, the implementation of this innovation cannot be separated from various challenges that need to be overcome. Some of the key challenges found in this study include:

- a. **Technological Infrastructure Limitations:** Although the digitization of services is one of the keys to the success of PLUT, technological infrastructure problems, such as slow internet connections and limited access to digital devices, are a major obstacle for MSME actors in more remote areas. Therefore, to expand the scope of this innovation, there needs to be a more equitable improvement in technological infrastructure, both in terms of internet network quality and adequate device availability.
- b. **Resistance to Change:** Some MSME actors still show resistance to change, especially in terms of the adoption of new technologies and changes in business models. Some business actors who are used to traditional ways are hesitant to switch to digital systems, because they find them complicated or irrelevant to their type of business. For this reason, there needs to be a more educational and persuasive approach so that MSME actors are more open to this change.
- c. **Limitations of Post-Training Mentoring:** Although the training organized by PLUT has had a positive impact, most MSME actors feel that they need more mentoring after the training to ensure that the knowledge gained can be applied effectively in their efforts. Therefore, PLUT needs to develop a sustainable mentoring program so that MSME actors can continue to receive support in facing challenges that arise after training.

5. Innovation Development Opportunities

Despite the challenges, the implementation of innovation at PLUT South Sulawesi also opens up various opportunities for further development. Some of the opportunities that can be used to increase the effectiveness of this innovation include:

- a. **Strengthening Digital Infrastructure:** The government needs to increase support for the development of digital infrastructure throughout South Sulawesi, especially in hard-to-reach areas. The provision of faster and cheaper internet access will make it easier for MSMEs to access digital services provided by PLUT.
- b. **Development of Continuous Assistance Programs:** PLUT can introduce more structured and

sustainable mentoring programs, which do not stop at training. The program can include regular consultation sessions, mentoring, and technical assistance to help MSME actors implement the knowledge they have gained in training.

- c. Increased Partnerships with Third Parties: PLUT can expand its partnerships with more e-commerce platforms, financial institutions, and other training institutions to create a more holistic business ecosystem for MSMEs. This partnership will help MSMEs not only in terms of product marketing but also in terms of financing and better business management.

Innovations carried out by PLUT Cooperatives and SMEs Office of South Sulawesi Province have shown a significant positive impact on increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. By implementing service digitization, market-based training, and market access facilitation, PLUT has succeeded in strengthening the capacity and competence of MSMEs, as well as opening up opportunities to expand the market. However, challenges related to infrastructure, resistance to change, and limitations of post-training mentoring need to be overcome so that these innovations can have a broader and sustainable impact.

Conclusion

The innovations carried out by the Integrated Business Service Center (PLUT) at the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office have made a significant contribution in increasing the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the region. Through various innovations, such as service digitization, market needs-based training, and market access facilitation, PLUT has successfully encouraged MSMEs to optimize their potential, expand markets, and improve product quality. However, there are several challenges that need to be overcome so that this innovation can be sustainable and have a wider impact on the development of MSMEs in South Sulawesi.

The innovations carried out by PLUT have had a real positive impact on increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. Digitization of services, among others, allows MSME actors to access various important services, such as business consulting, training, and market information more efficiently and without geographical restrictions. This is very beneficial for MSMEs in remote areas who previously had difficulty obtaining relevant information. In addition, the training, which focuses on the development of technical, managerial, and digital marketing competencies, provides a deeper understanding to MSME actors in managing their businesses professionally. With the increase in competence, MSME actors are now able to make better use of market opportunities, both in the local and international markets.

Overall, the innovations implemented at the Integrated Business Service Center (PLUT) of the South Sulawesi Province Cooperatives and SMEs Office have had a significant positive impact on increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. Through various innovative programs, such as service digitization, market needs-based training, and market access facilitation, PLUT has succeeded in

empowering MSMEs to be more competitive in facing increasingly complex and global market challenges. Although challenges such as uneven infrastructure, limited mentoring, and resistance to change still exist, the opportunity to continue to develop these innovations is enormous. In the future, with greater support from the government and related stakeholders, as well as improvements in terms of infrastructure, training, and mentoring, PLUT can continue to be a driving force for increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs in South Sulawesi and even at the national level.

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