

# EMPOWERING MSMEs IN SOUTHERN SUMATRA THROUGH SMEXPO PALEMBANG 2025 IN SUPPORT OF SDG 8: STRENGTHENING MARKET ACCESS AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

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## Abstract

Empowering micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is a crucial strategy for strengthening local economies and supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 on inclusive economic growth. This community engagement program was implemented through SMEXPO Palembang 2025, held on 17–19 October 2025 at Palembang Square Mall. The activity involved 27 active MSMEs from the Southern Sumatra region and aimed at expanding market access, enhancing marketing capacity, and strengthening business networks. The implementation methods included a product exhibition (expo), branding and digital content workshops, direct booth-based mentoring, and multi-stakeholder collaboration involving academics, industry, local government, and business communities. The results indicate an improvement in MSME capacity in terms of branding, product display arrangement, digital literacy, and marketing communication. In addition to qualitative impacts, the program generated an economic turnover (Gross Merchandise Value/GMV) of IDR 128,758,952 over the three-day event. Overall, SMEXPO Palembang 2025 made a tangible contribution to strengthening the MSME ecosystem and aligned with SDG 8 by creating more inclusive and sustainable economic opportunities.

**Keywords:** MSMEs; SMEXPO; Empowerment; SDG 8; Market Access

## Introduction

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are recognized as a vital pillar of the national economy due to their contribution to economic activity and job creation, while also serving as a key channel for economic inclusivity at the local level (Khotimah & Budi, 2020; Tarru & Tarru, 2024; Yuvanda et al., 2024). Despite their substantial quantitative contribution, the competitiveness of MSMEs remains uneven—particularly in marketing, product innovation, network access, and digital channel utilization—which ultimately limits their ability to expand their markets at the regional and national levels (Khotimah & Budi, 2020; Retnowati et al., 2019; Sari et al., 2024).

This gap tends to be more pronounced in non-metropolitan areas. Various community service studies and empirical studies show recurring obstacles, such as low digital marketing literacy, reliance on conventional marketing, and limited cross-sector networks, resulting in suboptimal market penetration efforts (Nugraha et al., 2024; Retnowati et al., 2019; Santi et al., 2022). Interventions that emphasize branding, packaging improvements, and digital marketing assistance have been shown to increase competitiveness and expand the market reach of MSMEs (Khalifaturafi'ah et al., 2023; Kurniawan et al., 2023; Nugraheny et al., 2022).

In the context of the global development agenda, strengthening MSMEs is directly related to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, which emphasizes inclusive and productive economic growth. Strengthening MSME capacity through improved marketing, networking, and market access is seen as a relevant strategy for expanding more equitable economic opportunities (Kamil et al., 2022; Radianto et al., 2024; Tarru & Tarru, 2024). The findings of the community service also emphasize that effective empowerment models need to move from one-way training to a more

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experiential approach, namely combining interactive workshops, hands-on practice, and structured mentoring for more measurable and sustainable results (Kamil et al., 2022; Suprpto et al., 2024; Yuwinanto, 2020). One relevant strategic instrument for this purpose is an exhibition/expo, as it serves as a product exposure space, a meeting point for MSMEs with consumers and potential partners, and an arena for learning about real-time marketing practices (Fauji et al., 2023; Suprpto et al., 2024). However, the impact of an expo tends to be stronger when it is designed in an integrated manner with mentoring and capacity building, such as marketing content development, branding, and facilitating cross-actor business networking (Erstiawan et al., 2024; Suprpto et al., 2024).

Based on this background, SMEXPO Palembang 2025 is designed as a community service activity based on multi-stakeholder collaboration that combines product expo with capacity building sessions (branding, marketing content, and networking) to encourage MSMEs to move up a class and expand market access. Thus, the goal of this service activity is to empower 27 active participating MSMEs from Southern Sumatra through SMEXPO Palembang 2025 with a focus on increasing marketing capacity, expanding market access, strengthening business networks, and contributing to the achievement of SDG 8 regarding inclusive and sustainable economic growth (Kamil et al., 2022; Radianto et al., 2024; Tarru & Tarru, 2024).

### **Method of Service**

This community service activity uses a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to systematically describe the implementation process and changes in the capacity of MSME partners during the activity. This approach was chosen because it is relevant to evaluating process-based empowerment programs, direct experience, and interactions between business actors and the market. Data collection techniques included field observations, activity documentation, and informal interviews with MSME actors during and after the activity.

The event was held on October 17–19, 2025, at Palembang Square Mall, Palembang City. The event partners consisted of 27 active booth participants from the Southern Sumatra region, with diverse business characteristics, including the food and beverage, crafts, and creative processed product sectors. All partners were actively involved in a series of activities, including product exhibition sessions, workshops, and direct mentoring.

### **Preparation Stage**

The preparation phase is carried out through coordination with various stakeholders, including PT Pertamina Patra Niaga and other supporting partners. Activities at this stage include the selection and curation of participating MSMEs, mapping partner needs, preparing the activity agenda, determining and confirming speakers, and preparing supporting facilities and infrastructure for the implementation of SMEXPO Palembang 2025. This phase aims to ensure MSME readiness and the suitability of activity materials to the actual needs of partners.

### **Implementation Stage**

The implementation phase includes product expos, workshops, and direct mentoring. The expo focuses on providing product exposure spaces that enable direct interaction between MSMEs and visitors. These activities are complemented by short workshops on branding, product display design, and digital marketing content creation. Furthermore, direct mentoring at the booth is contextual and applicable, tailored to the characteristics of each MSME, allowing partners to directly apply the material learned in real-world market situations.

Details of the stages and series of community service activities are presented systematically in Table 1 .

**Table 1 Stages and Series of Community Service Activities for SMEXPO Palembang 2025**

Stage	Series of Activities	Output	Person responsible
Preparation	Selection of 27 participating MSMEs; coordination with PT Pertamina Patra Niaga; preparation of the workshop agenda; determination and confirmation of speakers (Agam Pisan, Mind.id, Cooperatives Office, Dekranasda, HIPMI)	Selected MSMEs; final activity agenda; confirmed speakers	Community Service Team & PT Pertamina Patra Niaga
Implementation of the Expo	Opening of activities; product arrangement and display; interaction between MSMEs and visitors; field observations; documentation of activities	Product promotion activities; MSME–visitor interaction records; activity documentation	Community Service Team
Workshop & Mentoring	Branding session by Agam Pisan; digital marketing content training by Mind.id; coaching by the Cooperatives Office and Dekranasda; business networking facilitation with HIPMI	Increasing the marketing capacity of MSMEs; opportunities for collaboration and business networking	Speakers & Community Service Team
Evaluation and Monitoring	Informal interviews with MSME actors; participant reflections; thematic analysis of activity results	Qualitative findings; program development recommendations	Community Service Team

### Evaluation and Monitoring Stage

The evaluation and monitoring phase was carried out after the activity concluded to assess the achievements of the community service program. The evaluation was conducted through observations of changes in MSME marketing practices, informal discussions and interviews regarding the benefits of the activity, and recording of transaction results during the activity. The data obtained was analyzed descriptively and qualitatively to illustrate the impact of the activity on increasing MSME capacity and local economic turnover during the implementation of SMEXPO Palembang 2025.

### Results and Discussion

The implementation of SMEXPO Palembang 2025 resulted in changes in the capacity of MSME partners, visible in aspects of branding, digital literacy, marketing communications, and strengthening business networks. This impact emerged through a series of stages described in the method, starting from preparing MSME needs, implementing the expo as a market practice space, thematic workshops, and post-activity reflective evaluation. The integration of these stages shows that the expo functions not only as a buying and selling space, but also as an experiential learning arena that allows MSMEs to test strategies, receive direct feedback, and make rapid adjustments according to visitor responses and field dynamics.

During the preparation phase, coordination and needs mapping revealed that some MSME partners still had limitations in brand identity consistency, booth display standards, and product narratives. This initial condition served as the basis for learning interventions during the expo. As the expo entered its implementation phase, MSMEs had the opportunity to implement improvements in product displays and communication through direct interactions with consumers. The most significant changes were seen in MSMEs' ability to convey product value more persuasively, improve product layout, and enhance the quality of booth visual presentation. These improvements were qualitative and reflected in the increased intensity of MSME dialogue with visitors, increased product-related questions, and the emergence of repeat purchase interest at several booths based on field observations and informal interviews.

The workshop and mentoring phases were central to the empowerment process, facilitating the transfer of best practices from multi-stakeholder speakers. Branding materials from Agam Pisan encouraged MSMEs to understand the importance of visual identity and storytelling, enabling partners to simplify brand messaging, create consistent visual elements, and create more engaging displays. Digital content training from Mind.id strengthened digital marketing

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literacy through product content creation, engaging captions, and understanding engagement. Meanwhile, coaching from the Cooperatives Office and Dekranasda strengthened institutional perspectives, quality standards, and business development direction. The presence of HIPMI South Sumatra expanded business networks and opened up broader partnership opportunities. This combination of interventions demonstrates that multi-stakeholder collaboration not only enhances MSME knowledge but also broadens access to resources and networks relevant to business sustainability.

In terms of increasing the capacity of MSMEs, the results of the implementation of SMEXPO Palembang 2025 showed a strengthening of partners' adaptive capabilities in responding to market demands, particularly in aspects of branding, marketing communications, and the use of digital channels. This capacity increase was not only reflected in technical changes such as improvements to booth displays and promotional content, but also in changes in the mindset of MSMEs in viewing marketing as a continuous strategic process. Through experiential learning during the expo, thematic workshops, and direct mentoring, MSMEs had the opportunity to test strategies in real life, receive direct feedback from consumers, and adjust marketing approaches contextually. These findings confirm that an empowerment model based on the integration of direct practice and multi-stakeholder mentoring is more effective in building MSME capacity than one-way, theoretical training.

In terms of economic impact, SMEXPO Palembang 2025 generated a transaction turnover of Rp128,758,952 during the three days of implementation, reflecting the occurrence of market activation and real economic interactions between MSMEs and consumers. This achievement shows that the expo functions not only as a promotional medium, but also as an instrument for creating direct economic value for business actors. Variations in transaction patterns characterized by peak and low hours provide important lessons regarding the dynamics of the temporary retail market, while also emphasizing the need for adaptive visitor activation strategies. Thus, the resulting economic impact is not only quantitative in the form of transaction value, but also qualitative as a learning experience for MSMEs in managing market momentum, attracting consumer attention, and maximizing sales opportunities.

The post-event evaluation was conducted through informal interviews and reflections with partners, which confirmed that the main obstacles during implementation were related to the varying readiness of MSMEs in implementing digital marketing techniques, the limitations of some partners in developing consistent product narratives, and fluctuations in visitor traffic at certain times. Based on these findings, the recommended solutions are the implementation of a pre-event clinic (short coaching) to standardize product displays and narratives, mentoring with example-based digital content (content templates and upload schedules), and strengthening visitor activation programs during off-peak hours through mini-activities integrated with booth promotions. Furthermore, post-event monitoring is needed to ensure that the increased capacity that has been formed during SMEXPO is truly implemented in MSME operations after the event ends. To fulfill journal requirements, activity documentation must be presented in this section as evidence of the implementation of the method stages and the resulting impacts.



**Figure 1.** The atmosphere of the implementation of SMEXPO Palembang 2025 at Palembang Square Mall which involved 27 active participating MSMEs as part of efforts to expand market access and strengthen the MSME ecosystem.

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**Figure 2.** Branding workshop by Agam Pisan that encourages experience-based learning in MSME marketing communications during SMEXPO Palembang 2025.



**Figure 3.** Visitor interaction and public participation in SMEXPO Palembang 2025 interactive activities that contributed to increased booth visits, local product exposure, and MSME market interaction.

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**Figure 4.** Coaching and mentoring of MSMEs with the author acting as the main initiator and facilitator in integrating coaching, promotion, and product transaction activities.

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The implementation of SMEXPO Palembang 2025 demonstrated that an exhibition-based community service approach integrated with workshops and multi-stakeholder collaboration was able to effectively achieve the goal of empowering MSMEs. The main achievement of the activity was reflected in the increased capacity of MSME actors in understanding and applying the principles of branding, marketing communications, and utilizing digital media as a promotional tool, which was obtained through experience-based learning and direct interaction with the market. From a quantitative perspective, the transaction turnover during the three-day event, which reached Rp128,758,952, indicated real economic activation and strengthened evidence that the expo can function as an instrument for strengthening market access and inclusive economic growth. Scientifically, these findings emphasize that the integration of direct practice, thematic mentoring, and multi-stakeholder ecosystem support can increase the adaptive capacity of MSMEs and expand opportunities for business sustainability at the local level.

However, the implementation of the activity still faces several challenges, including variations in MSME readiness in implementing digital marketing strategies, fluctuations in visitor visits at certain times, and limitations of some partners in maintaining consistent product narratives and displays. Therefore, it is recommended that future community service activities be supplemented with pre-event mentoring in the form of short product arrangement and marketing narrative development clinics, as well as post-activity monitoring to ensure the application of the knowledge gained. In addition, strengthening visitor activation programs during off-peak hours and expanding networks with business actors and supporting institutions are expected to increase the economic impact and sustainability of community service results. With these developments, the SMEXPO model has the potential to be replicated and expanded as a community service practice that supports the strengthening of MSMEs and the achievement of inclusive economic growth.

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