

## Direction for Strengthening MSMEs in The IKN Support Area: Study of Issues and Expectations of Business Actors in Samboja and West Samboja, Kutai Kartanegara Regency

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**Abstract:** The development of the new capital city, IKN Nusantara, has a significant impact on surrounding buffer areas, including Samboja and Samboja Barat, which are projected to become gateways for economic mobility, labor supply, and strategic supply chains that support the capital city. This study aims to explore and understand the dynamics, challenges, potentials, and capacity-building needs of MSMEs in responding to emerging economic opportunities generated by IKN development. This research applies a qualitative exploratory approach through written responses, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), observation, and documentation. The findings reveal that MSMEs possess substantial local potential, such as raw material availability, unique products, and expanding market prospects, yet continue to face limitations in access to capital, digital literacy, managerial skills, business legalization, and market competition. The study concludes that MSMEs require a comprehensive support ecosystem through capacity strengthening, strategic partnerships, and responsive policies to enable their role as economic pillars in the buffer areas of IKN. Recommendations include continuous mentoring, business digitalization, and the establishment of collaborative MSME networks across Samboja and Samboja Barat.

### Introduction

The relocation of the national capital (IKN) Nusantara to East Kalimantan Province is a major transformational moment that will not only impact the political, bureaucratic, and governmental structures, but also the regional economic configuration. Supporting areas such as Samboja and West Samboja in Kutai Kartanegara Regency are projected to become new economic hubs given their position as gateways for the mobility of goods, labor, and support services for the IKN (Yusuf et al., 2023). Amidst this rapid change, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role as employers, guardians of the local supply chain,

and representatives of the local community's economic identity (Hakim, 2021). The adaptation of MSMEs to market needs and the direction of IKN development policies is an important issue that determines the sustainability of the local economy.

Currently, MSME actors in Samboja and West Samboja are faced with a paradox between opportunity and anxiety. On the one hand, the development of the IKN creates new demand and expands market potential, but on the other hand, it also gives rise to increasingly fierce competition with the entry of business actors with large capital and superior technological capabilities (Sianipar et al., 2025). Classic problems such as access to capital, business legality, digital literacy, branding and marketing capabilities, and adaptation to product quality standards remain realities that have not been fully resolved. Furthermore, there are socio-cultural dimensions such as perceptions of change, mental readiness for transformation, and dependence on traditional business patterns that become invisible obstacles (Troilo et al., 2025).

Although MSME assistance and strengthening programs have been rolled out by the central and regional governments, the effectiveness of these policies is often not fully aligned with the real needs of business actors in the field. Many MSME actors say that the solutions provided are still uniform without considering the local characteristics, work culture, and economic interaction patterns of the people of Samboja and West Samboja, which have developed organically and based on social networks (Ruiz, 2023). The geographical and demographic conditions that differ from those of large cities, as well as the background of the community, which still partly depends on traditional sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and home-based businesses, mean that MSME empowerment strategies require an adaptive and contextual approach. Therefore, it is important to understand how MSME actors perceive these policy interventions, whether they are considered relevant, too hasty, or fail to address the fundamental aspects they need (Tariq, 2025a).

Furthermore, IKN development often focuses on macro potential and economic projections, while the voices of local MSME actors have not been raised to the surface as part of a comprehensive policy discourse. Their experiences, concerns, and adaptation strategies are important sources of knowledge for future policy formulation (E. Kremin et al., 2021). This is where a qualitative research approach has a significant contribution because it allows researchers to explore the meaning behind people's economic behavior, understand the dynamics of responses to change, and reveal the hopes and survival strategies from the perspective of the business actors themselves, not just from growth indicators (Vetrivel et al., 2025). This experience-based understanding is believed to provide a more complete picture of the readiness of local MSMEs in facing the rapid and unpredictable flow of IKN transformation.

Thus, this study takes a strategic position to present a qualitative perspective oriented towards the narratives of MSME actors in Samboja and West Samboja in order to map their actual problems, priority needs, and expectations regarding the direction of MSME strengthening in the IKN buffer zone. The findings of this study are expected to serve as input for local governments and stakeholders so that MSME empowerment policies are not only reactive to the physical development of the IKN, but also proactive in ensuring that local MSME actors are able to become key players, rather than mere spectators, in the new economic ecosystem that is being built.

#### *The Concept and Role of MSMEs*

MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) are productive business units whose operations and scale are below certain limits in terms of assets, turnover, and number of

employees. Globally, the concept of MSMEs is often equated with the term Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) used by the European Union, the World Bank, the WTO, and other international institutions (Xu & Guo, 2021). MSMEs have distinctive characteristics such as flexibility, dynamism, high mobility, and the ability to adapt quickly to market changes. With a relatively simple organizational structure and a more agile decision-making pattern, MSMEs are able to respond quickly to changes in consumer demand while also becoming a forum for the formation of a culture of innovation at the grassroots level. However, on the other hand, limited capital, access to banking, and managerial capacity are often fundamental obstacles to the development of MSMEs (Ahmad et al., 2020).

The role of MSMEs is very strategic in the context of economic and social development. From an economic perspective, MSMEs contribute significantly to job creation, strengthening local supply chains, increasing Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and forming the basis for new entrepreneurs and managers (Qasim et al., 2025). On the social dimension, MSMEs play a role in reducing unemployment, overcoming economic inequality, and promoting social inclusion in various levels of society. In addition, MSMEs are a source of innovation and competition that drives market dynamics in various sectors, making their existence an important catalyst for sustainable growth. To overcome classic challenges such as limited financing and access to technology, government support through incentive policies, research and innovation funding, and the adoption of digital technology are determining factors in improving the competitiveness, operational sustainability, and performance of MSMEs in the current era of economic transformation (Jeong et al., 2021).

#### *The Development of the Nusantara National Capital City and Its Impact on Support Area*

The development of the Nusantara National Capital (IKN) in East Kalimantan has consequences for buffer zones such as Balikpapan, Samarinda, and the area around Balikpapan Bay. Mobility and urbanization are the initial impacts that arise as accessibility increases and new infrastructure networks are opened, driving regional economic development (Buana et al., 2023). On the one hand, there are opportunities to improve community welfare through job creation, investment, and new business opportunities. However, several studies have noted that the socio-economic readiness of local communities is not yet fully in line with the rapid pace of development, which has the potential to create inequality, exclusion of vulnerable groups, and unfair competition between local MSMEs and large-scale businesses. The relatively low Human Development Index (HDI) in the buffer zone reinforces the indication that the benefits of development have not been distributed evenly and require more inclusive and responsive affirmative policies that take into account the characteristics of the local community (Syafi'i et al., 2025).

The impact of IKN development is also very evident in environmental and socio-ecological aspects. The transformation of land use from vegetation to built-up areas has increased the risk of environmental degradation, rising surface temperatures, and the threat of forest ecosystem loss. Although the concept of a sustainable forest city with a large proportion of protected areas is an official development commitment, in reality, the development of the new capital also reinforces the pattern of resource extraction that has previously put pressure on the ecology of East Kalimantan (Anggraeni et al., 2025). The exclusion of coastal communities and fishermen around Balikpapan Bay is a critical issue, particularly in relation to the loss of access to livelihoods and the increased potential for social conflict. Therefore, the literature emphasizes the importance of inclusive development governance, measurable environmental mitigation, vegetation expansion, and strengthening public involvement so that the development process not only produces physical

infrastructure but also ensures socio-ecological justice and long-term sustainability for the buffer zone (Simanjuntak et al., 2025).

#### *Opportunities and Challenges for MSMEs in Support Area*

The development of the Nusantara IKN creates strategic opportunities for MSMEs in buffer zones through digitalization, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and infrastructure strengthening. The use of digital technologies such as e-commerce, cloud-based management systems, and the application of artificial intelligence offers great potential to reduce production costs, improve operational efficiency, expand markets, and strengthen business sustainability. Digitalization also opens up opportunities for direct exports and cross-regional market access without geographical boundaries (Kusumaningtyas et al., 2022). In addition to technology, other opportunities arise through partnerships between the government, the private sector, educational institutions, and business communities that create an ecosystem that supports innovation. Infrastructure development in the IKN buffer zone improves logistics connectivity, labor mobility, and access to the distribution of goods and services, thereby strengthening the local economic base (Yelfiarita et al., 2025).

On the other hand, MSMEs in the buffer zone still face fundamental challenges that can reduce their ability to take advantage of the momentum of IKN development. Problems with access to capital, limited human resources, low financial and digital literacy, and a lack of technological mastery are the main obstacles in the business transformation process (Said & Soi, 2025). Other challenges relate to regulations and bureaucracy that do not fully support the efficiency of MSME players, as well as the need to increase skills capacity in order to adapt to increasingly competitive and technology-based competition. Therefore, a more collaborative, measurable, and sustainable strategy is needed to ensure that MSMEs can overcome these structural challenges and maximize the opportunities arising from the development of the IKN (Harnida et al., 2024).

#### **Research Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the dynamics, needs, challenges, and readiness of MSME actors in the Samboja and West Samboja regions in facing economic development opportunities as a result of the construction of the Nusantara Capital City (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore the perspectives, social experiences, and economic contexts of MSME actors more broadly and meaningfully through narrative and interpretive data. Qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena based on the perspectives of participants through an exploratory, interpretive, and holistic process. This is in line with the view that a qualitative approach allows researchers to read social reality contextually and not merely in terms of numerical measurements (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

This research is exploratory-descriptive in nature to capture the actual conditions of MSMEs, identify obstacles, and find relevant partnership potentials for increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs in the IKN buffer zone. The research stages began with the collection of preliminary information through written questionnaires to map issues and needs, which was then followed up with focus group discussions (FGD) to explore the meanings and in-depth views of MSME actors. This exploratory approach is in line with the explanation (Saunders et al., 2019) that exploratory research is effective for identifying the direction of problems and understanding developing phenomena.

The research subjects were MSME actors in Samboja and West Samboja subdistricts with various business categories such as culinary, handicrafts, services, trade,

agriculture/plantations, and other businesses. Participants were determined using purposive sampling based on business type, location, and willingness to participate in the research process. Purposive sampling was used to select informants who were most relevant to the phenomenon being studied (Sugiyono, 2023). Data collection was conducted through written questions, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), non-participatory observation of business activities and the surrounding environment, as well as documentation in the form of field notes, photos, and recordings (if approved by the participants). (Silverman, 2024) emphasizes that a combination of observation and discussion techniques can give researchers a stronger understanding of the social context.

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis through a process of reduction, categorization, interpretation, and drawing of findings based on the emergence of consistent patterns. This approach refers to the guidelines (Braun & Clarke, 2021) which state that thematic analysis can identify the main meanings and themes in qualitative data. The validity of the findings was strengthened through triangulation of sources as recommended (Flick, 2022) to ensure the reliability and credibility of the data. Research ethics were maintained by ensuring voluntary participation, protecting the confidentiality of respondents' identities, and ensuring that the data was only used for academic purposes and policy recommendations. Ethics in qualitative research are very important because they involve direct interaction and narratives of participants' personal experiences.

## **Result and Discussion**

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with MSME actors in Samboja and West Samboja provided a comprehensive picture of the actual conditions of micro, small, and medium enterprises in the buffer zone of the Nusantara Capital City. Data obtained from questionnaires and direct discussions revealed the dynamics of business management, obstacles faced, utilization of local potential, readiness to face regional economic changes, and MSME actors' expectations for institutional support and partnerships. These findings form the basis for formulating MSME strengthening strategies based on the real needs of business actors and the context of IKN development.

### *Key Issues for MSMEs in Samboja and West Samboja*

The participants' questionnaires and discussion results show that MSME actors in Samboja and West Samboja face a combination of structural and managerial problems. Frequently cited problems include limited access to capital, lack of business management skills, difficulties in marketing (especially digital marketing), distribution and raw material availability issues, weak packaging and branding, and weak business licensing/legality aspects. Some actors wrote that capital and marketing issues were the main obstacles to scaling up their businesses, while others emphasized the constraints of product packaging and limited marketing networks outside their immediate environment.

From a discussion perspective, these findings confirm that MSMEs in the IKN buffer zone still face the classic problems of MSMEs in Indonesia, namely limited financial resources, managerial knowledge, and market access. This condition puts business actors in a "survival mode" position, making it difficult for them to innovate or expand, even though market opportunities related to IKN development are increasingly open. Obstacles in branding and packaging also indicate that the added value of local products has not been optimally utilized, making MSMEs vulnerable to competition from products from outside the region that have a more professional appearance and marketing strategy (Yunus & Ernawati, 2025).

### *Business Potential and Supporting Local Factors*

*On the other hand, the FGD also revealed that MSME players are not only aware of the obstacles but also clearly recognize their potential. The main potentials that were frequently mentioned include the availability of local raw materials, the uniqueness of products or distinctive regional flavors, established customer networks, and market opportunities that are growing along with the development of the IKN. In several questionnaires, business actors wrote that the easy availability of raw materials in their vicinity was an important advantage, while others considered the location of their business on a main traffic route or close to the IKN project area as an attractive opportunity to expand their market.*

In the discussion, this potential shows that the local economic base in Samboja and West Samboja is actually strong enough to be developed as a support for the IKN supply chain, especially for daily consumption needs (culinary), souvenirs/crafts, supporting services, and processed agricultural products. Local uniqueness and geographical proximity to the IKN can become a specific competitive advantage (local competitive advantage) if accompanied by strengthened production capacity, improved quality, and targeted marketing strategies. This means that strengthening MSMEs in this region does not have to start from scratch, but rather from the management and development of existing potential (Surya et al., 2021).

#### *Readiness and Need for Competitiveness Strengthening*

When asked to assess the extent to which the problems they face hinder business development, MSME players tend to admit that these obstacles are quite to very hindering. This is in line with their answers regarding the main requirements for improving competitiveness: business skills training (management, financial recording, digital marketing), access to capital or MSME credit, legal facilitation (halal, PIRT, and business licenses), assistance with production tools, marketing assistance, and strengthening business digitalization, including access to marketplaces. Some entrepreneurs stated that their businesses need additional preparation before expanding production or sales, while others feel “partially ready” as long as there is adequate capital and marketing support.

Discussion of these findings shows that MSME readiness to face IKN opportunities is not only a matter of willingness, but primarily a matter of capacity. The desire to grow is evident from the need for training, mentoring, and broader market access. However, without improvements in managerial skills, digital literacy, and access to affordable financing, MSMEs risk becoming mere spectators in the flow of large IKN projects. The need for legality and certification is also important as it is a prerequisite for entering formal supply chains, whether to modern retailers, hotels/restaurants, or collaborations with large companies and government agencies (MV et al., 2024).

#### *Desired Partnership and Networking Patterns*

The dimension of partnership was another important theme that emerged from the FGD. Some MSME players stated that they already had forms of cooperation with external parties (e.g., suppliers, collectors, or certain stores), but many did not yet have clear and sustainable partners. When asked to name the partners they need, MSME players mentioned local governments, private companies/CSR, MSME communities or associations, banks/fintech, marketplace platforms, as well as business mentors or incubators. The most effective forms of partnership include joint marketing, training and mentoring, distribution and raw material support, capital investment, and joint promotion and branding.

Discussion of these findings indicates that MSME actors view partnerships as a key strategy for escaping the trap of small business scale. They recognize their limitations in going it alone in an increasingly competitive market, and therefore need a collaborative ecosystem that bridges them to broader markets, technology, and sources of financing. The desire to

join the Samboja–West Samboja MSME network expressed by many participants indicates the existence of social capital that is ready to be managed: trust, a desire to support one another, and the hope of forming a joint forum that can serve as a channel of communication with the government and the private sector (Analia et al., 2020).

*Expectations for FGD Follow-up and Implications for Strengthening MSMEs Supporting the IKN*

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to express their expectations for the FGD and relevant partnership strategies for the Samboja and West Samboja regions. The answers generally pointed to expectations for ongoing assistance (not just a single meeting), regular practical training, facilitation of access to capital, promotional and marketing support, the establishment of shared production centers or houses, and the strengthening of MSME communities/networks across villages and subdistricts. Some participants also expressed their hope that the results of the FGD would not end with discussions, but would actually be followed up in the form of concrete programs involving local governments, surrounding companies, and other supporting institutions.

Table 1. Findings from the FGD with MSME actors in Samboja and West Samboja

Theme Findings	Field Findings Description	Implications of the Discussion
Key Issues	Limited access to capital, low management skills, suboptimal digital marketing, unstable distribution and raw materials, weak packaging and branding, incomplete legalities.	MSMEs are still in survival mode, product added value is not yet optimal, competitiveness against foreign products is low, and they are not yet ready to enter the formal market or large supply chains.
Potential and Supporting Local Factors	Abundant local raw materials, product uniqueness, existing customer network, strategic location near the new capital city, potential for increased demand.	They have a local competitive advantage and can support the IKN supply chain if accompanied by increases in production capacity, quality, and marketing.
Readiness and Capacity Building Needs	Requires training in management, financial record-keeping, digital marketing, access to capital, legal compliance, production tools, marketing assistance, digitalization, and access to marketplaces.	Readiness remains partial; change requires ecosystem support, not just short-term training; managerial capacity and financing are critical factors.
Desired Partnership Models	Partnerships with the government, private sector/CSR, marketplaces, associations, banks, joint marketing collaborations, distribution, training, investment, and branding.	Partnerships are considered a key strategy, requiring collective networks; collaboration opens access to markets, technology, and financing.
Future Expectations	Sustainable mentoring programs, regular training, access to capital, promotions, joint production centers, cross-regional SME networks, and practical implementation post-FGD.	Comprehensive ecosystem intervention is needed; program sustainability is a prerequisite; SMEs aim to be active participants in regional development, not merely program recipients.

Source: Data processed by researchers, 2025

Overall, the results of the FGD show that MSME actors in Samboja and West Samboja are in a unique position: on the one hand, they face various structural limitations and internal capacity constraints, but on the other hand, they have high local potential and a strong spirit

of collaboration. In the context of the development of the Nusantara IKN, these findings have important implications: MSME strengthening strategies should not be limited to short-term training programs or individual capital assistance, but should be designed as ecosystem interventions that connect capacity building for actors, strengthening MSME networking institutions, favorable regional policies, and concrete partnership schemes with projects and economic actors in the IKN area. Thus, SMEs in Samboja and West Samboja can truly serve as the backbone of the supporting region's economy, rather than merely spectators amid the ongoing major transformation (Tariq, 2025b).

## **Conclusion**

The results of the study through written questions and focus group discussions with MSME actors in Samboja and West Samboja show that MSMEs have strong local potential through the availability of raw materials, product uniqueness, strategic location, and market opportunities from the development of the Nusantara Capital City. However, this potential has not been fully maximized because MSME players still face limitations in human resources, access to capital, digital literacy, business legality, and branding and marketing capabilities, which are still relatively low. This condition places MSMEs in a position full of opportunities but also risks if economic transformation proceeds without capacity readiness and ecosystem support.

Therefore, it can be concluded that MSMEs in the IKN buffer zone require a comprehensive and sustainable strengthening strategy. Interventions should not only be directed at improving the technical skills of business actors, but also at strengthening institutions, facilitating partnership networks, and implementing regional policies that are adaptive and responsive to the needs of MSMEs. The results of this study provide an important basis for the formulation of more targeted program recommendations so that MSMEs can become active actors in the IKN economic value chain, rather than merely passive parties facing the dynamics of change.

Local governments, training institutions, and private partners are expected to develop a sustainable mentoring model, not just a one-time training, with a focus on improving management competencies, digital literacy, business legality, and access to affordable funding. The ideal mentoring program should be designed based on the real needs of MSMEs in the field so that each intervention has a direct impact on increasing competitiveness, production capacity, and marketing expansion, both offline and digitally.

Next, it is necessary to establish a regional MSME networking forum or institution as a platform for communication, collaboration, and advocacy that connects MSMEs with the government, the private sector, and financial institutions. This forum can serve as a center for information on IKN opportunities, a partnership facilitator, and a joint promotional medium. With a strong institutional framework, SMEs in Samboja and West Samboja will have a better bargaining position, broader access to support, and the ability to act as a collective force in welcoming new economic growth in the IKN buffer zone.

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