



Strengthening Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Empowerment Programs through a Cross-Sector Collaboration Perspective: Evidence from Indonesia

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Abstract. The empowerment of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) requires an integrated cross-sector collaboration. However, key stakeholders such as government agencies, state-owned banks, and NGOs have largely operated in silos when implementing empowerment initiatives. This study aims to analyze the cross-sectoral collaboration within MSME empowerment programs in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative exploratory approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, documentation, and observations. The informants consisted of senior officials from Himbara Banks, the Ministry of MSMEs, NGO leaders, and MSME owners. The data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that successful MSME empowerment demands strong synergy among stakeholders, starting from planning to evaluation phases. Challenges identified include the absence of a shared vision, weak structures and governance mechanisms for collaboration, limited collaborative leadership capacity, and ineffective accountability and evaluation systems. Therefore, strengthening cross-sector collaboration is crucial to achieving optimal MSME empowerment outcomes in Indonesia.

Keywords: Cross-Sector Collaboration, Empowerment, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Stakeholder Synergy.

1 Introduction

Collaboration in resolving complex public problems is currently a trend in public administration studies, both public management and public policy. Government-formulated policies often face obstacles in their implementation, as their multi-sectoral nature involves various stakeholders from government, private sector, and public sectors. These obstacles often include limited resources among the actors involved, resulting in ineffective and inefficient policies. Collaboration studies, however, emphasize utilizing stakeholders' resources for effective and efficient implementation.

Practically, cross-sector collaboration has also occurred in the implementation of MSME empowerment programs in Indonesia. Post-COVID-19 pandemic, MSMEs

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have proven to be a relatively resilient sector in the face of economic pressures. Although many have been significantly impacted, MSMEs have been at the forefront of national economic recovery efforts. The government has made this sector a priority in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) and various national economic recovery (PEN) policies.

However, despite their significant contributions, MSMEs also face numerous structural and systemic challenges. These challenges not only hinder their growth but also hinder efforts to create competitive and sustainable MSMEs. A classic problem faced by MSMEs is the difficulty in accessing formal financing. According to data from the Financial Services Authority (OJK), only around 30% of MSMEs have access to formal financial services. Most MSMEs, especially micro and small-scale ones, still rely on their own capital or loans from family. These obstacles arise from various factors, ranging from limited collateral, low levels of financial literacy, to a lack of business documentation required by financial institutions.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that MSMEs in the informal sector are often not administratively registered, making it difficult for banks to verify their eligibility. This makes most MSMEs unbankable. Another equally serious problem is limited managerial capacity and human resources (HR). Many MSMEs lack basic business management knowledge, such as financial record keeping, business planning, or marketing strategies. This makes it difficult for them to develop their businesses systematically and measurably. The lack of training, education, and access to experienced business mentors exacerbates this situation.

Despite the high quality of many MSME products, market access is often a barrier. MSMEs struggle to penetrate modern markets or export markets due to a lack of distribution networks, product certification, or price competitiveness. Furthermore, competition from cheaper and more standardized imported products is a challenge. In the era of digital transformation, most MSMEs remain lagging behind. The lack of use of digital technologies such as e-commerce, digital marketing, and cashless payments leaves them lagging behind larger businesses or businesses in urban areas. The government notes that only around 20 million MSMEs have connected to digital platforms, out of a target of 30 million digital MSMEs by 2024. This means that a significant digital divide remains, particularly between MSMEs in urban and rural areas.

To overcome these challenges, an active role is needed from various parties, especially the banking sector. This is where the importance of Himbara banks (Association of State-Owned Banks) namely BRI, BNI, Mandiri, and BTN in encouraging the empowerment of MSMEs lies. Himbara banks not only play a role as financing providers, but also as strategic partners of the government in implementing various MSME programs. Himbara banks are the main distributors of People's Business Credit (KUR), a subsidized financing scheme specifically designed for MSMEs. In 2023, the total distribution of KUR nationally reached IDR 373 trillion, with BRI contributing 83% of the total Himbara MSME credit, or around IDR 1,328 trillion. Through KUR, MSMEs receive low interest rates and a simpler process compared to regular commercial loans. BRI also initiated the Ultra Micro Holding (UMi) program, which aims to reach the ultra-micro segment that has not been served by banks. Within one year, this program successfully added 6 million new borrowers and disbursed IDR 53 trillion to more than 8.6 million ultra-micro businesses, through a synergy between

BRI, Pegadaian, and Permodalan Nasional Madani (PNM). Bank Himbara is also active in providing business mentoring, entrepreneurship training, digitalization, and financial education. Programs like BRILianPreneur, for example, provide a platform for MSMEs to enter the international market through business matching and product showcases.

Although Himbara Banks play a significant role in the development of MSMEs, problems have been identified, such as dependence on government subsidies, leading many MSMEs to become overly reliant on the People's Business Credit (KUR) and not yet develop independence in accessing non-subsidized financing. Another issue relates to the distribution of MSME programs, which tend to be concentrated in Java and major cities, while MSMEs in the 3T (Frontier, Outermost, and Disadvantaged) regions remain underserved. Furthermore, not all bank mentoring initiatives have measurable quality or output. Some training is merely a formality, without in-depth monitoring and evaluation.

In its efforts to strengthen and empower Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia, the Himbara banks, comprising Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI), Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI), Bank Mandiri, and Bank Tabungan Negara (BTN), cannot operate independently. The successful implementation of MSME empowerment programs depends heavily on synergy and collaboration with various stakeholders with strategic functions and mandates in this sector. These stakeholders include government agencies, non-banking financial institutions, digital platforms, the private sector, training and mentoring institutions, and others.

This research differs significantly from previous studies, both in terms of focus, theoretical approach, and case study phenomena. Previous studies generally focused on specific aspects of collaboration, such as partnerships between companies and MSMEs, synergies between institutions at the regional level, or collaboration within different sectors, such as tourism or food security. These studies tended to be descriptive and did not delve deeply into how cross-sector collaboration operates within a broader context, such as a national program. Therefore, this research is crucial, aiming to analyze the strengthening of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) from the perspective of cross-sector collaboration.

2 Literature Review

Experts have seen public sector reforms shift from the administrative state to new governance (Osborne, 2006: 5). Traditional public administration has given way to new forms of governance such as new public management (Hood, 2012; Osborne and Gaebler, 1993; Rhodes, 1997: 14), the neo-administrative state (Jessop, 1990: 8), the hollowed-out state (Milward and Provan, 2000: 11), and new public governance (Osborne, 2006: 29). Whatever term is used to describe new practices in public administration, experts argue that increasing citizen participation in the second phase is key to successful decision-making and policy implementation (Ansell and Gash, 2008). Regarding the characteristics of new public governance, Osborne (2006: 32) explains that the "plural state" is an entity of "several interdependent actors contributing to public services" and the "pluralist state" is an entity of "several information processes of policy-making systems".

In this context, cross sector collaboration has become a theoretical and practical issue that arises in the realm of government affairs because it has been used up to the local or small level Choi (2014: 5) The concept of cross sector collaboration usually refers to "policy makers who are interdependent and work to develop and implement policies to solve complex obstacles, or situations of "multi-faceted problems" (Choi and Robertson, 2014: 495) Then added, in institutional settings, placing the position of collaboration in the middle between the government and citizens, so that it has different names, including new public governance (Osborne, 2006; 42), network governance (Provan and Kenis, 2008), collaborative planning (Booher and Innes, 2010: 14), cross-sector collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006 3). However, the terms put forward by these experts are different but all are concepts of collaboration in the perspective of governance.

Policy implementation is part of the policy process and can no longer be seen as the end of the policy formulation process, but as a complex process because it involves various government agencies across sectors and other sectors outside the government. This shows that the effectiveness of policy implementation is highly dependent on the involvement of stakeholders across sectors, because in such complex conditions the government can no longer work alone but requires joint effort and collaborative action with them to solve public problems and implement policies (Goggin et.al, 1990; Klijn, 2008).

This shows that policy implementation is an urgent and complex matter, because a policy implemented in different locations within the same time period has the potential to have different policy performance (Goggin et.al, 1990). Cross-sector collaboration in policy implementation is a policy implementation model that can integrate stakeholders to improve the performance of a policy.

3 Research Method

The researcher chose a qualitative approach to descriptively explain and analyze the phenomenon under study, achieving objectivity in the data and enabling understanding. This approach was chosen to understand the phenomenon of cross-sector collaboration in the MSME Empowerment Program through Bank Himbara financing in Indonesia.

Case studies are used as a research strategy with the aim of obtaining comprehensive explanations related to various aspects of organizations, programs, groups or community conditions related to cross-sector collaboration studies in the Bank Himbara MSME Empowerment policy in Indonesia. Case studies include three types of research, namely exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory Yin (2013), while this study uses descriptive and exploratory types. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews with research informants from Bank Himbara, the Ministry of MSMEs, MSME actors, and the private sector. Data were also obtained through program documentation, policies, and field observations. Research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Data analysis uses an interactive model including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al, 2014).

4 Results and Discussion

The research results reveal various findings. The first concerns the role of stakeholders in cross-sector collaboration, as shown in the following table:

Table 1. The Role of Stakeholders in Empowering MSMEs

Stakeholder	Role in Empowering MSMEs
Himbara Bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing access to financing such as KUR (People's Business Credit), working capital loans, and investments. - Providing digital financial services (cashless & QRIS). - Providing financial literacy education for MSMEs.
Ministry of Cooperatives and SMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing and implementing national policies related to MSME development. - Providing business incubation programs, management training, and legal assistance. - Driving digital transformation and going global through exports.
Local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fostering local MSMEs through training, exhibition facilitation, and product promotion. - Issuing micro and small business permits (IUMK). - Providing regional tax incentives and ease of business location.
University/Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting research on developing MSME business models. - Providing managerial assistance and appropriate technology.
NGO	Providing training and advocacy for MSMEs
MSMEs	Empowerment target

Source: Author's processing, 2025

Based on the table above, MSME empowerment in Indonesia involves more than just Bank Himbara (State-Owned Banks) in financing, but also various other stakeholders. This also demonstrates that MSME empowerment in Indonesia is not carried out by a single actor, but involves various other stakeholders. Considering the role of the Association of State-Owned Banks (Himbara), the following is a summary of Bank Himbara's role and contribution to MSME empowerment programs in Indonesia.

Table 2. Focus and Contribution of Himbara Banks in the MSME Empowerment Program

Himbara Bank	Empowerment Focus	Contribution
Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MSME Financing: The main focus is on distributing People's Business Credit (KUR) and micro credit. - Financial Inclusion: Providing financial services for MSMEs in remote areas. - Digitalization: Encouraging MSMEs to go digital through platforms such as BRILink and BRImo. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distribution of KUR: Rp1,015.54 trillion in the first semester of 2023. - Proportion of MSME Credit: 84.48% of BRI's total credit. - MSME Customers: More than 36 million customers through the Ultra Micro (UMi) holding.
Mandiri Bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MSME Financing: Providing credit to small and medium businesses. - Business Mentoring: Organizing the Mandiri Entrepreneur Expo to bring together MSMEs with the market. - Digitalization: Providing digital services for MSMEs through Mandiri Online and Mandiri Mobile. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distribution of MSME Credit: Rp119.7 trillion in the first semester of 2023. - Credit Growth: Grow 8.1% YoY.
Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MSME Financing: Focus on export and diaspora sectors. - Business Mentoring: Provides more than 100 business matching activities. - Digitalization: Providing digital services for MSMEs through BNI Mobile Banking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MSME Credit Portfolio: Rp117.9 trillion. - Distribution of KUR: Rp154 trillion to more than 1.4 million debtors.
Bank Tabungan Negara (BTN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MSME Financing: Focus on the housing sector and property-related MSMEs. - Business Mentoring: Providing training and market access for MSMEs in the property sector. - Digitalization: Providing digital services for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distribution of KUR: Rp1.19 trillion in the first semester of 2023. - KUR growth: Up 123.1% YoY.

	MSMEs through BTN Digital Banking.	
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Source: Author’s processing, 2025

Various findings indicate that the government is the primary and most central partner in the collaboration to empower MSMEs with Bank Himbara. The government's role is divided across several institutions, each with distinct functions. The Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises (Kemenkop UKM) is tasked with formulating strategic policies for MSME development, including regulation, coaching, and facilitation of various entrepreneurship programs. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance plays a role in managing funds and providing pro-people financing schemes, such as providing interest subsidies for People's Business Credit (KUR) and financing guarantees for unbankable MSMEs. Meanwhile, the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) coordinates synergies between SOEs, including Bank Himbara, in carrying out their socio-economic mandates, one of which is by establishing an ultra-micro holding company to reach business segments that have not yet been touched by formal financial services. Local governments also play an equally important role in implementation on the ground, particularly in facilitating licensing, collecting data on MSME actors, and organizing local training.

Beyond the government, non-banking financial institutions are also actively involved in the MSME empowerment ecosystem. Prime examples include Pegadaian and Permodalan Nasional Madani (PNM), which, together with BRI, formed the Ultra Micro Holding. This collaboration aims to target businesses in the lowest segment that lacks access to banking by providing small-scale financing, simple savings services, and basic financial education. Furthermore, credit guarantee institutions such as Jamkrindo and Askrindo play a crucial role in guaranteeing loans disbursed to MSMEs, thereby reducing credit risk for banks and opening greater opportunities for MSMEs to access financing.

Collaboration in empowering MSMEs is also strengthened by the presence of training institutions, business incubators, and universities. These institutions support MSMEs in areas such as human resource capacity building, business management, digital literacy, and product development. For example, Bank Mandiri has partnered with several state universities to initiate business incubators that foster MSME start-ups and provide intensive training in entrepreneurship and business innovation. In addition to academic institutions, several Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) and Vocational Training Institutions (LPK) are also involved in mentoring local entrepreneurs.

Amidst the development of the digital economy, digital and e-commerce platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee, Bukalapak, and Grab have also become involved stakeholders. They play a role in connecting MSMEs with the wider market through business digitization, electronic payment system integration, and digital marketing training. In recent years, Bank Himbara has collaborated with these platforms to encourage the digital onboarding process for MSMEs. For example, Bank BRI has developed the BRImo application, which functions not only as a banking application but also as a tool for MSMEs to manage business transactions digitally.

In addition, private companies and other state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are involved as part of the supply chain and as partners in corporate social responsibility

(CSR) programs. They act as offtakers of MSME products, provide market access, and provide ongoing development programs. Private sector involvement in supporting MSMEs is crucial to creating a mutually beneficial and long-term business ecosystem.

Throughout the process, collaboration between Himbara Banks, the government, and other stakeholders has not always been smooth sailing. One of the main issues that frequently arises is weak inter-agency coordination. Program fragmentation between ministries, institutions, and banks leads to overlapping, duplication of activities, and inefficiencies in implementation. This is exacerbated by a top-down approach to program design, where MSMEs are often not directly involved in the planning and evaluation process, resulting in programs that are less relevant to needs on the ground.

Furthermore, weak program monitoring and evaluation systems are also a serious issue. Many training programs or capital assistance programs are implemented without clear success indicators and without any effort to measure their long-term impact on MSME growth. Inequitable information distribution is also a problem, with MSMEs in remote areas or those not affiliated with formal associations often unaware of the existence of these programs.

Slow bureaucracy and complex administrative procedures for applying for financing such as the People's Business Credit (KUR) also hinder MSME participation, especially for those lacking legal business documents or adequate financial reports. Furthermore, the program's overly focused focus on financing without balancing it with strengthening non-financial aspects such as product innovation, business strategy, or business legality also creates inequality. As a result, many MSMEs receive capital but fail to develop their businesses sustainably.

On the other hand, in collaborations between Himbara Banks and other partners, there is often a lack of explicit and measurable shared visions and goals. Collaboration tends to be sectoral, with each actor (government, banks, and supporting institutions) implementing programs with their own targets. Furthermore, capacity gaps between collaborative partners lead to low synergy among stakeholders. Many local governments and partners in the field lack sufficient human resources, information systems, or budgets to optimally carry out their collaborative roles. This hampers collaborative capacity, the ability of parties to work together productively.

Not all collaborations are implemented within a clear institutional framework, lacking coordination forums, shared decision-making systems, and collective accountability mechanisms. Leadership in cross-sector collaboration should be facilitative and build bridges between actors. However, in practice, leadership is often dominated by powerful actors such as banks or specific ministries, while other actors remain merely implementers or passive beneficiaries. This imbalance can create dominance and hinder collaborative leadership, which should be participatory and empowering.

In many cases, collaboration between Himbara Banks and other stakeholders remains focused on achieving quantitative targets (such as the number of People's Business Credit (KUR) disbursed), rather than on building long-term, mutually reinforcing relationships. Program impact evaluation and cross-actor learning are not yet established collaborative practices. As a result, the successes and failures of collaborations are not systematically documented, and lessons learned from one program are difficult to replicate or improve by other partners.

The findings of this study indicate that MSME empowerment through cross-sector collaboration involves a wide variety of actors, ranging from Bank Himbara (State-Owned Enterprises), ministries, local governments, non-bank financial institutions, guarantee institutions, universities, NGOs, to digital platforms and private companies. This picture aligns with the concept of collaborative governance as defined by Ansell and Gash (2008) as a joint decision-making process involving public and non-public actors in a collective forum to achieve common goals. In this context, MSME empowerment is not carried out by a single actor, but rather by a multi-actor network with complementary roles. However, as Huxham and Vangen (2005) caution, such collaboration does not automatically produce "collaborative advantage" if not managed properly; instead, it can lead to collaborative inertia when output is slow or insignificant. Field findings such as program fragmentation, overlapping activities, and a heavy focus on quantitative targets (e.g., the number of KUR disbursements) are indicative of symptoms of this inertia.

The Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance developed by Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) helps explain why these challenges arise. According to them, the effectiveness of collaboration is heavily influenced by three core elements: principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. In this case, weak coordination between actors, the lack of a joint decision-making forum, and the capacity gap between local governments and partners at the field level indicate that shared motivation and capacity for joint action have not yet developed optimally. This capacity gap is also closely related to the "starting conditions" described by Ansell and Gash (2008) as the initial conditions that shape the level of trust, social capital, and distribution of power in collaboration. The dominance of powerful actors such as banks or ministries, amidst the weak direct involvement of MSMEs in program planning, reflects an institutional design that is not yet inclusive.

From a network governance perspective, Provan and Kenis (2008) distinguish three main modes: participant-governed, lead organization, and network administrative organization (NAO). The pattern evident in this study's findings approximates a lead organization, in which Bank Himbara or a specific ministry plays a dominant role. This model can provide execution efficiency, but often sacrifices inclusivity and shared ownership. The literature suggests that for networks involving multiple actors, goals that are not fully aligned, and demands high network competency, the formation of an NAO or backbone organization is more effective (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Kania & Kramer, 2011). This backbone organization is tasked with maintaining a shared agenda, managing a joint monitoring system, facilitating ongoing communication, and ensuring that actors' activities mutually reinforce the principle known as Collective Impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

The fact that the evaluation focus is still dominated by input metrics such as the amount of funds disbursed and the number of training participants demonstrates the weakness of the shared measurement system suggested in the Collective Impact approach. However, outcome indicators such as MSME business sustainability, increased turnover, or digital market penetration are more relevant for assessing long-term effectiveness. Furthermore, the absence of a clear coordination forum and collective accountability mechanisms weakens the principled engagement that is a prerequisite for quality collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012). Leadership that tends to be dominated by powerful actors also indicates a lack of inclusive, facilitative

leadership, which Ansell and Gash (2008) argue is crucial for bridging differences in interests and capacities between partners.

Thus, these findings demonstrate that although cross-sector collaboration in MSME empowerment has brought together numerous actors and potential synergies, its success remains hampered by a non-inclusive institutional design, unequal collaborative capacity, and a weak results-based monitoring and evaluation system. To address this, the literature recommends shifting the governance model toward a NAO, or backbone organization, capable of facilitating shared agendas, managing cross-actor performance measurement, and strengthening capacity and trust among stakeholders. This approach is expected to not only reduce collaborative inertia but also maximize collaborative advantage in sustainable MSME empowerment.

5 Conclusion

Based on research findings, it can be concluded that empowering MSMEs in Indonesia through cross-sector collaboration is a complex process involving various actors, ranging from Bank Himbara (State-Owned Enterprises), ministries, local governments, non-bank financial institutions, universities, NGOs, digital platforms, and the private sector. This diversity of actors demonstrates the potential for collaborative advantage in expanding access to financing, strengthening business capacity, and expanding the MSME market. However, field practice still faces challenges such as program fragmentation, weak coordination, the dominance of powerful actors, capacity gaps at the local level, and an unintegrated monitoring and evaluation system. These conditions have the potential to create collaborative inertia, thus preventing collaboration from fully producing optimal impacts for MSME sustainability.

To strengthen MSME empowerment programs, a shift in governance model toward a network administrative organization or backbone organization is needed, ensuring a shared agenda, cross-actor performance measurement, ongoing communication, and strengthening the capacity of partners at all levels. With this approach, cross-sector collaboration is not only oriented toward achieving quantitative targets such as KUR distribution, but also directed at sustainably improving MSME performance and competitiveness.

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