

The Firewood-Fried Shrimp Crackers MSME: A Model for Sustainable Local Economic Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of the Firewood-Fried Shrimp Cracker Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) in Mendahara Ilir Village, East Tanjung Jabung Regency, in enhancing the income of coastal communities. Employing a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and were subsequently analyzed inductively using data reduction, data display, and conclusion-drawing techniques. The findings indicate that this MSME makes a significant contribution to the local economy by creating employment opportunities for low-educated workers, increasing household income, and improving quality of life in areas such as education, health, and housing. The enterprise's main strengths lie in production skills inherited across generations and the use of traditional methods that preserve its distinctive flavor. Nonetheless, it faces challenges including limited capital, unstructured management, a shortage of skilled labor, and dependence on raw material supplies affected by weather and environmental conditions. Government support in the form of training, financial assistance, and marketing facilitation has helped expand market reach. The study concludes that, with strengthened managerial capacity, improved access to financing, and the development of adaptive marketing strategies, the Firewood-Fried Shrimp Cracker MSME has the potential to serve as a sustainable model of local wisdom-based economic development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in driving the national economy, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia (Abidin, 2024; Ariyani et al., 2024). The presence of MSMEs serves as one of the main pillars in creating employment opportunities, ensuring equitable income distribution, and alleviating poverty. In the historical context of Indonesia's economy, MSMEs have proven to be a resilient sector in the face of crises, including the 1997 monetary crisis, owing to their adaptive nature and reliance on local resources. The success of MSMEs lies not only in their ability to survive but also in their significant contribution to inclusive and equitable economic development (Fajri, Abidin, & Lestari, 2024; Ikhlas, Yasmin, Muharramah, & Kuswanto, 2025).

The vital role of MSMEs is explicitly regulated in Law No. 20 of 2008, which classifies micro, small, and medium enterprises based on assets and turnover, while also providing a framework of support for entrepreneurs (Fajri et al., 2024; Ismail & Musthofa, 2024). This policy is expected to enhance the competitiveness of MSMEs while ensuring that the economic benefits are equitably distributed across all segments of society. Nevertheless, disparities in access to facilities and capacity-building programs remain a challenge. MSME actors in various regions often face obstacles in securing adequate capital, technology, and markets, limiting the optimal realization of their potential contributions.

Indonesia holds considerable potential for the development of MSMEs based on local resources, one of which is derived from the fisheries sector. Shrimp is one of the country's leading commodities, offering both high nutritional value and strong market demand domestically and internationally. Its processing into various derivative products, such as shrimp crackers, opens up promising business opportunities, especially in coastal areas (Fajri et al., 2024; Ismail & Musthofa, 2024). Shrimp crackers have long been part of Indonesia's culinary heritage and enjoy a broad consumer base across all social classes, making them one of the most economically valuable processed fishery products.

The uniqueness of shrimp crackers lies in their variations in shape, size, taste, and processing techniques, which are often influenced by local wisdom. One distinct variety is the Kayu Api shrimp cracker, which employs a traditional wood-fired frying method to produce an authentic aroma and flavor. This method not only preserves the region's culinary heritage but also appeals to consumers seeking authenticity. The commercialization potential of Kayu Api shrimp crackers continues to grow in line with increasing consumer interest in high-quality local products.

The Kayu Api shrimp cracker MSME holds tangible socio-economic significance, particularly in coastal areas such as Mendahara Ilir Village, East Tanjung Jabung Regency. The production of shrimp crackers serves as a primary source of livelihood for the local community, the majority of whom depend on marine resources for their daily sustenance. Beyond providing direct employment, this MSME stimulates secondary economic activities, ranging from raw material supply to distribution and marketing, thereby generating a multiplier effect on the local economy (Kurniawan, Marwendi, Yusuf, Aiman, & Tauvani, 2024; Kuswanto, Abidin, Pestano, & Ikhlas, 2024; Kuswanto, Fajanela, & Abidin, 2024; Syariah, 2024).

One prominent business actor in this sector is the Kayu Api Shrimp Cracker MSME “Cempaka 2.” Its products enjoy a wide market reach, not only within the surrounding areas but also in other cities such as Jambi. The competitive edge of this product lies in its consistent flavor quality and adaptive marketing strategies, combining traditional word-of-mouth promotion with the use of social media. Distribution networks that include partnerships with modern retail outlets, such as Mandala Mart, have further expanded market access and strengthened business sustainability (Munip, 2024).

Despite these opportunities, Cempaka 2 faces considerable challenges, particularly concerning the availability of shrimp, which is dependent on environmental and weather conditions. External factors such as heavy rainfall and strong winds disrupt local fishing activities, thus affecting supply availability, production capacity, and marketing strategies. Such dependence on fluctuating natural resources necessitates effective adaptation strategies to ensure business continuity (Dewi & Febrianto, 2023).

The urgency of this study lies in the need to comprehensively understand the role of the Kayu Api Shrimp Cracker MSME in improving the income of coastal communities. This research is relevant not only for illustrating the microeconomic contributions of such enterprises but also for providing a foundation for formulating strategies to develop MSMEs based on local resources. The findings are expected to offer practical recommendations for business owners, local governments, and private stakeholders involved in supporting the growth of MSMEs in the fishery processing sector. Based on this background, the research questions of this study are as follows: (1) What is the role of the Kayu Api Shrimp Cracker MSME in increasing community income in Mendahara Ilir Village? (2) What factors support and hinder the development of the Kayu Api Shrimp Cracker MSME in the area?

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, aiming to systematically, factually, and accurately portray the role of the Firewood-Fried Shrimp Crackers MSME in increasing community income in Mendahara Ilir Village, Mendahara Subdistrict, East Tanjung Jabung Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen for its capacity to reveal meaning and provide in-depth understanding from the perspectives of MSME actors and the local community. According to Creswell, qualitative research emphasizes the exploration of meanings that emerge from social phenomena and enables researchers to comprehend natural contexts that cannot be reduced to mere numerical representations. In this study, the researcher positions themselves as the primary research instrument, conducting direct field observations and engaging in in-depth interactions with informants to capture the social realities and business dynamics comprehensively.

The research subjects consist of the Firewood-Fried Shrimp Crackers MSME actors in Mendahara Ilir and their customers, including both regular and occasional consumers. Informants were selected purposively, based on their direct involvement in and knowledge of the phenomenon under study. Data sources were divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from business owners, vendors, and consumers through field observations and in-depth interviews. Secondary data were collected from official documents, reports, books, journal articles, and other literature relevant to the research topic. This combination of sources allowed the researcher to integrate multiple perspectives and enrich the research findings.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques. First, direct observation at shrimp cracker production and distribution sites, to record business processes, social interactions, and market dynamics. Second, in-depth interviews with MSME actors and consumers, conducted either face-to-face or through communication media, using open-ended questions to allow informants to freely express their views. Third, documentation, which included collecting photographs, sales records,

production notes, and promotional materials used by the business owners. The data collected were then analyzed inductively through three stages: data reduction to filter relevant information, data display in the form of descriptive narratives, and conclusion drawing based on patterns, themes, and relationships identified during the research process.

Data validity was maintained through persistent observation, involving repeated and in-depth observation of business activities and related social interactions. Triangulation techniques were applied to verify the accuracy of the data by comparing information from multiple sources and data collection methods. Source triangulation was conducted by cross-checking information from business owners, consumers, and supporting documents, while methodological triangulation was achieved by combining the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. This validation process ensured that the research findings achieved a high degree of credibility and accurately represented the actual conditions in the field.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The presentation of data in this study begins with an overview of the historical background and geographical conditions of Mendahara Ilir Subdistrict, the research site. Historically, the name "Mendahara Ilir" is closely associated with the Tembikar River, which flows from east to west and divides the area into the upstream (hulu) and downstream (hilir) sections. The first settlement emerged around the 1950s, when migrants from Malacca and Chinese families from various regions of Indonesia settled in the area—initially working as fishermen before shifting toward agricultural activities. Changes in the area's administrative status reflect the dynamics of local governance in Indonesia, beginning as a *kampung* (village) led by a *datuk penghulu* (traditional village head), transforming into a *desa* (village) in 1980 following the enactment of Law No. 5 of 1979 on Village Government, and finally being designated as a *kelurahan* (urban administrative village) in 2008. Mendahara Ilir covers an area of 10,540 hectares, situated on the eastern coast of Jambi Province at the mouth of the Batanghari River, and is bordered by Sinar Kalimantan Village to the west, Lagan Ilir Village to the east, the Berhala Strait to the north, and Sungai Tawar Village to the south. This strategic location positions Mendahara Ilir not only as a center for fishing activities but also as a coastal area with significant ecological value, serving as a mangrove forest conservation zone and a nature reserve (Djaja et al., 2023; Hidayat, Hardi, Sucipto, & Sunarti, 2023; Sya'bana, Nisak, Suryaningsih, Rukiyanto, & Hastuti, 2024).

Beyond its historical and geographical dimensions, the demographic and socio-cultural characteristics of the area also constitute an essential focus of the data presentation. Based on official records from the *kelurahan*, the population totals 7,566 inhabitants, comprising 3,609 males and 3,957 females, within 1,844 households. The ethnic composition—comprising Bugis, Malay, Javanese, Banjar, Minangkabau (Padang), and Batak communities—does not hinder social harmony; rather, it enriches the local cultural heritage, which is grounded in principles of kinship and mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*). Social activities such as *yasinan* (Qur'anic recitation gatherings), neighborhood savings groups (*arisan*), and active participation in community organizations, including the Family Welfare Empowerment (PKK) group, are hallmarks of community interaction. The *kelurahan*'s vision is to establish exemplary public services, supported by missions focusing on human resource empowerment, improved public service delivery, administrative efficiency, strengthening the capacity of local apparatus, and enhancing productivity in agriculture, fisheries, traditional markets, and small-scale enterprises. The organizational structure—comprising the *lurah* (head of *kelurahan*), implementing staff, fire brigade officers, computer operators, and office staff—demonstrates a clear division of responsibilities that supports effective local governance. This comprehensive portrait

provides a contextual foundation for examining the role of the Kayu Api Shrimp Cracker MSME, as the socio-cultural and economic environment plays a significant role in shaping patterns of production, distribution, and consumption of the product (Munip et al., 2024; Saryanti, Daud, Kadarsih, Munamah, & Dewi, 2024).

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Kerupuk Udang Kayu Api in Mendahara Ilir originated as a family business established in 1990 by Mrs. Siti Aminah and her four younger siblings, initially operating without any hired employees. As the product gained popularity, the business expanded by creating several brands such as Cempaka 1, Cempaka 2, Aulia, and Surya, while also increasing its workforce. The name “Kerupuk Udang Kayu Api” carries a philosophical meaning derived from the local Mendahara Ilir language, referring to the cracker’s shape resembling pieces of firewood and its production process that generates flames. Production is conducted manually using basic kitchen equipment, with fresh shrimp sourced directly from local fishermen as the main ingredient. Simple promotional strategies are employed, including word-of-mouth marketing, social media platforms, consignment sales in local shops, and the inclusion of contact information and halal certification on the packaging.

As part of the home-based industry sector, this MSME plays a significant role in transforming raw materials into higher-value products with limited capital and a workforce consisting of family members and local residents. The enterprise absorbs local labor, particularly individuals without specialized skills, while simultaneously increasing community income through product distribution to various regions. The MSME’s primary strength lies in its production skills passed down through generations, although it still faces challenges such as competition from other products and limited market access. Government support, including training programs, provision of business capital, and participation in trade exhibitions, has contributed to broader product promotion.

A major internal constraint is limited capital, especially during the initial establishment phase. Many entrepreneurs rely on personal savings or bank loans secured with business legality documents, as meeting formal banking requirements is often challenging. Interviews with owners and employees revealed diverse experiences—some had faced severe capital shortages, starting with as little as IDR 100,000, while others reported never experiencing financial difficulties due to mutual support among team members. Substantial capital remains essential for procuring raw materials, purchasing equipment, and facilitating business expansion (Karnadjaja, 2023; Mustofa, 2023; Nuri, Junaidi, & Achmad, 2024).

Another constraint is the limited human resources, as most workers have only completed primary or junior secondary education, and some have not attended school at all. Nevertheless, the dedication and perseverance of the business owners and employees enable production to continue. The need for additional labor has become more apparent as orders increase, yet community interest in joining remains low. Business management systems also remain informal, with financial management, record-keeping, and production planning handled directly by the owners or their family members without standardized procedures.

External challenges include market-related issues and the role of government. Unpredictable weather often affects daily production volumes, at times halting production entirely. Product marketing to retailers is conducted through a consignment system or direct offers by employees. From the government side (Hidayat, Mubyarto, Ritonga, & Sunarti, 2023), MSME operators benefit from regular training sessions, participation in regional and national trade fairs, and assistance in obtaining business legality. Although some production equipment has been modernized, traditional tools are still maintained to preserve product quality and retain job opportunities for local workers.

The MSME’s role in increasing household income is evident from the significant changes in employees’ earnings. Before joining the enterprise, many workers earned as little as IDR 600,000–

800,000 per month, often from agricultural labor or domestic work. After joining, their incomes increased to IDR 1,350,000–1,650,000 per month, with additional overtime pay and meal provisions. This income improvement enables workers to meet basic household needs, fund their children's education, and develop a sense of pride in having their own earnings.

The rise in income has had a positive impact on household expenditure, education, health, and housing conditions. Most employees can now afford three daily meals, cover their children's schooling costs, and even send them to higher education institutions. In terms of healthcare, they can seek treatment at clinics or hospitals without delay, supported by a stable income. Regarding housing, several employees have been able to renovate their homes from bamboo structures into permanent concrete houses, repair damages, and improve overall living comfort.

These findings indicate that the Kerupuk Udang Kayu Api MSME functions not only as a source of livelihood but also as a driver of improved quality of life for the Mendahara Ilir community. Despite challenges related to capital, labor availability, and market fluctuations, the enterprise has made a positive contribution to the local economy by generating employment, enhancing skills, and expanding access to healthcare and education. With continued government support and the development of more structured management systems, this MSME has the potential to serve as a sustainable model for local wisdom-based economic development.

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Kerupuk Udang Kayu Api in Mendahara Ilir originated as a family-owned business established in 1990 by Mrs. Siti Aminah and her four younger siblings, initially operating without external employees. As the product's popularity increased, the enterprise expanded by introducing several brands—Cempaka 1, Cempaka 2, Aulia, and Surya—and by increasing its workforce. The brand name “Kerupuk Udang Kayu Api” carries a philosophical meaning derived from the local Mendahara Ilir language, referring both to the cracker's shape, which resembles pieces of firewood, and to the burning process that produces flames. Production continues to be conducted manually using simple kitchen tools, with fresh shrimp sourced directly from local fishermen as the primary raw material. Promotional activities are relatively modest, relying on word-of-mouth marketing, social media platforms, product placement in local stores on a consignment basis, and the inclusion of contact details and halal certification on packaging.

As part of the home-based industrial sector, this MSME plays a significant role in transforming raw materials into higher-value products while operating with limited capital and relying primarily on family members and local community members as its workforce (Hidayat, Mubyarto, et al., 2023; Kadarsih, Munip, Aminah, & Rahmy, 2023). The enterprise creates employment opportunities for local residents—particularly those without specialized skills—while increasing household incomes through the distribution of products to various regions. The MSME's principal strength lies in production skills inherited through generations, although it continues to face challenges such as market competition and restricted access to wider markets. Government support in the form of training programs, access to capital, and participation in trade exhibitions has further facilitated product promotion.

One of the most prominent internal challenges is limited capital, particularly during the early years of operation. Many entrepreneurs in this sector are compelled to rely on personal savings or obtain bank loans secured with formal business documents, as fulfilling bank credit requirements is often difficult. Interviews with the owner and employees reveal varied experiences: some reported severe capital shortages, starting the business with as little as IDR 100,000, while others indicated that mutual support within the team prevented any significant shortages. Nevertheless, substantial capital remains essential for the procurement of raw materials, acquisition of equipment, and overall business development (Musthofa, 2024; Musthofa & Wulandari, 2024; Saputra & Susanti, 2024).

Another internal limitation is the scarcity of skilled human resources, as most employees have only completed primary or junior secondary education, and some have not attended school at all.

Despite this, the determination and diligence of the owner and workers ensure that production continues uninterrupted. The growing volume of orders has heightened the need for additional labor, yet community interest in joining the enterprise remains low. Furthermore, business management systems remain informal, with financial management, record-keeping, and production coordination handled directly by the owner or family members without standardized operational procedures.

External challenges include market-related constraints and the role of government. Unpredictable weather patterns often affect daily production volumes and, at times, result in complete production stoppages. Product marketing to retail outlets is conducted through a consignment system or by direct offers from employees. On the government side, the MSME benefits from routine training sessions, participation in regional and national exhibitions, and assistance in securing legal business status. While certain production equipment has been modernized, some traditional tools are deliberately retained to preserve the product's distinctive taste and to maintain employment opportunities for local workers.

The MSME's contribution to increasing household income is evident from the substantial improvement in employees' earnings. Prior to their employment with the enterprise, many workers earned as little as IDR 600,000–800,000 per month, often from agricultural labor or domestic work. After joining the MSME, their income increased to between IDR 1,350,000 and 1,650,000 per month, with additional overtime pay and meal provisions. This financial improvement enables employees to meet basic family needs, fund their children's education, and develop a sense of pride from financial independence.

The rise in income has also led to improvements in household expenditure patterns, educational attainment, healthcare access, and housing conditions. Most employees can now afford three meals a day, finance their children's education, and, in some cases, send their children to higher education institutions. In terms of healthcare, they are now able to seek medical treatment at clinics or hospitals without delay, supported by a stable income. In relation to housing, several employees have renovated their homes from bamboo structures into permanent concrete houses, repaired existing damage, and improved their overall living environment.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Kerupuk Udang Kayu Api MSME functions not only as a source of livelihood but also as a catalyst for improving the quality of life in the Mendahara Ilir community. Despite challenges related to capital limitations, labor shortages, and market fluctuations, the enterprise has made a positive contribution to the local economy by creating employment opportunities, enhancing workforce skills, and expanding access to healthcare and education. With sustained government support and the implementation of more structured management systems, this MSME holds significant potential as a sustainable model for community-based economic development rooted in local wisdom.

4. CONCLUSION

The Kerupuk Udang Kayu Api MSME in Mendahara Ilir has demonstrated a significant role in enhancing local economic resilience through the transformation of raw materials into value-added products, the provision of employment opportunities for low-skilled workers, and the improvement of household welfare indicators such as income, education, healthcare access, and housing quality. Despite persistent challenges—including limited capital, an unstructured management system, labor shortages, and vulnerability to market and environmental fluctuations—the enterprise's generational production expertise and support from government initiatives have enabled it to sustain operations and expand market reach. These findings suggest that with strengthened managerial capacity, improved access to financing, and strategic market development, this MSME has strong potential to

serve as a sustainable, community-based economic development model rooted in local cultural identity.

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