

Analysis of Productivity and Comparative-Competitive Advantage of MSMEs in Gorontalo City

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Abstract

MSMEs play a strategic role in the local economy, but in Gorontalo City, their productivity and sectoral advantages show a complex dynamic and have not optimally supported the transformation towards a service-based city. This study aims to analyze the productivity and comparative and competitive advantages of MSMEs in Gorontalo City, as well as to map potential sectors for future development. The research uses a mixed-method approach with an explanatory sequential design, where quantitative analysis of productivity data from 2014–2024 and projections for 2025–2030 is conducted using dynamic system modeling with Vensim, as well as regression, exponential smoothing, and ARIMA methods. Sectoral advantage analysis is carried out using the LQShare and LQShift approaches, which are dynamic in nature. The results show that MSME productivity experienced fluctuations and a decline due to the pandemic, but began to recover in 2024 and is projected to increase in an optimistic scenario along with digitalization policies and strengthening the service sector. The LQ analysis identifies the garment and handicraft sectors as progressive, while the metal-electronics sector remains sluggish, and the building materials and food sectors fall under the developing category. The study recommends strengthening local fiscal policies, improving MSME digital literacy, developing an e-commerce ecosystem, and business incubation for the developing and sluggish sectors. These efforts are expected to strengthen MSME productivity sustainably and support the vision of Gorontalo City as a service economy hub in 2025–2029.

Key words: MSME Productivity; Comparative Advantage; Competitive Advantage; Gorontalo City; Economic Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in Indonesia's economy, including in Gorontalo City. Not only as the main contributors to employment, MSMEs also serve as the driving force behind local economic growth. However, despite their significant contribution, many MSMEs still face challenges in terms of productivity and competitiveness. According to research conducted by Tambunan, the main issues faced by MSMEs in Indonesia include low productivity and limited access to broader markets (Tambunan, 2011).

One important aspect that influences the competitiveness of MSMEs is human resource (HR) competence. Sari et al. revealed that digital competence and entrepreneurial orientation have a significant impact on MSMEs' competitive advantage, where entrepreneurs with less digital competence tend to have lower competitiveness (Sari et al., 2020). With the increasing digital era, mastering technology becomes a key factor for MSMEs to survive and grow, especially in the face of increasingly fierce competition.

The importance of enhancing MSMEs' competitive advantage is also supported by research on factors influencing technology adoption. Wong and Kee noted that technology is an important tool to support companies' competitiveness in facing market dynamics, although their research focused more on the manufacturing sector in Malaysia (Wong & Kee, 2022). Therefore, MSMEs in Gorontalo City need to pay attention to the right technology adoption strategies to improve productivity and maintain their position in the market.

The development of business networks and clusters is an effective strategy to improve MSME productivity. Beraha et al. showed that business clusters can be a solution for MSMEs to overcome size limitations and enhance competitiveness and innovation, although their findings focused more on the automotive industry in Serbia (Beraha et al., 2023). In Gorontalo, the formation of integrated MSME clusters can encourage joint growth and provide better access to information and resources necessary for competition. Effective supply chain management practices can improve MSMEs' performance and operational efficiency, which in turn enhances their competitiveness (Kerekes & Felföldi, 2020). This indicates that MSMEs need to invest in integrated supply chain management to optimize their resources.

This research will also examine how improving digital marketing can help expand MSMEs' market share. Wasito and Fuji highlight the importance of digital marketing in enhancing MSMEs' competitiveness, where many entrepreneurs still face difficulties in effectively utilizing digital marketing, especially in the context of women farmers' groups (Wasito & Fuji, 2023). By conducting training and socialization on digital marketing, MSMEs in Gorontalo can reach a wider consumer base and increase their sales.

Adopting innovation practices in processes is a vital element for improving MSMEs' financial performance. Soesetio et al. showed that process innovation is closely related to competitiveness and financial performance, where companies that innovate tend to have better outcomes (Soesetio et al., 2024). Therefore, this research will also discuss innovations applied by MSMEs in Gorontalo and how they can contribute to productivity and profitability.

In addition, it is important to address the challenges related to increasing HR capacity within MSMEs. Rizki et al. emphasized the need to improve MSME actors' knowledge and skills to compete in an increasingly competitive market (Rizki et al., 2024). Training focused on HR development can be a strategic step in improving MSME productivity in Gorontalo, so they can adapt to changing market demands.

Technological and informational advancements also play a major role in increasing MSMEs' productivity. According to Nahimana, effective knowledge management strategies can improve MSMEs' innovation performance (Nahimana, 2024). By utilizing information systems and technology, MSMEs in Gorontalo will be better able to innovate and create products that meet market needs. Therefore, this research aims to explore how information and technology can be utilized to support MSME productivity and competitiveness.

This study focuses on the analysis of productivity, comparative advantage, and competitive advantage of MSMEs, particularly in Gorontalo City, as an effort to identify challenges and opportunities. With a comprehensive approach, it is hoped that this study can make a tangible contribution to MSME development, improve competitiveness, and ultimately strengthen the economy of Gorontalo City.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

Literature Analysis

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are an important segment in the economy that significantly contributes to economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation. MSMEs in Indonesia are recognized as the backbone of the national economy, contributing around 60% to GDP and absorbing more than 90% of the workforce (Wati et al., 2024). Research shows that the presence of MSMEs helps improve the welfare of society through the provision of jobs and income enhancement (Aliyah, 2022). As independent businesses, MSMEs are expected to survive in various dynamic market situations and economic crises. Therefore, the development of MSMEs has become a priority in government policies, with support for training, access to financing, and ease of doing business, all of which are expected to increase their competitiveness (Sabrina, 2021), (Dhamayantie & Fauzan, 2017).

MSME productivity is a key indicator in measuring the efficiency of resource use and the output produced by these business units. Research indicates that MSME productivity is influenced by factors such as capital, working hours, and entrepreneurial experience (Alkumairoh & Warsitasari, 2022). In addition, the implementation of information technology and the improvement of employee skills also play a significant role in boosting productivity (Kii & Sehendri, 2023). By improving productivity, MSMEs can compete better in both local and global markets. This is important because a high level of productivity not only impacts business income growth but also contributes to broader economic growth (Ariprabowo, 2023). Furthermore, in the post-pandemic context, MSMEs are required to adapt and innovate in order to remain productive and relevant in the digital era (Kii & Sehendri, 2023).

The advantages of MSMEs, both comparative and competitive, determine the sustainability and growth of the business. The comparative advantage of MSMEs often lies in their flexibility and ability to adapt to local market needs, giving them the ability to compete against larger companies (Sari et al., 2020). Meanwhile, competitive advantage can be achieved through product innovation, superior customer service, and cost efficiency (Kara, 2013). Additionally, mastery of digital competencies and entrepreneurial orientation is an important factor in building a competitive advantage in this modern era (Dhamayantie & Fauzan, 2017). Support from the government and private institutions in the form of training and access to financing also plays a role in strengthening MSME advantages (Sabrina, 2021). Thus, encouraging MSMEs to develop these advantages not only creates sustainable business opportunities but also influences the economic growth of a region.

Methodology

The location of this research is Gorontalo City, using secondary data from the Gorontalo City Bappeda, the Gorontalo City BPS website, and the Gorontalo Provincial BPS website. The research will be conducted in 2025. This research employs a mixed-method approach. The mixed-method approach combines quantitative and qualitative approaches with a specific design to answer the research objectives. The mixed-method approach in this study is associated with an explanatory design, where the main quantitative results (secondary data) are then supported by qualitative results (interviews with stakeholders to reinforce the discussion). The data analysis performed, besides dynamic systems using Vensim, also includes forecasting analysis combining regression methods, exponential smoothing, and ARIMA. Then, the analysis of comparative and competitive advantages is conducted using LQShare and LQShift analyses, which are developed from the LQ analysis

model, where this analysis is dynamic because it considers the sectoral development in two time points.

RESEARCH AND RESULTS

MSMEs play a strategic role in the structure of the local economy, including in Gorontalo City, which is undergoing dynamic economic growth and transformation of productive sectors. In this context, it is important to understand how the productivity level of MSMEs contributes to regional development, as well as how comparative and competitive advantages can be maximized to create sustainable competitiveness. Gorontalo City has unique economic characteristics, with strengths in certain sectors that have the potential to be further developed. Therefore, this research begins with the urgent need to identify leading sectors that not only can survive in regional and national competition but also serve as the main drivers of regional economic growth. The following discussion will outline in detail how MSME productivity is identified, as well as how sectors with comparative and competitive advantages are mapped to support more targeted and effective regional economic development policies.

MSME productivity is the ratio of the total production value generated by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to the number of business units. This indicator is used to measure the efficiency and contribution of MSMEs to the economy. The existing data on MSME productivity (production value/number of MSMEs) for the years 2014-2024 and the forecast for Gorontalo City for 2025-2030 are as follows:

Table 1: MSME Productivity (Production Value/Number of MSMEs) Gorontalo City (Existing and Forecasting)

Year	Existing	Forecasting		
		Moderate	Pesimistic	Optimistic
2014	50,610,148			
2015	52,339,740			
2016	50,047,788			
2017	54,110,610			
2018	49,977,739			
2019	49,242,694			
2020	48,854,065			
2021	48,424,469			

Year	Existing	Forecasting		
		Moderate	Pesimistic	Optimistic
2022	45,317,660			
2023	44,663,476			
2024	52,208,501			
2025		47,040,594	44,827,048	50,830,950
2026		46,858,586	46,182,224	49,779,453
2027		47,205,398	45,710,062	49,549,131
2028		47,774,372	46,146,745	49,886,822
2029		48,236,825	45,924,560	50,022,864
2030		47,907,891	45,719,614	51,067,939

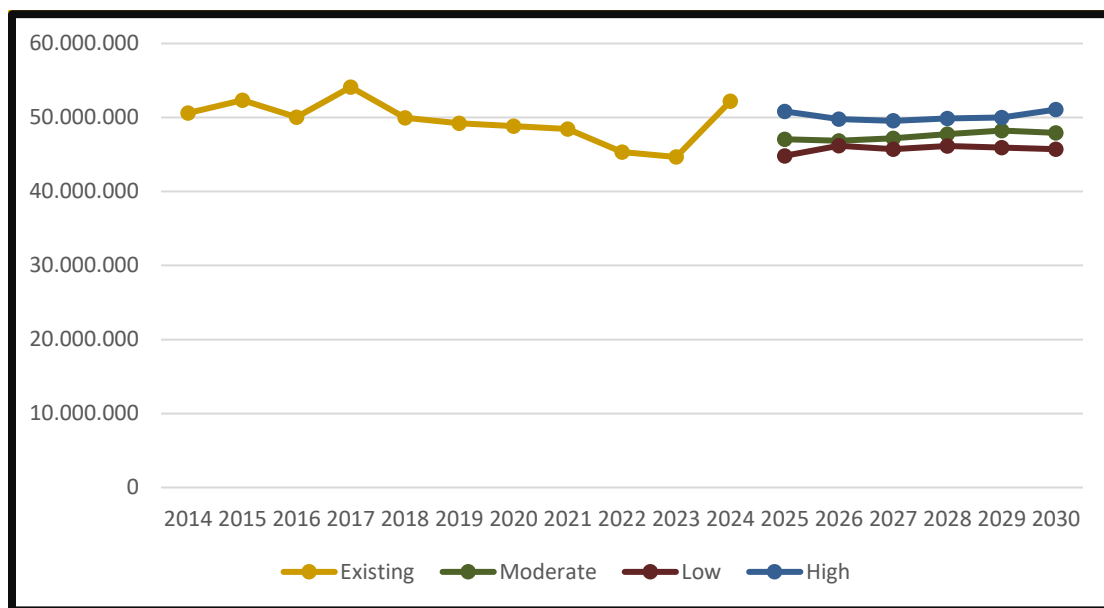


Figure 1: MSME Productivity (Production Value/Number of MSMEs) Gorontalo City (Existing and Forecasting)

MSME productivity in Gorontalo City shows significant fluctuations from 2014 to 2024. In the early years, MSME productivity increased from IDR 50.6 billion in 2014 to IDR 54.1 billion in 2017. This increase was influenced by relatively stable economic growth, higher capital spending to support economic infrastructure, and fiscal decentralization that allowed local governments to directly allocate funds for MSME development. However, from

2018 to 2023, MSME productivity declined significantly, reaching a low of IDR 44.6 billion in 2023. This decline can be attributed to the slowdown in economic growth, limited access to capital for MSME actors, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which slowed business activities. Nevertheless, in 2024, productivity surged to IDR 52.2 billion, most likely driven by post-pandemic economic recovery policies and increased spending based on economic functions and tourism.

The variables affecting MSME productivity in Gorontalo City are closely interconnected. Economic growth is the primary factor driving productivity improvements because when the economy grows, purchasing power increases, and demand for MSME products rises. In addition, capital spending or assets also plays a significant role in driving productivity. Government investment in economic infrastructure such as traditional markets, logistics centers, and digital technology helps MSMEs improve production efficiency and expand market access. Fiscal decentralization provides flexibility for the Gorontalo City government to formulate policies that directly support MSMEs. Spending based on economic functions and tourism is also essential, especially since Gorontalo City has growing tourism potential that opens opportunities for local MSMEs to grow in the culinary, handicraft, and service sectors.

In the moderate scenario (moderate) for the period 2025-2030, MSME productivity is projected to grow steadily from IDR 47.0 billion in 2025 to IDR 47.9 billion in 2030. This growth reflects the assumption that Gorontalo City's economic conditions will continue to improve, supported by consistent policies that strengthen MSMEs. The main drivers of this scenario are moderate economic growth, increased capital spending for business digitalization, and fiscal decentralization policies that allow direct intervention in MSME development. Furthermore, government efforts to strengthen the digital financial transaction ecosystem are key in driving productivity in this sector.

Meanwhile, in the pessimistic scenario, MSME productivity is projected to stagnate or even slightly decline from IDR 44.8 billion in 2025 to IDR 45.7 billion in 2030. This scenario reflects a situation where economic growth slows, capital spending decreases, and fiscal decentralization policies are not effectively optimized. Global uncertainties, high inflation, and low investment in the tourism-based economy sector may hinder MSME recovery. Additionally, limited access to technology and low digital literacy among MSME actors may impede efforts to transform the economy towards a smart economy in Gorontalo City.

On the other hand, in the optimistic scenario, MSME productivity is projected to increase significantly from IDR 50.8 billion in 2025 to IDR 51.0 billion in 2030. This increase reflects optimism that Gorontalo City will successfully implement economic transformation policies based on information technology. Support for industry ecosystems through business

incubation programs, MSME digitalization, and financing access facilitation drives higher productivity. The vision of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Gorontalo City for 2025-2029 as a Service City supports the expansion of MSMEs in the service and tourism sectors. Increased spending based on economic functions and tourism, along with innovative fiscal policies, becomes the main pillar in realizing this optimistic scenario.

Economic transformation in Gorontalo City plays a crucial role in enhancing MSME productivity in the future. By integrating information technology through the smart economy, MSMEs can improve production efficiency, expand market access through digital platforms, and accelerate financial transaction processes. The developing industry ecosystem encourages collaboration between the government, private sector, and MSME actors to create innovation and enhance competitiveness. In addition, poverty reduction policies and increased public welfare through financial support and skill training become the main drivers of sustainable MSME productivity growth in Gorontalo City.

The vision of Gorontalo City as a Service City for 2025-2029 provides great opportunities for MSME development in the service and tourism sectors. By encouraging service digitalization and strengthening economic infrastructure, the government can create a conducive environment for MSME growth. Cross-sector collaboration, optimization of spending based on economic functions and tourism, and fiscal policies supporting innovation in the MSME sector are key to ensuring the sustainability of MSME productivity in Gorontalo City in the future.

MSME productivity in Gorontalo City has experienced significant fluctuations during the period studied. The productivity increase from 2014 to 2017 reflects economic stability and effective government intervention in supporting MSME growth. The maintenance of fiscal decentralization policies that facilitate budget allocation directly to the MSME sector, as well as infrastructure improvements, has proven to be an important factor in this productivity increase (Prasanna et al., 2019; Umar et al., 2022). However, a significant decline began in 2018 through 2023, where productivity reached its lowest point of IDR 44.6 billion. This decline can be linked to the slowdown in economic growth and the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lutfi et al., 2020; Hidayati & Rachman, 2021). Economic growth, which drives consumer purchasing power, is essential, and access to capital for MSME actors becomes crucial to understand (Lutfi et al., 2020). The recovery in 2024, driven by economic recovery policies, clearly shows that the right strategies can help push MSME productivity in a positive direction.

The productivity projection scenarios for 2025 to 2030 provide diverse pictures: in the moderate scenario, MSME productivity is expected to grow steadily, but in the pessimistic scenario, stagnation or even decline may occur without significant intervention.

This emphasizes the importance of responsive public policies to address challenges; for example, increasing digitalization and technology access for MSMEs must be maximized to enhance competitiveness in the era of Industry 4.0 (Prayitno et al., 2024; Taneo et al., 2023). In the optimistic scenario, the implementation of economic transformation policies focused on digitalization can result in more significant growth, indicating that adaptive and innovative MSMEs have great potential to contribute to the local economy (Surya et al., 2021). The integration of information technology and government support in creating a conducive business climate will be the main drivers for developing MSME productivity in Gorontalo City, making the vision of becoming a Service City achievable efficiently and effectively.

The following is an overview of the results of the advantages of each type of MSME in Gorontalo City based on MSME and labor data from 2015 to 2024:

Table 2: MSME Advantages in Gorontalo City

No	MSME Type	LQ Share	LQ Shif	Description	Category
1	Pangan	0.885	2.315	$LQ_{Share} < 1$ dan $LQ_{Shift} \geq 1$	Sektor Berkembang
2	Sandang	1.032	2.507	$LQ_{Share} \geq 1$ dan $LQ_{Shift} \geq 1$	Sektor Progresif
3	Kimia dan Bahan Bangunan	0.874	6.060	$LQ_{Share} < 1$ dan $LQ_{Shift} \geq 1$	Sektor Berkembang
4	Logam dan Elektronika	1.169	0.282	$LQ_{Share} \geq 1$ dan $LQ_{Shift} < 1$	Sektor Lamban
5	Kerajinan & Ekraf	1.051	1.458	$LQ_{Share} \geq 1$ dan $LQ_{Shift} \geq 1$	Sektor Progresif

Based on the analysis above, it can be seen that the food MSMEs in Gorontalo City, which fall into the developing category, show that this sector has a good growth potential but still faces challenges in expanding its market and increasing production capacity. The developing category indicates that businesses in this sector have operational stability, but have not fully utilized technology and innovation to improve efficiency and competitiveness. Factors such as limited access to raw materials, lack of product diversification, and limited production technology are the main obstacles. By promoting digitalization in marketing (such as e-commerce) and product innovation based on local and national market needs, food MSMEs can transition to the progressive category, which means faster and sustainable growth in the future.

Clothing MSMEs in the progressive category indicate that this sector has experienced significant growth and is able to adapt to changes in market demand. This category reflects that clothing businesses in Gorontalo City have capitalized on various opportunities, such as

local fashion trends, digital marketing, and collaboration with creative communities. In addition, innovation capabilities in product design, use of digital platforms for sales, and efficient production technology are key factors driving this growth. By maintaining continuous innovation and expanding access to both national and international markets, clothing MSMEs have great potential to become the main drivers of the service-based economy in Gorontalo City.

Chemicals and building materials MSMEs in the developing category indicate that this sector has a solid foundation but has not reached optimal growth acceleration. This category reflects that entrepreneurs in this field have been able to meet local needs but face challenges in production and distribution efficiency. The main challenges include high raw material costs, lack of modern technology in production processes, and limited marketing networks. To drive this sector to become progressive, the adoption of more efficient manufacturing technology, supply chain optimization, and the development of digital-based distribution networks are required to improve competitiveness and expand market share.

Metal and electronics MSMEs in Gorontalo City, which fall into the slow category, show that this sector has experienced relatively low growth compared to other sectors. This category indicates that MSMEs in this field are still facing various challenges such as limited advanced technology, lack of skilled labor, and high production costs. In addition, limited access to quality raw materials and minimal product innovation are the main inhibiting factors. For this sector to move towards the developing or progressive category, investment in technology-based skill training, integration of digital production systems (smart manufacturing), and better access to markets through online platforms to expand business opportunities are needed.

Handicrafts and creative economy MSMEs in the progressive category show dynamic and sustainable growth, driven by product innovation and the use of digital technology. This category reflects that this sector is able to adapt to market trends, such as locally-based cultural products combined with modern marketing technology (e.g., social media and e-commerce). Handicraft MSMEs in Gorontalo City have great potential as a leading sector in supporting the transformation towards a service-based economy. By expanding collaboration networks, utilizing creative technologies, and strengthening local branding, this sector can become one of the main pillars in realizing Gorontalo City's vision as a service-based economic hub during the 2025-2029 period.

Food MSMEs in Gorontalo City are in the developing category, which reflects potential for good growth despite challenges related to market and production capacity. This phenomenon aligns with the theory stating that MSMEs that adapt quickly to market environments tend to have higher competitiveness (Akhyar et al., 2021). Limiting factors

such as difficult access to raw materials and lack of product diversification, as revealed in this study, are consistent with other findings that product innovation and the ability to access digital marketing are critical to improving MSME competitiveness (Ali et al., 2020; Hurdawaty & Tukiran, 2024). By utilizing digital technology to market products and innovating in products based on market needs, food MSMEs can move towards the progressive category, showing faster and sustainable growth, as hoped in many previous studies (Octaviana & Andni, 2023).

Clothing MSMEs show significant growth and fall into the progressive category, indicating the sector's ability to adapt to changes in market demand. The application of digital marketing strategies and collaboration with creative communities are important aspects driving this sector (Nuvriasari et al., 2022; Wisnujati et al., 2023). This progressive category also reflects findings from other studies showing that market orientation, innovation, and product quality are key factors in improving MSME performance (Puspaningrum, 2020). In this context, clothing MSMEs in Gorontalo have been able to leverage existing opportunities through continuous innovation and expand market access, both nationally and internationally, becoming the main drivers of the service-based economy. This aligns with the vision of the Mayor of Gorontalo City to make the area a competitive and modern service-based economic hub (Manuain et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, chemicals and building materials MSMEs, still in the developing category, show that the sector has a solid foundation but has not maximized its growth potential. Challenges such as high raw material costs and lack of technology in the production process are obstacles faced, consistent with research that emphasizes the importance of adopting technology to improve production and distribution efficiency (Aspiranti & Amaliah, 2019). These limitations show that there is an urgent need to implement better supply chain management systems and develop digital-based marketing strategies (Hanggraeni et al., 2019). To transform into a progressive sector, this sector needs to invest in modern technology and training to improve workforce skills, enabling it to capitalize on opportunities in the increasingly competitive market (Aslikhah, 2023). Technology-based economic transformation will not only help MSMEs achieve growth goals but also contribute to community welfare in a more equitable manner (Nazry & Mapjabil, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MSME productivity in Gorontalo City has experienced significant dynamics throughout the period from 2014 to 2024, with a declining trend due to the economic slowdown and the impact of the pandemic, but showing recovery in 2024. The forecasting analysis up to 2030 presents three scenarios: moderate, pessimistic, and optimistic, which reflect the

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important role of fiscal policy, capital expenditure, and digital transformation in driving MSME productivity. In the optimistic scenario, business digitalization, strengthening economic infrastructure, and cross-sector synergy are key drivers of significant MSME productivity growth. Meanwhile, the comparative-competitive advantage analysis using the LQ approach shows that the clothing and handicraft sectors fall into the progressive category, while food and chemicals and building materials sectors are categorized as developing. The metal and electronics sector is identified as a slow sector. Overall, economic transformation based on information technology, strengthening the service sector, and MSME digitalization are crucial to realizing the vision of Gorontalo City as a Service City for 2025-2029, as well as increasing the contribution of MSMEs to the regional economy in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Based on the research findings, more focused and sustainable strategic policies are needed to improve MSME productivity in Gorontalo City. The local government is advised to strengthen fiscal decentralization policies to provide flexibility in decision-making related to MSME development, particularly through increased allocation of capital expenditure based on economic and tourism functions. The implementation of digital technology should be a priority, including digital literacy training for MSME actors, the development of a local e-commerce ecosystem, and integration of digital financial transaction systems. For MSME sectors that fall into the developing and slow categories, interventions such as business incubation, facilitation of access to capital, and revitalization of technology-based supply chains and distribution are necessary. Meanwhile, progressive sectors such as clothing and handicrafts should be scaled up by encouraging creative industry collaboration and improving product competitiveness in the global market. The government is also expected to develop a synergistic MSME transformation roadmap in line with the 2025-2029 Service City vision, so that MSME growth can have a broad, inclusive, and highly competitive economic impact.

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