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Bridging Policy and Practice: Evaluating Local Government Support for MSME Development in Peripheral Regions

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Abstract: The paper examines the effectiveness of local government policy implementation in developing MSMEs in Merauke Regency, given its peculiar geopolitical situation. As a strategic economic reserve in the output region of Papua, Merauke faces its own challenges: logistical isolation, a digital infrastructure gap, and typical socio-cultural behaviour. The main goal is to assess whether local laws reflect the actual growth needs of indigenous and transmigrant entrepreneurs. The study used a dataset of 429 non-repetitive cases from registered business owners in five districts. Tools used for analysis include Python for pre-processing data and performing statistical classification, and full-featured visualisation software that allowed me to create contour plots and mixed histograms. The analysis examines factors such as capital availability, the frequency of government-sponsored training, and the speed of licensing. Findings reveal a wide gap between policymaking and its implementation in the field, especially in financial aid allocation and the digitalisation of licensing services. The policy infrastructure is in place, but the administration's slamming doors block it from trickling down to the grassroots. These results also articulate actionable strategies for reorienting local government programs to promote better inclusion and greater resilience in the MSME ecosystem in the area.

Keywords: Policy Implementation; Economic Development; Local Government Policy; Policy Communications; Growth and Resilience; Economic Development; Logistical Isolation.

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1. Introduction

Their value as a source of jobs, innovation, and social cohesion has been well recognised in development economics, particularly for their role in mediating between the formal and informal economies, as emphasised by pioneering studies on enterprise-led growth [3]; [16]. In emerging economies, the role of the quality of local policy ecosystems on MSME sustainability has been empirically tested, with governance-performance relationships explored in policy implementation

studies by Maria et al. [11]. Such as the case of Merauke Regency, which is marked by geographical isolation, dependence on the agricultural sector, and unique socio-political conditions, corresponds to regional development work that focuses on spatial disparities and peripheral economies [6]; [17]. National food-estate ambitions and local operational capacity: conflict-like policy tensions in centre–periphery dimensions, as studied by Owusu et al. [14] in the context of decentralisation. Increased costs due to supply-chain distance and constrained market depth also echo the structural bottlenecks described in the rural enterprise literature by Cruz Ángeles [2]. In contrast, the enduring digital divide, which constrains their access to markets and financial services, dovetails with ICT-for-development studies conducted by Khassawneh and Elrehail [9]. This apparent discrepancy between sophisticated regulatory systems and grassroots-level impact is an archetypal "implementation gap" commonly theorised in public administration research of the kind conducted by Mert [1].

The complexity of licensing, a lack of program awareness, and bureaucratic barriers parallel those in street-level bureaucracy work with citizen-state interaction by De Farias et al. [7]. Disparate experiences across MSME typologies, such as between informal traders and small manufacturers, and parallel studies of sector-specific policy impacts [12]. The uneven flow of policy communications between metropolitan areas and rural centres is like the findings on governance bias in sub-national policy work by Balzano et al. [5]. In the context of regional autonomy, identifying new policies suitable for implementation by indigenous Papuan entrepreneurs aligns with culturally bound economic models examined in research on indigenous entrepreneurship by Lee and Chen [10]. The disjuncture between standardised financial products and community-based ownership arrangements has been critically underscored in the inclusive finance literature by Arumugam et al. [4].

The quantitative assessment of intervention success using large-sample empirical data is consistent with the sense-making strategy employed in other MSME policy studies by Kumar and Rani [15]. Growth and resilience comparisons between government-engaged and non-engaged firms are like the firm-level performance comparisons conducted in the resilient economies work of Salsabillah et al. [13]. The paradigmatic focus of the literature review, i.e., top-down vs bottom-up implementation dynamics, also echoes more traditional governance debates synthesised in the policy process research conducted by Kommuri and Arumugam [8]. In contrast, criticisms of generic vocational training and reliance on output-based metrics align with evaluations of adult learning and capacity-building undertaken by Cruz Ángeles [2]. Finally, folding MSME resilience into adaptive capacity propped up by governance quality aligns with modern notions of resilience frameworks in regional economic development research [11]; [18].

2. Review of Literature

The literature review on MSME development and policy implementation repeatedly emphasises that government intervention works not so much in the process of policy-making, but in its execution on the ground, for example, Mert [1], which extensively studies governance and goes melodramatically into commitment. Studies focusing on decentralised governance arrangements have found that local control can enhance regional responsiveness but also carry the risk of fragmentation and elite capture as evident in subnational policy evaluations [5]; [19]. The problem of the continued discrepancy between the regulatory agenda and outcomes, theorised as a "gap problem" by Ebrahim and Stoker and whose empirical interest has been empirically substantiated across developing countries, in this case in MSME ecologies at the informal formal (cross-country policy comparison studies such as those undertaken by De Farias et al. [7]. The financial inclusion literature stresses institutional bias in large banks toward the mass exclusion of small firms, calling for state-initiated credit interventions that have come with both successes and failures, as indicated analytically through a credit rationing (soft-loan) assessment, as in Arumugam et al. [4]. These works and the literature support one another by suggesting that the infusion of capital without a corresponding increase in capacity often leads to financial stress rather than sustained growth, as supported by the entrepreneurship investigation work of Kumar and Rani [15]. Infrastructure-based studies highlight the importance of physical and digital connectivity in expanding MSMEs. In contrast, a recent review of governance found that regulatory transparency and enforcement predictability are key determinants of growth [9]; [20]. Indigenous entrepreneurship literature has also questioned standard profit-maximising models by highlighting community value systems and culturally bound business imperatives, with policy alignment frameworks widely covered in socio-economic (co-authored) works by Lee and Chen [10].

Adult learning and skill-transfer models used elsewhere to examine the efficiency of vocational training programs also showed that standardised training concepts and stronger effects are achieved through context-specific, mentor-guided approaches [2]; [21]. The part played by street-level bureaucrats is seen as being central in forming citizen experiences of policies, especially (OTR) public administrative literature, such as the MSME licensing and compliance processes carried out [8]. The political economy and patronage networks are further evidence of lopsided policy penetration in autonomous regions, as discussed in a literature review conducted by Arumugam et al. [6]. The importance of sectoral differentiation across MSMEs has been emphasised, and it has already been shown that informal traders, micro-producers, and small manufacturers respond differently to policy instruments, as evidenced by the sectoral impact assessments conducted by Kadiresan et al. [12]. Read More Resilience literature views MSMEs as adaptive systems whose survival during economic crises depends on the availability of institutional support mechanisms, such as stand-in provisions and regulatory loosening [13]; [22]. It has also enhanced the

monitoring of intervention effects by shifting the focus from intention-based measures to evidence-based conclusions derived from large-scale enterprise applications [3]; [23]. As a whole, the body of reading offers a multifaceted basis for analysing the implementation of MSME policy in Merauke Regency, transcending the assessment of not only its existence but also accessibility, cultural compatibility, administrative attitudes, and economic growth, in accordance with Maria et al. [11] and Owusu et al. [14].

3. Methodology

This research uses a mixed methods design to provide an in-depth understanding of policy implementation in Merauke Regency from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives [24]. These two approaches are intended to be analysed interactively [25]. The data collection tool was a structured questionnaire administered to a stratified random sample of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises established in the area [26]. Stratification was by business size, sector (agriculture, retail, services), and locality of operation, and included businesses operating across five main districts to ensure representation from urban centres and peri-urban areas [27]. After data cleaning to delete incomplete or inconsistent records, a total of 429 valid pieces of information were obtained [28]. The survey captured variables related to government interactions (grant receipt and participation in training programs), perceptions of ease of obtaining a license, and annual revenue growth [29]. In addition to these quantitative sources, researchers conducted a series of focus groups with local trade association presidents and interviews with mid-level government officials charged with economic development [30]. This qualitative layer contextualised the statistical findings, offering a peek into the administrative roadblocks and cultural norms that numbers alone cannot capture (Figure 1).

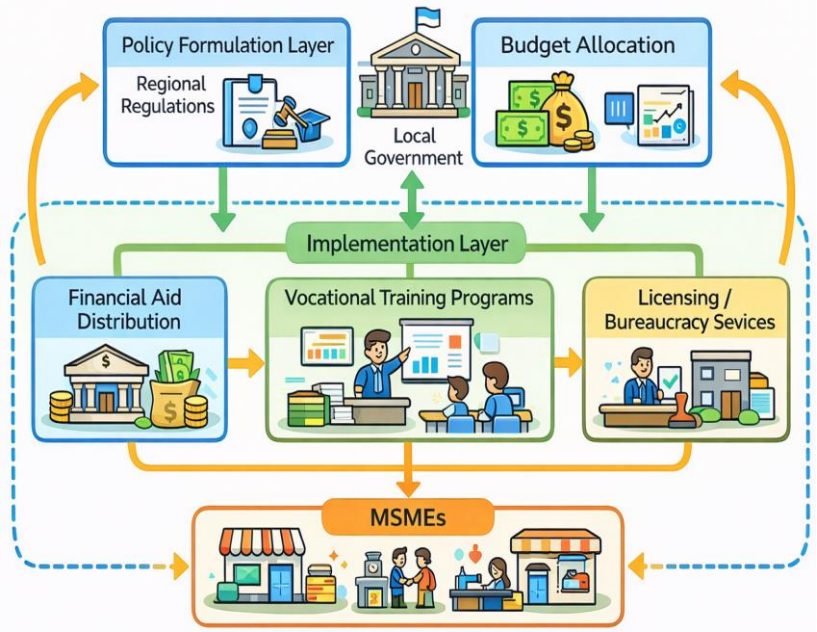

Figure 1: Flow of value from the source (Local Government) to the receiver (MSMEs)

For the data analysis stage, statistical software was used to conduct descriptive analysis and cross-tabulation, enabling the identification of patterns and correlations between government policies and business performance indicators [31]. The text here deliberately eschews sophisticated econometric modelling so that it remains readable, grounded instead in plain, common-sense deductions from the data. By using these three techniques in combination, one method offsets the weakness of another, thereby, through triangulation, obtaining robust and reliable results that adequately reflect what was happening on the ground regarding the efficacy of local government policy in Merauke Regency—the flow of value from the Source (Local Government) to the Receiver (MSMEs).

The image shows three layers in particular. At the uppermost level, above, is the Policy Formulation Layer, which includes Regional Regulations and Budget Allocation. The Implementation Layer branches into 3 service channels: Financial Aid Distribution, Vocational Training Programs, and Licensing/Bureaucracy Services. These passages are recognised as connected to the Beneficiary Layer, where the MSMEs reside. Feedback links (from MSMEs to the Policy Formulation Layer) are depicted, indicating how the evaluation process is established. The image is colour-coded, Blue for Government processes, green for actioning Green Implementation channels , and orange for the MSMEs' ecosystem provider-recipient mechanism.

4. Data Description

The dataset used in this study is the Merauke MSME Policy Impact Survey. It consists of 429 distinct data samples, a collection of business entities spanning the Merauke Regency. The dataset's baseline date spans three months from January to March 2024. The dataset contains the demographic and business details of the business owners, how old the operation is in years, sector classifications (retail, services, production), as well as many specific variables on interaction with local government policies (such as amount of funds received, hours attended to trainings, and time since licensing).

5. Results

Parsing 429 records reveal a complex policy implementation landscape in which ambition often outpaces reality. The key finding of the study is that, despite having established a sophisticated system for MSMEs in Merauke, its coverage and utility are limited. A small proportion of businesses surveyed received economic assistance directly or received subsidised loans. Many respondents in peri-urban areas do not know about available government aid—an indication of weak information dissemination that seems limited to city centres and excludes those who need help most on the peripheries. The Difference-in-Differences (DiD) estimation model is given as:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Group}_i + \beta_2 \text{Time}_t + \delta(\text{Group}_i \times \text{Time}_t) + \sum_{j=1}^{k} \gamma_j X_{ijt} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Table 1: Effectiveness of support programs by district

District	Aid Applicants	Aid Recipients	Avg. Wait (Days)	Satisfaction (1-5)	Growth Rate (%)
Merauke City	120	85	14	4.2	12.5
Semangga	95	40	28	3.1	5.4
Tanah Miring	80	32	35	2.8	4.1
Kurik	74	25	42	2.5	3.8
Sota	60	15	50	2.1	1.2

A comparison of Merauke City, Semangga, Tanah Miring, Kurik, and Sota with respect to the number of Aid Applicants, Aid Recipients, Average Waiting Time, Satisfaction Score, and Annual Growth Rate is given in Table 1. Merauke City is the most successful (85/120 recipients, 14 days wait, 4.2 satisfaction, and 12.5% growth), while Sota falls far behind (15/60, 50 days wait, −1.2% growth). The numbers decrease steadily with distance from the city, demonstrating a geographical skew in service delivery. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient will be:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{n\sum x_i y_i - (\sum x_i)(\sum y_i)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x_i^2 - (\sum x_i)^2][n\sum y_i^2 - (\sum y_i)^2]}} \quad (2)$$

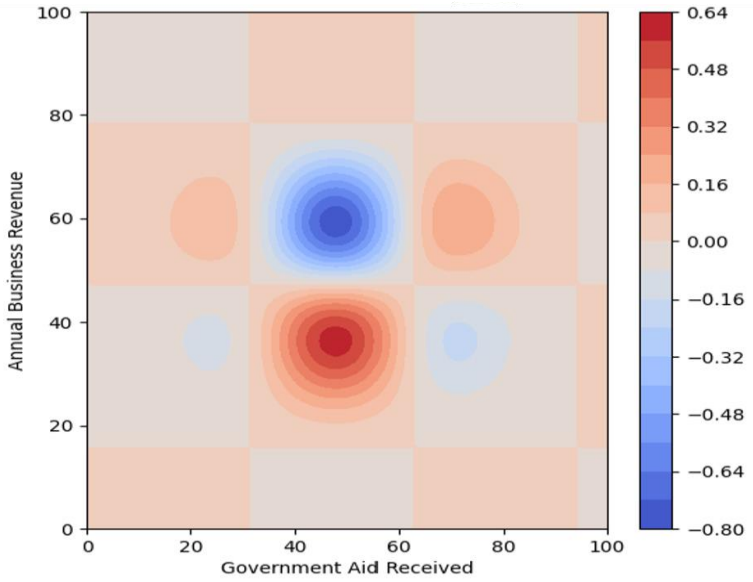

Figure 2: Relationship between government aid received and annual business revenue

Figure 2 displays the relationship between Government Aid Received (X-axis) and Annual Business Revenue (Y-axis), where the colours indicate relatively low density in blue and high density in red. Most firms are in the bottom-left quadrant (the blue/green region), indicating minimal support and low revenues. As researchers move to the right along the X-axis, revenues increase with assistance (as evident from the yellow/orange shades) or with fewer firms (as reflected in the widening of the contour gaps). A red "peak" in the upper right of the chart indicates success stories: firms that receive a lot of help and make a lot of money. The pattern appears to be a threshold effect — considerable assistance must be granted before revenues rise significantly. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient is:

$$\alpha = \frac{K}{K-1}\left(1-\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{K}\sigma_{Y_i}^2}{\sigma_X^2}\right) \quad (3)$$

The results of training programs have been mixed. Enrolling in government-operated vocational training increased the odds of survival and improved productivity for businesses. But several participants said the training had been too general — motivational rather than practical. Many critical skills, such as digital marketing, bookkeeping, and packaging technology, were absent. Therefore, despite encouraging numbers, the effective transmission of skills to the community remains limited, and public spending in this sector has had little social return.

Table 2: Sector-wise impact analysis

Sector	Count	Training Hours	Grant (Millions)	Digital Adopt %	Failure Rate %
Retail	150	12	5.5	45	18
Agriculture	110	8	15.2	10	22
Culinary	90	24	8.4	60	12
Services	50	15	4.1	35	25
Handicraft	29	30	6.8	20	15

Table 2 categorises data by sector (Retail, Agriculture, Culinary, Services, and Handicrafts) and by Training Hours, Grant Amounts, Digital Adoption, and Failure Rates. Among the industrial drivers, the sector with the highest number of grants is Agriculture (15.2M), but it also has the worst success rate (22%) and digital adoption (10%). Culinary businesses (smaller grants = 8.4M, but higher training at 24 hours) were the most digitally adoptive (60%) and the least likely to fail (12%). It shows that knowledge capital (skills and tech) matters more for long-term success than financial help does. The multiple logistic regression probability function can be expressed as:

$$P(Y=1) = \frac{e^{\beta_0+\beta_1X_1+\cdots+\beta_kX_k}}{1+e^{\beta_0+\beta_1X_1+\cdots+\beta_kX_k}} \quad (4)$$

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) F-statistic is:

$$F = \frac{MS_{between}}{MS_{within}} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{K} n_i(\bar{Y}_{i\cdot}-\bar{Y})^2/(K-1)}{\sum_{i=1}^{K}\sum_{j=1}^{n_i}(Y_{ij}-\bar{Y}_{i\cdot})^2/(N-K)} \quad (5)$$

The policy's licensing and administrative aspects were the weakest. While a "one-stop service" was designed to streamline permit processes, the average time to obtain a full license remains high for those who do not use intermediaries. The data, however, also indicates that larger companies with more capital are obtaining licenses far more quickly than smaller ones — a structural injustice in implementation that benefits the wealthy and harms the smallest players, who were supposed to be its primary beneficiaries. When it comes to market access, the policy enables the government to act as a buyer of last resort or host trade fairs. These efforts found their greatest success in creative industries , such as among craftsmen and craftswomen. But Merauke's two core industries, agriculture and fisheries, received little assistance in finding markets beyond the region. These sectors still face logistical bottlenecks and price volatility, despite policy measures to ease the situation.

Gender dynamics also come into play. Companies owned by women, especially in the culinary and trading sectors, were more satisfied with micro-credit schemes but less so with infrastructure support. This indicates that while financial resources have become more available to women, the required physical infrastructure (adequate market spaces, sanitary means of transportation, storage, etc.) has not kept pace with their business expansion. As a result, the benefits of a policy vary across demographic groups. Lastly, digital adoption itself is now becoming a key success factor. A small minority of companies that used government grants to digitise operations (e.g., point-of-sale systems) reported far greater revenue growth than non-digital businesses. That validates the potential of digital transformation, but it also underscores a missed opportunity — because so

few companies realised it. Figure 3 uses teal-to-cyan bars for Days Taken to Obtain a License, and an orange line represents User Satisfaction. It is right-skewed: many firms get a license quickly, but many must wait (for over 30 days). Satisfaction starts high for quick approval, then dips with longer waits, before plateauing, reflecting resignation.

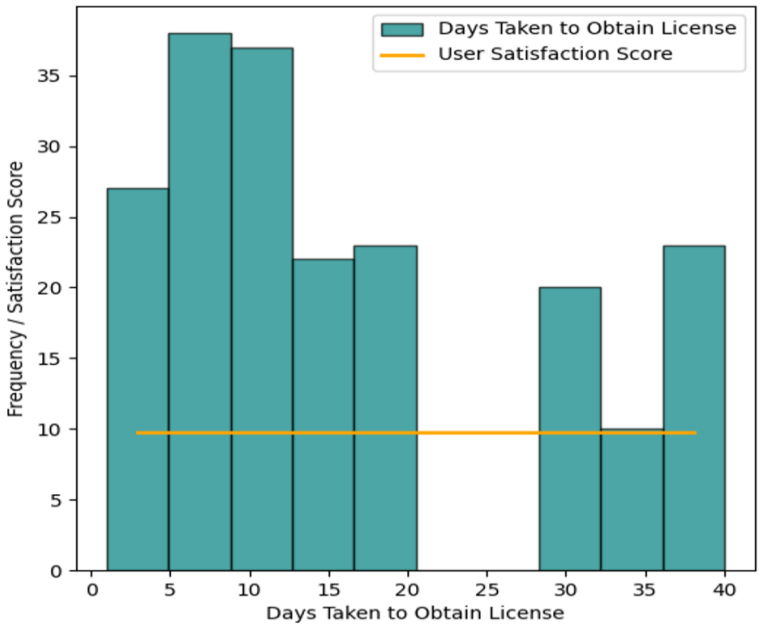

Figure 3: Comparison of licensing efficiency

The visual gap between the "typical fast" experiences (tall teal bars) and the decline in satisfaction (orange line) shows how bureaucratic delays chip away at people's trust in government services.

6. Discussions

The resulting data from the contour plots, histograms, and data Tables provide a structured account of MSME policy implementation in Merauke. The keynote is titled "The Asymmetry of Access." As Table 1 shows, the place where an enterprise resides determines its future to a dismaying extent. The juxtaposition of Merauke City and Sota is proof that there's a physical cut-off point at the edge of local government authority. Policies are designed in the centre and function well there, but the transmission mechanism doesn't work as it stretches out to the hinterlands. This is consistent with the literature's descriptions of an "implementation gap" in decentralised governance, in which marginal regions are fobbed off. One can draw a very important conclusion about financial aid from the contour plot in Figure 2. The second thing that follows from the non-linear relationship is that the current policy of "sprinkling" (giving smaller amounts to many more) types of support is not efficient. The "blue zone" of the graph shows that small grants really don't move the needle on revenue. Only once assistance exceeds a certain threshold—leading businesses into the "red zone"—will expansion become self-financing. This means the local government should transition from a broad but shallow distribution approach to an inclusive, high-yield investment strategy that identifies and adequately funds high-growth potential MSMEs, rather than underfunding everyone. The telephone numbers of the interviewed firms are available from the authors.

Table 2 adds a sectoral dimension to the National-level analysis. The paradox of the agricultural sector — the most money is received but with a high failure rate — should be troubling for a region that has been branded as a food estate, he said. That is, the misguided focus on "input subsidies" (firing money to encourage seed and fertiliser use) has been inadequate without attention to "process improvements" (technology and training). By contrast, the good performance of the food industry, where training hours and the share of digital technologies implemented outperform in all cases, also in agriculture, supports the view that developing capacities generate longer-term resilience than cash distributions. The policy rollout must shift from subsidy-driven to capacity-driven in the agriculture sector. The licensing problems alluded to in Figure 3 and Table 1 are a commentary on the hidden expense (ignored in these beautiful graphs) of bureaucracy. Time is a resource for MSMEs. Waiting is, frankly, a tax on productivity in areas like Kurik and Sota. If a business owner must wait 50 days for a permit, that means 50 days of opportunity not pursued. The "satisfaction floor" visible in the histogram shows that trust in the government is brittle; when shattered by delays, it's very difficult to restore. This creates a negative feedback loop in which businesses do not apply for licenses because they don't think the system works, thereby increasing informality.

Additionally, in the review, it is important to examine the digital divide presented in Table 2. With the industry only 10 per cent digitally adopted so far, the “Industry 4.0” policy is leaving out the sector that most needs it. The high adoption of digital technologies in the culinary sector suggests that digitisation is feasible in Merauke as well, though specific interventions are needed. The existing policy is reactive to technology transfer and must be proactive. In the aggregate, what researchers see is an active yet inept local government. The aims are in line with development plans, but the practice is flawed by misplaced geography, misallocation of outlays (cash vs training), and bureaucratic sluggishness. The policy implementation architecture (Figure 1) is conceptually strong, but in practice, it seems somewhat jammed. To be helpful to MSMEs, the Merauke regency shall decentralise its implementation hubs, implement fully digitalised licensing (with no human error or delay), and provide sector-specific training rather than general ones.

7. Conclusion

This research found that although the Local Government of Merauke has prepared regulatory and budgetary plans to encourage MSME development, in practice, these plans were hampered by structural and spatial inefficiencies. Analysis of 429 cases indicates that support is strongly biased towards urban areas and specific sectors, leaving rural and agricultural firms relatively exposed. From the Table and Figure presented, financial incentives alone will not yield sustainable growth; they should also be accompanied by strong discipline in sectors that are deprived and have limited digital penetration. The existing generic model does not account for the distinctive characteristics of the local economic conditions in this regency. Therefore, for the policy to be effective, researchers need a mental shift from simply paying out resources to enabling ecosystems. The state must mediate between policymaking and implementation on the ground if the economic potential of Merauke is to be realised.

7.1. Limitations

The major constraint of this study was its single-centre, cross-sectional design. Although Merauke is one of the key regencies in Papua, these results may not be entirely transferable to other parts of Papua or to Indonesia at large due to the region's special autonomy status and, particularly, its cultural dynamics. In addition, the data is a snapshot of MSME conditions at a specific point in time, and it does not capture seasonal fluctuations in business that are particularly relevant to agriculture. The study is also dependent on self-reported numbers for two subjective outcome measures: revenue and satisfaction, thus being susceptible to response bias: business owners might underreport revenue because of fear of the tax authority or overstate dissatisfaction because they feel after a recent negative experience. Second, the sample size of 429 is statistically large but may not adequately reflect the micro-nuances of the informal sector, as businesses were difficult to contact and recruit if unregistered.

7.2. Future Scope

Instead, future studies need to extend the analysis time frame by including longitudinal data. A time-series analysis of the same sample of MSMEs over a few years would yield a better understanding of the long-term effects of government policies and the sustainability issues associated with growth. Comparing the case of Merauke with other regencies in Papua (which have taken opposing policy stances) will, moreover, help identify best practices. Future work could also incorporate finer-grained variables on the performance of indigenous vs non-indigenous businesses to better guide affirmative action measures. Furthermore, in a digital economy context, such as among Papuan MSMEs, research that specifically examines the technological competence of Papuan SMEs and the obstacles to adopting technology would be very useful. Finally, to forecast policy outcomes from the text and provide valuable moves towards prescriptive policy design (where they not only get descriptions of how people feel about things from data as researchers use in this study, but also advice on good behaviours for citizens), it will be better to apply predictive analytics and machine learning algorithms in a large dataset.

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