

## **Empowering Communities Through Partnerships: The Case of PT Unilever Sei Mangkei**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to find out the partnership empowerment strategy to improve community welfare in maqashid sharia review. This method uses descriptive qualitative. In this study, the data obtained directly through interviews with the person in charge of empowerment of the Unilever Indonesia Foundation (UIF), the person in charge of the perlawanan village government partnership and the local community. The implementation of this research took place at one of PT Unilever Sei Mangkei in bosar maligas sub-district, simalungun district. The analysis technique used in this research uses the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method. The results showed that there are 2 empowerment strategies, namely the oil palm farmer program and the local MSME program. Based on the results of AHP, the highest weight of the alternative aggregate, the strategy chosen is the oil palm farmer program with a weight of 0.608. The smallholder program is in line with the principles of maqashid sharia which upholds justice, sustainability and social balance.

**Keywords:** Empowerment Strategy, AHP, Partnership, Maqashid Syariah.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Empowerment is a process of awareness of the potential or power possessed by a person to become empowered and actualized with the participation of that person, through assistance to share knowledge. Community empowerment is an effort to improve the dignity of the lower layers of society (grass root) who with all their limitations have not been able to escape from the trap of poverty, ignorance and backwardness, so that community empowerment is not only strengthening individuals but also existing social institutions (Heru Nugroho, 2004).

Unilever is a multinational company headquartered in Rotterdam, Netherlands (as Unilever N.V.) and London, UK (as Unilever plc.). Unilever is the third largest home furnishing company in the world, behind Procter & Gamble and Nestlé. Unilever is one of the oldest companies in the world and today has successfully expanded into more than 190 countries. Over the years since its founding Unilever has made significant efforts to diversify its business areas and expand into various countries. In 1933 Unilever entered Indonesia, until in 1980 it chose to give the name PT. Unilever Indonesia to the Unilever branch in Indonesia. Unilever is a company that was founded with noble goals. Unilever aims to create a sustainable life that is worth living. In

addition, Unilever also wants to foster a good outlook on life for all living things to change the world for the better (Unilever Indonesia, 2022).

PT Unilever Oleochemical Indonesia (Unioleo), located in Sei Mangkei Special Economic Zone, North Sumatra. The company was established on January 3, 2012, with its plant commencing operations on November 26, 2015. PT Unilever Oleochemical Indonesia (UOI), operating in the Sei Mangkei Special Economic Zone (SEZ), North Sumatra, is one example of the implementation of a partnership-based economic empowerment strategy. As a company that focuses on sustainable palm oil processing, PT Unilever works with local MSMEs to support sustainable supply chains while increasing the business capacity of surrounding communities (Unilever Indonesia, 2022).

Community economic empowerment is a crucial aspect of social and economic development, which aims to improve individual and community welfare. In this case, partnership strategy becomes one of the effective approaches to empower communities, especially in the agricultural and micro-enterprise sectors. PT Unilever Sei Mangkei as one of the multinational companies operating in Indonesia, has implemented a partnership strategy that focuses on the economic empowerment of the surrounding community.

This partnership not only aims to improve the income and welfare of the community, but also to create synergy between the company and the local community. Through specially designed programs, PT Unilever Sei Mangkei seeks to provide communities with access to resources, training and a wider market network. This is important to overcome the various challenges faced by micro-enterprises, such as limited capital, market access, and effective management.

The maqashid Sharia approach is also a cornerstone of this empowerment strategy. Maqashid Shariah emphasizes the achievement of broader social and economic goals, including justice, welfare and poverty reduction. By applying Shariah principles in these partnerships, it is expected that not only financial gains will be achieved, but also a fair distribution of benefits to all members of the community. However, while there is great potential in this partnership strategy, there are still challenges that need to be overcome. Limited access to resources and ineffective management can hinder the sustainability of empowerment programs. Therefore, it is important to conduct continuous evaluations of the strategies implemented so that they can have the maximum positive impact on the welfare of the community.

## METHODOLOGY

In this research, the author uses a qualitative descriptive method. Data obtained are primary and secondary through interviews, documentation, and direct observation to the person in charge of the Unilever Indonesia Foundation (UIF) empowerment, the person in charge of the perlanaan village government partnership and the local community. The respondents selected are individuals who have experience in the field under study, such as oil palm farmers, MSME players, academics, or government officials. The implementation of this research took place at one of PT Unilever Sei Mangkei in the bosar maligas sub-district of Simalungun district. The analysis technique used in this research uses the *Analitycal Hierarchy Process* (AHP) method. The AHP method is a concept, tool, technique or method in making and making decisions for complex problems and a measurement method used to find the best ratio scale from discrete and continuous pairwise comparisons. The reason for choosing this method is

because it is able to quantify subjective factors in the decision-making process, provide systematic and objective results, and assist in prioritizing strategies based on stakeholders' perspectives. With this approach, the resulting decisions are more targeted and data-based, so that they can be used as a basis for formulating effective policies for oil palm farmer empowerment strategies and local MSME programs.

**Table 1. List of resource persons**

| Name          | Position                 | Education   |
|---------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Ridwan, SE    | Head of CSR management   | S1          |
| Trijaka, S.ag | Head of perlanan village | S1          |
| Sucipto       | Partnership Actors       | HIGH SCHOOL |

The stages in the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method are defining problems and objectives, identifying criteria, forming a hierarchy, conducting pairwise comparison analysis, determining relative weights, determining alternative scores, making decisions, verification and interpretation of results. AHP is a decision-making method used to solve complex unstructured problems. The method was developed by Thomas L. Saaty, a mathematics professor from the University of Pittsburgh.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As an initial stage through the mechanism of pairwise comparisons that have been compiled to respondents who are considered experts (experts) is carried out. The writing of this research is a data in the form of a questionnaire that has been submitted to the perpetrators of the PT Unilever partnership regarding the questionnaire questions in conducting research. After distributing the questionnaire, the next step is to do the weighting. From processing using *Expert Choice software*, the weights for each criterion are obtained as follows:

**Table 2. Weighting of Criteria against Goal**

| Criteria                         | Weight |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Effectiveness                    | 0.232  |
| Profesionaitas                   | 0.211  |
| Coaching pattern                 | 0.103  |
| Supervision pattern              | 0.207  |
| Development potential            | 0.043  |
| Capital disbursed                | 0.032  |
| Bureaucratic producer            | 0.172  |
| <i>Inconsistency Ratio =0.09</i> |        |

From the above processing, the overall weight or aggregate weight of the alternatives can then be obtained against all existing criteria (effectiveness, professionalism, coaching patterns, supervision patterns, capital channeled, development potential, and bureaucratic procedures). The results of the aggregate weight of each alternative are as follows:

**Table 3. Alternative Aggregate Weight**

| Alternative                  | Weight |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Oil palm smallholder program | 0.608  |

Local MSME program

0.392

From the processing results above, it can be seen that the weight obtained by the Oil Palm Farmer Program has a greater weight value of 0.608 than the local MSME Program with a weight value of 0.392. In this case, the Smallholder Program has a better preference than the local MSME Program for all existing criteria. This can improve welfare as shown through a more stable increase in income and improve living standards. The smallholder program is considered superior to the local MSME program because it has a larger economic scale with high global demand, making it easier to get investment and infrastructure support. In addition, many large companies have partnership programs with oil palm smallholders, providing mentoring, technology, and wider market access. Palm oil is also Indonesia's main export commodity, which makes it easier for smallholder programs to penetrate international markets compared to local MSMEs that tend to depend on the domestic market. In terms of policy, the government often provides incentives and regulations that support the palm oil industry due to its contribution to the national economy, while local MSMEs still face regulatory challenges and limited capital. In addition, palm oil smallholders' income tends to be more stable as it follows global market prices, while local MSMEs are more vulnerable to economic fluctuations and people's purchasing power. Despite challenges such as sustainability and deforestation issues, palm oil smallholder programs are overall considered superior in terms of competitiveness, market access, and industry support.

## Discussion of AHP Findings

### Oil Palm Farmer Program

In developing a partnership program for oil palm smallholders, there are several alternatives that can be identified based on the needs of smallholders and the sustainability of the industry. First, there is the inti-plasma scheme, in which large companies act as the core and provide technical assistance, market access, and capital to smallholders as plasma. Second, the farmer cooperative model, which allows farmers to manage their farms collectively with financial support and training from the government or private sector. Third, partnerships based on off-taker agreements, where companies buy crops at a pre-agreed price, providing market certainty for farmers. Fourth, sustainable mentoring programs, which involve education on sustainable agricultural practices, ISPO/RSPO certification, and productivity improvement. Each of these alternatives has its own advantages and challenges, so they need to be adapted to the conditions of the farmers and the company's strategy in building a mutually beneficial partnership.

### Local MSME Program

Partnership programs for local MSMEs can be developed through several alternative strategies tailored to the needs of businesses and market potential. First, distribution partnership schemes, where large companies assist MSMEs in expanding their market reach through modern retail networks, e-commerce, or exports. Second, inclusive financing models, such as low-interest loans, revolving fund programs, or venture capital-based investments to increase production capacity and innovation. Third, business mentoring and training, which includes improving managerial skills,

business digitalization, and product certification to make them more competitive. Fourth, off-taker agreement schemes, where large companies commit to buying MSME products at agreed prices and standards, providing market certainty and business stability. Fifth, collaboration in research and innovation, which allows MSMEs to participate in new product development with technological support and resources from strategic partners. Each alternative has the potential to improve MSME competitiveness, so the selection of partnership models must consider the specific needs and readiness of each business actor.

Previous research Application of Ahp Method in Selecting E-Commerce Marketplace Based on Iso/Iec 9126-4 Quality And Evaluation Software for MSMEs, by Angga Setiyadi and Richi Dwi Agustia this research is to implement a decision support system to determine the best alternative from a number of existing E-Commerce system alternatives using the AHP method to help MSME players. The determination of criteria in the AHP hierarchical structure is determined through a measure of quality in the use of a system using the ISO / IEC 9126-4 standardization criteria for the quality in use model of the three marketplace systems most frequently accessed by Indonesian internet users until May 2018 based on alexa statistical data. Assessment data is obtained through distributing questionnaires to MSME actors which are then processed and tested using AHP. To test whether the results of processing and calculations carried out manually are correct, an implementation is carried out using Expert Choice software to see the comparative value and suitability of the final decision results obtained. The final result of the research is an alternative sequence of E-Commerce marketplace systems according to the assessment of MSME actors. Based on the results of this implementation, the application of the AHP method can provide recommendations in decision making to determine the E-Commerce marketplace system that best suits the needs of MSME players to market their creative industry products.

This is because the palm oil smallholder program is superior to each criterion than the local MSME program. In this case, the palm oil smallholder program, which is encouraged in accordance with the maqashid sharia review, maintains religion (hifzhad-din), the palm oil smallholder program is halal allowed and even recommended as long as it is done in a good way and in accordance with sharia. Safeguarding the soul (hifzh an-nafs), the oil palm smallholder program has paid attention to the welfare of farmers by providing work safety standards and not over-exploiting labor. In addition, environmental sustainability in oil palm cultivation is also an important part of maintaining the balance of the ecosystem for the survival of the community. Safeguarding the mind (hifzh al-alq), the oil palm smallholder program has provided education to farmers about several trainings in the field of production including good cultivation techniques, the use of organic fertilizers, sustainable pest management, and the application of modern technology to increase plantation productivity, farmers also need to understand certification standards such as ISPO (Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil) so that their crops meet the criteria of the global market. Safeguarding offspring (hifzh an-nashl), the smallholder program ensures the welfare of farmers' families by providing access to education for their children as well as maintaining the sustainability of natural resources so that they can be utilized by future generations ensuring that farmers get safety and health facilities. and Safeguarding property (hifzh al-mal), the smallholder program provides capital

and ensures that there is a transparent system in determining prices, and does not disadvantage farmers in the distribution of profits.

The oil palm smallholder program has advantages over the local MSME program in the perlanaan area where the area is surrounded by plantations. The advantages of the smallholder program are mainly in terms of economies of scale, income stability, and market access. Structurally, oil palm plantations take advantage of the geographical conditions of the area which has large and fertile land, making it more suitable for agricultural development based on export commodities. In addition, oil palm farmers receive support from large companies through partnership programs, access to agricultural technology, and more stable market guarantees compared to local MSMEs that often face limited capital and access to distribution. From an economic perspective, the palm oil industry also creates a multiplication effect by opening up more employment opportunities in the upstream and downstream sectors, such as processing and distribution of plantation products. While local MSMEs tend to be more flexible in business diversification, market and competitiveness limitations are a major challenge. Therefore, the oil palm smallholder program is superior in improving the economic welfare of communities in the perlanaan area compared to the development of local MSMEs that have limitations in production scale and market access

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis conducted using the AHP method, it can be concluded that the result of the identification of PT Unilever's empowerment strategy is the most appropriate oil palm farmer program. It can be seen from the aggregate weight of the smallholder program is 0.608 which is greater than the local MSME program with an aggregate weight of 0.392. The smallholder program is superior to the local MSME program in the perlanaan area because it is more in line with geographical conditions, has a larger economic scale, and offers better income stability and market access. Support from large companies through partnerships and agricultural technology further strengthens the sustainability of smallholder businesses, while the industry also creates more jobs in the upstream and downstream sectors. While local MSMEs have an advantage in business diversification, limited capital, markets and competitiveness are major challenges. Therefore, the oil palm smallholder program is a more effective solution in improving the economic welfare of communities in the perlanaan area. The oil palm smallholder partnership program has been in accordance with the maqashid sharia review, namely protecting religion (hifz had-din), soul (hifz an-nafs), intellect (hifz al-alq), offspring (hifz an-nashl) and property (hifz al-mal). The program is considered an instrument that not only improves farmers' welfare, but is also in line with Islamic economic principles that uphold justice, sustainability and social balance.

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