Developing Sustainable Business Practices in SMEs: A Community Outreach Initiative for Environmental and Economic Resilience

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Abstract

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in the economy but often face challenges in implementing sustainable business practices. Constraints such as limited resources, access to information, and unsupportive regulations make it difficult for SMEs to switch to more environmentally friendly practices. In addition, community initiatives and local support are important factors in encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices. This study aims to explore effective strategies that can help SMEs switch to sustainable business practices. This study uses a qualitative approach by collecting data from various reliable sources and analyzing them in depth. The conclusion of the study shows that the implementation of sustainable business practices by SMEs can reduce negative impacts on the environment, such as reduced carbon emissions and better waste management. In addition, these practices also increase the efficiency and productivity of SME operations. The adoption of sustainability strengthens the long-term resilience of SMEs to market changes and environmental challenges. Positive impacts are also felt by local communities, including improved quality of life and economic stability. Support from proactive government policies, adequate infrastructure, and access to green financing are critical to the success of this transition.

Keywords: *SMEs, Sustainable Business, Environmental Resilience, Economic Resilience.*

A. INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid globalization and industrialization, environmental sustainability is increasingly urgent. Climate change, environmental degradation, and natural resource depletion are major challenges faced by the global community. One sector that plays a significant role in facing these challenges is the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector. SMEs are the backbone of the economy in many countries, including Indonesia, due to their significant contribution to job creation, local economic development, and innovation (Mondal & Palit, 2022).

Although SMEs have great potential in supporting the economy, they often face challenges in adopting sustainable business practices. Factors such as limited resources, lack of access to green technology, and minimal awareness and knowledge about sustainability often become barriers for SMEs to switch to more environmentally friendly practices. The implementation of sustainable business practices not only contributes to environmental conservation but can also improve operational efficiency and reduce costs in the long term (Pizzi et al., 2021).

On the other hand, the government and various non-governmental organizations have initiated various programs and policies to support SMEs in implementing sustainable business practices. These programs include training, technical assistance, and financial incentives designed to encourage SMEs to be more environmentally friendly. However, the effectiveness of these programs is often limited by the lack of active participation from communities and the lack of collaboration between various stakeholders (Permatasari & Gunawan, 2023).

Communities play a vital role in encouraging SMEs to commit to sustainable business practices. Community engagement can take many forms, from environmental awareness campaigns, and participation in community programs, to more sustainable consumption practices. Community initiatives can create social and economic pressures that encourage SMEs to be more environmentally responsible. In addition, community initiatives can also help create a more supportive business ecosystem for sustainable practices through close collaboration between businesses, government, and communities (DiBella et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, community initiatives to support sustainable business are still in their early stages but show promising developments. Several communities have started campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of environmentally friendly business practices. In addition, there are also examples of SMEs that have successfully integrated sustainable practices into their operations with support from local communities (Pasaribu et al., 2020).

There are still many barriers that need to be overcome to expand the adoption of sustainable business practices among SMEs. These barriers include a lack of specific education and training on sustainable practices, limited funds for initial investment in green technology, and policies and regulations that do not fully support the transition to sustainable business. Therefore, a more holistic and collaborative approach is needed to address these challenges (Alayón et al., 2022).

The importance of community initiatives in supporting SMEs to implement sustainable business practices is also increasingly relevant in the context of economic resilience. With the increasing frequency of natural disasters caused by climate change, SMEs that implement sustainable practices are more likely to survive and adapt to these changes. Sustainable business practices not only improve competitiveness and long-term sustainability but also help reduce risks associated with environmental impacts (Suriyankietkaew et al., 2022).

Given the urgency and relevance of this issue, this study aims to explore how community initiatives can play a key role in encouraging SMEs to adopt sustainable business practices. This study will also analyze the existing barriers and opportunities, and propose strategies that can improve the effectiveness of these initiatives. Thus, it is hoped that this study can provide a meaningful contribution to the collective effort to achieve environmental and economic resilience through the development of sustainable business practices in the SME sector.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

According to Warkum Sumitro, micro, small, and medium enterprises are businesses carried out by a company with a workforce of no more than 50 people. Micro-scale businesses are the majority of micro and small businesses, for example, street vendors, handicrafts, souvenir businesses, and the like. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are business activities that can expand employment opportunities and play an important role in the process of equalizing and increasing community income, encouraging economic growth, and realizing national economic stability (Khanzode et al., 2021).

According to Law Number 20, 2008, the general provisions for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are as follows:

a) Micro Enterprises are productive businesses owned by individuals and/or individual business entities that meet the criteria for Micro Enterprises as stipulated in this Law (Maksum et al., 2020).
b) Small Businesses are productive economic businesses that stand alone, carried out by individuals or business entities that are not subsidiaries or branches of companies owned, controlled, or become part either directly or indirectly of Medium Enterprises

or Large Enterprises that meet the criteria for Small Enterprises as referred to in this Law (Vdovenko et al., 2020).

c) Medium Enterprises are independent productive economic enterprises, carried out by individuals or business entities that are not subsidiaries or branches of companies owned, controlled, or are part of either directly or indirectly with Small Enterprises or Large Enterprises with the number of net assets or annual sales results as regulated in this Law (Sahela et al., 2021).

The criteria for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are as follows:

a) The criteria for Micro Enterprises are as follows:
   1) have a maximum net worth of IDR 50,000,000.00 (fifty million rupiah) excluding land and buildings for business premises; or
   2) have annual sales of a maximum of IDR 300,000,000.00 (three hundred million rupiah) (Sutapa & Miati, 2020).
b) The criteria for Small Enterprises are as follows:
   1) have a net worth of more than IDR 50,000,000.00 (fifty million rupiah) up to a maximum of IDR 500,000,000.00 (five hundred million rupiah) excluding land and buildings for business premises; or
   2) have annual sales of more than IDR300,000,000.00 (three hundred million rupiah) up to a maximum of IDR 2,500,000,000.00 (two billion five hundred million rupiah) (Akbar et al., 2023).
c) The criteria for Medium Enterprises are as follows:
   1) have net assets of more than IDR500,000,000.00 (five hundred million rupiah) up to a maximum of IDR10,000,000,000.00 (ten billion rupiah) excluding land and buildings for business premises; or
   2) have annual sales results of more than IDR 2,500,000,000.00 (two billion five hundred million rupiah) up to a maximum of IDR 50,000,000,000.00 (fifty billion rupiah) (Arif & Nurzansyah, 2020).
d) The criteria as referred to in paragraph (1) letter a, letter b, and paragraph (2) letter a letter b, and paragraph (3) letter a letter b, the nominal value can be changed following economic developments as regulated by Presidential Regulation (Disantara, 2020).

2. Sustainable Business

The theory of sustainability was first put forward by Meadows who explained the community's efforts to prioritize social responses to environmental and economic problems. This social response is expected to meet the needs of the present and future generations. The concept of sustainability is currently growing and applied in the context of corporate sustainability (Spiliotopoulou & Roseland, 2020). Artiach and Pemer explain the context of corporate sustainability as a business and investment strategy that can improve business practices by balancing the needs of current and future stakeholders. This concept emphasizes the interests of stakeholders by balancing the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of company performance (van Lieshout et al., 2021).

Corporate Sustainability is usually measured through the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), this concept was developed by Elkington & Rowlands. There are three dimensions of TBL, namely economic, social, and environmental. Pemer states that companies can move towards sustainable development by integrating TBL into management strategies. Markley and Davis prove that organizations that focus on TBL can increase the company's competitive advantage (Satar, 2022).

There are several objectives of this sustainable business concept. Here are some of them:

a) Protecting the Environment

The environment is an issue that is often discussed lately. This is due to the declining quality of the environment. Some locations are no longer habitable and have even sunk due to rising sea levels. That is why one of the objectives of business sustainability is to prevent this situation from getting worse. Thus, future generations can still have a decent life (Isiaka et al., 2021).

b) Managing Energy

Currently, the majority of people in the world still use non-renewable energy. This energy has various weaknesses, such as it can run out if used continuously. In addition, this energy can produce exhaust gases that can cause global warming. Therefore, energy use must be managed. In addition, the use of renewable energy can be a consideration. This is because this energy will never run out even if used continuously. One way is to apply the concept of sustainable business. Companies that apply this concept will manage and try their best to use renewable energy (Halkos & Gkampoura, 2020).

c) Improving Efficiency

Companies that want their business to continue for a long time need to increase their efficiency. The efficiency referred to here is related to production activities in their environment and the raw materials used. This can be achieved by implementing business sustainability. This method allows companies to manage raw materials better so that they can maximize their use. So, not many raw materials are wasted. This efficiency will result in less waste being produced by the company so that it can minimize its negative impact on the environment. In addition, companies can also make more products with existing raw materials (Sheth, 2020).

d) Benefits

Another goal of business sustainability is to gain profit. As previously mentioned, this concept can enable companies to gain profit sustainably or continuously. But unfortunately, many companies gain profit by damaging the environment. This not only reduces the quality of the environment itself but also destroys the place where the company stands so that the business is threatened to not last long. That is why this concept is needed so that the company continues to produce. In addition, this concept can also increase profits with as little capital as possible (Schoneveld, 2020).

e) Beneficial for Society

A company with this concept is not only beneficial for its own business but also for society. This is because a well-maintained environment will affect the lives of the surrounding community in particular and the world community in general. In addition, the company can also always meet the needs of the community. This is due to the existence of the company that continues to exist and can run properly. Not only that, this company can also ensure that its workers can work comfortably. In addition, this concept can also make workers get a fixed salary in the long term (Yahman & Setyagama, 2023).

C. METHOD

This research will be conducted using a qualitative approach to explore more deeply the implementation of sustainable business practices among SMEs. Through this approach, research data will be obtained from various reliable sources, such as research results and previous studies that are still relevant to the content of the research. A qualitative approach allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the factors that influence the adoption of sustainable practices, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in the process. After the research data has been successfully collected, the next step is to process the data systematically. Data processing will involve in-depth analysis to identify patterns, themes, and insights that are relevant to the research objectives. The results of this analysis are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of effective strategies to encourage SMEs to switch to sustainable practices, the impact of implementing these practices on environmental and economic resilience, and the role of community initiatives in supporting sustainable business. Thus, this research can make a significant contribution to the development of more sustainable business policies and practices in the future (Sarosa, 2021).

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Challenges and Obstacles for SMEs in Implementing Sustainable Business Practices

Developing sustainable business practices among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) faces several complex challenges and barriers. One of the biggest challenges is the limited resources that SMEs have. Many SMEs operate on limited budgets, making it difficult to allocate additional funds to invest in green technologies or other sustainability initiatives (Bakos et al., 2020). The initial costs of adopting green technologies, such as energy-efficient equipment or efficient waste management systems, are often beyond the financial reach of SMEs. In addition, there is a shortage of skilled workers to operate and maintain these technologies. SMEs often lack staff with the technical knowledge needed to effectively implement and maintain sustainable practices.

These limitations are compounded by a lack of access to information and knowledge relevant to sustainable business. Many SME owners and managers lack an understanding of the long-term benefits of sustainable practices and how to implement them. The lack of training and education available to SMEs in the area of sustainability leaves them unaware of the opportunities that exist and how to optimize their operations sustainably. In addition, information about green technologies, environmental management methods, and best practices in sustainable business is often not easily accessible to SMEs, especially those in remote areas or with limited internet connectivity.

The role of government policies and regulations is also very significant in supporting or inhibiting the implementation of sustainable practices in SMEs. In many countries, existing environmental policies often benefit large companies that have more resources to comply with strict regulations. Meanwhile, SMEs often feel burdened by complex and expensive compliance requirements. Inconsistent policies or the absence of adequate incentives to support the transition to sustainable practices also act as barriers. For example, subsidies or tax incentives for investment in green technologies are often insufficient or unavailable to SMEs. Existing regulations sometimes do not take into account the capacity and capabilities of SMEs, making it difficult for them to meet the requirements without adequate support.

Awareness and commitment of SME owners and managers to the importance of sustainable business practices is also a determining factor. Many SMEs focus on short-term profits and day-to-day business continuity, so they pay little attention to the long-term impact of their operations on the environment. This low level of awareness is often due to a lack of information and education about the environmental impacts and benefits of sustainability. Furthermore, in some cases, even when there is awareness, there is still a lack of commitment to take the necessary steps due to the perception that the costs and efforts required are not worth the benefits gained. This creates a cycle where the lack of sustainable action reinforces the perception that sustainable practices are not feasible for SMEs.

Addressing these challenges and barriers requires a holistic and collaborative approach. First, government intervention is needed to create supportive policies and adequate incentives for SMEs. This includes the provision of subsidies, tax incentives, and funding programs to support investment in green technologies. Second, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions need to play an active role in providing training and outreach to SMEs on sustainable practices. This can be done through workshops, seminars, and training programs specifically designed for the needs of SMEs. Third, there needs to be an effort to raise awareness and build commitment among SME owners and managers. Awareness campaigns and community initiatives can play a significant role in driving a business culture shift towards sustainability.

Overall, addressing the challenges and barriers to adopting sustainable business practices in SMEs requires collaboration from various parties, including government, communities, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions. With the right support and an integrated approach, SMEs can overcome resource constraints, improve access to information, take advantage of supportive policies, and increase their awareness and commitment to sustainable business. This will not only help protect the environment but also improve the economic resilience and long-term sustainability of SMEs themselves.

2. The Role of Community Initiatives in Supporting Sustainable Business

Community initiatives play a critical role in encouraging small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to adopt sustainable business practices. One effective way is through public awareness campaigns. These campaigns, often driven by non-governmental organizations, local communities, and environmental advocacy groups, can raise awareness among SMEs about the importance of sustainability. Successful campaigns use a variety of media, including social media, seminars, and workshops, to disseminate information about the environmental impacts of current business practices and the potential benefits of moving toward sustainability. These campaigns also often feature case studies and real-world examples of SMEs that have successfully implemented sustainable practices, providing inspiration and practical guidance for other SMEs.

Active participation and collaboration from the community are also critical in encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices by SMEs. When communities are actively involved in sustainability initiatives, such as recycling programs or local renewable energy projects, they provide not only moral but also practical support to SMEs. Collaboration between stakeholders, including local governments, businesses, and community organizations, can create an ecosystem that supports sustainability. For example, collaborative initiatives such as green markets or eco-fests can provide a platform for SMEs to showcase their sustainable products and services, while also getting direct feedback from consumers and the wider community. Community involvement in these projects creates a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for sustainability.

Local support is another crucial aspect of encouraging sustainable business among SMEs. Local communities can support SMEs in several ways, including by choosing to purchase sustainably produced products and services. When local consumers show a strong preference for environmentally friendly products, this provides an economic incentive for SMEs to adopt sustainable practices. In addition, communities can provide technical support, for example through mentoring or training programs run by local organizations or universities. This technical support can help SMEs overcome the technical and operational barriers they face in implementing sustainable practices. Through local networks and communities, SMEs can also more easily access the resources and information they need.

Social pressure from the community can also be a powerful motivator for SMEs to act more responsibly in an environmentally responsible manner. An environmentally conscious society tends to demand more from businesses around them, encouraging them to be transparent about their environmental practices and to innovate to reduce their negative impact on the environment. This social pressure can come in the form of consumer campaigns, petitions, or even boycotts of products that are not environmentally friendly. This pressure makes SMEs realize that sustainability is not just about business ethics, but also about maintaining reputation and customer loyalty. In today's digital age, where information spreads quickly through social media, social pressure can be very effective in driving change in business behavior. SMEs that do not meet societal expectations regarding sustainability can quickly lose customer support, while those that commit to sustainable practices can build a loyal and dedicated customer base.

Community initiatives have great potential to support SMEs on their journey towards more sustainable business practices. By raising awareness, facilitating collaboration, providing local support, and creating social pressure, communities can help SMEs overcome the barriers they face in adopting sustainability. These steps not only support environmental sustainability but also help build stronger and more resilient local economies. When SMEs successfully implement sustainable practices, they not only meet the demands of an increasingly environmentally conscious market but also contribute to the well-being and quality of life of the communities in which they operate. These initiatives, therefore, must continue to be encouraged and expanded to create significant and far-reaching change.

3. Effective Strategies to Encourage SMEs to Shift to Sustainable Practices

Shifting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to sustainable business practices requires a structured and comprehensive approach. One of the key strategies is capacity building and training. Training programs specifically designed for the needs of SMEs are essential to ensure that SMEs have the knowledge and skills needed to implement sustainable practices. This training should cover a range of aspects, from environmental management, and the use of environmentally friendly technologies, to sustainable product marketing strategies. In addition, training should also be tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of each SME, so that they can apply what they learn effectively in their operational context. This capacity building not only helps SMEs to be more competent in running sustainable businesses but also increases their awareness of the importance of sustainability in the long term.

In addition to capacity building, access to green innovation and technology is a key factor in encouraging SMEs to shift to sustainable practices. Technological innovation can help SMEs improve operational efficiency and reduce environmental impacts. For example, the use of renewable energy technologies such as solar panels or more efficient waste management systems can significantly reduce SMEs' carbon footprint. However, access to these technologies is often limited by cost and availability. Therefore, it is important to create mechanisms that facilitate SMEs' access to green technology. This can be done through subsidy programs, partnerships with technology providers, or financing schemes that allow SMEs to obtain technology at a more affordable cost. Innovation should also be encouraged through research and development involving SMEs so that they can actively participate in finding technology solutions that suit their needs.

Infrastructure and financial support also play a critical role in encouraging SMEs to shift to sustainable practices. Adequate infrastructure, such as recycling facilities and renewable energy networks, is needed to support sustainable SME operations. In addition, access to green finance or financial incentives is essential to help SMEs cover the often high upfront costs of adopting sustainable practices. Governments and financial institutions should provide financing schemes specifically designed to support sustainability, such as low-interest loans, grants, or tax incentives for investment in green technologies. With adequate financial support, SMEs will be better able to make the investments needed to achieve sustainability. Adequate infrastructure and strong financial support can reduce the financial risks faced by SMEs in their transition to sustainable practices, making sustainability a more attractive and viable option.

Proactive policy development by governments is also essential to encourage SMEs to adopt sustainable business practices. Supportive policies should include incentives for SMEs that implement sustainable practices, as well as regulations that reduce barriers to them. Governments should take an active role in creating a regulatory environment that encourages innovation and sustainability. For example, policies that provide tax incentives for SMEs that use renewable energy or that reduce production waste can provide a significant boost to sustainable practices. In addition, regulations that ensure transparency and reporting of sustainable practices are also important to encourage accountability and continuous improvement. The government needs to work with various stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, to design effective and implementable policies.

Overall, strategies to encourage SMEs to shift to sustainable practices must include a holistic and integrated approach. Strengthening capacity through training and education, better access to innovation and green technologies, supportive infrastructure, and proactive government policies are all important components of this strategy. By combining all these elements, SMEs can more easily and effectively adopt sustainable practices, which will ultimately improve their competitiveness, strengthen economic resilience, and contribute to environmental sustainability. Collaboration between various stakeholders, including governments, civil society, the private sector, and local communities, is essential to ensure that these efforts are successful and provide long-term benefits.

4. The Impact of Implementing Sustainable Business Practices on Environmental and Economic Resilience

The adoption of sustainable business practices by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has a significant impact on environmental and economic resilience. One of the most direct impacts is reducing negative impacts on the environment. Sustainable business practices can help reduce carbon emissions through the use of renewable energy and increased energy efficiency. For example, the adoption of energy-efficient technologies and the use of alternative fuels can substantially reduce an SME’s carbon footprint. In addition, better waste management through recycling practices and the reduction of production waste also reduces pollution and other negative impacts on the environment. These efforts not only help preserve the environment but also improve the reputation of SMEs in the eyes of consumers who are increasingly concerned about environmental issues.

In addition to environmental impacts, the adoption of sustainable practices can also improve the efficiency and productivity of SME operations. Practices such as optimizing resource use, improving production processes, and managing a more efficient supply chain can reduce operational costs. For example, by reducing waste of raw materials and energy, SMEs can lower production costs and increase profit margins. The use of environmentally friendly technologies is also often accompanied by increased efficiencies, such as more energy-efficient machines or more sophisticated management systems. These increased efficiencies not only help SMEs remain competitive in the marketplace but also provide greater flexibility in dealing with price fluctuations and market demand.

Furthermore, sustainable business practices play a key role in strengthening the long-term resilience of SMEs to changing market and environmental challenges. By adopting more sustainable practices, SMEs can reduce the risks associated with climate change and increasingly stringent environmental regulations. For example, SMEs that have already switched to renewable energy or reduced their carbon emissions will be better prepared for stricter emissions regulations in the future. In addition, consumers are increasingly choosing products and services that are produced sustainably, so SMEs that are committed to sustainability can build stronger customer loyalty and expand their market share. Long-term sustainability also means that SMEs can continue to operate and thrive in changing market conditions, maintaining their stability and growth.

The adoption of sustainable business practices also has a significant positive impact on local communities. SMEs that operate sustainably often contribute to improving the quality of life in their communities. For example, by reducing pollution and waste, SMEs can create a healthier environment for the surrounding community. In addition, SMEs that focus on sustainability tend to invest more in local community and development initiatives, such as job training programs or local environmental projects. This not only enhances the SME's reputation but also strengthens the social and economic ties within the community. Thus, sustainable practices not only benefit the business itself but also help create a local economy that is more stable and resilient to various economic and environmental shocks.

E. CONCLUSION

The adoption of sustainable business practices among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) offers significant benefits for both environmental and economic resilience. By reducing negative environmental impacts, increasing efficiency and productivity, and strengthening long-term resilience, SMEs can adapt themselves to face increasingly complex future challenges. In addition, community support through public awareness campaigns, active participation, and social pressure have proven effective in encouraging SMEs to be more environmentally responsible. With the help of adequate infrastructure and access to green financing, SMEs can overcome the obstacles they face in adopting sustainable technologies and practices. The success of SMEs' transition to sustainable business practices depends heavily on proactive government policies, including financial incentives and supportive regulations. Training and capacity-building programs are also needed to ensure that SMEs have the necessary knowledge and skills. The positive impacts of implementing these practices are felt not only by the SMEs themselves but also by the local communities who experience improved quality of life and a more stable economy. Therefore, collaboration between the government, society, the private sector, and local communities is essential to achieving broader and deeper sustainability goals.

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