



Enhancing MSME Competitiveness in Brunei through Halal Certification: Challenges and Training Opportunities

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Abstract

The International Community Service held in Brunei Darussalam occurred at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bandar Seri Begawan, targeting Indonesian micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) entrepreneurs residing there. This event was organized in collaboration with the Association of Indonesian Accounting Lecturers (ADAI), the Indonesian Community Association, and the Indonesian Muslim Entrepreneurs Association. The main objective was to unify perspectives on addressing pressing halal issues and enhancing MSME competitiveness through halal certification. Featuring knowledge-sharing sessions themed "Strategies for Enhancing MSME Competitiveness through Halal Certification: Challenges and Opportunities," the event occurred on September 18, 2024, and attracted 150 participants from 40 universities across Indonesia, both online and in person. The implementation method employed a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) approach and in-depth interviews, including training on strategies to improve MSME competitiveness through halal certification, obtaining halal certification, and identifying challenges and opportunities. Activities included preparing the team, introducing topics, summarizing discussions, analyzing data, and assessing the feasibility of qualifying MSMEs. The FGD and training materials cover the halal certification process, benefits, compliance with Islamic law, and strategies to improve MSME competitiveness at the international level and understand the differences in halal certification and product labelling between Indonesia and Brunei

INTRODUCTION

Despite still facing challenges related to connectivity that need to be improved, Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have significant potential to compete in the Brunei Darussalam market, mainly when supported by the right business partners, competitive product pricing and maintained product quality consistency. According to market analysis, there are several products with high demand in Brunei Darussalam, especially consumer goods, with a specific focus on Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), vehicles and their spare parts, animal feed, agricultural products, as well as textiles and garments. To penetrate the Brunei market, Indonesian exporters must pay attention to several imports.

The Requirements set by the Brunei government include clear labelling regulations, halal certification, food safety guarantees, completeness of export documentation, and any special permits required for specific commodities. Meeting these requirements will facilitate the export process and enhance consumer confidence in Indonesian products in Brunei.

Brunei Darussalam is one of Southeast Asian countries with an advanced economy supported by a component of creative and innovative human resources. After achieving a significant level of prosperity, Brunei has demonstrated a high capacity for adaptation to emerging changes and challenges. The country is committed to continuously improving its education and skills sectors to address various existing issues. Covering an area of approximately 5,765 km², Brunei is a member of ASEAN with a population of around 406,000. Despite its small size, the country boasts a low unemployment rate of only 3.7%. This low unemployment figure reflects the success of Brunei's society in creating job opportunities and new employment. The culture of entrepreneurship and the innovative spirit among the Bruneian people are key factors in economic development, driving them to continually create more job opportunities (Cheong et al., 2016; Ibrahim & Ghani, 2018; Susminingsih, 2019).

With a high level of community welfare, Brunei Darussalam has made rapid progress in the era of globalization. The Bruneian society generally does not feel the need to actively seek employment, as they believe that job opportunities will come to them. In this context, to enhance the competitiveness of Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), it is crucial to consider the characteristics of the Brunei market, which has the largest Muslim population. This necessitates the implementation of Islamic law, including the requirement to possess halal certification or halal labels on products indicating their halal status (Laila et al., 2024). Having halal certification on product labels is essential for business operators as a strategy to enhance competitiveness, expand markets, ensure compliance with religious principles, meet legal regulations, and improve product quality and safety. Halal certification offers various benefits, including instilling consumer confidence regarding the halal status of the products they consume (Arzaqi et al., 2024; Fathurohim & Muliya, 2024; Munawaroh et al., 2024). In Indonesia, several products, including those originating from the United States, are obtaining halal certification from the Halal Product Assurance Agency (BPJPH).

The body's energy derived from sources that are not halal tends to drive individuals toward undesirable behaviour. As stated by the companion Sahl bin Sa'ad Ra, "Anyone who eats haram food, then acts on his limbs, inevitably" (HR. Al-Bukhari and Muslim). This hadith emphasizes that negative actions will not yield positive results. Therefore, for Indonesian micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), obtaining halal certification is a strategic step in competing internationally. Halal certification or labels clarify the halal status of products, an essential aspect of the company's responsibility toward consumers who adhere to religious beliefs. Producing halal goods is not merely about meeting regulatory demands; it also represents a commitment to maintaining and enhancing product quality to ensure competitiveness. Improving quality and providing legal protection for consumers through guarantees of product halal status is crucial for MSMEs. In facing intense market competition and increasing consumer demand, MSMEs must obtain halal certification to meet market demands, particularly in predominantly Muslim countries such as Brunei Darussalam. Thus, halal certification serves not only as a tool for market entry but also as a strategy to enhance product competitiveness on a global scale (Haleem et al., 2020; Krisharyanto et al., 2019; Ruhana, 2021).

One of the main challenges Indonesian micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) face in Brunei in obtaining halal certification is the cost and complexity of the processes involved. This process typically includes audits, inspections, and oversight conducted by certification bodies. Therefore, MSMEs need support from various parties to overcome these challenges and obtain halal certification by equipping them with the necessary knowledge and understanding to comply with these regulations and effectively compete in the halal market.

In addition, it is important to harmonize perceptions and standards regarding the possession of halal certification between Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia. The government institutions regulating products entering Brunei Darussalam include the Royal Brunei Police Force, the Royal Customs & Excise Department, and the Brunei Darussalam Food Authority. In light of this, this community service initiative aims to enhance the competitiveness of Indonesian MSMEs operating in Brunei Darussalam through halal certification for their products.

The approach employed in this effort is a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which is expected to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by MSMEs in obtaining halal certification (Alam et al., 2024; Ben-Nasr & Ghouma, 2022; Bux et al., 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Priority Issues

A newly established business does not automatically develop into a large enterprise; it requires hard work, perseverance, and consistency from the entrepreneurs to achieve progress. Numerous challenges, both from internal and external sources, can impact the development of a business. The primary objective of a business is to achieve profitability, which ensures its operational sustainability. Such an endeavour necessitates mobilizing human resources, intellectual effort, and other resources to attain the established goals.

Businesses that take the form of household enterprises or individually owned entities are called Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). MSMEs play a vital role in the economy, as these business activities can expand job opportunities and serve as the backbone of the grassroots economic system. MSMEs contribute to income distribution and societal enhancement, significantly accelerating regional and national economic development. Thus, developing MSMEs is crucial for fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

One of the common issues faced by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is the lack of awareness and knowledge regarding halal certification regulations. This aspect is essential for MSMEs to understand the prevailing legislation in Indonesia. The law mandates that MSMEs obtain halal certification, as stipulated in the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Decree Number 748 of 2021, which determines the types of products that must be halal certified. Furthermore, the Halal Product Assurance Agency within the Ministry of Religious Affairs has been designated as the government agency responsible for halal certification, as outlined in the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia Decree Number 3/UMK.05/2019. This regulation also includes the service fee rules set by the Public Service Agency for Halal Product Assurance at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as regulated in Number 57/PMK/2021. The New Public Service (NPS) approach is the most coherent in implementing food security policies for MSMEs (Rudiatin et al., 2024). A lack of understanding of these regulations can impede MSMEs' efforts to access broader markets, particularly in countries with large Muslim populations. Therefore, enhancing MSME entrepreneurs' understanding and knowledge of halal certification is essential.

Additionally, there are several weaknesses faced by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia. These weaknesses include management, organization, technology, capital, operations, and technical skills. Furthermore, MSMEs also encounter limited market access, challenges in the licensing process, and unavoidable non-technical costs (Iskandar et al., 2024; Liani & Jumaidi, 2023; WINARNO et al., 2024). The implementation of regulations concerning halal certification for MSME operators has been postponed until 2026. Initially, this policy was planned to take effect in October 2024. However, the presidential decision indicated that this requirement would not only apply to MSMEs in the food and beverage sector includes other products such as traditional herbal medicines, chemical products, cosmetics, and medical devices.

Consequently, all product categories must comply with halal certification regulations by 2026. Meanwhile, in Brunei Darussalam, compliance with halal certification standards has become an integral part of product regulation, given the majority Muslim population in the country. Therefore, a better understanding of halal certification is essential for MSMEs in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam to access broader markets.

Implementation Solution

The community service team aims to enhance the understanding of MSMEs through focus group discussions (FGDs) and training on strategies for improving the competitiveness of MSMEs through halal certification. This training is designed to explore the challenges and opportunities for Indonesian MSMEs in entering the Brunei Darussalam market while considering local regulations and market interests (source: kemenlu.go.id). Information regarding the applicable regulations in Indonesia related to products that are required to have halal certification will also be provided, including the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Decree Number

748 of 2021, the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia Decree Number 3/KMK.05/2022, and Regulation Number 57/PMK/2022.

A deep understanding of these regulations is crucial for identifying challenges and opportunities to enhance the competitiveness of Indonesian MSME products in Brunei Darussalam.

The CEO of the export school stated that although the Brunei Darussalam market is relatively small, its high purchasing power presents significant opportunities for Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to compete and capture market share. Within the framework of the Indonesian economy, MSMEs represent the most dominant business segment, thus contributing substantially to national economic growth. This international community service initiative is designed to educate MSME operators on strategies for enhancing competitiveness through mastering halal certification for their products. The main focus of this initiative includes providing information on the characteristics of MSME businesses, as well as the classification of enterprises into micro, small, and medium businesses. Additionally, the program addresses legal aspects related to halal certification guarantees, standard operating procedures (SOPs) for issuing halal certificates in Indonesia, and the prerequisite documents required to obtain halal certification and the halal logo. Through these efforts, Indonesian MSMEs will enhance their competitiveness and optimally leverage market potential in Brunei Darussalam.

METHODS

Activity Methods

The implementation method employed by the community service team involves a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) approach and training on strategies to enhance the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through halal certification, including how to obtain halal certification and the associated challenges and opportunities. The activities consist of several stages:

Selection of the Moderator

A moderator is chosen from the community service team, as this individual manages the discussion during the session.

Preparation of the Community Service Team

The established community service team is organized to facilitate discussion and effectively distribute tasks and roles among team members.

Introducing the Topic and Posing Questions

The next stage involves dividing the FGD into smaller groups or classes according to the themes set by the community service team and introducing the topic along with relevant questions.

Summarizing Discussion Content

The team designated as the note-takers carefully records all important points and responses from participants during the discussion.

Data Analysis

Once the discussion concludes, the team is tasked with analyzing the data by evaluating the notes taken and compiling a general summary of the discussion.

Decision-Making and Assessing the Feasibility of MSMEs

The team will decide the eligibility of MSMEs that meet the prerequisites for obtaining halal certification. These decisions are based on the analysis of the discussed topics and are part of a selection process aimed at determining eligibility for progressing to the next stage



Figure 1. Photograph and Interview with a Representative from the Indonesian Muslimah Entrepreneurs Association in Brunei Darussalam.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Brunei is one of the countries with an advanced economy, attributed to its highly creative human resources. After achieving prosperity, Brunei Darussalam has demonstrated the ability to adapt to all changes and confront obstacles arising from various situations. The country strives to excel in education and skills development to address existing challenges. Covering an area of 5,765 km², Brunei is one of the Asian countries member of ASEAN. Despite having a population of 406,000 people, its territory is relatively small, which is evidenced by a very low unemployment rate of only 3.7%. With a high standard of living, Brunei has experienced rapid advancement in the era of globalization.

In this context, to enhance the competitiveness of Indonesian MSMEs, it is important to note that Brunei is the largest Muslim-majority country, which necessitates the application of Islamic law, including the mandatory implementation of halal certification or halal labelling for products, ensuring the apparent legitimacy of their halal status (Laila et al., 2024).



Figure 2 Physical Map of Brunei Darussalam

The partners in this international community service initiative comprise Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) located in Brunei Darussalam, affiliated with the Indonesian Community Association in Brunei Darussalam and the Indonesian Muslim Women Entrepreneurs Association. This community service project is implemented in the multipurpose room of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam. The participating MSMEs encompass various sectors, including food and culinary services, general services, and restaurants. The products presented by these MSMEs in the Bandar Seri Begawan area are highlighted during these activities.



Figure 3 Logo Halal of ASEAN Countries

The halal certification indicated by the halal logo is a trust marker. When consumers see the halal certification label on a product, it assures them that the food is permissible, sound, and hygienic, adhering to the principles of *halalan thayyiban*. Particularly for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), cleanliness and health are heavily emphasized in Islamic teachings. In Brunei, the Halal Food Control Division (BKMh) operates under the Department of Syariah Affairs. It oversees and manages halal food product supervision, including restaurants, food and beverage industries, and food stalls, and similar businesses. This division also oversees export products that seek to use the official halal logo issued by the Brunei Islamic Religious Council (Majlis Ugama Islam Brunei, MUIB). The rapid growth of the global market has brought halal product standards into focus, protecting the rights of Muslim consumers (Abderahman et al., 2021; Shahabuddin et al., 2020; Zulfa et al., 2023). Countries in ASEAN have developed national standards for halal products, halal certification, and halal labelling; however, the differences in standards between countries often pose challenges for international halal product trade. In Brunei Darussalam, the application for halal certification is mandatory, particularly for business owners involved in the food sector.



Figure 4 Abdimas Team Observing and Educating on the Importance of Halal Certification and Halal Labels

Halal certification is important in global marketing because it necessitates recognizing a product's halal status. While possessing halal certification and a halal label may be accepted across all ASEAN countries, the official recognition of such certification can vary significantly from one nation to another. The rapid expansion of the global market has brought the standardization of halal products to the forefront, which is aimed at protecting the rights of Muslim consumers. Countries within ASEAN have developed national standards for halal products; however, discrepancies in standards between countries frequently pose challenges for international halal product trade. These variations can hinder the seamless flow of halal goods across borders, emphasizing the need for harmonised halal certification standards to facilitate international trade and ensure consumer confidence in halal products.

The roles of religion, government, and the market are intricately interconnected in understanding and aligning perceptions regarding the use and significance of halal certification and halal labelling for products. Products with halal certification and labelling are more likely to thrive, serving as a long-term investment that benefits economic growth. By establishing the obligation for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to obtain halal certification and labelling, all stakeholders contribute to creating a conducive environment for business development. This enhances the competitiveness of MSMEs in the market, reinforces consumer trust, and fosters economic resilience within the community. Consequently, the collaborative efforts of religious authorities, government entities, and market participants are essential for promoting the widespread acceptance and implementation of halal standards, ultimately leading to sustainable economic growth.

Allah SWT states in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 168, which means:

"O' humanity! Eat what is lawful and good on earth, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Surely, he is a manifest foe for you."

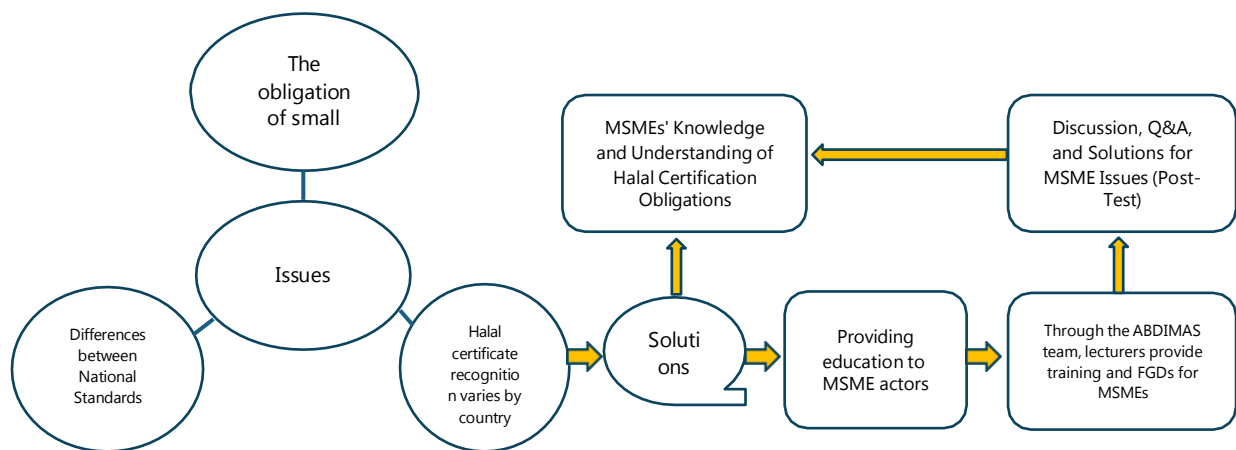


Figure 5 Solution Scheme Conducted from the Analysis of the Problem in Community Service

The issues presented in the image above are:

1. Differences in National Standards: There are variations in the national standards for halal certification and labelling implemented in several countries, including Brunei Darussalam.
2. Recognition of Halal Certification: Halal certification can be recognized in one country or another.

Possessing halal certification and labelling adds significant value to a product's competitiveness internationally, particularly for Indonesian products sold in Brunei Darussalam. This creates an attractive proposition for consumers, especially given that the global Muslim population exceeds 1.8 billion. Halal products consumed worldwide, including food, beverages, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics, account for approximately USD 2.2 trillion (Halalmui.org). This represents a substantial opportunity for producers to supply halal products, a demand expected to grow yearly.

In Brunei Darussalam, the regulation and implementation of halal practices are enforced through the issuance of halal certification and labelling, subject to amendments. Therefore, this international community service initiative aims to provide education and understanding regarding halal. Certification by Islamic law. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) must obtain halal certification, as Government Regulation has no mandates. PP No. 39 of 2021 requires MSME products to possess halal certification and labelling, with a deadline extended until 2026. This initiative aims to equip MSME operators with the necessary knowledge and understanding to comply with these regulations and effectively compete in the halal market.

The limited time allocated to the community service team from the Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta and collaborative universities to discuss the challenges and opportunities in enhancing the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through halal certification and labelling necessitated the division of tasks among team members to understand better the activities conducted by MSMEs in Brunei Darussalam.

According to information gathered from the Indonesian Muslimah Entrepreneurs Association members, halal regulations in Brunei Darussalam are enforced through amendments that apply to small and medium-sized enterprises. The Halal Food Control Division (BKMh) operates under the Department of Religious Affairs. It plays a crucial role in controlling and supervising food products, which includes oversight of restaurants, food and beverage industries, and similar business establishments.



Figure 6 *Participants of the Community Service in Brunei Darussalam Attended by Representatives of the Indonesian Embassy in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam*

This structured approach enables the community service team to comprehensively explore the dynamics of halal certification within the local MSME context while addressing pertinent issues that these enterprises face in complying with regulations and enhancing their market competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

The international community service event held on September 18, 2024, at the Indonesian Embassy in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, was a success, with participation from 150 people representing 40 universities across Indonesia. Collaborating with the Association of Indonesian Communities in Brunei, the Indonesian Muslimah Entrepreneurs Association in Brunei and the Indonesian Accounting Lecturers Association, the initiative facilitated meaningful discussions and knowledge sharing to enhance the MSME capabilities of Indonesian Communities in Brunei. The activity, which commenced on September 13, highlighted the importance of obtaining halal certification for MSME products, driving economic development, and creating employment opportunities for local communities. Support from the Indonesian government and the involvement of academics and practitioners are instrumental in this initiative, emphasizing the need for continuous collaboration to improve the international competitiveness of Indonesian MSMEs in Brunei.

To improve the success and sustainability of Indonesian MSMEs in Brunei, it is recommended that collaboration between universities, associations, and government entities be strengthened to support ongoing initiatives while developing a comprehensive training program focusing on halal certification and product labelling. Understanding the differences in halal certification and product labelling between Indonesia and Brunei where in general, although both countries have a halal certification system, Indonesia has a more complex system, with broader coverage and more detailed regulations, while Brunei has a more straightforward and focused approach, especially in the food and beverage sector. Both countries emphasize the importance of halal products, but their approaches and regulations are tailored to each country's conditions. Conducting market research to identify international opportunities, facilitating networking events to foster relationships with potential buyers and investors, and establishing a participant feedback mechanism will help refine future initiatives. In addition, increasing awareness and promotion of halal products in local and international markets will emphasize quality and compliance with halal standards, ultimately improving the competitiveness of MSMEs of the Indonesian Community in Brunei on a global scale.

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