**THE PROBLEM**

In Pancasila, Indonesia clearly states that it will ensure social justice for every Indonesian. Social justice is a condition where everyone has equal rights and opportunities (SDFoundation, 2016). However, disparities in job opportunities in rural and urban cities are still visible. According to Tauhid Ahmad, the director of INDEF, there are limited job opportunities in rural areas, which necessitates their workforce to move to the cities to find a living. He adds that these limited job opportunities in villages lead to economic disparity: according to Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), in 2022, the urban poverty rate is at 7.53 percent and rural poverty at 12.36 percent. This problem becomes urgent as the BPS shows that the rural poverty rate has fluctuated between 12-13% since 2017.

**THE SOLUTION**

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) bring a clear solution to this issue. According to Badan Koordinasi Penanaman Modal, Indonesian MSMEs accounted for more than 61% of the country's GDP and employed over 97% of domestic workforce. Consequently, the growth of MSMEs in rural areas is a viable approach to providing more employment opportunities in rural areas and stimulating regional economic activities.

**THE COMPLICATIONS**

To improve enterprises in rural areas, one needs to understand that it can be challenging due to infrastructure disparity.

For instance, Kak Narti, a female business owner from Bolu, travels twenty hours per month to buy her inventories in Makassar. Her gender makes it even more difficult for her because she needs to make the 20 hours of the business trip while taking care of her kid since our culture heavily sees women as the family's caretakers. Luckily, she found a solution to her problem when she became a client of UTG, in which she got access to buy her inventories in the comfort of her home.

**PERSONAL MOTIVATION**

Biar nyambunggg, certain disini kenapa sih kamu kok bisa tergerak untuk ingin membantu menyelesaikan masalah ini? Ini juga penting karena sebagai pembaca, aku bisa cukup melihat rencana kamu dengan jelas, tetapi aku nggak terlalu kenal dengan diri kamu dan motivasi kamu. Jadi, sebagai pembaca, aku sudah cukup jelas tentang ‘apa yang Jibran mau lakukan,’ tapi belum jelas tentang ‘siapa itu Jibran.’

Jadi nanti flow nya seperti ini: 1) ada masalah, 2) ini solusi nya, 3) tapi solusi itu ga bisa langsung di implement, karena ada komplikasi, 4) tapi karena pengalaman pribadi saya yang memotivasi saya, saya ingin sekali untuk bisa mengatasi masalah ini. Baru setelah ini lanjut ke 5) apa yang saya sudah lakukan.

**WHAT I’VE DONE**

The idea of helping other female entrepreneurs in rural areas and giving women an equal opportunity to do their business prompted me to leave my secure job at a multinational retail company to lead a small family business in Makassar called UTG.

UTG is a wholesale clothing company that wants to enable women-led small clothing businesses to purchase their inventories from anywhere at any time. As a company, we believe that female-led fashion business units in rural areas can only grow if they have the same access to a wide variety of clothing suppliers that MSMEs in the city have access to. Hence, UTG serves 3,000 clothing brands that MSMEs can buy through their phone. My bachelor's degree in entrepreneurship enables me to bring about a few adjustments that are advantageous to both rural businesses and UTG as a business.

Firstly, I modified our aim by concentrating on business units in the countryside, which doubles our customer base. We have helped 237 woman-owned small and micro companies stock up to 30.000 clothes per month so far.

Second, at the beginning of 2022, I spearheaded a customer visit program where my team and I went to our client’s homes or stores. This is to observe their customers’ purchasing patterns and then use that information to advise them on the types of clothes to sell to make their businesses appear appealing. I’m grateful to have seen our customers’ business growth emerge through this new program. For example, Kak Idha from Mamuju grew her business and opened a new branch in another area. My data shows that 10 percent of our clients have opened a new branch and/or modified their boutique to be bigger, hence creating more job listings. The clients' growth help UTG to experience a revenue boost and has doubled the amount of its employee to serve more female entrepreneurs in rural areas.

Third, I created a secure way to give out payment plans that ultimately reduce the number of yearly uncollectible debt by 92 percent. It helps UTG to keep a healthier cash flow and have more funds to offer payment plans to female entrepreneurs.

**THE IMPACT**

Here, expand on the impact of your efforts at UTG on the community.

**MORE COMPLICATION**

Combating limited job opportunities in rural areas and developing regional economies will need a long-term solution, such as educating our future generation in entrepreneurship. Therefore, I collaborate with SMA Athirah to create an entrepreneurial club to help students leap on their entrepreneurial journey. The movement will encourage students to be open to starting their firms and expanding employment options in South Sulawesi. I have designed the module with SMA Athirah since October and have finalized it to include several business tools such as design thinking to help students approach business as a solution to solve everyday life's problems, the business model canvas to help students plan a sustainable business, small business accounting, and finance module to make sure they can make a calculated decision regarding their business, and many other modules fit for seed-stage business.

Even though I wish to see MSMEs catalyze the expansion of the rural economy, business owners' financial illiteracy impacts the sustainability of their businesses. For instance, one of my clients, Kak Rayyan from Masamba, saw increased sales from her apparel business and launched her beauty line. She could not, however, pay her garment invoices in UTG since she used the money she made from her clothing store to launch the beauty line. Consequently, she struggled to pay her debts, maintain her two businesses, and keep her employees. From this case alone, we can see the snowballing effect of the lack of financial literacy on a business and its stakeholders.

The same case happens to many other small business owners in the world. In the US, for example, research by U.S. Small Business Administration in 2015 shows that more than 286,000 SMEs suffered from financial illiteracy. This is alarming because the government helps MSMEs by focusing on offering business loans and credit assistance, such as KUR and LPDB KUKM, which can be disastrous if entrepreneurs are not assisted with adequate financial knowledge. Suppose many business owners in rural areas have to close down because of a financial mishap. In that case, many job opportunities will be closed, more people will become unemployed, and eventually rural economy will not thrive. Currently, we can combat this problem through financial books targeted toward MSMEs. Yet, some books are unsuitable as they omit financial transactions like barter, which are common in rural micro businesses.

Additionally, most MSMEs run retail businesses but need more vital supply chain management skills. For instance, Kak Ain, a store owner from Palopo, experienced overstocking during the holy month of Ramadan. In 2021, she stocked 12 million worth of clothing during Ramadhan. If she knew how to forecast her sales using the straight-line method, she would buy 16 million worth of inventories by factoring in her 34 percent growth according to her inventories purchasing capabilities in UTG. However, she did not know about this and bought 50 million worth of clothes. Hence, some of her inventories still need to be sold. This is disastrous because small businesses typically have limited funds. If their inventory doesn't move, they must stop purchasing stocks corresponding to their present client behavior. Owners can purchase books about retail. However, the books in Bahasa are mostly university-level and can only be comprehended with formal business education.

**THE SOLUTION**

Therefore, I aim to open a consulting firm geared towards female-led businesses in rural areas. The consulting firm we have in the market right now is primarily based in Java and uses consultants that usually work with large firms, making it hard to sympathize with MSMEs owners in rural areas. I want to create a consulting company that avoids English business jargon that can be hard to comprehend for entrepreneurs in rural areas.

At UTG, I learned that some female entrepreneurs prioritize their families over their businesses. Accordingly, our firm will not solely focus on the corporation side but also their personal goal. For example, I want to discuss how female business founders can make employees' workflow so that they do not have to close their stores if they are away to get their kid's rapport cards. Regardless of this vision, my background in entrepreneurship covers only the tip of business understanding and does not prepare me with deep corporate finance and supply chain that is vital in retail businesses. Consequently, I will need to obtain a master's degree in business administration to study finance decision-making, retail operation, and consultation framework.

**WHY I NEED GRAD SCHOOL**

I plan to take my MBA at Harvard Business School (HBS), Cornell Johnson, or New York University (NYU) Stern. First, these universities offer a unique program to pair students with businesses to help businesses with their current difficulties. HBS has its FIELD Global immersion project, where students will partner up with global corporations. Cornell Johnson has immersion programs that pair students with big companies such as Johnson & Johnson (a world-renowned retail company). Lastly, NYU Stern requires its students to do consulting projects with retail companies through Stern Solution Project. This chance will help me hone my consulting abilities to support small retail firms' growth. The experience will be helpful in letting me know what to expect in a consulting process and adjust that to fit the unique nature of micro-enterprises.

On top of that, all three universities also have brilliant faculties that can help me realize my goal of helping small businesses. For instance, Professor Leonard A. Schlesinger from HBS is an advisory member of Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Small Business Initiative, which provides business education and support services to small businesses. On the other hand, One of Cornell Johnson's professors, Chris Bordoni, is the founder of Bordoni & Company, a boutique consultancy that assists managers of medium-sized businesses, significant nonprofits, and foundations in completely reimagining their organizations in times of radical change. Lastly, NYU Stern lets their students work closely and be mentored by top C-suites from retail companies, such as the President of Carolina Hererra. Sharing a discussion with these professors will help me understand the unique nature of small and retail businesses to construct a helpful business framework for them. I want to discuss how we can track and evaluate the performance of small enterprises and assist them in making a robust business plan.

**FUTURE PLANS**

Immediately after returning to Indonesia, I will share my business knowledge with female entrepreneurs in rural areas whom I worked with at UTG. I plan to collaborate with some MSMEs owners who reside in rural areas as part of my prototyping and testing process before applying the business framework to the consultation firm I want to build. For instance, I'll work with Kak Joan from Kotamubagu, who told me that maintaining a healthy financial flow was difficult. I will design a daily business workbook with understandable vocabulary and relevant MSMEs' transactions and conditions by working with her. Then, entrepreneurs can read that book whenever they encounter problems or are considering some moves to take. My mission is to make our micro businesses more resilient to any given uncertain condition, can open up more job opportunities, and hack regional economic growth.

In the long run, after validating the proper business blueprint in rural areas, I will open a consultation firm for female entrepreneurs in the countryside. I will hire female consultants to ensure that female entrepreneurs feel at ease. This is important because female entrepreneurs are usually uncomfortable with having a long conversation with a male because of their beliefs, cultures, or partner.

I will also make a consulting firm where the business owners do not need to travel to meet us, lowering the entry barriers so more people will be interested in getting a consultation. To ensure that the service is financially accessible for many female small business owners, I will offer the session in a group setting. By offering a mentoring session in a group setting, female entrepreneurs will feel more comfortable as they have the session with a familiar face. On top of that, it will also allow my consulting firm to serve even more female entrepreneurs through word-of-mouth marketing strategy.

To make a sustainable impact after my study, I will still collaborate with SMA Athirah to equip their students with business skills if they wish to take an entrepreneurship journey after graduation. For instance, I will simplify my training in corporate human resources so that it is appropriate for teenagers who frequently ask their friends to work alongside them. I will also collaborate with local female entrepreneurs to make a business case out of their problems and discuss that with high school students. This way, students who wish to be an entrepreneur will be aware of the problems they may encounter in the future and know how to deal with them.

I got the chance to meet a boutique owner in Masamba, Hj. Zubaedah, who struggled financially after making a wrong financial move. She decided to keep all her workers and cut funding in another part of her business. She said the employees were always there for her, so it was her time to repay that loyalty. In our Buginese culture, we call it "Rebba Sipatokkong, Mali Siparappe, Malilu Sipakainge." It is translated to "Straighten the fallen, ashore the drifted, advise the wrong." I believe that our success, as the proverb puts it, can only be attained if people walk hand in hand to help each other. One conglomerate cannot bring about social equality and economic growth in Indonesia. However, thousands of our micro, small, and medium enterprises can collectively achieve that.

I aspire to be surrounded by bright people in the LPDP awardee community to pursue my vision of becoming a catalyst in bridging the income imbalance between rural and urban areas. I look forward to the day when every Indonesian will have the same opportunity to thrive, regardless of gender and where they live.

Hi Jibran!

Ini keren banget asli. Aku suka banget sama kamu punya semangat dan kamu punya hati buat membangun MSME di daerah.

I think at this stage, kamu punya essay bakal lebih keren lagi kalo kamu ngembangin beberapa poin yang aku udah anjurkan di atas:

1. Big Ideas nya yang jelas. Kenapa mengembangkan MSME dan bagaimana? Kenapa membuka consulting firm menjadi kunci pengembangan MSME dan bagaimana?
2. Personal motivation kamu apa? Help us to get to know who Jibran is. Kata orang tak kenal maka tak saying. Help us to understand what your personal motivation for undertaking this long and difficult quest.
3. Why do you need an MBA? Kalo dibaca sekilas, seperti nya kamu udah lebih dari mampu untuk membuka consulting firm kamu sendiri untuk membantu MSMEs di daerah. Kenapa harus ambil MBA? Apa yang kurang dari diri kamu yang akan di unlock oleh MBA dari unis ini?

Itu aja sihh. Udah keren banget ini, tinggal diperjelas dan ditingkatin lagi. All the best, Jibran!

Paul

ALL-in Essay Editor