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Building Region from Village: Koperasi Desa Merah Putih as a Community Empowerment Instrument in Indonesia

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Abstract

Village cooperative formation raises questions about how new institutions can generate community empowerment rather than merely expand organizational coverage. This study aims to develop a conceptual understanding of how the KDMP may function as a community empowerment instrument and contribute to endogenous-participatory regional development. Using a literature review and thematic synthesis of publications from 2015–2026, the research develops a conceptual capital–governance–empowerment pathway. Findings indicate that KDMP functions beyond an economic entity as a village-level institutional mechanism operating through collective resource coordination, member agency and accountability, complementary relations with BUMDes, and digital inclusion. The study enriches the endogenous-participatory development framework by positioning empowerment as an intermediate process linking community capitals, cooperative governance, and regional outcomes, and offers three testable propositions. Practically, the KDMP can reduce the rural–urban divide and build rural economic resilience, provided it is implemented through democratic governance, sustained managerial capacity building, financial literacy, and clear institutional collaboration.

Keywords: Koperasi Desa Merah Putih, community empowerment, regional development, local economy.

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INTRODUCTION

Village development is an important part of the regional development agenda (Sukri et al., 2025) because villages are not only understood as administrative units but also as socio-economic spaces with potential resources, social networks, and local institutions (Long et al., 2024). Contemporary rural development perspectives emphasize that sustainable development cannot rely solely on infrastructure expansion or external interventions; rather, it requires strengthening endogenous capacity, improving local institutions, and enabling communities to actively participate in managing their economic resources (Pylypenko et al., 2024). This approach aligns with the idea of community-based rural development, which places the community as the main actor in development through participation, capacity building, and sustainable utilization of local resources (Sambodo et al., 2023). Therefore, rural area development needs to be viewed as an endogenous-participatory process that relies on local initiatives, village economic institutions, and the community's ability to manage the resources they possess. One form of institution that is relevant in this context is the KDMP, a flagship program of President Prabowo Subianto. The urgency of strengthening village development is increasingly evident from the vast coverage of rural administrative areas in Indonesia.

The urgency of strengthening village-based economic institutions is particularly relevant in Indonesia due to the scale and complexity of rural development challenges. Indonesia consists of 84,276 administrative areas at the village level, including 75,753 villages, 8,486 urban villages, and 37 UPT/SPT distributed across 7,281 sub-districts and 514 districts/cities (BPS RI, 2024). Despite this extensive rural administrative structure, socio-economic disparities remain evident. In September 2025, the proportion of poor people in rural areas reached 10.72%, higher than the urban poverty rate of 6.60% (BPS RI, 2026). This condition indicates that rural development requires more than physical infrastructure improvement; it requires institutional arrangements that can expand access to productive resources, strengthen economic participation, and create sustainable community-based economic activities. In response to this challenge, the Indonesian government introduced the KDMP program through Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2025, targeting the acceleration of approximately 80,000 village cooperatives nationwide (Kementerian Pertahanan RI, 2025) not only demands the formation of legal entities but also raises unresolved questions about institutional relations, manager capacity, member accountability, data integration, and digital readiness. Thus, the research gap lies in explaining how the Red and White Village Cooperatives can be understood not merely as an administrative instrument of the state, but as a medium for community empowerment through participation, capacity building, management of local potential, and expanded village economic access (Marta et al., 2025).

The importance of these questions is reinforced by the broader condition of cooperative governance in Indonesia. Although Indonesia has a substantial cooperative sector, with 127,846 active cooperatives recorded in 2024 (Indonesia Baik, 2026), institutional effectiveness remains a challenge. Data from the Ministry of Finance indicates that only 93,002 cooperatives, or approximately 71.5%, conducted Annual Member Meetings (RAT), reflecting ongoing issues related to accountability, transparency, and member involvement (DJPB Kementerian Keuangan, 2025). These conditions demonstrate that institutional establishment alone does not guarantee cooperative sustainability. Previous studies have emphasized that cooperative performance

depends heavily on governance quality, managerial competence, institutional trust, and the capacity to mobilize collective resources (Setyabudi, 2025). Therefore, the implementation of the Koperasi Desa Merah Putih requires a conceptual understanding that connects cooperative governance with broader objectives of community empowerment and regional economic transformation.

Previous research has highlighted the contribution of cooperatives to local economic development and community empowerment. Saputri et al. (2025) argue that the Koperasi Desa Merah Putih has strategic potential in strengthening village economies by improving access to productive resources and supporting collective economic activities. Similarly, Syafrizal et al. (2025) demonstrate that village cooperatives may contribute to community empowerment through the strengthening of local enterprises and economic participation. The remaining task is to connect these contributions within an explicit account of how community capitals are organized through cooperative governance, how members acquire greater capability and influence, and under what conditions these changes may contribute to regional development.. Previous research has also identified several barriers, including limited capital availability, inadequate financial literacy, weak managerial capability, and limited digital adoption (Aprilis & Zulkarnain, 2025; Setyabudi, 2025). Nevertheless, these challenges have rarely been synthesized within a broader theoretical framework explaining how cooperatives transform community resources into sustainable regional development capacity.

From the perspective of endogenous regional development, village cooperatives can be understood as institutional nodes that facilitate the interaction between local resources, social capital, human capability, and economic participation. Rokhim et al. (2017) found that successful local economic development in peripheral Indonesian regions depends on the ability of communities to manage local potential, establish networks, and strengthen economic institutions. This argument aligns with Wang & Wang (2024), who emphasize that rural cooperative performance is influenced by institutional capacity, collective mechanisms, and resource coordination. Furthermore, the community capitals framework proposed by Flora et al. (2018) provides a relevant perspective by explaining that rural transformation occurs through the interaction of social, human, financial, political, and other forms of capital. Within this framework, cooperatives are not merely economic organizations but platforms through which communities accumulate and convert different forms of capital into collective development outcomes.

Based on this research context, this study addresses the existing gap by positioning the Koperasi Desa Merah Putih not only as a government policy instrument but as a community-based institution that connects cooperative governance, empowerment processes, and regional development. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine cooperative implementation or economic impacts, this research synthesizes theoretical and empirical literature on village cooperatives, community empowerment, local economic development, and community capitals framework to develop a conceptual understanding of how village cooperatives may contribute to sustainable regional development. The contribution is a proposed capital–governance–empowerment pathway that distinguishes resource availability, institutional arrangements, changes in member agency, and potential regional outcomes. The study has three objectives: to

identify the institutional mechanisms through which KDMP may organize community resources; to explain how participation, capability development, and control over benefits connect those mechanisms to empowerment; and to formulate conditions and propositions for examining their potential regional consequences.

METHOD

This study employed a literature review approach to synthesize previous studies related to village cooperatives, community empowerment, local economic development, and regional development. This article develops a conceptual and theoretical synthesis of selected literature on rural cooperatives, community empowerment, and regional development. Its purpose is explanatory framework development, rather than exhaustive evidence identification or estimation of pooled effects. The literature search was conducted through several databases and platforms, including Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and official government websites such as the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs. The search process covered publications published between 2015 and 2026 using combinations of keywords related to "village cooperative", "rural cooperative", "community empowerment", "local economic development", "cooperative governance", and "institutional capacity". State whether 23 denotes raw records, deduplicated records, full texts assessed, or included publications; provide the actual counts and exclusions at each stage. The inclusion criteria consisted of studies that discussed village/rural cooperatives, community empowerment, governance, or local economic development, while publications that were unrelated to rural institutional development, non-academic sources, or lacked sufficient methodological information were excluded. The selected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key concepts, theoretical perspectives, research findings, and limitations from previous studies.

The analysis process involved categorizing the literature based on cooperative roles, governance mechanisms, community empowerment dimensions, and contributions to regional development. This approach enabled the study to synthesize previous findings and identify conceptual relationships between village cooperatives and endogenous-participatory regional development (Snyder, 2019). To ensure the credibility and transferability of the findings, this study applied triangulation principles within the context of literature research. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing evidence from academic publications and official institutional documents to ensure consistency of information. Theoretical triangulation was applied by analyzing village cooperatives from multiple perspectives, including community-based development, endogenous regional development, and the community capitals framework. Furthermore, analytical triangulation was conducted through comparison of themes and findings across reviewed studies. Credibility was maintained through transparent literature selection procedures, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematic analysis of reviewed sources, while transferability was supported by providing sufficient contextual descriptions regarding village cooperatives, community empowerment, and rural development settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Positioning of Koperasi Desa Merah Putih as a Community Empowerment Institution

The synthesis of reviewed literature indicates that the Koperasi Desa Merah Putih (KDMP) can be positioned as more than an economic organization; it represents a village-level institutional mechanism that connects collective economic activities, community empowerment, and regional development. The conceptual synthesis is organized around four themes: collective resource coordination; member agency and accountability; complementary institutional relationships; and digital inclusion. These themes distinguish published evidence from the propositions developed here. The strategic value of KDMP does not only depend on the establishment of cooperative entities but also on its ability to function as a participatory institution that enables communities to become active actors in rural economic transformation (Cholifah et al., 2026).

This finding strengthens previous perspectives that cooperatives operate simultaneously as economic and social institutions. As economic institutions, cooperatives facilitate capital accumulation, collective business management, and market access; meanwhile, as social institutions, they provide spaces for members to participate in decision-making processes and collectively manage community resources (Duarte & Krajsic, 2016). In the context of KDMP, these two functions become particularly relevant because rural economic problems are often not solely caused by limited resources but also by weak institutional capacity to organize, distribute, and utilize those resources effectively. Thus, KDMP should not be interpreted merely as a government program for establishing village-based business entities, but as an institutional platform that strengthens community capacity and collective economic ownership.

The literature synthesis also shows that the empowerment potential of KDMP lies in its ability to shift rural communities from passive beneficiaries into active economic participants. Previous studies have emphasized that community empowerment requires more than financial assistance; it involves improving people's capacity to identify local opportunities, manage economic activities, develop entrepreneurial skills, and access wider economic networks (Yani & Wahyuni, 2026).

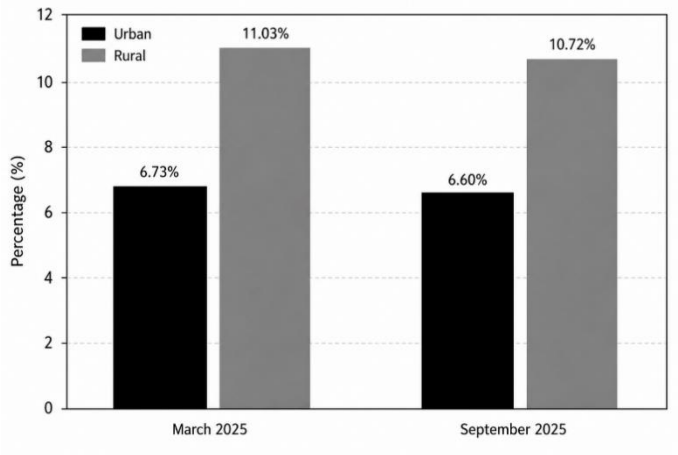


Figure 1. Comparison of the Percentage of the Urban and Rural Poor in Indonesia in 2025
(BPS RI, 2026b)

This perspective becomes increasingly important considering the persistent socio-economic disparity between rural and urban areas in Indonesia. As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of rural poverty remains consistently higher than urban poverty, reaching 10.72% in September 2025 compared with 6.60% in urban areas (BPS RI, 2026b). This disparity indicates that rural development challenges are not solely related to income levels but also reflect differences in access to productive resources, economic networks, and institutional support. Therefore, strengthening village-based economic institutions such as KDMP becomes relevant as a mechanism to improve rural communities' capacity to participate in productive economic activities.

This argument is particularly relevant when considering Indonesia's persistent rural economic disparities. The comparison between rural and urban poverty levels shown in Figure 1 demonstrates that rural poverty remains higher than urban poverty, indicating that rural communities continue to face structural limitations in accessing economic opportunities (Syaiful & Halilintar, 2026; Yusriadi, 2026). Rather than simply reflecting income differences, this disparity illustrates the need for institutional mechanisms that can improve access to capital, markets, information, and productive networks. Therefore, KDMP has strategic relevance because it can function as an intermediary institution that connects individual community economic activities with broader market systems.

The role of KDMP in reducing rural economic disparities is consistent with the concept of endogenous development, which emphasizes that sustainable regional development should be based on local resources, institutional capacity, and community participation rather than external dependency (Burhanuddin et al., 2024; Laeni et al., 2020). In this perspective, the cooperative becomes a mechanism for converting local assets into collective economic value. Local products, community skills, and social networks that previously operated separately can be organized through cooperative structures to create stronger bargaining positions and wider market access.

However, the empowerment function of KDMP depends on the extent to which participation occurs substantively. Formal membership or administrative involvement does not automatically indicate empowerment. Inclusive participation requires the involvement of vulnerable groups, including low-income communities, women, youth, and small-scale entrepreneurs, in planning, decision-making, and benefit distribution processes. This finding aligns with the community-based development perspective, which emphasizes that development institutions must incorporate democratic governance, social inclusion, and local contextual understanding (Sambodo et al., 2023). Therefore, the success of KDMP should be evaluated not only through institutional growth indicators but also through changes in community capacity, participation, and ownership of local economic processes.

Contribution of Koperasi Desa Merah Putih to Endogenous Regional Development

The findings indicate that the Koperasi Desa Merah Putih (KDMP) has significant relevance within the framework of endogenous-participatory regional development because it provides an institutional mechanism for mobilizing local resources, strengthening community capacity, and improving rural economic connectivity. The contribution of KDMP to regional development should therefore not be understood merely from the perspective of economic growth or

cooperative business performance, but from its ability to transform local assets into collective capabilities that support sustainable village development. In this perspective, cooperatives become intermediary institutions that connect individual economic activities with broader regional development processes.

The urgency of strengthening such institutions is reflected in the persistent socio-economic disparities between rural and urban areas. As presented in Figure 1, the percentage of rural poverty remains higher than urban poverty, indicating that rural communities continue to experience limitations in accessing productive resources, markets, financial services, and economic networks. This condition suggests that rural development challenges are not only related to income inequality but also institutional inequality, where rural communities often have weaker mechanisms for organizing and utilizing their economic potential. Therefore, the role of KDMP becomes strategically important because it can provide collective mechanisms to overcome fragmented economic activities by organizing production, strengthening marketing networks, and improving community bargaining positions.

The large number of village-level administrative areas in Indonesia further strengthens the relevance of village-based economic institutions. The extensive geographical and administrative coverage of villages demonstrates the strategic importance of strengthening village-level institutions in Indonesia's regional development agenda. As illustrated in Figure 2, villages represent the dominant proportion of village-level administrative areas, accounting for 75,753 units or 89.9% of the total village-level administrative structure (BPS RI, 2024). This condition indicates that rural development cannot rely solely on centralized economic strategies but requires institutional mechanisms that operate directly within local communities.

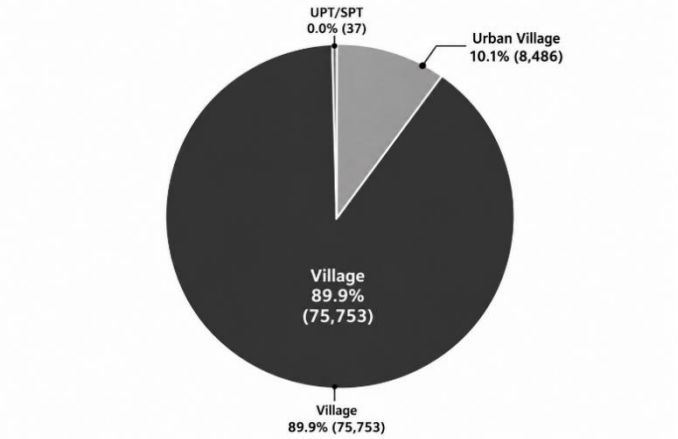


Figure 2. Composition of Village-Level Administrative Areas in Indonesia in 2024 (BPS RI, 2024)

In this context, KDMP has strategic relevance because it operates within the socio-economic environment where local resources, community networks, and economic activities are directly formed. Figure 2 illustrates the extensive scale of village development contexts, showing that rural transformation requires institutions capable of operating directly within local communities. The existence of 75,753 villages demonstrates that regional development policies cannot rely only

on centralized economic approaches but must incorporate institutions that are embedded within local socio-economic environments. In this regard, KDMP has the potential to function as a local development platform because it operates close to community production systems and can adapt economic activities to specific village characteristics.

This perspective aligns with endogenous development theory, which emphasizes that sustainable regional development depends on the capacity of local actors to utilize internal resources, strengthen institutions, and participate in decision-making processes (Burhanuddin et al., 2024; Laeni et al., 2020). Unlike externally driven development models, endogenous development highlights the importance of community ownership and local institutional capacity. Therefore, KDMP can contribute to regional development when it successfully integrates local economic potential, community participation, and institutional governance into a coherent development mechanism.

However, the contribution of KDMP to regional development is strongly influenced by its relationship with existing village institutions, particularly village-owned enterprises (BUMDes). The findings indicate that KDMP and BUMDes should not be positioned as competing organizations but as complementary institutions with different roles. BUMDes generally focuses on managing village assets and collective village enterprises, while cooperatives emphasize member-based economic participation and collective ownership. The effectiveness of village economic transformation therefore depends on the ability of these institutions to establish coordination mechanisms, avoid overlapping functions, and develop complementary business models based on local potential.

Furthermore, KDMP's contribution to regional development requires a shift from an institution-building perspective toward an institution-strengthening perspective. Establishing cooperative legal entities is only the initial stage; long-term development depends on governance quality, managerial capability, member participation, and the ability to establish market linkages. Previous studies indicate that cooperative institutions become effective development actors when they possess strong internal governance, social trust, and the capacity to organize collective economic activities (Bianchi & Vieta, 2020). Therefore, KDMP should be evaluated not only through quantitative indicators such as the number of established cooperatives but also through qualitative indicators related to empowerment, institutional learning, and community economic resilience.

Governance, Capacity, and Institutional Challenges of Koperasi Desa Merah Putih

Although the Koperasi Desa Merah Putih (KDMP) has significant potential as an instrument for community empowerment and regional development, the findings indicate that its effectiveness is highly dependent on institutional readiness and governance capacity. The establishment of cooperatives through government policy does not automatically guarantee successful community empowerment because cooperative sustainability is determined by the interaction between governance quality, managerial competence, member participation, and supporting ecosystems. Therefore, the main challenge of KDMP is not merely institutional formation but ensuring that the cooperative develops into a functioning economic institution that is trusted and actively utilized by the community.

Governance represents one of the most fundamental prerequisites for KDMP sustainability. The literature synthesis shows that cooperative governance determines the extent to which organizations can maintain transparency, accountability, member trust, and collective decision-making processes (Setyabudi, 2025). This issue is particularly relevant in Indonesia because the existence of cooperatives does not always correspond with effective institutional performance. Although Indonesia has a large number of active cooperatives, the relatively limited implementation of Rapat Anggota Tahunan (RAT) indicates that aspects of accountability and member participation remain challenges. Therefore, governance should not be treated merely as an administrative requirement but as the foundation for ensuring that KDMP remains aligned with cooperative principles of democracy and collective ownership.

In addition to governance, managerial capacity represents another critical determinant of KDMP performance. Village cooperatives operate within increasingly complex economic environments that require managers to possess capabilities in business planning, financial management, market development, and digital adaptation. The findings indicate that limited managerial skills may restrict cooperatives from transforming local resources into competitive economic activities. Previous research shows that assistance programs for KDMP management, including business proposal preparation, village potential mapping, and operational planning, can improve managerial understanding and strengthen cooperative readiness (Arifin et al., 2020). This finding suggests that capacity building should be designed as a continuous process rather than a short-term training activity during cooperative establishment.

Another important challenge concerns community readiness, particularly financial literacy and participation. As illustrated in Figure 2, differences in financial literacy and inclusion between rural and urban communities indicate that rural communities may face barriers in accessing and utilizing formal financial services. This condition has implications for KDMP because cooperative success depends on members' ability to understand financial mechanisms, participate in decision-making, and utilize cooperative services effectively. Therefore, strengthening financial literacy should become an integral component of cooperative empowerment strategies rather than being considered a separate development agenda.

Digital transformation also represents an important prerequisite for strengthening KDMP competitiveness. Digital technologies can improve access to agricultural information and market connections, although their use depends on connectivity, affordability, and skills . However, digitalization requires not only technological infrastructure but also human capability to operate and utilize digital systems effectively. Thus, digital transformation should be approached as an institutional capacity-building process rather than merely the adoption of technological tools.

Furthermore, the sustainability of KDMP requires regulatory coordination and institutional collaboration. The cooperative should operate within a broader village development ecosystem involving village governments, BUMDes, financial institutions, private sectors, and community organizations. Without clear institutional arrangements, KDMP may face overlapping functions, dependency on government support, or difficulties in developing sustainable business models. Therefore, policy support should focus not only on accelerating cooperative establishment but

also on creating an enabling ecosystem consisting of mentoring, financing access, market networks, and regulatory clarity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that KDMP requires a transition from a program-oriented approach toward an institution-oriented approach. The success of KDMP cannot be measured solely by the number of established cooperatives but by its ability to develop internal capabilities, maintain democratic governance, and generate sustainable economic benefits for village communities. In this regard, institutional strengthening becomes the key mechanism that connects cooperative formation with long-term community empowerment and regional development outcomes.

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of village cooperatives as institutional mechanisms within the framework of endogenous-participatory regional development. Rather than viewing cooperatives merely as economic organizations, this study positions the Koperasi Desa Merah Putih (KDMP) as an institutional node that connects local resources, community capabilities, and collective economic action. This perspective expands the understanding of rural cooperatives by emphasizing that their contribution to regional development is not only generated through business activities but also through their capacity to build social capital, strengthen community participation, and facilitate collective management of local resources.

The proposed refinement is to treat empowerment as an intermediate process through which institutional arrangements may connect local resources to development outcomes. Governance conditions shape whether this process is inclusive or exclusionary; the framework does not assume a positive effect from institutional establishment alone. This adds an explicit institutional explanation to the endogenous-participatory perspective: local resources matter through the arrangements that determine who can mobilize them, influence their use, and obtain benefits.

The framework differentiates four analytical levels. Community capitals describe the available resource base. Cooperative arrangements specify collective decisions and economic coordination. Empowerment refers to changes in members' capabilities, influence, and access to benefits. Regional outcomes concern wider and more durable effects, such as local linkages, diversification, and resilience. Moving between these levels requires evidence; organizational performance is not itself proof of community empowerment or regional transformation.

Three propositions follow. First, resource mobilization is more likely to support empowerment where members have accessible information and effective influence over decisions. Second, empowerment is more likely to contribute to wider local benefits where cooperative activities generate sustained links with local producers and enterprises. Third, external support and digital services are more likely to strengthen local capability where institutional rules preserve member accountability and prevent exclusion. These propositions are theoretical expectations for testing, not causal findings from the present synthesis.

The framework also admits feedback: members who gain skills and confidence may exercise stronger oversight, while unsuccessful or inequitable activities may erode trust and participation. Its contribution lies in making these relationships and potential failures explicit, rather than

claiming the first explanation of cooperative economic mechanisms. This distinction preserves the contributions already made by Simamora (2025) and Marta et al. (2026).

Koperasi Desa Merah Putih has potential to become a strategic instrument for inclusive rural transformation if developed through participatory governance, local resource orientation, and institutional capacity building. However, this potential depends on the ability of stakeholders to ensure that cooperatives operate as community-owned economic institutions rather than temporary policy programs. Therefore, the long-term contribution of KDMP to regional development will be determined by its capacity to create collective learning, strengthen local economic resilience, and expand community participation in rural economic transformation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the Koperasi Desa Merah Putih (KDMP) holds a strategic position not merely as an economic entity, but as a village-level institutional mechanism that connects collective economic activities, community empowerment, and regional development. The KDMP has the potential to transform rural communities from passive beneficiaries into active economic actors through four main dimensions: collective resource coordination; member agency and accountability; complementary institutional relationships (particularly with BUMDes); and digital inclusion. Theoretically, this study enriches the endogenous-participatory development framework by positioning empowerment as an intermediate process that links community capitals, cooperative governance, and regional outcomes, while also offering three testable propositions. Practically, the KDMP is relevant as an instrument for reducing the rural–urban divide, strengthening local economic bargaining positions, and building rural economic resilience, provided that it is implemented through democratic governance, sustained managerial capacity building, financial literacy, and clear institutional collaboration.

This study is a literature synthesis and therefore has limitations in empirically testing the causal relationships between the establishment of the KDMP, changes in member capacity, and tangible regional impacts. The secondary data employed (including poverty figures and the number of villages) are aggregate in nature and do not yet capture significant local variation. The framework developed also does not thoroughly consider variations in local contexts, village political dynamics, and external factors such as market fluctuations and national policy. Future research should therefore conduct more in-depth empirical studies to test the proposed propositions, measure qualitative indicators of empowerment and collective ownership, and analyse KDMP–BUMDes governance practices and synergies across diverse village contexts. The government and relevant stakeholders are advised to shift from a program-oriented approach (the number of cooperatives established) towards an institution-strengthening approach that emphasises substantive participation, sustained managerial capacity, financial literacy, inclusive digital transformation, and an adequate supporting ecosystem, so that the KDMP can genuinely become an instrument of inclusive and sustainable rural transformation.

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