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Activation of Business and Institutionalization of the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives in the Kolono District, South Konawe Regency

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ABSTRACT

The Red-and-White Village Cooperatives has strategic potential as a forum for the people's economy that plays a role in improving the welfare of rural communities, creating jobs, expanding economic participation, accelerating the strengthening of MSMEs, and reducing inflation and extreme poverty. However, its establishment and sustainability face a number of challenges, particularly related to business aspects, the quality of management resources, institutional aspects, and partnership networks. This activity aims to improve the business and institutional capacity of its managers so that cooperatives can operate as transparent, accountable, sustainable economic entities based on local potential. The expected benefits include increased understanding and skills in cooperative governance, particularly in business and institutional management, as well as support for local governments in strengthening the role of cooperatives as pillars of family-based and mutual assistance economic empowerment. The results show that Kolono Subdistrict has 21 Red-and-White Village Cooperatives, all of which were established through a new cooperative establishment model in accordance with the Minister of Cooperatives Implementation Guidelines Number 1 of 2025. The existence of these cooperatives is supported by government support, institutional structures, local resource potential, and market opportunities. However, several obstacles remain, such as low management and human resource capacity, limited capital, minimal member participation, and market uncertainty. Business and institutional activation needs to be directed towards strengthening governance, increasing human resource capacity, developing relevant business models, utilizing technology, strengthening capital, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperatives constitute one of the key pillars in improving community welfare through the principles of solidarity, self-reliance, and mutual cooperation (Majee & Hoyt, 2011; Saastamoinen & Puusa, 2024). Nevertheless, cooperatives face a range of challenges in institutional capacity, management performance, and the development of competitive business units (Zhang et al., 2023). The Red-and-White Village Cooperatives was established out of concern for economic inequality and the longstanding dependence of rural communities on economic systems that do not sufficiently support small-scale producers, an initiative promoted by national actors and rural

development practitioners. On the other hand, the diversity of natural and human resources in rural areas must be continuously optimized through collective economic entities that can mobilize local potential and respond to the economic challenges faced by rural communities (Shava & Hofisi, 2019).

The Red-and-White Village Cooperatives hold significant potential as a people-centered economic institution. Referring to the Implementation Guidelines No. 1 of 2025 concerning the establishment of the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives, the purpose of forming these cooperatives is to enhance rural welfare, create employment opportunities, increase community participation in economic activities, serve as an

accelerator for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and reduce inflation and extreme poverty. The role of cooperatives in promoting development and poverty reduction is also emphasized in international studies (Birchall, 2003; Fernandez-Guadano et al., 2020). Therefore, these cooperatives still require institutional strengthening and business activation to enable them to play a more optimal role in improving the welfare of members and local communities.

According to data from the Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs of Southeast Sulawesi Province (2025), there are 2.285 units of the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives, consisting of 1.908 Village Cooperatives (*KDMP*) and 377 Urban Cooperatives (*KKMP*). Among the 17 districts and municipalities in the province, South Konawe District has the highest number, accounting for 15,36 percent with 336 *KDMP* and 15 *KKMP* units. The existence of these cooperatives is supported by global studies that highlight their role as drivers of local economic development and community empowerment (Gephart, 2002). Thus, their presence serves not only as ordinary business institutions but also as engines of economic and social empowerment in various local communities across South Konawe, a district endowed with diverse natural and human resources.

The establishment and sustainability of the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives are not without challenges. From a business perspective, these cooperatives face difficulties in creating enterprises aligned with local economic potential and the availability of human resources. Furthermore, the limited knowledge and experience of cooperative managers often lead to unprofessional business management practices and unclear business strategies (Fernandes & Silva, 2022). Challenges related to competitiveness and marketing further affect business continuity. From an institutional perspective, these cooperatives were established by local governments rather than through community-led initiatives, resulting in managerial appointments that tend to be formalistic, with low managerial capacity. Decision-making processes often do not adhere to the cooperative's bylaws (*AD/ART*), member meetings as mechanisms for evaluation and oversight are not conducted optimally, transparency and accountability are weak, conflicts of interest

between management and supervisory bodies emerge, internal oversight becomes ineffective, administrative systems remain weak, and the ability to build relationships with stakeholders is limited. These institutional challenges align with findings from global studies on cooperative governance (Cornforth, 2004; Novkovic, 2008). Therefore, business and institutional activation is needed, including mentoring, strengthening governance practices, and developing business units based on member needs or local potential.

METHODS

The business and institutional activation activities for the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives represent a form of community service specifically targeted at cooperative boards and managers in Kolono Subdistrict, South Konawe Regency. This program is designed to strengthen institutional capacity and managerial competence so that cooperatives can operate more effectively and sustainably; such targeted capacity-building interventions have been shown to improve cooperative governance and performance in multiple contexts (Sauter & Loss, 2021). The initiative focuses on addressing concrete needs of cooperative leaders and managers, particularly organizational strengthening, managerial skills enhancement, and the optimization of the cooperative's role as a local economic driver by combining classroom-based learning with participatory methods that build local ownership and practical skills (Mastronardi & Romagnoli, 2020).

Implementation is organized in four main, sequential stages: (1) an initial survey and mapping of the current conditions of the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives in Kolono Subdistrict; (2) delivery of activities through training modules, in-depth interviews, and facilitated discussions aimed at increasing the knowledge and capacity of cooperative boards and managers; (3) intensive hands-on mentoring to assist practitioners in applying learned practices; and (4) systematic monitoring and evaluation to assess outcomes and ensure sustainability. This staged approach follows best practices in cooperative capacity building and community-based program evaluation, combining needs assessment, participatory training, continuous

technical assistance, and M&E to produce measurable and durable improvements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective Conditions of the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives

The Red-and-White Village Cooperatives (*KDKMP*) is a rural-based cooperative established to empower local economies through principles of mutual cooperation and communal solidarity, functioning as a community-driven economic institution that pools resources and strengthens local productive activities. In line with Article 33(1) of the Indonesian Constitution, which mandates that economic activity be organized as a collective enterprise for public welfare, the Government of Indonesia under President Prabowo Subianto has prioritized the strengthening of cooperatives as a key strategy for economic empowerment through the establishment of 80,000 Red-and-White Village Cooperatives, as detailed in the Implementation Guidelines of the Minister of Cooperatives of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1 of 2025. This initiative aims to enhance local economic resilience, foster sustainable food self-sufficiency, develop agro-maritime industries with cooperative participation, and promote rural-led development to support equitable economic growth.

The presence of *KDKMP* has the potential to advance rural economies by serving as a formal mechanism through which village communities can optimize the use of natural and human resources, improve economic welfare, and address structural rural challenges such as limited access to capital, lack of financing mechanisms, underemployment, rural poverty, and regional economic disparities. The regulatory framework for the establishment of *KDKMP* enumerates a wide range of benefits, including increased community participation in economic activities, job creation, improved village welfare, systematic and efficient service provision, consumer price stabilization, enhanced farmgate prices, reduced dependence on intermediaries, shortened supply chains, increased financial inclusion, and the roles of cooperatives as accelerators, consolidators, and aggregators of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as well as contributors to poverty reduction, inflation control, and the modernization of cooperative management systems.

Currently, three general models are observed in the establishment of *KDKMP*, including in South Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province: (1) establishment of new cooperative institutions; (2) development of additional business units within existing cooperatives; and (3) revitalization of inactive cooperatives at the village/urban level. In Kolono Subdistrict, the 21 newly formed *KDKMP* units follow the model of newly established cooperatives, bolstered by experienced cooperative practitioners in certain villages. These practitioners possess cooperative knowledge, vocational skills, business acumen, and entrepreneurial motivation, all of which are essential for effective cooperative performance and long-term sustainability.

The new cooperative establishment model is characterized by the recruitment of members, mobilization of initial capital, and the initiation of business operations through deliberative mechanisms. The development model involves transforming existing cooperatives into *KDKMP* entities with expanded business coverage, while the revitalization model consists of a series of strategic steps to reactivate cooperatives that have become dormant both institutionally and operationally, with attention to existing asset base and obligations.

According to data from the Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs of Southeast Sulawesi Province (2025), South Konawe Regency accounts for 15.36 percent of all the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives in the province, with 336 Village Cooperatives and 15 Urban Cooperatives. The cooperatives formed exhibit diverse primary business activities carefully planned to match the needs and characteristics of the local community, including retail outlets, savings and loan units, warehousing and logistics, and other context-appropriate enterprises. Selection of business units requires thorough technical and operational feasibility analysis, management and organizational assessment, market and marketing analysis, financial and capital analysis, legal and regulatory compliance analysis, as well as social and environmental considerations to ensure that the cooperative's core enterprises are not only responsive to member needs but also viable in terms of market potential and future sustainability.

Supporting and Constraining Factors of Business and Institutional Development

Following the establishment of the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives (*KDKMP*), both business operations and institutional arrangements constitute critical determinants of cooperative success and long-term sustainability. The business aspect concerns the selection of economic activities based on the Indonesian Standard Industrial Classification (*KBLI*) and the economic potential of each village. Meanwhile, the institutional aspect relates to the cooperative formation model and the quality of human resources within the cooperative's management and governance structures. These two dimensions are widely acknowledged as core predictors of cooperative performance and resilience in rural development settings.

Based on field data and information regarding the implementation of *KDKMP* in Kolono Subdistrict, several supporting and constraining factors were identified that significantly influence the success and sustainability of both business operations and cooperative governance.

1. Supporting Factors

a. Government Support

Government facilitation constitutes a primary enabling factor, as *KDKMP* is part of a national strategic program that provides procedural simplification and institutional incentives for establishment across all villages and urban administrative units. The issuance of official implementation guidelines offers clear, systematic, and comprehensive directions for local governments and communities concerning the cooperative's business processes and institutional mechanisms. Empirical studies consistently highlight that government support significantly strengthens cooperative establishment, legitimacy, and performance (Aref, 2011; Develtere et al., 2008).

b. Institutional Structure

Structurally, *KDKMP* units in Kolono Subdistrict possess complete organizational components similar to cooperatives across Indonesia, including elected executives, supervisory bodies, and operational managers with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and qualifications as stipulated in the official guidelines. In addition, formal statutes (*AD/ART*) are available to provide regulatory foundations for business and institutional governance. Institutional completeness and role

clarity are well-established predictors of cooperative viability and member trust (Sseguya et al., 2018).

c. Local Resource Potential

Kolono Subdistrict comprises villages endowed with diverse local resources, including agricultural produce, fisheries, and micro-enterprises, which constitute strategic assets for cooperative development. Village-owned assets such as land and buildings may also be utilized as cooperative facilities. Furthermore, the availability of local labor presents an opportunity to strengthen community-based economic participation. Research in rural cooperative development underscores that leveraging endogenous resources enhances sustainability and community ownership (Markelova et al., 2009).

d. Market Opportunities

KDKMP in Kolono Subdistrict has access to promising markets not only at the local scale but also through broader networks enabled by digital platforms. These opportunities align with business activities that address community needs and market demand. Partnerships with Village-Owned Enterprises, MSMEs, and private sector actors further expand cooperative market access. Existing studies confirm that diversified market opportunities and cross-sector partnerships significantly enhance cooperative competitiveness and economic outcomes (Samad et al., 2025).

2. Constraining Factors

a. Low Managerial Quality

Although *KDKMP* units in Kolono Subdistrict possess a complete organizational structure, the technical and operational understanding of cooperative management, including organizational governance, market analysis, marketing, finance, and capital management, remains relatively limited among board members and managers. Gaps in managerial knowledge also exist between newly established cooperatives and those undergoing revitalization. Limited managerial competence is a well-documented factor that reduces cooperative performance, efficiency, and sustainability (Kontogeorgos et al., 2018).

b. Limited Technological Capacity

Digital network and internet infrastructure gaps in Kolono Subdistrict hinder operational efficiency in several *KDKMP* units. Moreover, digital systems, hardware, and computer facilities

remain inadequate to support digitalized business operations. Many cooperative managers demonstrate low levels of digital literacy, limited adaptability, and even organizational resistance toward digital-based systems due to fear, uncertainty, and cultural constraints. Studies highlight that insufficient digital infrastructure and literacy significantly impede cooperative modernization and rural economic participation (Salemink et al., 2017).

c. Capital Constraints

Despite government support in establishing *KDKMP*, capital limitations remain a significant challenge for cooperative business operations. Many board members and prospective cooperative members are unprepared to contribute initial capital due to uncertainty about the business model and types of activities to be developed. Partnerships as alternative avenues for enterprise development are also limited by capital shortages, legal requirements, and the unavailability of proper business feasibility studies or proposals. Capital inadequacy is widely recognized as a major barrier to cooperative development, especially in rural contexts (Mazzarol et al., 2011).

d. Limited Member Participation

Member participation is a critical determinant of cooperative sustainability. Despite prior socialization efforts in Kolono Subdistrict, community involvement as cooperative members remains low. Several factors contribute to limited participation, including infrequent use of cooperative services, inadequate understanding of the importance of cooperatives, weak sense of ownership, and insufficient communication strategies by cooperative leaders. Low member engagement has consistently been linked to reduced cooperative effectiveness and stagnation (Fulton & Hueth, 2009).

e. Market Uncertainty

Although *KDKMP* units in Kolono Subdistrict have obtained business permits according to the Indonesian Standard Industrial Classification (*KBLI*) and established supporting outlets, they face limited business options aligned with village potentials and constraints in managerial and human resource capabilities. As a result, *KDKMP* struggles to compete in terms of product and service quantity, quality, and pricing. Externally, rural *KDKMP* units also face strong competition from established

market actors such as middlemen, minimarkets, and other private sector entities. Market uncertainty and external competitive pressures are common barriers affecting cooperative success and rural enterprise development (Markelova et al., 2009).

Business and Institutional Activation Strategies

Based on the analysis of supporting and constraining factors that influence the success and sustainability of *KDKMP* business and institutional performance in Kolono Subdistrict, several activation strategies can be elaborated as follows:

a. Strengthening Institutional Governance

To reinforce the institutional structure of *KDKMP* units in Kolono Subdistrict, cooperative boards, supervisory bodies, and managers must operate clearly, consistently, and collaboratively in accordance with the official *KDKMP* Implementation Guidelines. In addition to the existing Articles of Association (*AD*), it is necessary to establish Standard Operating Procedures (*SOPs*) for administration, services, and finance to ensure orderly and sustainable business operations. Optimizing the Annual Members Meeting (*RAT*) as a decision-making forum is crucial for setting transparent and accountable outputs and performance indicators. The adoption of digital systems is also required to strengthen cooperative management, improve operational efficiency, and support future business models. Relevant literature shows that robust governance systems and digitalized cooperative management enhance member trust, performance transparency, and long-term sustainability (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009; Bretos & Marcuello, 2017).

b. Capacity Building, Competence, and Professionalism of Human Resources

Human resources constitute a critical component determining *KDKMP's* business continuity. Based on the assessment of challenges and capacity needs among cooperative boards, supervisors, and managers in Kolono Subdistrict, capacity-building strategies must include management and financial skills, business and marketing capabilities, and digital cooperative governance literacy. These efforts can be delivered through training, mentoring programs, and the adoption of best practices from other successful cooperatives. Effective HR development requires collaboration with stakeholders such as central and local government agencies, universities,

associations, and certified training institutions. Empirical studies confirm that cooperative success is strongly influenced by the managerial and entrepreneurial competencies of their human resources (Savitri et al., 2024).

c. Development of Relevant Business Models

KDKMP can develop various business fields, but the selection of business activities must align with member needs, village potential, market opportunities, and business feasibility. Kolono Subdistrict possesses commodities related to agriculture, plantations, livestock, fisheries, and tourism, enabling potential business areas such as agricultural trade, processing industries, logistics/distribution, village-based tourism development, micro-finance services, and other locally specific ventures. Business activities must have clear markets and healthy profit margins. Diversification is essential to avoid reliance on a single revenue source and to ensure long-term sustainability. Business selection must be supported by feasibility analyses, including technical–operational, market–marketing, managerial–organizational, financial–capital, legal–licensing, and socio–environmental assessments. Scholarly research emphasizes that market-driven, diversified, and locally adapted cooperative business models significantly increase resilience and economic viability (Mohammadi et al., 2024).

d. Optimization of Technology and Digitalization

As technological advancements shape production processes and consumption patterns, *KDKMP*, as a community-based economic institution, must remain adaptive. In Kolono Subdistrict, digital applications for business and financial services, member information systems, online product marketing platforms, and social media promotion must be continuously developed. The integration of digital tools also supports cooperative boards and managers in monitoring business progress, member profiling, and identifying operational challenges. Studies show that digital transformation enhances cooperative transparency, operational efficiency, member participation, and market competitiveness (Golovina et al., 2023).

e. Activation of Capital and Financing

KDKMP capital originates from members, government support, banking institutions, and other external sources. Strengthening member capital

contributions and accessing external financing through partnerships or loans are essential strategies for sustaining cooperative operations. Equally important is the implementation of disciplined cash-flow management to maintain business health and minimize financial risks. International evidence indicates that diversified funding sources and prudent financial governance are major predictors of cooperative growth and sustainability (Cuevas & Fischer, 2006).

f. Partnerships and Collaboration

Strengthening *KDKMP* development in Kolono Subdistrict requires collaborative networks with local government, village administrations, sectoral agencies, MSMEs, and Village-Owned Enterprises. Partnerships aim to reinforce operational capacity and business performance. Collaboration with universities and professional associations is also needed to support research, technical assistance, and product or service development. Participation in national and regional programs such as food system partnerships or initiatives aligned with the Free Nutritious Meals Program (*MBG*) can further enhance business opportunities. Research shows that cooperative–stakeholder collaboration improves innovation, resource mobilization, and market integration (Zeuli & Radel, 2005).

g. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Follow-Up

As business entities requiring ongoing development and sustainable operations, *KDKMP* units in Kolono Subdistrict must strengthen their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms. Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as membership growth, liquidity, transaction volume, surplus distribution, and service satisfaction must be regularly assessed. Quarterly evaluations of business units and institutional performance are necessary. Follow-up actions and continuous improvement based on reliable data will ensure that *KDKMP* becomes more adaptive to market dynamics. The literature highlights that structured M&E systems significantly enhance cooperative accountability, operational performance, and strategic adaptation (Majee & Hoyt, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on observations, in-depth interviews, and discussions with the board and management of the Red-and-White Village Cooperatives (*KDKMP*)

in Kolono District, as the locus of community engagement, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. Of the three establishment models for the *Merah Putih* Village Cooperative (KDKMP) as stipulated in the Implementation Guidelines of the Minister of Cooperatives of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1 of 2025, namely: (1) the establishment of new cooperatives, (2) the development of existing cooperatives, and (3) the revitalization of inactive cooperatives the 21 KDKMP operating in Kolono District fall under the model of new cooperative establishment.
2. The supporting factors contributing to the presence and initial development of KDKMP in Kolono District include government support, institutional structures, local resource potential, and market opportunities. Conversely, the inhibiting factors include low managerial quality, limited human resource capacity, insufficient capital, low member participation, and market uncertainty.
3. Strategies for activating and strengthening KDKMP's business and institutional functions in Kolono District consist of the following: strengthening cooperative governance; enhancing human resource capacity, competence, and professionalism; developing relevant business models; optimizing technology and digitalization; activating capital and financing mechanisms; building partnerships and collaborative networks; and ensuring systematic monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up actions to promote sustainability in both business operations and institutional performance.

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