

REVITALIZATION OF THE PEOPLE'S ECONOMY THROUGH THE RED AND WHITE COOPERATIVE ECOSYSTEM

Pardomuan Robinson Sihombing

BPS-Statistics Indonesia, Jln dr Sutomo No 6-8 Jakarta

Correspondence Author Email: robinson@bps.go.id

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study analyzes the policy architecture, business model, and strategic implications of the Red and White Cooperative (KMP) program and its integration with the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia to strengthen rural economic empowerment and sustainable development.

Design/methodology/approach: This study employs a qualitative approach using a policy case study design supported by a systematic literature review and global comparative analysis. The analysis focuses on cooperative governance, digital transformation, and institutional development related to the KMP and MBG programs.

Findings: The findings show that the KMP program has strong potential as a rural economic aggregator supporting food security and community empowerment. However, its success depends on effective digital governance, institutional capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration. The study also identifies risks of institutional isomorphism that may hinder substantive empowerment outcomes if cooperatives function only administratively.

Research limitations/implications: This study is limited to qualitative analysis and secondary data. Future research should apply empirical approaches to examine the socio-economic impact and digital readiness of cooperatives in different rural contexts.

Practical implications: The findings provide insights for policymakers and practitioners in developing more effective cooperative governance, digital integration, and sustainable rural economic policies in Indonesia.

Originality/value: This study contributes by offering a policy-oriented analysis of the integration between the KMP and MBG programs while emphasizing the importance of digital governance and institutional strengthening for sustainable rural transformation.

Paper type: Literature review

Keywords: Economic, Policy case, Qualitative, Red and White Cooperative

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's economic landscape in the first half of the decade leading up to 2030 is at a crucial strategic inflection point. Amid the state's efforts to break free from the shackles of the middle-income trap and welcome the grand vision of Golden Indonesia 2045, the revitalization of the rural economy is a non-negotiable imperative. The grand narrative of "Asta Cita" carried out by the government of President Prabowo Subianto places cooperatives not just as complementary entities or "firefighters" in times of crisis, but as economic pillars that must be radically and structurally reactualized (Prabowo Subianto, 2025). The Merah Putih Village/Village Cooperative Program (hereinafter referred to as KMP), which aims to establish one cooperative in every village across the archipelago, is the most ambitious manifestation of this vision.

Revitalization Of The People's Economy Through The Red And White Cooperative Ecosystem
Sihombing

However, given Indonesia's long history of cooperatives, we face fluctuating, often traumatic dynamics. The dualism between Mohammad Hatta's idealism of "building a company in accordance with the spirit of family" (Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution) and the political economy reality on the ground often does not meet. Persistent academic criticism of the cooperative model in Indonesia is its tendency to be trapped as an extension of the state-led cooperative state bureaucracy, its loss of autonomy, and its vulnerability to the phenomenon of elite capture or the piracy of resources by a handful of local elites (Dulkiah & Majid, 2025; Olken, 2007). The past trauma related to the Village Unit Cooperative (KUD) in the New Order era, which is often distorted as the "Chairman of Profit First" due to centralization and corruption, is a stern warning for the design of KMP today (CNN Indonesia, 2025; Tempo, 2025).

The fundamental question is: Will KMP be the antithesis of past failures, or is it simply a repetition of history with a new nomenclature? The urgency of this research lies in analyzing the integration of KMP's policy with other national strategic programs, namely the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). This synergy promises a huge captive market for rural agricultural products, but also demands supply chain management standards that are efficient, hygienic, and transparent (National Nutrition Agency, 2025). Without fundamental governance reforms, the amount of state budget disbursement risks becoming merely rent-seeking behavior by individuals.

On the other hand, the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0 requires cooperatives to carry out digital transformation to remain relevant. The use of technologies such as super-apps, big data analytics, and blockchain in cooperative governance is no longer an option, but an absolute necessity to ensure accountability and prevent fraud. (Pajri & Sa'ida, 2026). The concept of Platform Cooperativism introduced by Trebor Scholz offers a theoretical framework for understanding how technology can be democratized through cooperative ownership, countering the hegemony of extractive platform capitalism (Scholz, 2016).

Despite the extensive academic discourse on cooperative development in Indonesia, a significant research gap remains. Previous studies have predominantly focused on traditional cooperative models (such as KUD) or on general, isolated digital transformations, lacking an in-depth analysis of state-driven cooperative integration with national food security initiatives, such as the MBG program. This study distinguishes itself from prior literature by providing a novel evaluation of the 'Red and White Cooperative' (KMP) ecosystem as a newly mandated institutional hybrid. It specifically analyzes the KMP's policy architecture and the underlying risks of institutional isomorphism in its rapid, top-down deployment, offering a fresh perspective on modern rural economic aggregation.

This research report aims to provide an indepth, critical, and exhaustive analysis of KMP's policy design, business model, and implementation framework. The analysis does not only stop at the description of normative programs, but also explores the theoretical and practical implications by comparing them critically with models of the world's successful cooperatives, such as Mondragon Corporation in Spain, which excels in the industrial innovation ecosystem, and Zen-Noh in Japan, which dominates agricultural supply chains (Godo, 2015; Hodgson, 2017). Through a comparative approach and rigorous regulatory analysis, it is hoped that strategic insights can be formulated for policymakers, academics, and practitioners to ensure that KMP truly becomes a vehicle for the nation's economic independence.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical policy case study design (Adlini et al., 2022; Sugiyono, 2019). This approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena involving the dynamic interactions among state regulations, market mechanisms, and the social behaviors of rural communities.

The data collection method is carried out through the triangulation of tightly curated secondary data sources:

Revitalization Of The People's Economy Through The Red And White Cooperative Ecosystem
Sihombing

- 1) Analysis of Primary Policy Documents: Textual and contextual readings of Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2025, Regulation of the Minister of Cooperatives Number 2 of 2025, and Regulation of the Minister of Finance Number 49 of 2025 were carried out (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025; Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). The analysis is focused on the identification of incentive structures, supervisory mechanisms, and legal institutional design.
- 2) Systematic Literature Review: A search of reputable academic journals (indexed by Scopus Q1-Q4 and Sinta 1-2) (Falagas et al., 2008) that discuss the themes of cooperative governance, institutional economics, food supply chain, and digital transformation in the period 2020-2025.
- 3) International Comparative Studies: In-depth analysis of annual reports) Moreover, academic case studies on Mondragon Corporation (Spain) and Zen-Noh (Japan) were used to obtain a global benchmark.
- 4) The collected data were analyzed using an eclectic theoretical framework combined:
- 5) New Institutional Economics (NIE): The Williamson Framework (Williamson, 2000) is used to analyze transaction costs and principal-agent problems in the KMP structure.
- 6) Institutional Isomorphism: DiMaggio and Powell's Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) applied to evaluate whether the mass formation of KMPs is driven by efficiency or pressure to gain political legitimacy.
- 7) Stewardship Theory: Used as an alternative lens to see the potential motivation of service-based cooperative administrators (Donaldson & Davis, 1991)
- 8) Platform Cooperativism: Scholz's Theory (Scholz, 2016) is used to dissect the issue of justice in the digital transformation of cooperatives.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Political Economy of Red and White Cooperatives: Between State Hegemony and Independence

The KMP program was not born in a vacuum, but rather is the state's strategic response to the stagnation of the rural economy and the market's failure to distribute welfare evenly. Politically, this program also functions as an instrument of consolidating the economic base at the *grassroots* level.

3.1.1 Regulatory Architecture and Risk of Coercive Isomorphism

The primary legal basis of KMP, namely Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2025, explicitly mandates a massive top-down approach. The central government instructed 18 Ministries/Institutions to "gang up to accelerate the formation of cooperatives in each village (President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). From the perspective of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), this phenomenon indicates intense pressure for coercive isomorphism.

The main risk of this approach is the emergence of "symbolic compliance". Villages may compete to establish cooperatives not because of fundamental economic needs or collective consciousness, but solely to meet administrative requirements to access government assistance funds of Rp 1-3 billion per unit. This data has the potential to give birth to so-called "shell cooperatives": entities that have a complete legal entity, offices, and signage, but have little substantial business activity (Chen et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024).

However, there are fundamental differences in KMP policy design compared to the previous KUD. If KUD relies heavily on distribution monopoly rights without adequate oversight, KMP is designed for a more competitive, transparent ecosystem. PMK No. 49 of 2025 introduces a financing scheme executed through banking (Himbara), under which cooperatives must pass a strict business due diligence test before obtaining credit (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). This mechanism serves as a market filter, separating bona fide cooperatives from rent seekers.

3.1.2 Elite Capture Governance and Mitigation

Revitalization Of The People's Economy Through The Red And White Cooperative Ecosystem
Sihombing

One of the chronic pathologies in village development in Indonesia is elite capture, where public resources are controlled by a handful of village elites (village heads, traditional leaders, relatives of officials) for personal gain (Fritzen, 2007; Olken, 2007). In the context of KMP, this risk manifests as the cronies of the village head controlling the strategic positions of cooperative administrators, or as the use of cooperative funds to finance local electoral politics.

To mitigate this, the application of the principles of Good Cooperative Governance (GCG) is absolute. The study by. shows that transparency is key. This study highlights the vital role of digital technology. KMPs are required to use an integrated core system (digital bookkeeping system) that enables real-time supervision. If each member can monitor the cooperative's cash flow through an application on their mobile phone, then the information asymmetry that creates a corruption loophole can be significantly reduced.

3.2 Strategic Integration with Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program

The strategic value of KMP jumps dramatically when placed in the context of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). This integration is not just a patchwork policy, but a supply chain engineering on a national scale.

3.2.1 KMP as an Aggregator and Service Unit (SPPG)

The National Nutrition Agency (BGN) has established a policy requiring that the raw materials for the MBG program be sourced from local production. In this ecosystem, KMP is positioned as an "aggregator" that purchases crops from farmers, ranchers, and village fishermen. Furthermore, KMP is encouraged to manage the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) or public kitchens (Retno Ayuningrum, 2025).

Data as of January 2026 shows a significant acceleration: 284 cooperatives have been active as suppliers of raw materials, and 13 cooperatives have been upgraded to SPPG kitchen managers (CNN Indonesia, 2026). This business model creates a captive market, ensuring certainty of product off-take and absorption. For farmers, this is a solution to the classic problem of price fluctuations during the big harvest. KMP cuts the long middleman distribution chain, so that farmers get a better farm gate price. At the same time, the MBG program receives fresher, cheaper raw materials (Zulkifli et al., 2025).

3.2.2 Supply Chain Management Challenges: Cold Chain and Quality

However, this strategic role requires operational capabilities that are not simple. KMP faces logistics management challenges, including the cold chain (ice chain) for perishable goods (such as fish, meat, dairy, and vegetables). Recent bibliometric studies confirm that modern food security is highly dependent on the efficiency of cold chain technology (Hasan et al., 2025).

Without adequate cold storage infrastructure and a refrigerated logistics fleet, KMP is at risk of food spoilage (food loss). More fatally, failure to maintain hygiene can lead to incidents of mass food poisoning in students, which will destroy the credibility of the program. Therefore, the allocation of funds from the Revolving Fund Management Institution (LPDB) and banking investment must be prioritized for the development of this physical infrastructure, rather than for trade working capital (Nugroho et al., 2025).

3.3 Digital Transformation: Towards a Cooperativism Platform Ecosystem

In the KMP narrative, technology is not just an administrative tool, but the foundation of data sovereignty and the economy.

3.3.1 Super-App Ecosystem and Biometric Validation

The government has developed an integrated application ecosystem, including "Kopdesa" and "KDMP Mobile," that offers core banking, marketplace, inventory management, and logistics features (Kopdesa, 2025). One of the most crucial security features is AI-based facial recognition for membership verification. This innovation effectively closes the loophole for "fictitious members" or "signage cooperatives" that have often been used to gain access to government program credits (Pajri & Sa'ida, 2026).

3.3.2 Data Sovereignty in the Framework of Cooperativism Platforms

Revitalization Of The People's Economy Through The Red And White Cooperative Ecosystem
Sihombing

Adopting Trebor Scholz's thinking (Scholz, 2016), KMP's digital transformation must be directed at the Cooperativism Platform. This theory means that the digital platform used must be owned and controlled by the cooperative itself, not by tech giants, which would make the cooperative a passive user.

Student consumption behavior data, farmers' crop production data, and financial transaction data are very valuable digital assets (the new oil). If managed correctly, this data can be used for precise planting planning, market price prediction, and credit risk mitigation. The principle of Platform Cooperativism ensures that the added value of this data returns to cooperative members in the form of Residual Business Results (SHU) or better services, rather than being extracted from the village (Sukardi et al., 2024).

3.4 In-Depth Comparative Studies: Reflecting on Global Giants

To gauge the potential for success and identify gaps in KMP's weaknesses, a comparative analysis with Zen-Noh (Japan) and Mondragon (Spain) provides a very valuable lesson.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Business Models and Cooperative Institutions

Dimensions	Merah Cooperative (Indonesia)	Putih Unit	Zen-Noh (Japanese)	Mondragon (Spanish)
Basics	Village (Territorial)	Unit	National Federation of Agriculture	Worker <i>Co-op</i>
Supply Chain	Local aggregator for MBG	for	Total upstream dominance (Import & Retail)	Manufacturing & Finance Industry
Education	Sporadic government training	government	Centralized Institute	Training Has its own university (<i>Mondragon Univ.</i> Düsseldorf)
Independence	<i>State-Led</i> (Top-Down)		Autonomous with a strong political lobby	Fully autonomous, solidarity-based

Source: Author's Analysis based on (Godo, 2015; Hodgson, 2017; Siregar et al., 2024)

3.4.1 Zen-Noh: The Importance of Economic Scale Through Federation

Zen-Noh (National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations) in Japan is an example of successful consolidation. Zen-Noh did not let the local cooperatives struggle alone. They are consolidating purchasing power to import fertilizers and animal feed in bulk, thereby reducing input prices for their member farmers (Godo, 2015; Yui, 2023).

Lesson for KMP: KMP's biggest weakness today is the atomized structure at the village level. Without a strong federation (Cooperative Parent) at the district or provincial level, 80,000 KMP units will lack bargaining power against fertilizer manufacturers or large buyers other than the state. The government should immediately facilitate the formation of this federation.

3.4.2 Mondragon: Education as a Core Investment

Mondragon Corporation in Spain survived for decades because it had an independent educational ecosystem, including its own university. They inculcate the principle that the main capital of cooperatives is people, not money (Cheney et al., 2014).

Lesson for KMP: The quality of human resources in rural Indonesia is still an obstacle. KMP cannot only rely on rapid training from the agency. There needs to be a fixed allocation of funds from SHU for vocational education scholarships for young cooperative cadres. In addition, Mondragon's financial solidarity mechanism, in which profitable business units subsidize loss-making units to prevent layoffs, is an enviable social safety net that helps sustain the KMP ecosystem (Bakaikoa et al., 2004).

3.5 Critical Analysis: Stewardship vs Agency in KMP Leadership

Revitalization Of The People's Economy Through The Red And White Cooperative Ecosystem Sihombing

The success of KMP's transformation depends heavily on who holds it. The pessimistic Agency Theory assumes that cooperative administrators will act opportunistically in pursuit of personal interests if they are not closely supervised. On the other hand, Stewardship Theory assumes that, given the same trust and vision, management will act as steward-servants concerned with the collective welfare (Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Sugiyanto & Rahayu, 2018).

In the context of villages in Indonesia that still value cooperation, the Stewardship approach is actually more culturally relevant. However, the history of corruption in village funds shows that cultural values alone are not enough. Therefore, KMP needs to adopt a hybrid model: building a culture of stewardship service through value education, but still implementing a strict oversight mechanism (agency controls) through digital audits and open transparency. Administrators must be given fair and professional salary incentives to prevent them from being tempted to commit fraud.

D. CONCLUSION

The Red and White Village/Village Cooperative Program (KMP) is the Indonesian government's biggest bet in the last decade to restructure the rural economy. Through vertical integration with the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), KMP gains captive market privileges that guarantee cash flow, a luxury rarely possessed by pioneer cooperatives. The digital transformation adopted offers a technocratic solution to the classic problems of data inefficiency and corruption.

However, the study concludes that capital and technology interventions alone are not enough. KMP's biggest challenge is structural and cultural transition. KMP must evolve from a state-driven entity to a member-driven economic movement. Without this independence, KMP risks suffering the same fate as KUD: dying when the regime changes and subsidies are revoked.

Learning from Zen-Noh, KMP absolutely needs a solid federation structure to achieve economies of scale. Learning from Mondragon, KMP must place education and innovation at the heart of the organization. If these institutional prerequisites are met, the Red and White Cooperative has the real potential to become a true economic teacher, ushering villages in Indonesia to become new growth centers towards a Golden Indonesia 2045.

This study has methodological limitations, considering that the Red and White Cooperative program has only been massively launched through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2025, so longitudinal data to measure long-term economic impact and financial sustainability (*survival rate*) is not yet available in its entirety, as well as the potential for generalization bias due to Indonesia's geographical diversity that is not yet fully represented. Therefore, future research agendas are strongly recommended to conduct quantitative impact evaluations using methods such as Difference-in-Differences (DiD) to precisely measure the multiplier effect, longitudinal studies to track the independence of cooperatives after subsidy revocation, and in-depth ethnographic analysis of cultural resistance or adaptation to digital technology at the village level.

To move beyond conceptual frameworks and ensure successful execution, this study proposes highly specific practical implementation strategies and institutional strengthening recommendations. In practice, the government must launch a phased digitalization roadmap for KMPs, prioritizing foundational digital financial literacy training for local administrators before the mandatory deployment of complex supply chain management software. Institutionally, it is crucial to establish an independent oversight task force comprising local academics, professional auditors, and civil society representatives to monitor KMP governance closely. This structural strengthening is necessary to prevent local elite capture and enforce transparent auditing standards, thereby guaranteeing that the MBG funds strictly empower the grassroots economy as originally intended.

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Revitalization Of The People's Economy Through The Red And White Cooperative Ecosystem
Sihombing

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