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The Role of Social Actors in Strengthening BUMDes Administration and Rural Self-Reliance

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of social actors in the development of Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) administration and its contribution to rural self-reliance. Although BUMDes have been widely discussed as instruments of village economic development, limited attention has been given to how local social actors shape administrative governance within village enterprises. This study employed a qualitative, exploratory case study design in Blitar Regency, East Java, focusing on villages with active BUMDes, including Tumpang Village. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The study involved 18 informants, consisting of community leaders, a village head, BUMDes administrators, and village facilitators. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that social actors play an important role in strengthening BUMDes administration by improving administrative order, encouraging transparent reporting, supporting accountability, and mobilizing community participation. Their contribution is not limited to technical assistance, but also includes building trust, providing local legitimacy, and bridging formal village institutions with community members. This study concludes that BUMDes administration should be understood not merely as a bureaucratic procedure, but as a socially embedded governance process shaped by leadership, social capital, and community participation. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on BUMDes governance by highlighting the role of social actors in administrative development. In practice, it suggests that strengthening BUMDes requires not only administrative training but also the empowerment of local actors to sustain transparency, accountability, and rural self-reliance.

Keywords:
Administrative governance
BUMDes administration
Community participation
Social actors

1. Introduction

Foreign Rural self-reliance is an important indicator of sustainable rural development. In Indonesia, efforts to strengthen village independence have been supported by various policies, including the

establishment and development of Village-Owned Enterprises (Badan Usaha Milik Desa, or BUMDes). BUMDes are expected to function as strategic village-level economic institutions that manage local assets, support community welfare, and encourage participatory development (Ismawati, 2020; Putra et al., 2023; Yusriadi & Cahaya, 2022). Through BUMDes, villages are encouraged not only to develop local economic potential but also to build institutional capacity for sustainable, accountable governance.

However, the effectiveness of BUMDes is not determined solely by formal institutional structures. In practice, many BUMDes still face administrative problems, including weak financial recording, limited reporting capacity, low accountability, and insufficient managerial competence among administrators (Yusriadi & Cahaya, 2022). BUMDes administration should not be understood merely as a technical activity related to financial documentation or activity reporting. Rather, it reflects the quality of institutional governance, public accountability, community participation, and trust between village institutions and local communities (Alessandro et al., 2021; Ansell & Torfing, 2022; Beshi & Kaur, 2020). Therefore, strengthening BUMDes administration is a crucial requirement for improving village enterprise performance and supporting rural self-reliance.

In this context, the role of social actors becomes highly significant. Social actors, such as village heads, community leaders, BUMDes managers, village facilitators, religious leaders, and youth groups, occupy strategic positions in shaping community understanding, building trust, and encouraging participation in village development (Syamsiyah et al., 2025; Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012). They not only act as formal or informal leaders but also serve as agents of change, connecting village institutions with community members (Ngarawula et al., 2025; Strachwitz, 2022). Their social legitimacy allows them to influence collective behavior, strengthen local networks, and facilitate community involvement in governance processes (Amin & Ritonga, 2024; Berenschot et al., 2021; Dlouhá et al., 2022). Through these roles, social actors can contribute to more transparent, participatory, and accountable BUMDes administration.

Previous studies have discussed BUMDes in relation to village economic empowerment, asset-based development, food security, and rural welfare (Ismawati, 2020; Putra et al., 2023; Yusriadi & Cahaya, 2022). Other studies have examined the importance of local leadership, social capital, community participation, and social networks in supporting rural development and sustainable development practices (Dlouhá et al., 2022; Hietschold et al., 2023; Md Rami et al., 2021; Vercher, 2022). These studies show that local actors and social relations play an important role in shaping development outcomes. Nevertheless, most existing studies tend to treat BUMDes administration as a technical or institutional matter, while paying less attention to how administrative practices are socially constructed, influenced, and sustained by local actors.

This gap is important because BUMDes administration cannot be separated from the social context in which village institutions operate. Administrative order, transparency, reporting discipline, and accountability are not produced only through formal rules, but also through trust, leadership, local legitimacy, community norms, and social interaction. Although previous research has emphasized the importance of social actors in rural development, limited attention has been given to their specific role in developing BUMDes administration and linking it to rural self-reliance. In other words, there is still a need to explain how social actors contribute to strengthening administrative governance within BUMDes and how this contribution supports broader village independence.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the role of social actors in the development of BUMDes administration and their contribution to promoting rural self-reliance. This article argues that BUMDes

administration should not be understood merely as a formal bureaucratic mechanism, but as a socially embedded governance process shaped by local actors, social capital, trust, and community participation. By focusing on social actors, this study offers a more contextual understanding of how administrative governance is developed within village enterprises.

The contribution of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it expands the discussion on BUMDes governance by placing social actors at the center of administrative development. This perspective highlights that the success of BUMDes depends not only on organizational structure and regulatory compliance, but also on the social capacity of local actors to mobilize participation, build trust, and sustain accountability. Practically, this study provides insights for village governments, BUMDes managers, and village facilitators in designing administrative strengthening strategies that combine formal procedures with social support, local leadership, and community-based participation.

2. Literature Review

Social Actors and Local Governance

Social actors are individuals or groups who can act within a social structure and influence the direction of social relations (Odoom et al., 2023; Omar, 2021). Lee & Suh (2022) emphasize that actors are not passive subjects of structure; they continuously reproduce and transform social practices through action. Beshi & Kaur (2020) similarly argue that agency involves the capacity to interpret past experiences, respond to present conditions, and imagine alternative futures. In village governance, this means that local actors do not simply implement formal rules; they interpret, negotiate, and translate those rules into practices that fit the local context (Tran et al., 2018).

In rural communities, social actors often gain legitimacy through trust, moral authority, experience, and their embeddedness in local networks. Community leaders, village officials, religious figures, and youth leaders may influence residents' perceptions of village programs and their willingness to participate. Strachwitz (2022) describes civil society actors as agents of change because they can mobilize collective awareness and facilitate cooperation. Dlouhá et al. (2022) also show that local actors play an important role in sustainable development processes by connecting networks, knowledge, and community interests. These insights are relevant for understanding BUMDes administration because administrative reform in villages requires local acceptance and collective learning.

Social Capital, Trust, and Administrative Governance

Social capital provides a useful lens for explaining why social actors matter in BUMDes governance. Clerke & Heerey (2021), define social capital through networks, norms, and trust that enable collective action. Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes that social capital is linked to resources embedded in social networks. In the context of BUMDes, social capital is reflected in actors' ability to build trust, connect different groups, and encourage cooperation in managing village enterprises (Toma & Laurens, 2024).

Trust is particularly important because BUMDes administration is closely related to public accountability. Community members are more likely to support BUMDes when they believe that managers are honest, reports are transparent, and decisions are made through fair deliberation. Studies on local governance show that transparency and good governance practices can increase public trust (Alessandro et al., 2021; Beshi & Kaur, 2020). Therefore, the role of social actors is not only to encourage participation but also to cultivate administrative norms such as openness, responsibility, and consistency in reporting.

Community Participation in BUMDES Administration

Community participation is often mentioned as a key principle of village development, but participation can take different forms and serve different interests. Ara et al. (2024), distinguish participation into nominal, instrumental, representative, and transformative forms. Nominal participation occurs when people are included only symbolically; instrumental participation uses community involvement mainly to achieve project goals; representative participation allows community voices to be represented in decision-making; and transformative participation enables people to influence power relations and institutional direction (Adedokun et al., 2021; Handayani et al., 2023).

This typology is useful for analyzing BUMDes because not all forms of community involvement lead to accountability. Residents may attend meetings without influencing decisions, or their participation may be limited to supporting business activities, with no access to information. Transformative participation requires that community members understand administrative processes, have access to reports, and be able to supervise BUMDes activities. Social actors can help move participation from nominal or instrumental forms toward more representative and transformative forms by facilitating communication, opening deliberative spaces, and strengthening community confidence to engage (Aierken et al., 2022; Calculli et al., 2021).

Research Gap

The literature shows that social actors, social capital, and participation are important elements of local governance. However, there remains a limited explanation of how these elements specifically shape BUMDes administrative governance. Many studies on BUMDes emphasize institutional establishment, business performance, or economic contribution, while the social processes behind administrative strengthening receive less attention. Conversely, studies on social actors often discuss empowerment and sustainable development without examining their direct contribution to administrative practices.

This study addresses that gap by linking three analytical elements. First, social actors are examined as facilitators, translators, motivators, and mediators in village governance. Second, BUMDes administration is understood as a governance practice that includes documentation, reporting, transparency, role distribution, and accountability. Third, rural self-reliance is viewed as the capacity of village communities to manage resources and institutions with reduced dependence on external actors. The relationship among these elements forms the analytical basis of this study: social actors strengthen administrative governance through trust, participation, and learning; stronger administration, in turn, supports rural self-reliance.

3. Research Methods

This study used a qualitative, exploratory case study design to examine the roles of social actors in the development of village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) administration and their contributions to rural self-reliance. This design was chosen because the study focuses on understanding social processes, actor interactions, and governance practices within the local institutional context (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted in Blitar Regency, East Java, with a specific focus on villages that have active BUMDes, including Tumpang Village. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in BUMDes governance and village development activities. The study involved 18 informants: five community leaders, one village head, nine BUMDes administrators, and three village facilitators.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions, roles, strategies, and difficulties encountered by social actors in strengthening BUMDes administration. Observation was used to examine administrative practices, BUMDes meetings, and stakeholder interaction. Document analysis was conducted by reviewing relevant institutional documents, including BUMDes Statutes, organizational structures, financial reports, meeting minutes, and village regulations related to BUMDes management.

To confirm data validity, this study used source and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from different informants, observations, and documents. The data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involved selecting and categorizing information based on key themes, including the roles of social actors, administrative governance, community participation, and rural self-reliance. The findings were then examined to identify patterns of social actor involvement in strengthening the BUMDes administration.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents findings on the roles of social actors in developing the administration of Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) and their contributions to rural self-reliance. The findings are organized into four analytical themes: strengthening administrative order, improving transparency and accountability, encouraging community participation, and supporting rural self-reliance. This structure is used to ensure that the discussion remains focused on administrative governance rather than expanding too broadly into general issues of rural development.

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Social Actors' Roles in BUMDes Administrative Development

Theme	Main Social Actors	Forms of Role	Implication for BUMDes Administration
Administrative order	BUMDes managers, village facilitators, village head	Improving records, organizing documents, guiding reporting procedures	More systematic and orderly administrative practices
Transparency and accountability	Village head, BUMDes managers, community leaders	Presenting reports, opening access to information, monitoring BUMDes activities	Increased public trust and stronger accountability
Community participation	Community leaders, village facilitators, local residents	Encouraging attendance in meetings, facilitating discussion, representing community aspirations	Broader involvement in planning, monitoring, and evaluation
Rural self-reliance	Village government, BUMDes, community groups	Managing local resources, strengthening institutional capacity, reducing dependence on external actors	Stronger village institutional independence

The analysis shows that social actors not only function as formal or informal leaders in village development. They also act as facilitators, motivators, mediators, and supervisors in the development of BUMDes administration. Their roles are important because BUMDes administration is not merely a technical process of recording and reporting, but also a social governance process shaped by trust, participation, leadership, and local legitimacy.

To provide a clearer overview of the empirical findings, the roles of social actors in BUMDes administrative development are summarized thematically in Table 1. The table does not replace the

detailed analysis presented in the following sub-sections, but serves as an analytical map that connects the main themes, the actors involved, their forms of contribution, and the implications for BUMDes administrative governance. This thematic summary shows that the contribution of social actors is not limited to informal support but is directly related to strengthening administrative order, transparency, accountability, participation, and institutional self-reliance.

Based on Table 1, the role of social actors operates across several interconnected dimensions of BUMDes governance. Administrative order provides the basic foundation for organizational management, while transparency and accountability strengthen public trust in BUMDes. Community participation further ensures that BUMDes governance is not dominated solely by formal administrators, but also reflects the aspirations and supervision of residents. These dimensions collectively support rural self-reliance by strengthening village institutions' capacity to manage resources, make decisions, and sustain collective economic initiatives. The following sub-sections discuss each theme in more detail, linking the empirical findings to relevant theoretical and conceptual arguments.

Social Actor and the Strengthening of BUMDES Administrative Order

The findings indicate that social actors play an important role in strengthening the administrative order of BUMDes. In the studied villages, BUMDes were initially administered in a relatively informal manner. Administrative documents such as meeting minutes, financial records, and activity reports were not consistently updated. This condition shows that the main problem in BUMDes governance is not only the availability of administrative procedures, but also the limited capacity and discipline in implementing them.

The involvement of village facilitators, BUMDes managers, and village heads helped improve this condition. They encouraged more regular documentation, clearer division of administrative responsibilities, and more systematic reporting. Village facilitators, in particular, provided technical guidance to BUMDes administrators, while village heads provided institutional support and legitimacy.

"BUMDes administrator explains that financial records and meeting documents were previously incomplete, but became more organized after receiving guidance from the village facilitator or village government" (Interview with BUMDes Manager, Blitar Regency, 2025).

This finding is supported by field observation. During BUMDes administrative activities, the researchers observed that BUMDes managers collected and organized administrative documents with assistance from village facilitators. The observation also showed that a single individual did not carry out administrative tasks but involved coordination among BUMDes managers, village officials, and facilitators. The researchers observed that BUMDes managers used meeting records, financial documents, and activity reports as references during internal discussions. This indicates that administrative documents began to function not only as formal requirements but also as tools for organizational decision-making.

This finding suggests that administrative improvement requires more than formal regulation. It depends on social actors' capacity to translate administrative rules into practical routines. Social actors serve as agents of change, helping BUMDes administrators understand the importance of documentation, reporting, and organizational discipline (Stevens et al., 2020; Strachwitz, 2022). This finding also supports previous studies that emphasize the roles of local actors, leadership, and social learning in strengthening rural institutional capacity (Dlouhá et al., 2022; Hietschold et al., 2023; Rami et al., 2021).

Building Transparency and Accountability in BUMDes Governance

The second finding shows that social actors help strengthen transparency and accountability in BUMDes governance. Transparency is reflected in the effort to present financial reports, business

activities, and program developments to village stakeholders. Accountability is reflected in regular reporting, community meetings, and informal supervision by village leaders and community figures.

The role of the village head is important in this process because it provides formal authority and institutional support for BUMDes' governance. At the same time, community leaders provide social control by reminding BUMDes managers to maintain openness and responsibility in managing village business activities.

> *"Community leader explains that people are more willing to support BUMDes when they know how funds, business activities, and benefits are managed"* (Interview with BUMDES Manager, Blitar Regency, 2025).

The observation also shows that village meetings became an important arena for accountability. In these meetings, BUMDes managers presented reports and received responses from village stakeholders. Although not all community members were actively involved, the presence of community leaders, village officials, and BUMDes managers created a social supervision mechanism. During BUMDes meetings, the researchers observed that reporting extended beyond financial matters. Discussions also covered business progress, implementation challenges, and plans. This shows that accountability was exercised through collective discussion, not only through written reports.

This finding confirms that both formal and informal mechanisms shape transparency and accountability in BUMDes. Formal mechanisms include reports, documents, and meetings, while informal mechanisms include trust, social pressure, and the moral authority of community leaders. This is consistent with the argument that trust, social networks, and local legitimacy are important elements in strengthening governance at the community level (Alessandro et al., 2021; Beshi & Kaur, 2020; Dlouhá et al., 2022).

However, the findings also indicate that transparency practices still depend heavily on the commitment of key actors. If village heads, BUMDes managers, or community leaders are inactive, administrative transparency may weaken. Therefore, the role of social actors needs to be institutionalized through clear administrative procedures, regular reporting mechanisms, and participatory forums.

Community Participation in BUMDes Administrative Governance

Community participation is another important aspect of BUMDes administrative development. The findings show that social actors helped encourage community members to become more involved in BUMDes activities, especially through village meetings, consultations, and informal discussions. Community leaders and village facilitators played a strategic role in explaining the importance of BUMDes administration to residents.

In rural communities, participation is often influenced by trust in local figures. Community members tend to follow or support village programs when they are encouraged by actors who have social legitimacy. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that rural communities often rely on figures who possess moral and social authority (Amin & Ritonga, 2024; Berenschot et al., 2021).

> *"Village facilitator explains how community members were encouraged to attend meetings, understand BUMDes reports, and provide input on business activities"* (Interview with village facilitator, Blitar Regency, 2025).

Using (Ara et al., 2024), framework of participation, the findings suggest that community participation in BUMDes governance takes several forms. In some cases, participation remains representative because

community aspirations are conveyed through village elites, community leaders, or BUMDes administrators. However, there are also signs of more substantive participation when community members are involved in discussing business priorities, monitoring activities, and evaluating BUMDes performance.

This indicates that social actors have a dual role. On the one hand, they can expand participation by mobilizing community involvement. On the other hand, participation may be limited if a single local elite dominates it. Therefore, BUMDes administrative governance should not rely solely on influential figures but must also create inclusive participation mechanisms that allow broader community voices to be heard.

The role of social actors in this context is not only to invite people to participate, but also to make administrative processes more understandable to the community. When reports, decisions, and business activities are explained in accessible language, community members are more likely to understand and support BUMDes governance.

BUMDes Administrative Governance and Rural Self-Reliance

Enhancing BUMDes administration contributes to village self-reliance by strengthening institutional capacity, fostering public trust, and promoting the sustainability of village enterprises. In this study, improved administrative governance enabled BUMDes to manage activities more systematically and facilitated local stakeholder oversight of organizational performance.

Effective administrative governance provides BUMDes with a foundation for independent operation. Maintaining accurate financial records, establishing clear management roles, documenting decisions, and ensuring regular reporting reduce reliance on informal practices or individual leadership. These measures enhance the stability and accountability of village enterprises.

*"Informant explains that better documentation and reporting help BUMDes plan business activities, evaluate performance, and become more trusted by the community" (*Interview with Village facilitator, Blitar Regency, 2025).

The data indicate that rural self-reliance extends beyond economic independence. It is also contingent upon the capacity of village institutions to manage resources, make decisions, sustain collective initiatives, and maintain accountability. Thus, effective BUMDes administration supports the institutional independence of villages.

This finding is consistent with previous research identifying BUMDes as a key institution for enhancing local welfare and strengthening village capacity (Ismawati, 2020; Putra et al., 2023; Yusriadi & Cahaya, 2022). However, the present study demonstrates that BUMDes' contribution to rural self-reliance is influenced not only by business outcomes but also by effective administrative governance and the engagement of local social actors.

However, BUMDes administration can only facilitate rural self-reliance when specific conditions are fulfilled. These conditions include the presence of competent BUMDes managers, consistent administrative procedures, active village facilitators, and community members who are committed to monitoring and supporting BUMDes activities. In the absence of these factors, administrative improvements may remain procedural and fail to produce substantive change.

Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that social actors serve as a bridge between formal administrative requirements and local social practices. Formal regulations alone are not sufficient to ensure effective BUMDes administration. Administrative governance becomes more effective when local actors can

translate rules into daily practices, build trust, mobilize participation, and maintain accountability.

This study strengthens the argument that BUMDes governance is socially embedded. BUMDes administration is not merely a bureaucratic process, but a social process shaped by actor relations, community trust, leadership, and local norms. Social actors contribute by helping BUMDes managers understand administrative responsibilities, encouraging community members to participate, and ensuring that BUMDes remains accountable to village stakeholders.

The findings contribute to the literature on BUMDes by shifting attention from economic performance and formal institutional structure to the social process of administrative development. Previous studies have widely discussed the role of BUMDes in village economic empowerment and local development (Ismawati, 2020; Putra et al., 2023; Yusriadi & Cahaya, 2022). However, this study shows that the success of BUMDes also depends on the development of administrative governance through the active involvement of social actors.

The findings also clarify the specific gap addressed by this study. While previous research has emphasized the importance of social actors, social capital, and participation in rural development, little attention has been paid to how these actors directly shape BUMDes' administrative governance. This study shows that social actors influence BUMDes administration through at least four mechanisms: improving administrative order, strengthening transparency and accountability, encouraging community participation, and supporting institutional self-reliance.

In practical terms, the study implies that efforts to strengthen BUMDes should not focus only on technical training or regulatory compliance. Village governments, BUMDes managers, and village facilitators need to strengthen local actors' social capacity, create inclusive participation mechanisms, and institutionalize transparent administrative practices. In this way, BUMDes administration can become a foundation for more accountable governance and stronger rural self-reliance.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that social actors play a significant role in the development of BUMDes administration and the strengthening of rural self-reliance. Village heads, community leaders, BUMDes managers, and village facilitators contribute not only through formal authority, but also through their ability to build trust, encourage participation, guide administrative practices, and strengthen accountability. Their involvement helps transform BUMDes administration from a merely technical reporting activity into a socially embedded governance process.

The findings show that effective BUMDes administration depends on the interaction between formal institutional procedures and local social support. Administrative order, transparency, accountability, and community participation are strengthened when social actors actively guide, monitor, and legitimize BUMDes' governance. In this sense, rural self-reliance is not only achieved through economic activities but also through village institutions' capacity to manage resources, maintain accountability, and sustain public trust. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on BUMDes governance by highlighting the role of social actors in administrative development, an aspect that has received limited attention in previous studies. It shows that BUMDes administration should be understood not only as a bureaucratic or technical mechanism, but also as a social process shaped by leadership, trust, social capital, and community participation.

Practically, the study suggests that village governments, BUMDes managers, and village facilitators need to strengthen administrative capacity while also empowering local social actors. Efforts to improve

BUMDes governance should include regular administrative training, transparent reporting mechanisms, participatory village forums, and stronger collaboration between formal village institutions and community leaders. These strategies can help BUMDes become more accountable, more trusted, and better able to support sustainable rural self-reliance.

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