

## Effectiveness of Regional Cooperation Implementation in Enhancing Public Service Delivery: Evidence from Jembrana Regency

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of regional cooperation in improving public service delivery in Jembrana Regency. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, documentation, and observation. The findings reveal that regional cooperation has contributed positively to enhancing public service accessibility, responsiveness, and institutional capacity. However, its effectiveness remains moderate and uneven across sectors. Several challenges were identified, including weak coordination among institutions, sectoral ego, limited financial and infrastructural resources, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Furthermore, some cooperation initiatives tend to be formalistic and lack strong operational implementation, resulting in a gap between policy objectives and actual outcomes. The study also finds that improvements in public service quality are not solely driven by regional cooperation but are also influenced by internal bureaucratic reforms. Therefore, regional cooperation should be positioned as a complementary mechanism within a broader governance framework. Strengthening coordination, institutional capacity, and evaluation systems is essential to optimize the effectiveness of regional cooperation in supporting sustainable public service improvement.

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### INTRODUCTION

The post-reform era in Indonesia since 1998 has brought significant transformations in the public governance system, particularly through the shift from a centralized system toward decentralization <sup>[1]</sup>. This transformation has been further institutionalized through Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, which grants broader authority to local governments in managing governmental affairs and regional development. Normatively, decentralization aims to improve the quality of public services, accelerate regional development, and optimize local potential based on regional characteristics. However, in practice, these objectives have not been fully achieved, as disparities in regional development persist due to limitations in fiscal capacity, human resources, and infrastructure constraints <sup>[2]</sup>. In this context, intergovernmental cooperation emerges as a strategic instrument to address such limitations. Regional cooperation, as regulated under Government Regulation Number 28 of 2018 and Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 22 of 2020, is designed to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and mutual benefits in public service delivery.

Conceptually, regional cooperation reflects both horizontal and vertical collaboration among local governments and other stakeholders, enabling resource sharing, institutional strengthening, and collective problem-solving<sup>[3]</sup>.

Previous studies highlight that inter-regional cooperation plays an important role in improving governance performance and public service quality. Organizational effectiveness theory emphasizes that program success can be measured through indicators such as efficiency, productivity, adaptability, stakeholder satisfaction, and sustainability<sup>[4]</sup>. Meanwhile, governance network theory underscores the importance of multi-actor collaboration in addressing complex public issues. The concept of intergovernmental relations further highlights the necessity of coordination and synergy across different levels of government to achieve development goals<sup>[5]</sup>. Nevertheless, empirical findings indicate that the implementation of regional cooperation still faces various challenges, including weak coordination, sectoral ego, limited resources, and suboptimal monitoring and evaluation systems. Notably, a report from the Ministry of Home Affairs reveals that only around 40% of regional cooperation programs in Indonesia are effectively implemented<sup>[6]</sup>. In the context of Jembrana Regency, regional cooperation has been actively implemented as a strategy to improve public service quality and accelerate regional development. Various collaborative initiatives with government institutions and third parties have resulted in notable achievements, including high public satisfaction index scores and recognition for service quality. However, at the implementation level, several challenges remain, such as inadequate supporting infrastructure, suboptimal execution of cooperation agreements, and unclear causal linkages between regional cooperation and improvements in public service quality<sup>[7]</sup>. Based on the existing literature and empirical conditions, several research gaps can be identified. First, there is still limited empirical research that specifically measures the effectiveness of regional cooperation in improving public service quality. Second, a gap exists between the normative objectives of regional cooperation and its practical implementation. Third, most previous studies tend to focus on formal and economic aspects, while process-oriented and service quality dimensions remain underexplored<sup>[8]</sup>.

Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to evaluating regional cooperation effectiveness, not only from regulatory and output perspectives but also from implementation processes and their direct impact on public service quality at the local level. Accordingly, this study addresses two main research questions: (1) to what extent is the implementation of regional cooperation in Jembrana Regency effective in supporting public service improvement and regional development? and (2) what factors influence the success and constraints of regional cooperation implementation?. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of regional cooperation implementation in Jembrana Regency and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors, in order to formulate strategies for optimizing public service delivery through a collaborative governance approach.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to examine the effectiveness of regional cooperation in improving public service delivery in Jembrana Regency. A case study strategy is applied to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation processes, institutional interactions, and contextual factors influencing regional cooperation at the local government level. This approach allows the research to capture real conditions and explore how cooperation mechanisms contribute to public service outcomes within a specific regional setting<sup>[9]</sup>. The study utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data are collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including local government officials, stakeholders involved in regional cooperation, and public service providers. Secondary data are obtained from official documents such as regulations, cooperation agreements, performance reports, and relevant academic literature. Data collection techniques include interviews, documentation studies, and limited field observations to provide a comprehensive understanding of both formal policies and their practical implementation<sup>[10]</sup>.

Data analysis is conducted using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, carried out continuously throughout the research process. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applies triangulation techniques, including source and method triangulation. The analysis is guided by organizational effectiveness theory, focusing on indicators such as goal achievement, efficiency, adaptability, stakeholder satisfaction, and sustainability. Additionally, the study examines the extent to which regional cooperation contributes to improving public service quality, particularly in terms of responsiveness, accessibility, transparency, and user satisfaction<sup>[11]</sup>.

## RESULTS

### Characteristics of Informants

The characteristics of the informants in this study reflect the diversity of roles and responsibilities essential for supporting the implementation of Regional Cooperation in Jembrana Regency. The informants, consisting of five individuals, hold different yet complementary strategic positions. The Assistant for Government and People's Welfare plays a primary role in supervising and coordinating the overall policies and administration programs of Regional Cooperation, assisted by the Head of the Government Division who ensures the smooth operation of Regional Cooperation as part of the Regional Cooperation Coordination Team (TKKSD). The Assistant for Government and People's Welfare (often referred to as Assistant 1) holds a crucial role as the main coordinator and strategic supervisor throughout all stages of regional cooperation implementation. In this process, Assistant 1 is tasked with leading the synchronization of policies across regional apparatuses so that cooperation plans, whether with other regions or third parties, remain aligned with the Regent's vision and mission as well as applicable regulations. Technically, this function includes providing direction in mapping government affairs to be cooperated on, validating the feasibility of draft memoranda of understanding (MoU) or cooperation agreements (PKS) from legal and beneficial aspects, and ensuring that negotiation processes do not violate administrative authority.

Beyond coordinating functions, Assistant 1 also carries out supervisory and evaluative roles regarding the effectiveness of ongoing cooperation. As the supervisor of the Regional Cooperation Coordination Team (TKKSD), he is responsible for monitoring whether field implementation aligns with the agreed terms and providing tactical solutions when administrative obstacles or conflicts of interest arise between parties. Thus, Assistant 1 serves as the final filter ensuring that every collaboration undertaken by the Jembrana Regency Government is not only procedurally valid but also capable of providing real positive impacts on improving public services and regional development. The Head of the Government Division at the Regional Secretariat holds a central role as the administrative and technical driving force throughout the entire regional cooperation cycle. As the secretariat of the Regional Cooperation Coordination Team (TKKSD), the Head of this division is tasked with leading the identification and mapping of government affairs that have potential for cooperation, both with other regions (KSDD) and with third parties (KSDPK). During the planning stage, he is responsible for drafting cooperation documents, from Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) to Cooperation Agreements (PKS), ensuring that each article complies with legal frameworks and does not harm regional interests.

In addition to document drafting, the Head of the Government Division also performs coordination and facilitation roles, connecting various technical Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPDs) with partner entities. He is responsible for overseeing the negotiation process, facilitating TKKSD coordination meetings, and ensuring that cooperation documents receive validation from the Legal Bureau or relevant agencies before being signed by leadership. Once cooperation is underway, his main function shifts to monitoring and evaluation, where he must systematically document all cooperation documents and compile periodic reports on the effectiveness of such collaborations as policy considerations for Assistant 1 and the Regent. The Head of the Cooperation Sub-division (Kasubag Kerja Sama), currently filled by a young expert analyst in the Government Division, acts as the operational and technical frontline managing the details of every document and stage of regional cooperation. During planning, the Head of the Cooperation Sub-division is tasked with conducting initial identification of potential government affairs that can be cooperated on, as well as preparing coordination materials for meetings of the Regional Cooperation Coordination Team (TKKSD). His technical functions include drafting initial MoU and PKS documents, ensuring editorial accuracy, conformity of substance with the latest regulations, and synchronization of interests between the responsible regional apparatus and the partner entity.

Besides drafting, the Head of the Cooperation Sub-division also performs facilitation and documentation functions to ensure the bureaucratic flow runs on time. He is responsible for shepherding cooperation documents through the facilitation process at higher administrative levels, coordinating signing schedules, and managing numbering and archiving of original documents (hardcopy) as well as digital copies. At the end of the cycle, this sub-division head plays a vital role in collecting cooperation implementation reports from each technical OPD to be processed into periodic evaluation materials, enabling leadership to see the progress and obstacles faced in each ongoing collaboration. The Cooperation Staff in the Government Division acts as technical implementers and administrative back-office support, ensuring the smooth operation of each regional cooperation stage. During planning, these staff members are responsible for gathering data, conducting literature reviews on relevant regulations, and preparing presentation materials and invitations for TKKSD meetings. Their operational functions include typing draft MoU or PKS documents as directed by superiors, carefully checking for typographical errors, and ensuring the completeness of required technical appendices before documents are circulated to relevant regional apparatuses.

Beyond drafting, Cooperation Staff also manage logistics and archiving, serving as the administrative backbone of the organization. They are responsible for distributing copies of cooperation documents to all

parties, systematically organizing document numbering, and uploading cooperation data into the regional information system or database for easy access when needed. In the field, these staff members often accompany document signing processes, ensure the availability of stamps and complete signatures, and compile activity realization reports from responsible OPDs to then be drafted into final evaluation reports to be submitted to the Sub-division Head and Division Head. The Correspondence Staff for Cooperation holds a vital role as the administrative gateway and document flow controller throughout the entire series of regional cooperation processes. Their main duties focus on records management, ensuring that every incoming letter related to cooperation proposals from third parties or other institutions is promptly registered and dispatched to leadership in a timely manner. During implementation, this staff functions to standardize correspondence formats in accordance with applicable official document regulations, manage special numbering for MoUs and PKS, and ensure the duplication and distribution of physical and digital documents to all stakeholders proceeds without obstacles.

Beyond record-keeping, the Correspondence Staff for Cooperation also performs document security and information center (archivist) functions, guaranteeing the authenticity of cooperation documents. They are fully responsible for organizing the archival system, from storing original hardcopy documents in the archive room to inputting data into the regional correspondence application for easy status tracking. In the field, these staff members often ensure the completeness of formal letter requirements before signing, such as verifying partner correspondence addresses and the availability of stamps, so that all supporting legal documents for cooperation within the Jembrana Regency Government are neatly organized, secure, and accountable.

### **Effectiveness of Implementation of Regional Cooperation**

The results of this study reveal that decentralization in Jembrana Regency has provided a conducive institutional framework for improving public service delivery through regional cooperation. The autonomy granted to local governments has enabled Jembrana to initiate various collaborative arrangements with both governmental and non-governmental actors <sup>[12]</sup>. These collaborations have contributed to enhancing service accessibility, particularly in sectors such as administrative services, public utilities, and community empowerment programs. This finding confirms that decentralization, when supported by collaborative mechanisms, can function as an enabler of service innovation. However, the results also indicate that structural limitations—such as uneven infrastructure and limited fiscal capacity still constrain the full optimization of public service delivery, as highlighted in the introduction <sup>[13]</sup>. Furthermore, the implementation of regional cooperation in Jembrana demonstrates that collaboration serves as a strategic instrument to overcome local capacity constraints. The study finds that cooperation initiatives facilitate resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and institutional support, which collectively improve service effectiveness and efficiency <sup>[14]</sup>. For instance, partnerships with external institutions contribute to expanding service coverage and strengthening administrative capacity. This supports the theoretical perspective of collaborative governance, where multi-actor synergy enhances public service outcomes. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these collaborations varies depending on the level of coordination and commitment among stakeholders. In several cases, cooperation remains limited to formal agreements without strong operational follow-through, indicating that institutional collaboration has not yet reached its full potential <sup>[15]</sup>.

From the perspective of organizational effectiveness, the findings show a mixed level of effectiveness in the implementation of regional cooperation. In terms of goal achievement, many cooperation programs have successfully contributed to improving specific service indicators, including responsiveness and user satisfaction. However, efficiency remains a challenge due to overlapping roles and bureaucratic procedures that slow down implementation. Adaptability is also limited, as some cooperation frameworks are not sufficiently flexible to respond to rapidly changing public needs. While stakeholder satisfaction has generally improved, particularly among service users, sustainability is still weak due to insufficient monitoring, evaluation, and long-term planning mechanisms. These findings align with organizational effectiveness theory, which emphasizes that effectiveness is not only about achieving short-term goals but also about maintaining adaptability and sustainability <sup>[16]</sup>. In addition, the study identifies several key factors influencing the effectiveness of regional cooperation. Internal factors include organizational structure, leadership commitment, and communication among agencies, while external factors involve regulatory frameworks, availability of resources, and stakeholder support. Weak coordination and sectoral ego emerge as major barriers, often leading to fragmented implementation. Moreover, limited financial resources and inadequate infrastructure reduce the capacity of local government to fully leverage cooperation opportunities. These findings reinforce previous research that highlights coordination, resource availability, and institutional capacity as critical determinants of successful intergovernmental cooperation <sup>[17]</sup>.

Importantly, this study confirms the existence of a gap between the normative expectations and actual implementation of regional cooperation, as identified in the introduction. While regulations emphasize efficiency, synergy, and service improvement, in practice, some cooperation initiatives tend to be symbolic and lack measurable impact on service quality. This implementation gap indicates that policy design alone is

insufficient without strong execution mechanisms. Furthermore, the study reveals that improvements in public service quality in Jembrana are not solely driven by regional cooperation but are also influenced by internal bureaucratic reforms, suggesting a complex causal relationship between cooperation and service outcomes<sup>[18]</sup>. Finally, this study addresses the identified research gap by providing a more comprehensive analysis of regional cooperation effectiveness, particularly in linking implementation processes with public service quality outcomes. The findings demonstrate that while regional cooperation has contributed positively to service improvement, its impact remains partial and uneven. Therefore, strengthening coordination mechanisms, improving monitoring and evaluation systems, and fostering a collaborative institutional culture are essential to maximize the effectiveness of regional cooperation. In the context of Jembrana Regency, optimizing these aspects is crucial to ensure that regional cooperation can serve as a sustainable strategy for enhancing public service delivery.

### **Responsive Digital Communication**

The adoption of responsive digital communication in Jembrana Regency marks a fundamental departure from traditional, paper-laden bureaucratic practices. Historically, government coordination relied heavily on formal memos, scheduled meetings, and hierarchical approval chains that often took days or even weeks to resolve simple issues. This slow-moving system proved increasingly inadequate for the fast-paced demands of regional cooperation, especially when dealing with private partners or urgent public service needs. The Assistant for Government and People's Welfare explicitly rejected the notion that bureaucracy should be constrained by "desks and paper," signaling a cultural shift toward agility. The mandatory implementation of a dedicated WhatsApp Group served as the primary vehicle for this transformation. Unlike conventional channels, this informal digital platform enabled instant, unfiltered communication among all levels of the cooperation team. The result was a dramatic reduction in response times, cutting bureaucratic delays by more than half. More importantly, the shift redefined how information flowed within the organization. Instead of waiting for formal approvals, frontline staff could now report issues as they occurred. This reorientation from procedure-driven to information-driven governance became the cornerstone of Jembrana's bureaucratic reform.

One of the most critical functions of the WhatsApp Group is its capacity for real-time detection of service obstacles. Field staff no longer need to wait until the end of the day or until they return to the office to report problems. Whether it is a stalled draft agreement stuck at another regional apparatus organization or a direct complaint from a partner, the information is instantly shared via the group. This immediacy allows the entire team to have a shared situational awareness, preventing miscommunication or duplication of effort. Frontline staff are encouraged to send photos, short voice notes, or brief text messages rather than composing formal incident reports. This lowers the psychological barrier to reporting, as employees feel that honesty is valued over polished presentation. The Assistant can immediately see photographic evidence of a bottleneck at a partner's office or a delay in document processing. Such transparency transforms the group into a living dashboard of operational reality. Leaders can then assess the severity of each issue without waiting for secondhand summaries. Consequently, problems are identified and diagnosed within minutes, long before they would have surfaced through formal reporting channels.

Beyond mere information sharing, the WhatsApp Group evolves into a dynamic command center where decisions are made in real time. When a critical issue is reported, the Assistant or the Head of Division can provide immediate instructions without convening a formal meeting. This is particularly valuable when leaders are off-site, attending external meetings, or traveling. The ability to issue discretionary decisions on the spot prevents small problems from escalating into crises. For example, if a partner threatens to withdraw due to a delayed signature, the leader can authorize a staff member to proceed under specific conditions, with formal documentation to follow. This real-time responsiveness creates a sense of urgency and empowerment throughout the team. Staff know that their reports will not disappear into an administrative void but will trigger actionable responses. Leaders, in turn, can monitor the implementation of their instructions through subsequent updates in the same group. The group thus functions as both an early warning sensor network and a rapid reaction force. It effectively collapses hierarchical layers, allowing direct communication between the highest and lowest levels of the cooperation team. This flattening of hierarchy is precisely what enables bureaucratic agility in a digital era.

Complementing the WhatsApp channel, the early warning system provides a structured yet flexible mechanism for preventing service decline. While the WhatsApp Group excels at spontaneous reporting, the early warning system ensures that no critical signal is missed or forgotten. It functions as a digital complaint and coordination hub where both internal staff and external partners can flag deteriorating service standards. The system is designed to trigger automatic alerts when certain thresholds are crossed, such as repeated delays in document processing or unresponsiveness from a partner organization. Once alerted, the coordination team can intervene immediately, often before the issue becomes visible to the public. This proactive approach stands in stark contrast to reactive governance, where problems are only addressed after they have generated

complaints. The early warning system thus acts as a safety net, catching potential failures at their earliest stage. In practice, this has enabled the Jembrana government to rescue critical public services—such as health supply deliveries or water infrastructure projects—in a matter of minutes rather than days. The system's success depends on both technological infrastructure and a culture of vigilance, where all team members are trained to recognize and report early warning signs.

The true power of Jembrana's digital communication strategy lies in the synergy between the informal WhatsApp channel and the structured early warning system. The WhatsApp Group provides speed, flexibility, and human immediacy, allowing for nuanced conversation and rapid clarification. The early warning system provides discipline, documentation, and systematic tracking, ensuring accountability and preventing oversight. Together, they create a layered defense against bureaucratic failure. When a staff member reports a minor issue on WhatsApp, that same report can trigger a formal entry in the early warning system if the issue persists. Conversely, alerts from the early warning system can be instantly discussed and resolved through WhatsApp follow-up. This integration fosters both team solidarity and organizational transparency. Staff members feel secure knowing that honest, rapid reporting is encouraged, while leaders have the tools to monitor trends and systemic weaknesses over time. The synergy also reduces the risk of information silos, where one part of the organization is unaware of problems affecting another. By bridging informal communication with formal accountability, Jembrana has achieved a rare balance: speed without recklessness, and structure without rigidity. This integrated model offers a replicable template for other local governments seeking to modernize their coordination mechanisms.

Ultimately, the responsive digital communication strategy in Jembrana Regency has transformed the very culture of bureaucracy. The traditional image of government as slow, hierarchical, and indifferent to urgency has been replaced by an agile, proactive, and citizen-centered approach. Leaders no longer hide behind procedural requirements; they embrace their role as problem-solvers empowered by digital tools. Staff members have shifted from passive clerks to active sensors and agents of responsiveness. The outcome is not merely faster processing times but a fundamental reorientation toward community welfare. Every digital message, every early warning alert, and every rapid decision is ultimately aimed at ensuring that public services reach citizens reliably and promptly. The evidence from Jembrana shows that positional silos and physical distance no longer pose insurmountable barriers to effective governance. What matters instead is the speed and quality of information flow, combined with leadership courage to act on that information. This transformation from rigid and slow to agile and proactive represents a new paradigm for public administration in developing countries. It demonstrates that with the right combination of digital tools, adaptive leadership, and cultural change, even traditionally bureaucratic organizations can become engines of rapid, accountable, and citizen-responsive governance. The Jembrana experience thus offers valuable lessons for any government seeking to harness digital communication for genuine public service improvement.

### **Courageous and Adaptive Leadership**

The leadership in Jembrana Regency demonstrates a remarkable ability to adapt regulations to urgent field needs. This adaptability is characterized by the use of accountable discretion, where the Assistant I takes legal shortcuts to save critical public services. Such discretionary actions are always consulted with the legal division to ensure accountability and compliance. The underlying philosophy is that rules are made to serve people, not the other way around. When rigid administrative procedures hinder health services or clean water delivery, leaders are authorized to act first. The priority is to secure public welfare before completing administrative paperwork. A formal explanatory memo is submitted afterward to justify the discretionary action. This approach requires legal courage, provided the intent is purely for public benefit. Consultation with the legal division guarantees that the discretion remains within legal boundaries. Thus, adaptive leadership in Jembrana balances speed with legality and accountability.

The Assistant I explicitly states that he demands his team to prioritize citizen services over procedural delays. He instructs the division head and staff to execute necessary actions immediately and handle administration later. He personally assumes legal responsibility as long as the action serves the public and has been consulted with the legal division. This statement reflects a leadership style that is agile and responsive to dynamic field conditions. He believes that adaptive leadership means finding legal loopholes to enable innovation in cooperation. Without such flexibility, partnership initiatives could die due to incomplete paperwork. The Assistant I's approach transforms bureaucracy from a rigid obstacle into an enabling tool. It empowers staff to act decisively in crisis situations without fear of reprisal. This creates a culture where problem-solving is valued over procedural perfection. Consequently, the organization becomes more resilient and capable of delivering timely public services.

The Head of the Government Division reinforces the importance of flexibility when dealing with private sector partners. Private entities operate at a much faster pace than traditional government bureaucracy. If the government remains too rigid, potential partners may withdraw due to perceived slowness. Therefore, the Head of Division adjusts his working rhythm to match that of the private sector. He adopts an adaptive negotiation

strategy, seeking middle-ground solutions when certain clauses are difficult for partners to fulfill. His principle is not to stubbornly insist on following rule A, but to find ways to uphold rule A while achieving targets. This win-win approach makes private partners comfortable and willing to collaborate long-term. Flexibility does not mean abandoning rules; rather, it means creatively interpreting them to enable cooperation. The ability to balance regulatory compliance with practical outcomes is a hallmark of adaptive leadership. This balance ensures that cooperation agreements benefit both the region and its private partners.

Despite strong leadership, significant inhibiting factors hinder the effectiveness of regional cooperation. One major obstacle is the persistent silo mentality or sectoral ego among some Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPDs). Implementing OPDs often view cooperation administration as the exclusive task of the Government Division. Consequently, they are less proactive in providing technical data or monitoring field implementation. A staff member describes feeling trapped when delivering draft documents or requesting data from other agencies. One agency redirects the request to another, citing technical matters, while the second agency denies responsibility due to lack of budget. This bureaucratic ping-pong causes documents to pile up for extended periods. The staff member, as a mere subordinate, feels confused about whether to report the delay to superiors. Sectoral ego thus creates horizontal integration barriers at the middle management level. Although top leaders are committed, effectiveness remains blocked by compartmentalized work cultures that require decisive intervention.

Another critical barrier is the competency gap among human resources at the implementation level. Regional cooperation involves complex legal and administrative processes, not merely inter-agency 联谊 activities. Many staff members, particularly those with only high school education, lack adequate technical understanding. They struggle to differentiate between mandatory and voluntary cooperation, or between Memoranda of Understanding and Cooperation Agreements. Their limited comprehension of regulations derived from Permendagri Number 22 of 2020 causes frequent errors. Additionally, poorly trained staff tend to focus on ceremonial aspects while failing to analyze legal and financial risks. When facing technically dense draft agreements from private parties, they become helpless. Specialized training on negotiation, legal drafting, and performance evaluation is rarely conducted routinely for lower-level staff. This capacity gap forces managerial levels (division and sub-division heads) to absorb excessive workloads. Without investment in human resource development, the entire organization cannot achieve uniform standards in managing partnerships.

To overcome these barriers, Jembrana Regency must implement strategies focused on strengthening human resource capacity and dismantling bureaucratic silos. First, work procedures should be standardized through visual standard operating procedures (SOPs) or pocket books accessible to all staff, including those with secondary education. This eliminates technical confusion when drafting cooperation agreements. Second, periodic technical guidance sessions and mentoring programs by senior officials must be institutionalized to sustain competency and minimize administrative errors. Third, the role of the Regional Cooperation Coordination Team (TKKSD) needs reinforcement as the highest mediation forum to erode sectoral ego among OPDs. Fourth, a one-door coordination mechanism supported by a digital monitoring dashboard should be established. This dashboard enables real-time detection of obstacles during document preparation and provides instant solutions through directive yet participatory instructions. Fifth, fostering a collaborative work culture combined with appreciation for innovative work units is essential. Finally, optimizing a shared digital data warehouse will provide a common reference for all parties. Together, these strategies will give Jembrana's government high organizational flexibility to respond to partnership opportunities and deliver more excellent, accountable public services.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that regional cooperation in Jembrana Regency plays a significant role in supporting public service delivery, although its effectiveness remains partial and uneven. From the perspective of decentralization, the results demonstrate that local autonomy has created opportunities for innovation and collaboration in public service provision. This supports the theoretical argument that decentralization enhances service responsiveness by allowing local governments to tailor policies to community needs. However, consistent with previous studies, structural limitations such as fiscal constraints, human resource capacity, and infrastructure gaps continue to limit the full realization of these benefits. Thus, decentralization alone is insufficient without complementary mechanisms such as intergovernmental cooperation. In line with the concept of collaborative governance, this study finds that regional cooperation serves as an important instrument for overcoming local capacity limitations through resource sharing, institutional partnerships, and service integration. The positive impact on service accessibility and responsiveness indicates that collaboration among actors can enhance public service outcomes. However, the findings also reveal that the effectiveness of such cooperation depends heavily on the quality of coordination, communication, and commitment among stakeholders. In several cases, cooperation remains formalistic and lacks strong operational implementation, which weakens its actual contribution. This condition reflects the limitations of collaborative governance when institutional capacity and trust among actors are not sufficiently developed <sup>[19]</sup>.

From the standpoint of organizational effectiveness theory, the implementation of regional cooperation in Jembrana can be categorized as moderately effective. While goal achievement and stakeholder satisfaction have shown positive trends, other dimensions such as efficiency, adaptability, and sustainability are still constrained. This indicates that effectiveness should not be measured solely by the existence of cooperation agreements or short-term outcomes, but also by long-term performance and institutional resilience. The findings also highlight that internal organizational factors such as leadership, communication, and management practices play a crucial role in determining the success of cooperation initiatives <sup>[20]</sup>. Furthermore, this study identifies a clear gap between the normative expectations of regional cooperation and its empirical implementation. Although policies emphasize efficiency, synergy, and improved service quality, the actual implementation often faces practical barriers such as sectoral ego, weak coordination, and limited monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This confirms the existence of an implementation gap widely discussed in the literature. Additionally, the study reveals that improvements in public service quality are not solely driven by regional cooperation but are also influenced by internal bureaucratic reforms. This suggests that regional cooperation functions as a complementary factor rather than a primary determinant in improving public services <sup>[21]</sup>.

The discussion highlights that while regional cooperation has contributed positively to public service delivery in Jembrana Regency, its effectiveness is still constrained by structural, institutional, and managerial factors. Therefore, strengthening coordination mechanisms, enhancing institutional capacity, and improving monitoring and evaluation systems are essential to maximize the impact of regional cooperation. These findings contribute to the existing literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between regional cooperation and public service quality, particularly in the context of local governance in developing countries <sup>[22]</sup>. This research makes significant theoretical contributions to the existing literature on regional cooperation in developing countries. First, it challenges the assumption that formal cooperation agreements automatically translate into improved public service delivery. The findings demonstrate that structural factors, such as bureaucratic hierarchies and rigid procedures, can neutralize the positive potential of inter-regional partnerships. Second, this study extends the theoretical framework of organizational effectiveness by highlighting the mediating role of informal communication channels. The evidence from Jembrana shows that WhatsApp Groups and early warning systems serve as catalysts that bypass institutional bottlenecks. Third, the research refines the concept of adaptive leadership within public sector contexts. It reveals that accountable discretion, when properly balanced with legal consultation, enables rapid responses without sacrificing compliance. Fourth, this study adds nuance to the debate on technological determinism in governance. While digital tools are enablers, their effectiveness depends on leadership willingness to embrace flexibility. Finally, the findings suggest that existing models of regional cooperation must incorporate institutional capacity as a core variable, not merely an external condition.

For local governments in developing countries, this research offers actionable policy recommendations to enhance regional cooperation effectiveness. First, policymakers should formalize the use of digital communication platforms as official channels for crisis coordination. Second, local governments need to establish clear guidelines for accountable discretion, specifying when and how leaders can bypass standard procedures. Third, the study implies that standard operating procedures must be simplified into visual formats accessible to staff with varying educational backgrounds. Fourth, investment in regular technical guidance and mentoring programs is essential to close competency gaps among administrative personnel. Fifth, local governments should redesign their coordination mechanisms to eliminate sectoral ego, possibly through a one-

door policy enforced by a central team. Sixth, the research suggests that monitoring and evaluation systems must move from periodic reporting to real-time dashboard-based tracking. Seventh, performance incentives for OPDs that actively participate in cooperation processes should be introduced to reduce silo mentalities. Eighth, local governments need to conduct mandatory training on legal drafting and risk analysis for all staff involved in partnership agreements. Ninth, the findings imply that bureaucratic reform agendas should prioritize speed of response over procedural perfection in emergency service contexts. Tenth, replicating Jembrana's early warning system can help other regions detect partner service decline before it escalates into public complaints.

At the managerial level, the research provides clear guidance for leaders of Regional Cooperation Coordination Teams (TKKSD). First, division heads must adopt a facilitative leadership style that balances regulatory compliance with practical problem-solving. Second, managers should actively use WhatsApp Groups not merely for information sharing but for real-time decision-making and instruction delivery. Third, the findings indicate that managers must take legal responsibility when granting discretion to staff, provided that actions are consulted with legal divisions. Fourth, regular coordination meetings should be supplemented with informal check-ins to maintain team solidarity and trust. Fifth, managers need to develop negotiation skills that seek win-win solutions with private partners without abandoning core regulatory principles. Sixth, the research implies that managers should empower frontline staff to report obstacles honestly without fear of punishment. Seventh, building a digital database of all cooperation documents, easily searchable and accessible, is a managerial priority. Eighth, managers must design clear workflows that specify which OPD is responsible for each stage of cooperation implementation. Ninth, periodic competency assessments for staff handling technical documents can prevent bottlenecks caused by lack of knowledge. Tenth, finally, managers should institutionalize post-cooperation evaluation meetings to capture lessons learned and continuously improve future partnership processes.

This study also carries important methodological implications for future research on regional cooperation and public service quality. First, researchers should employ mixed-method designs that combine qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys to capture both perceptions and measurable outcomes. Second, future studies need to develop validated instruments for measuring adaptive leadership in local government contexts. Third, longitudinal research designs are required to track how digital communication tools affect cooperation effectiveness over extended periods. Fourth, comparative case studies across multiple regencies in Indonesia can help identify contextual factors that moderate the relationships found in Jembrana. Fifth, researchers should investigate the unintended consequences of informal digital coordination, such as information overload or burnout among staff. Sixth, future work could examine the specific conditions under which accountable discretion improves rather than undermines governance quality. Seventh, experimental designs might test whether visual SOPs actually reduce administrative errors compared to text-heavy manuals. Eighth, the relationship between sectoral ego and regional cooperation outcomes deserves quantitative testing using network analysis methods. Ninth, future research should also explore how citizen feedback mechanisms can be integrated into early warning systems for partnership monitoring. Tenth, ultimately, scholars need to build a comprehensive framework that links structural, institutional, managerial, and technological factors to explain variations in regional cooperation success across developing country settings.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of regional cooperation in Jembrana Regency has contributed positively to improving public service delivery; however, its effectiveness remains moderate and not yet fully optimal. Regional cooperation has proven to be a strategic instrument in supporting service accessibility, responsiveness, and institutional capacity through collaboration, resource sharing, and partnerships with various stakeholders. These findings confirm that intergovernmental cooperation plays an important role in complementing decentralization policies, particularly in addressing local government limitations. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of regional cooperation is influenced by several internal and external factors. Key challenges include weak coordination among institutions, sectoral ego, limited financial and infrastructural resources, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems. In addition, some cooperation initiatives tend to be formalistic and lack strong operational implementation, resulting in a gap between policy objectives and actual outcomes. This indicates that the success of regional cooperation is not solely determined by formal agreements, but also by the quality of implementation and institutional commitment. Furthermore, this study highlights that improvements in public service quality are not exclusively driven by regional cooperation, but also by internal bureaucratic reforms and organizational capacity. Therefore, regional cooperation should be understood as a complementary mechanism within a broader governance framework. To enhance its effectiveness, it is necessary to strengthen coordination mechanisms, improve evaluation systems, and foster a collaborative culture among stakeholders. Ultimately, optimizing regional cooperation

will be essential to achieving sustainable improvements in public service delivery and regional development in Jembrana Regency.

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