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Analysis of Rural Poverty in Bengkulu Province Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines poverty in the rural districts of Bengkulu Province. This study investigates how poverty in rural Bengkulu Province is affected by economic growth, village fund allocation, village development index, income distribution disparity, and duration of education. Panel data from 2018 to 2023, covering nine districts in the province, were used in this study. According to the study results, since 2018, village fund distribution and economic growth have been factors that have had a favorable impact on poverty in the rural districts of Bengkulu Province. The village development index, length of schooling, and economic disparity contribute to poverty in the rural districts of Bengkulu Province.

Keywords: *Poverty, Gini Ratio, Village Funds , Economic Growth, Rural Bengkulu Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of poverty is significant to the economic development of a region, in addition to the issues of unemployment and price instability. The problem of poverty occurs not only in Indonesia, but also in several other developing countries. Alvaredo (2013) found that the general facts that occur in developing countries are poverty and high inequality. Both of these characteristics are inherent in developing countries. In addition, Alvaredo (2013) found a solid downward trend in absolute income poverty rates in developing countries, mainly driven by East Asia in the 1980s and the 1990s, and generalized to other developing countries in the 2000s.

Indonesia is a developing nation, and poverty is undoubtedly a concern. The Indonesian government is focused on poverty, and several measures have been put in place to lessen it (Ramdani, 2015). In March 2023, 9.36% of Indonesians, or around 25.9 million people, were living below the poverty line. In Indonesia, the impoverished population is dispersed among the 34 provinces.

In addition to reducing the percentage of poor people, the government has focused on achieving positive economic growth as a benchmark for financial success after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indonesian economy is improving and its economic growth is 5.04 percent. Positive economic growth is expected not only nationally, but also at the regional, provincial, and district/city levels.

Economic growth on Sumatra Island in 2023 was 4.62 percent. Provinces with above-average economic growth in Sumatra include the Riau Islands (5.2%), South Sumatra (5.08%), North Sumatra (5.01%), Jambi (4.66%), and West Sumatra (4.62%). Meanwhile, Bengkulu Province has an economic growth rate of 4.26 percent, the third lowest position on the island of Sumatra. Figure 1 shows the economic growth and poverty rates in Sumatra for 2023.

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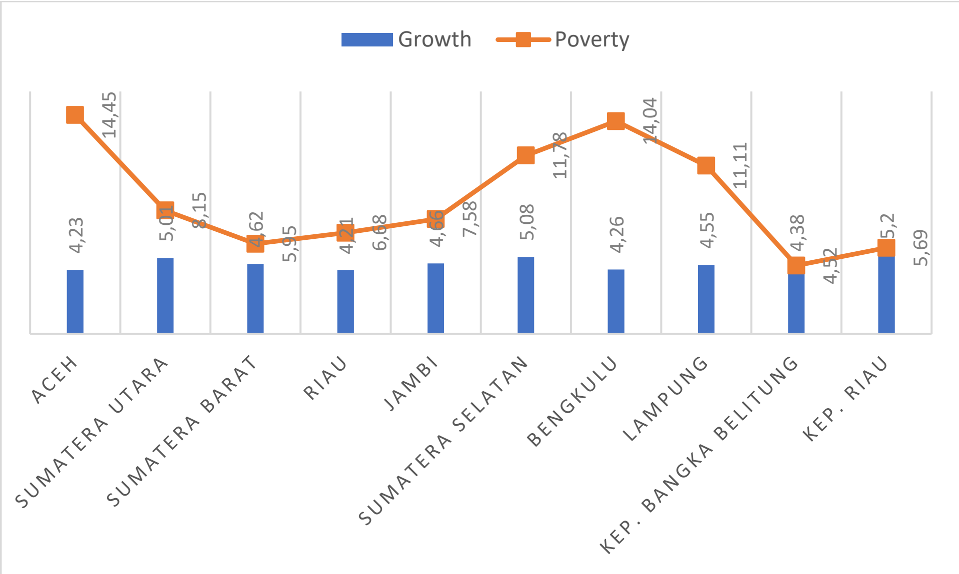

Figure 1. Economic growth and poverty rate in Sumatra in 2023.

Figure 1 indicates that the province of Bengkulu's poverty issue impeded economic growth. In 2023, Sumatra's average poverty rate was 8.99%, which is higher than the national average of 9.36%. At 14.04 percent, Bengkulu Province had the second-highest percentage of impoverished people after Aceh Province. Given Bengkulu Province’s below-average economic growth rate and above-average poverty rate, it is imperative to research their relationship.

In 2023, the number of poor people in Bengkulu Province was 288,460, spread across nine districts and cities. The highest percentage of poor people is in Seluma district at 18 percent, followed by Kaur district (17.83%) and South Bengkulu district (17.51), and the lowest is in Central Bengkulu district (9.4%). This indicates that poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province still occurs frequently. The percentage of poor people in Bengkulu Province by 2023 is shown in Figure 2.

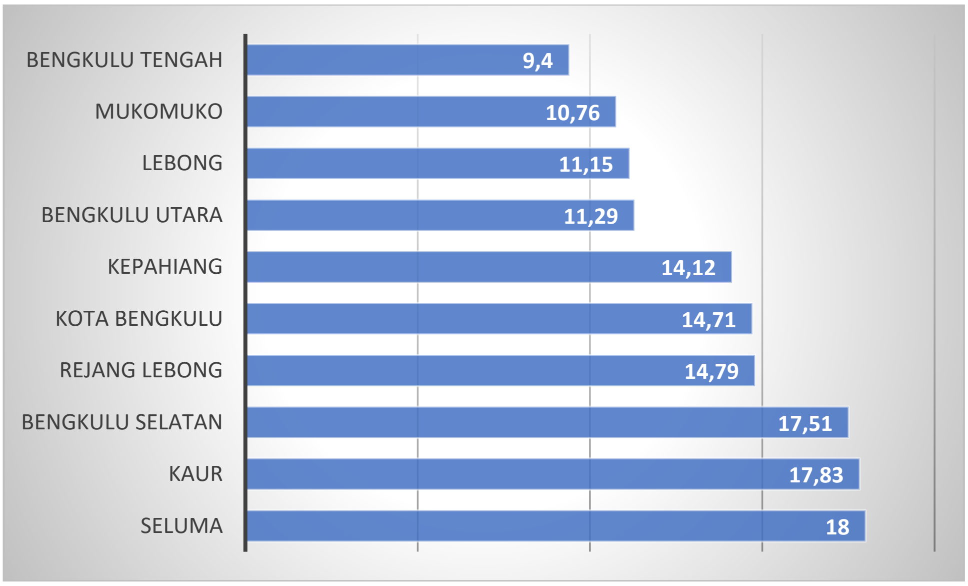

Figure 2. Percentage of poor people in Bengkulu Province in 2023.

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The government has taken several actions to address poverty in the area. Studies on factors contributing to poverty have been conducted both domestically and internationally. According to Craig and Porter (2003), governments must be highly committed to eradicating poverty. According to (Cremin & Nakabugo, 2012), investing in education helps people to escape poverty and achieve economic progress. However, (Hasibuan et al., 2019) discovered that the village development index, the distance to the capital, and the number of people using PLN electricity did not significantly reduce poverty, population, education level, village fund allocation (ADD), number of grocery stores, and village funds.

Poverty remains a dominant problem in villages (Fasya et al., 2020). The government has implemented several measures to combat the rising poverty rate, including capital expenditure, village funds, and Village Fund Allocation programs (Susilowati et al., 2017). Village-level finance initiatives are envisaged to help realize the objective of sustainable development in eradicating poverty.

One measure of village development achievement is the village development index. As one of the leading indicators of achieving Golden Indonesia, it is hoped that this IDM achievement will impact poverty alleviation. On average, the village development index in Bengkulu Province for 2023 is included in the developing category. This can be seen from the village development index value per district in Bengkulu Province, which ranges from 0.67-0.73. In addition, income distribution inequality in rural areas of Bengkulu Province is in the low category, where the Gini ratio value is less than 0.4. These conditions are indeed attractive to study where, macroeconomically, it has ideal conditions but poverty remains high.

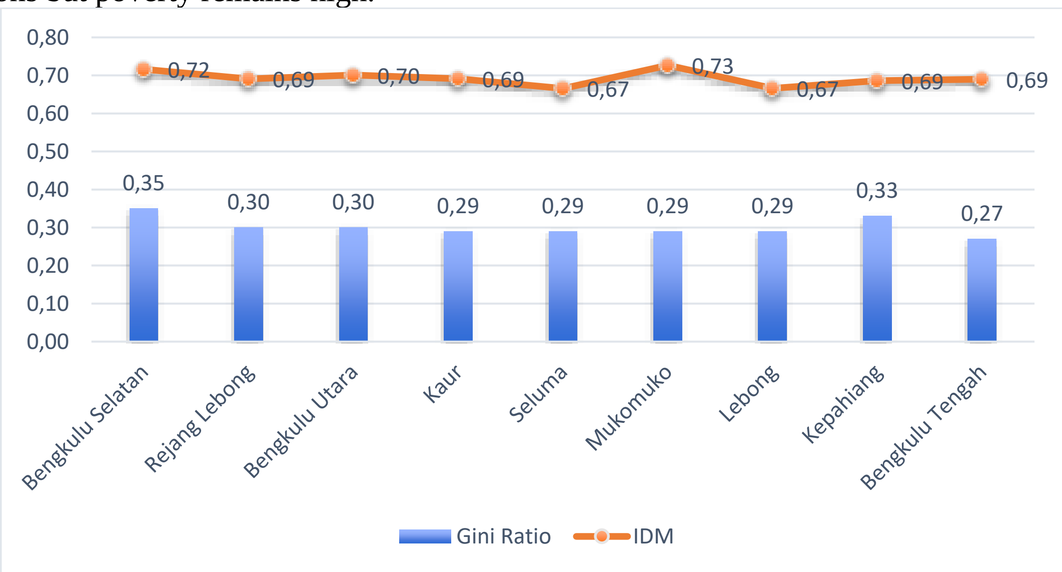

Figure 3. Gini ratio and IDM of Bengkulu province in 2023.

Theoretically, the results of this study can be helpful in the development of science, especially in the Development Economics. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for all parties involved in regional economic development.

Poverty is often measured using a multidimensional approach that includes access to education, health, and minimum living standards. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2022) uses per capita income standards to determine the poverty line in Indonesia. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) defines poverty as the inability to pay for essential food and nonfood necessities. A person can be classified as poor if monthly per capita spending falls below the poverty threshold. This method

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can be used to compute the Poverty Gap Index (P1), which measures the average difference between each poor person's spending and the poverty line.

Another common and popular concept of poverty is Capability Theory developed by Foster (1997). Capability theory emphasizes the importance of individual capabilities to achieve a meaningful life (capabilities) as a focus in measuring poverty and development. Foster further explained that poverty is measured not only from the dimensions of income or consumption, but also from an individual's ability to utilize available resources (capabilities). For example, they can obtain quality education, access adequate health services, or the opportunity to be involved in community life. According to Rorong et al. (2017), several interrelated causes make up a vicious circle of poverty. This situation causes a society or group to experience many problems in achieving higher levels of development.

Families living in poverty may be unable to provide sufficient educational resources for their children such as books, equipment, or additional educational support. This can have an impact on increasing gaps in education and skills, which limits future employment opportunities. In poor environments, a lack of economic opportunities can drive someone to engage in illegal or unethical activities to survive. This can worsen social and economic conditions in the area. Sustained poverty can lead to greater social inequality, exacerbating problems such as poor housing, limited access to public services, and inequality of opportunities.

This vicious circle is difficult to break, because each element influences and worsens the conditions of the others. To overcome this vicious circle, comprehensive and sustained interventions are often needed to improve access to education, health, employment, and economic opportunities, whether through government policies, social programs, or community initiatives. The poverty circle, based on Nurske's (1953) theoretical approach, is shown in figure 1.

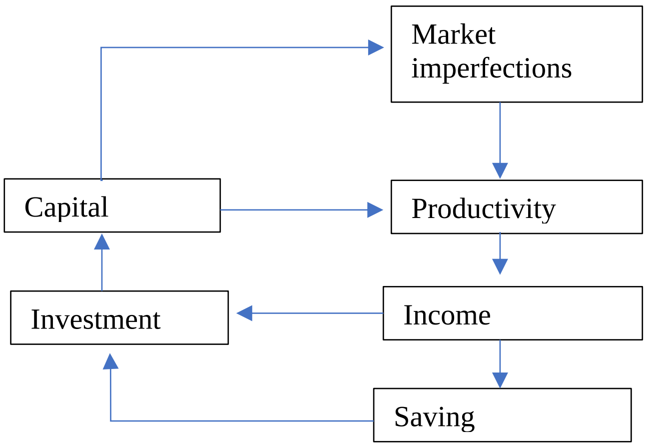

Figure 1. The Vicious Circle of Poverty (Ragnar Nurkse, 1953)

At the village level, the capability theory provides a broader understanding of poverty. Factors such as access to quality education, adequate health infrastructure, and local economic opportunities determine how rural communities can develop capabilities to improve their welfare. Poverty draws attention to the importance of interventions that can break the cycle. For example, human development programs that provide access to quality education, skills training, or business capital assistance for rural communities can help change poverty dynamics into more sustainable ones.

Ngurah Gede (2022) explains that the current development paradigm no longer adheres to a centralistic understanding. The development paradigm has shifted to decentralization (regional

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autonomy) in the hope that the regional economy can develop faster. In addition, since 2015, the government has intervened to encourage economic development, even in every village throughout Indonesia. This intervention was carried out by providing village funds to all villages in Indonesia. By 2021, the amount of village funds that had been disbursed reached 403.39 trillion rupiah. Village funds were prioritized for village development at the beginning of their implementation. This is important to study because most village funds are claimed to have been used for basic infrastructure and economic development in rural areas.

Several studies have attempted to analyze the effect of village funds on the performance of regional macroeconomic indicators. Ritonga et al. (2021) concluded that providing village funds was ineffective in encouraging economic growth; this study was conducted in West Sumatra Province. In line with Ritonga, Samsir et al. (2021) also concluded that village funds are negatively correlated with economic growth in South Sulawesi Province. These two studies show contradictory results with the expectations expected from providing village funds in Indonesia.

Iskandar (2021) stated that poverty is still a classic problem and requires special attention. Community poverty occurs not only in villages, but also in villages. Village communities are facing complex poverty problems. The Village Development Index is based on the belief that development includes social, economic, and environmental factors. These three interconnected dimensions play important roles in achieving sustainable development.

Village development, through the Village Development Index, is interpreted as a process to improve the ability of individuals and communities to utilize the potential of village communities. Based on this, the government is expected to prioritize increasing the economic, social, and environmental resilience indices, which together form the Village Development Index.

It increases the ability or skills of village communities evenly across all dimensions so that there is no inequality between one dimension and another. Each dimension plays a vital role in improving the status of village progress and independence as an effort to eradicate poverty. Equal income distribution is expected to solve the problem of income inequality. The Village Development Index is expected to be used as a database for evaluating village progress and independence, formulating strategic issues related to village development and empowerment, and setting targets in line with national development goals to create community welfare (Iskandar, 2021).

The Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2015) defines income inequality as an unequal income distribution among people. The inequality can be described using the Gini ratio as an indicator. According to the Gini coefficient, the Lorenz curve is the foundation of inequality. The cumulative expenditure curve in the Lorenz curve contrasts the distribution of a specific variable (such as income) with a uniform distribution that shows the cumulative proportion of the population. The Gini ratio, which measures income equality, ranges from zero to one. Low inequality is indicated if the Gini ratio is close to zero, whereas severe inequality is indicated if the ratio is close to one.

Poverty and education are closely related to each other. Education gives one the capacity to grow through mastering skills and information (Suryawati, 2005). Each individual had different characteristics. Individuals and communities are both educational targets and subjects of education. Education helps humans to develop their potential. Education is also an essential factor influencing income distribution and poverty. Marcelli (2000) emphasized the role of education in reducing inequality and poverty. This is in line with (Barika & Yusnida, 2021), who state that education directly reduces inequality and poverty by increasing community productivity and increasing opportunities to get better jobs.

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RESEARCH METHOD

This study was both quantitative and explanatory. The data used in this study are secondary data, namely, information obtained or collected by researchers from various sources. The definition of the research variables is explained in the following table 1:

Table 1. Definitions Operational Variables Study

Poverty	Ratio (percentage) of poor people in rural areas in Bengkulu Province.
Economic growth	The level of economic growth in each village in Bengkulu Province.
Village fund allocation	The rupiah of village fund allocation that goes into the village treasury each year.
Village development	The IDM score of each village in Bengkulu Province
Income distribution inequality	the value of the Gini ratio index for each village in Bengkulu Province
	the length of schooling indicated by the average number of years that the village population in Bengkulu has undergone formal education

Source: processed data author, 2024

A panel data regression model analysis technique was used in this investigation. Cross-sectional and time-series data were combined to create the panel data. The fundamental equation for panel data regression is as follows:

$Yit = \beta0 + \beta1X1it + \beta2X2it + \beta3X3it + \beta4X4it + \beta5X5it + \varepsilon it$

Where: Yit = Poverty Variable

$\beta0$ = Constant

$\beta1$, $\beta2$ $\beta3$ $\beta4$ $\beta5$= Regression coefficient

X1 = Economic growth

X2 = Village fund allocation

X3 = Village development index

X4 = Gini ratio

X5 = Length of school

ε = error term

i = Cross-section unit (9 districts in Bengkulu province)

t = Period (Time Series Data 2015-2019)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province. This study explores the influence of economic growth, village fund allocation, village development index, income distribution inequality, and length of schooling on poverty in the rural areas of Bengkulu Province. The results of data processing using Eviews were as follows:

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Dependent Variable: Poverty on rural region
Method: Panel Least Squares

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
GROWTH	0.012745	0.004804	2.653140	0.0125*
ADD(-1)	2.942881	0.579309	5.079988	0.0000*
IDM(-1)	-5.894580	1.421346	-4.147182	0.0002*
SCHOOL	-0.947169	0.365542	-2.591132	0.0145*
GINI	-1.523723	1.428591	-1.066591	0.2944
C	-48.57523	12.88630	-3.769525	0.0007
Effects Specification				
Cross-section fixed (dummy variables)				
R-squared	0.995478			
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000000			

Source: Data processing 2024.

Based on the results of the data processing, statistical tests were continued, including the following:

1) Determination coefficient test
   The determination coefficient value indicates the degree to which the independent variable accounts for the dependent variable. According to the findings of the analysis, the R2 value was 0.99, meaning that 99 percent of poverty in rural Bengkulu Province can be explained by the variables of economic growth, last year's village fund allocation, previous year's village development index, education, and income inequality. The remaining portion is explained by variables not included in the model.
2) F test or Overall test
   The F test determines how the independent variables—economic growth, village fund allocation from the previous year, village development index of the prior year, education, and income inequality—affect the dependent variable (rural poverty) alone or in combination. A significance threshold of 5% (Î ± = 0.05) was used. The variables of economic growth, last year's village fund allocation, the previous year's village development index, education, and income inequality simultaneously impact poverty in rural Bengkulu Province, according to the Prob(F-statistic) value of 0.0000 < 0.05.
3) T-test or partial test
   The t-test is carried out partially or independently on each independent variable against the dependent variable. The constant value in data processing of -48.57 indicates that if the independent variable (economic growth, last year's village fund allocation, previous year's village development index, education, income inequality) is equal to zero, then poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province does not exist or is -48.57. The results of the study indicate that the variables of economic growth and the previous year's village fund allocation positively affect poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province. In contrast, the variables of the previous year's village development index and education hurt poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province. In addition, the income distribution inequality variable has not been proven to affect poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province.
   The economic growth variable has a coefficient value of 0.012, with a probability of 0.01. The probability value is lower than α (0.05), indicating that economic growth significantly

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affects poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province. Every 1 percent increase in economic growth will increase poverty in the rural areas of Bengkulu Province by 0.01 percent.

The variable for village fund allocation last year has a coefficient value of 2.94 with a probability of 0.00. The probability value is lower than α (0.05), indicating that the allocation of village funds last year had a significant positive effect on poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province. Every 1 rupiah increase in village fund allocation from the previous year will increase poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province by 2.94 percent.

Last year, the village development index variable had a coefficient value of -5.89 with a probability of 0.00. The probability value was lower than α (0.05), indicating that the index of village development last year had a significant adverse effect on poverty in the rural areas of Bengkulu Province. Every 1-point increase in the index of village development in the previous year will decrease poverty in the rural areas of Bengkulu Province by 5.89 percent.

The same was true for the education variable. The education variable had a coefficient value of -0.95 with a probability of 0.01. A probability value lower than α (0.05) indicates that education has a significant negative effect on poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province. Every 1-year increase in schooling will decrease poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province by 0.95 percent. The income inequality variable has a coefficient of -1.52 with a probability of 0.29. A probability value greater than α (0.05) indicates that income inequality does not affect poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province.

Based on the data processing results, the best model is the fixed-effects model with the following equation:

$$Poverty = -48{,}57 + 0{,}013_{Growth} * +2{,}942_{add-1} * -5{,}89_{idm-1} * -0{,}94_{education} * -1{,}52_{gini} + \epsilon$$

In the equation, the constant value is -48.57, which means that if the variables of economic growth, village fund allocation, village development index, length of schooling, and income distribution inequality are considered constant, then the poverty that occurs in rural areas of Bengkulu Province is -48.57. The results of panel data processing show that since 2018, economic growth and village fund allocation have positively affected poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province. Meanwhile, the village development index, length of schooling, and income inequality are the variables that hurt poverty in the rural areas of Bengkulu Province. The estimation in the model shows that economic growth has a significant positive effect on poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province. Economic growth is widely recognized as an essential factor in reducing poverty, as evidenced by various studies in various contexts. Economic growth has been a significant driver of poverty reduction in developing countries over the past decade, with income growth being the main factor influencing poverty rate changes (Fosu, 2017). Economic growth is an essential prerequisite for poverty reduction. An adequate criterion is that this progress must effectively reduce the poverty rate. Thus, growth must be evenly distributed across all societal groups (growth with equity) to reduce poverty.

The estimation results show a positive effect of economic growth on poverty in rural areas of Bengkulu Province, one of which is the absence of inclusive growth in this province. Economic growth in districts that are cross-country routes, such as Rejang Lebong and Kepahiang, is more dominant than in the other districts. The findings of (Christiaensen et al., 2006) show that economic policy reforms that improve macroeconomic balance and liberalize markets are conducive to reducing poverty, as evidenced by the experience of countries that see poverty decline along with improvements in macroeconomic conditions and the quality of their institutions. There is significant variability in poverty outcomes across African countries, with some experiencing sustained growth and poverty reduction (e.g., Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania, and Uganda). In contrast, others face

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increasing poverty (e.g., Nigeria and Zimbabwe) or show no visible trend (e.g., Madagascar and Zambia), highlighting the importance of considering distributional effects beyond aggregate statistics.

A significant positive impact on rural poverty in Bengkulu Province also occurs in the allocation of village funds. The allocation of village funds in the previous year did not reduce poverty. The calculation of the Allocation Formula (AF) from village funds is a Village Fund distribution formula that considers village conditions, namely the number of residents, number of poor people, area, and level of geographical difficulty of the village. The correlation between the distribution of village funds, the number of poor villagers, and the Geographic Difficulty Index (IKG) shows that the distribution of village funds is still unfair.

Villages with impoverished populations receive relatively the same or more miniature Village Funds than those with poorer populations. In addition, the Utilization of Village Funds during the 2015-2017 period was used more for the priority development of basic infrastructure such as roads, bridges, drainage, irrigation, reservoirs, and others. However, village communities do not yet perceive the benefits obtained from the implementation of village development. Meanwhile, the utilization of Village Funds for empowering village communities is still not optimal, even though many villages have creative village economic activities that can be encouraged to become a livelihood for village communities.

The reverse is true for the village development index variable. Last year, the village development index considerably decreased poverty in the rural districts of Bengkulu Province. The findings of the correlation analysis in Jabung District, Malang Regency, which revealed a moderate to fairly strong relationship between the poverty level and the village development index, are not dissimilar from those of Fasya et al. (2020). The village development index level decreases as poverty levels increase. This implies that the community will be better developed at a lower poverty level. Bengkulu Province is classified as a developing village based on its (International Development Model IDM) rating.

In addition to the village development index, another variable that has a significant negative effect on poverty in the rural areas of Bengkulu Province is education. Education and poverty are closely related, and education is often considered an essential tool for reducing poverty. Over the past decade, research has highlighted the multifaceted relationship between these two elements, emphasizing the role of education in reducing poverty and the challenges faced by the poor in accessing quality education.

Education is widely recognized as a critical factor in reducing poverty by improving human resources and increasing income potential. Research has shown that higher levels of education are correlated with lower levels of poverty, as education improves employment prospects and economic stability (Araschiv, 2017; Julius & Bawane, 2011). In both developed and developing countries, education is a pathway to better opportunities, with parents in poor areas recognizing its potential to provide their children with a better future (Michael et al., 2015). Likewise, the role of education in poverty alleviation is not limited to economic benefits; education also contributes to social inclusion and empowerment, helping individuals participate more fully in society (Armstrong, 2010). Although education is a powerful tool for poverty reduction, it is not an absolute necessity. The relationship between education and poverty is complex, with education influencing and being influenced by poverty. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive strategy that takes into account the broader socio-economic context and aims to remove barriers to education for the most disadvantaged groups.

Meanwhile, the income distribution inequality variable does not affect poverty in the rural areas of Bengkulu Province. Income inequality has been a persistent problem, with significant implications for poverty levels and social cohesion. Ten years ago, discussions highlighted the

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widening gap between the highest-income earners and the rest of the population, exacerbating poverty and limiting access to resources. This trend has raised concerns about the sustainability of the welfare state, as rising inequality could undermine community development and lead to social unrest. In addition, the intersection of economic inequality with factors such as gender and ethnicity is increasingly recognized as vital in understanding the broader implications of social justice and equity.

CONCLUSION

Economic growth, village fund allocation, village development index, income distribution inequality, and length of schooling have a significant effect on rural poverty in Bengkulu Province. Economic growth, village fund allocation, village development index, and length of schooling affect rural poverty in Bengkulu Province. Meanwhile, the inequality variable does not have a significant effect on rural poverty in the Bengkulu Province. Encouraging better education programs and broader access to formal and non-formal education to improve the skills of rural communities. Develop policies encouraging inclusive and sustainable economic growth, especially in the agricultural and MSME sectors. Regular monitoring of the development of IDM and economic growth in rural areas was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the implemented programs.

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