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The Effectiveness Of The Rural Empowerment and Agricultural Development Scaling-Up Initiative (READSI) in Bone Bolango Regency

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Abstract

The agricultural sector plays a strategic role in developing countries, including Indonesia. This sector employs a large workforce in both the formal and informal sectors. Its contribution to both the national and regional economies cannot be underestimated. As one of the flagship programs of READSI (Rural Empowerment and Agricultural Development Scaling-Up Initiative), it aims to improve the welfare of farmers through their economic empowerment. Bone Bolango Regency is one of the regions participating in this program and has implemented the following components: Rural Agriculture and Livelihood Development, Improved Extension Services, Provision of Agricultural Inputs and Marketing Support, Availability of Policy and Development Strategy Support, and Program Management Support. Therefore, a study is needed to assess the effectiveness of the READSI program and identify its constraints. This study was conducted in Bone Bolango Regency using qualitative descriptive analysis in accordance with the Miles and Huberman model, which involves data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. There were 22 informants consisting of stakeholders (the Head of the Agency and extension workers), actors (READSI program facilitators), and program beneficiaries (farmers' group leaders and farmers). The results of this study indicate that: 1). The evaluation of the READSI program's effectiveness, as assessed from the input aspect (budgetary support, extension workers, and production facilities), the process aspect (implemented using a participatory approach and group-based learning), and the output aspect (farmers experienced increased income). 2). The factors hindering the implementation of the READSI Program include: low technology adoption rates among farmers, limited

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production facilities and supporting infrastructure, delays in aid distribution, lack of support from the village government, and limited market access.

Keywords: READSI, Program Effectiveness, Barriers

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays a vital role in Indonesia's economy (Dinata et al., 2024) , particularly in rural areas where the majority of the population relies on this sector as their primary source of livelihood. However, according to Utang et al.(2023) many smallholder farmers in rural areas face various challenges, such as limited access to modern technology, a lack of agribusiness management knowledge, and low competitiveness in the market (Fadli et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2025; Wanda et al., 2024) . As a result, farmers' incomes tend to stagnate, while poverty rates in rural areas remain high.

In response to these challenges, the Bone Bolango Regency government, through the Rural Empowerment and Agricultural Development Scaling-Up Initiative (READ-SI) program, is striving to provide training, mentoring, and access to technology and markets for farmers. The implementation of the READ-SI program in Bone Bolango Regency focuses on four main components: (1) Rural Agriculture and Livelihood Development, (2) Improvement of Extension Services, Provision of Agricultural Inputs, and Marketing, (3) Availability of Policy Support and Development Strategies, and (4) Program Management Support.

Although the READSI program has been implemented for several years in Bone Bolango Regency, there has been no comprehensive evaluation of the program's effectiveness in increasing farmers' income. Key challenges in implementing the READSI program in Bone Bolango Regency include low adoption rates of modern agricultural technologies and limited access to resources and infrastructure. The causes include the long distance from distribution centers, inadequate road and irrigation infrastructure, and the limited availability of microfinance institutions in the region.

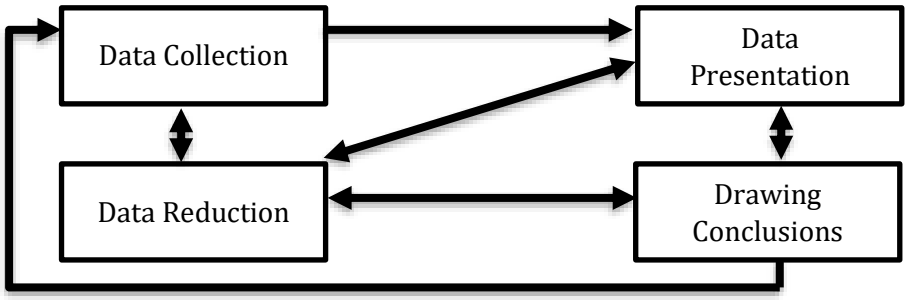
METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Bone Bolango Regency from December 2024 to January 2025. The study measured the effectiveness of the READSI program in increasing farmers' income. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, which, according to Rukajat(2018) , provides a systematic and accurate description of the conditions under study regarding the effectiveness of the READSI program in increasing farmers' income in

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Bone Bolango Regency. Data analysis in this study utilizes the Miles and Huberman interactive model as described by Thalib (2022)



The figure above regarding the components of Miles and Huberman's data analysis model illustrates that, in conducting qualitative data analysis, these steps can be carried out concurrently with the data collection process. These concurrent processes include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions

RESEARCH AND RESULTS

Informants are individuals considered to understand the issue under study and willing to provide information to the researcher. The researcher collects data from informants through a questionnaire. This study used 22 informants. Three of these informants were from the subdistrict/village where the research was conducted. The sample size used in qualitative research with informants is not fixed; in some cases, only one informant is used. At a minimum, the criteria for identifying informants must be met (Martha et al., 2016).

Table 1. Distribution of Research Informants

No	Position	Number	Percentage
1	Extension worker	1	4.54
2	Head of the Bone Bolango District Office	1	4.54
3	Farmer	10	45.45
4	Chairperson of the Farmers' Group	4	18.18
5	READSI Program Facilitator	6	27.27
Total		**22**	**100**

Source: Primary data after processing, 2024

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that there were 22 respondents who served as informants in this study. The largest group consisted of the target participants of the READSI

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program itself, namely 10 farmers, 4 farmer group leaders, and 6 READSI program facilitators who implement the program. The remainder consists of agricultural extension officers and the Head of the Bone Bolango Regency Agriculture Office, who are stakeholders in the READSI program.

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the READSI Program in Increasing Farmers' Income in Bone Bolango Regency

1. Input Dimensions in the Effectiveness of the READSI Program

The input dimension is a key element in assessing the extent to which a program's success can be achieved. In the context of the READSI Program (Rural Empowerment and Agricultural Development Scaling-Up Initiative), inputs include the resources utilized, namely human resources (facilitators and extension workers), budget, technology, and training activities. These inputs serve as the foundational basis supporting the entire program implementation process at the village level. First, regarding human resources, the READSI Program in Bone Bolango Regency is supported by agricultural extension workers and field facilitators tasked with assisting farmer groups in training and the implementation of agricultural practices. Although their presence is vital, the limited number of support staff poses a significant challenge. In practice, a single facilitator must handle more than five farmer groups simultaneously. This results in suboptimal guidance and monitoring of each group on a regular basis.

Joko et al.(2025) explain that the shortage of extension workers or facilitators has resulted in the training under the READSI program being implemented less effectively, making the training suboptimal for farmers. Some farmers noted that although training was provided, direct on-site assistance could not be fully implemented due to time constraints and limited human resources. Furthermore, the READSI program budget allocated to Bone Bolango Regency through the central government's grant scheme exceeded Rp 20.93 billion. These funds were allocated for various needs, such as training, institutional strengthening of farmer groups, provision of agricultural production inputs (saprodi), and other supporting activities. Nasrullah et al.(2025) note that the availability of a substantial budget demonstrates the government's commitment to strengthening the agriculture sector through empowerment. However, in its implementation, challenges remain regarding the effectiveness of budget distribution, particularly concerning the timeliness of disbursement and equitable utilization among farmer groups.

The training activities were assessed as having gone well and served as a tangible example of budget utilization; however, regarding the provision of tools and agricultural inputs, improvements are still needed in the areas of distribution management and

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monitoring. Furthermore, regarding technology and agricultural inputs. One of the key aspects of the READSI Program is the provision of agricultural technology and inputs, which includes sprayers, high-quality seeds, and fertilizers. This assistance aims to improve the efficiency and productivity of farmers, particularly smallholder farmers in rural areas. However, based on interviews with informants from various sub-districts, the implementation of this component still faces a number of significant challenges. First, the limited number of sprayers is a major constraint in the production process. Some farmer groups receive only one sprayer, which must be shared by dozens of members. According to Maruapey et al.(2025) , this inevitably hinders work efficiency in the field, especially when the planting season begins simultaneously. In such situations, time efficiency and pest control are compromised because not all farmers can spray according to the planting schedule.

Second, farmers consider the high-quality seeds provided by the program to be quite helpful because they are pest-resistant and more productive than local seeds. However, fertilizer a key component of the production process—often faces distribution delays. Farmers reported that they were forced to procure fertilizer on their own when planting time could not wait. This aligns with the findings of Hermawan et al.(2025) , which indicate a mismatch between planting time and the timing of aid distribution from the program a discrepancy likely caused by the lengthy bureaucratic procurement and distribution mechanisms at the district level

Third, there are disparities in the equitable distribution of assistance, particularly between male and female farmers. Women Farmers' Groups (KWT) in several locations reported that they have not yet received fully equitable attention regarding agricultural input assistance. Aid is more often prioritized for rice farmers or main crop farmers, while the use of backyard plots for vegetable cultivation is still considered supplementary (Nasikh et al., 2023) . In fact, this activity also contributes directly to household food security and income.

In addition, program facilitators acknowledged that the distribution of production inputs often fell short of expectations due to administrative and logistical challenges. Although planning had been carried out well in advance, implementation on the ground still faced obstacles, ranging from delays in procurement to a shortage of vehicles for distribution to villages. From these findings, it can be concluded that although inputs in the form of production inputs have been provided by the program, their effectiveness at the farmer level is still influenced by limited quantities, distribution timeliness, and allocation disparities. Therefore, improvements in logistics management and distribution policies that

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are more responsive to local needs are essential so that these input components truly have an optimal impact on increasing farmers' incomes.

Other input components include technology and production tools. Farmers participating in the program gain access to technologies such as sprayers, high-quality seeds, organic fertilizers, and other agricultural tools. This technology aims to improve production efficiency and reduce farming costs (Alfidyah, 2025) . However, some farmer groups reported that the number of tools available was insufficient, so they had to be used on a rotational basis. According to Sulthoni and Subekti(2023) , this can hinder the smooth running of farming activities, especially during the simultaneous planting season.

Finally, training activities have proven to be one of the most beneficial components for farmers. Through training in the form of Field Schools (SL), farmers gain practical knowledge on modern cultivation techniques, organic fertilizer management, integrated pest management, and financial literacy for managing their farm income. Farmers reported that they better understand the importance of recording production costs and planning agricultural needs in a more structured manner after participating in the "training . Moreover, the training successfully raised farmers' awareness of the importance of forming active and self-reliant farmer groups. Thus, overall, the input dimension of the READSI Program has been implemented effectively. However, the optimization of inputs still needs to be improved through the strengthening of extension agencies, the equitable distribution of technology, and improvements in budget management so that every farmer group can experience sustainable benefits.

2. Process Dimensions in the Effectiveness of the READSI Program

The *process* dimension is a key element in evaluating a program's success, particularly in terms of how strategies, methods, and operational mechanisms are implemented to achieve objectives. In the context of the READSI Program, the implementation process reflects how inputs such as human resources, budget, and technology are transformed into concrete activities that are directly experienced by farmer groups in the field.

The READSI program employs a participatory, community-based development approach, in which activity planning is carried out through joint deliberations between farmer groups and facilitators (Group Business Plan Development). According to Multiningrum et al.(2025) , this strategy is intended to ensure that farmers are not merely recipients of the program, but also key actors who are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities. This strategy has proven effective in increasing farmers' sense of ownership of the program, although implementation does not always

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proceed uniformly across all groups due to differences in facilitator capacity and levels of farmer participation.

The READSI program implementation method places strong emphasis on participatory learning through Field Schools (FS). In FS activities, farmers learn directly in the field about crop cultivation techniques, the use of organic fertilizers, the production of botanical pesticides, and financial literacy. Each training module is tailored to local needs (Sawitri et al., 2024) . For example, farmer groups in lowland areas focus more on rice pest control and water management, while groups in highland areas focus more on soil conservation techniques.

The program is implemented through coordination between the Agriculture Office, village facilitators, field extension workers, and village officials. Each group activity is monitored regularly and reported through the program reporting system to the district level. However, coordination across these levels has not yet been fully optimized. Some facilitators have complained about the large size of the groups they mentor, which results in less-than-optimal guidance. Additionally, not all villages have good communication and transportation networks, making routine monitoring difficult (Mukti et al., 2025).

The READSI program is quite flexible in accommodating the needs of local farmers. In some cases, facilitators give farmer groups the freedom to choose crop types or commodities that suit the characteristics of their region, such as horticultural crops in backyard gardens. However, according to Akbar(2025) , the level of responsiveness also depends on the group's initiative and the extension workers' proactiveness. Groups that are passive or lack a strong leader tend to fall behind in program implementation.

In general, the implementation of the READSI Program in Bone Bolango Regency has been guided by participatory and collaborative principles. Field schools, group discussions, and a community-based approach have been key drivers of the implementation process. However, several challenges remain, such as a shortage of facilitators, disparities in capacity among groups, and the need to improve coordination across government levels to optimize program outcomes.

3. Output Dimensions in the Effectiveness of the READSI Program

One of the key indicators of the success of the READSI Program (Rural Empowerment and Agricultural Development Scaling-Up Initiative) is an increase in farmers' income. In the context of program evaluation from an output perspective, changes in income serve as the most concrete measure for assessing the program's impact on farmers' economic well-being, both individually and collectively within farming groups.

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Following the implementation of the READSI Program—which included training, the provision of agricultural inputs, technical assistance, and group strengthening—most farmers experienced an increase in income. Interview results indicate that the rise in farmers' income ranged from 20% to 50%, depending on the intensity of their involvement in the program, technology adoption, and their ability to access markets. Although not all farmers have experienced a significant increase in income, a general upward trend is already evident, particularly among active groups that have intensive facilitator support and are able to access markets beyond middlemen. On the other hand, farmers who have not fully participated in the program or experienced delays in the distribution of production inputs show a slower rate of improvement. According to Sulfiana(2022) , changes in farmers' income before and after the implementation of the READSI Program indicate that this program makes a positive contribution to improving farmers' economic well-being. Although the results are not uniform across all groups, the achievements serve as an indicator that the community-based empowerment approach through training, technology, and group strengthening is moving in the desired direction.

Factors Hindering the Implementation of the READSI Program in Increasing Farmers' Incomes in Bone Bolango Regency, Gorontalo Province

The READSI program is designed to comprehensively empower farmers through capacity building, access to technology and markets, and institutional strengthening. However, in its implementation in Bone Bolango Regency, there are a number of constraints that affect the program's effectiveness in achieving its goal of increasing farmers' incomes. The following are the constraints on the implementation of the READSI program:

1. **Low Adoption Rates of Agricultural Technology**

One of the main factors hindering the success of the READSI Program in increasing farmers' incomes in Bone Bolango Regency is the low rate of adoption of agricultural technologies by farmers. Although the program has provided various simple technologies such as sprayers, high-quality seeds, and training on the use of organic fertilizers and modern planting systems, not all farmers are able or willing to adopt them in their daily practices. Although the READSI Program provides training and simple tools such as sprayers, some farmers, especially the elderly, are still reluctant to abandon traditional farming practices. The low rate of technology adoption results in the program's effectiveness in increasing farmers' productivity and income being suboptimal (Ritonga & Kenedi, 2025) . Many of the innovations introduced by the READSI Program are not fully implemented in the field due to farmers' lack of social and psychological readiness to change. Soedarto and Dainiyah(2022) state that farmers who do not adopt new methods

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tend to experience stagnant crop yields and do not feel the tangible benefits of the program. Additionally, the intensity of support from facilitators and extension workers plays a crucial role in driving technology adoption. In some locations, the limited number of extension workers has hindered farmers' ability to understand and try new technologies directly and sustainably.

2. Limitations in Production Facilities and Infrastructure

Another challenge is the limited availability of production inputs, such as sprayers and fertilizers, which is not commensurate with the number of farmer groups. In addition, supporting infrastructure, such as farm roads and irrigation systems, remains inadequate in some villages. However, the implementation of the program in Bone Bolango Regency still faces serious obstacles in the form of limited production inputs and supporting infrastructure, which directly impact the effectiveness of program implementation in the field. Farmers receive assistance in the form of sprayers, high-yielding seeds, and fertilizer from the program. However, the amount of assistance is very limited compared to the number of group members, so it must be used on a rotational basis. In practice, this causes delays in planting, spraying, and fertilizing. Furthermore, not all farmer groups receive the appropriate amount of seeds and fertilizer relative to their land area and number of members. This forces farmers to cover their additional production needs out of their own pockets—a situation that ironically contradicts the program's objectives.

Another challenge is the inadequate agricultural infrastructure, such as farm roads, irrigation canals, and storage facilities for harvested crops. This significantly impacts the efficiency of distributing production inputs and transporting agricultural products to markets. As stated by Indriani & Wicaksono(2025) , damaged or non-permanent irrigation channels also pose a barrier, particularly during the dry season. Crops do not receive sufficient water, thereby hindering productivity, even though agricultural inputs and technology are already available. Rikardus added(2025) that limitations in production facilities and infrastructure are highly significant constraints in the implementation of the READSI Program. Although this program provides good assistance and training, its benefits have not been fully realized due to unresolved technical and logistical issues. Therefore, the program's success will heavily depend on cross-sectoral collaboration and the government's attention to the physical infrastructure supporting agriculture

3. Delays in Aid Distribution During the Implementation of the READSI Program

One of the main challenges faced in implementing the READSI Program in Bone Bolango Regency is the delay in distributing agricultural inputs such as high-quality seeds, fertilizer, and farming tools. This assistance is actually designed to be provided on time to

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support a structured farming cycle, but in practice it often arrives late, out of sync with the planting calendar in use in the field.

Farmers in several districts have complained that seeds and fertilizer did not arrive until after the planting season had begun. As a result, they have had to find alternatives by purchasing fertilizer or seeds themselves from local markets— —despite their limited financial means. This clearly runs counter to the program's original objective of reducing farmers' production costs and promoting agricultural efficiency.

These delays not only affect planting operations but also erode farmers' confidence in the program's sustainability (Rupa, 2024) . Some farmer groups even stated that aid distribution never followed a fixed schedule. This uncertainty makes it difficult for them to develop systematic planting plans, ultimately resulting in suboptimal harvests. Delays in distribution also lead to increased production costs (Hakim & Supardi, 2025) .

When fertilizer or seed assistance fails to arrive, farmers are forced to spend their own money to buy agricultural inputs, which indirectly reduces the profit margin on their harvests. Furthermore, for farmer groups that are just learning about farm business management, such conditions can become an additional burden that causes them to lose motivation to actively participate in the program.

4. Limited Number and Capacity of Field Extension Workers

The number of facilitators and extension workers is not proportional to the number of target groups. A single extension worker may be responsible for more than five groups, resulting in less intensive support and ensuring that not all groups receive the same level of attention. As indicated by the research findings of Pri & Prastyawan(2025) , the limited number of extension workers and facilitators also undermines the program's effectiveness. A single facilitator is required to handle many farmer groups at once, so not all groups receive intensive and continuous guidance. In fact, according to Suwandi & Kurniawan (2025), the success of training and technology adoption is highly dependent on the presence of facilitators who actively provide guidance in the field. Without adequate guidance, farmer groups tend to become passive and revert to old, less productive work patterns.

5. Limited Market Access

On the other hand, limited market access keeps farmers dependent on middlemen as the primary buyers of their crops. The READSI program has not yet fully developed alternative marketing networks or established cooperatives that can purchase farmers' produce at more favorable prices. As a result, although productivity has increased, the selling price of products remains low because farmers lack strong bargaining power in the market. The READSI program has not yet fully established alternative marketing networks or formed cooperatives capable of purchasing farmers' agricultural produce at more

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favorable prices. Consequently, despite increased productivity, the market value of their products remains low because farmers lack strong bargaining power in the market. After harvest, many farmers still sell their produce to middlemen because they lack direct access to more profitable markets. The absence of a distribution system or farmers' cooperatives leaves farmers without pricing power.

Most farmers still rely on local middlemen or collectors as their primary sales channel for their crops. This reliance stems from farmers' lack of sufficient information about broader markets, as well as their lack of direct access to modern markets or fair-trade marketing institutions. As a result, farmers are forced to sell their produce at low prices often below market value because they have no other options. On the other hand, farmer groups have not yet been fully supported to form collective business units such as cooperatives or joint business groups that can assist with packaging, promotion, and distribution of agricultural products. In fact, the increased production potential resulting from training and program assistance could present a significant opportunity if farmers are supported to take on the role of key actors in the agricultural value chain.

This lack of cross-sectoral coordination results in farmers' produce ending up in local markets at uncompetitive prices. This situation demonstrates that increasing production alone is insufficient to boost farmers' incomes unless accompanied by support for fair and profitable market access. Therefore, marketing must be an integral part of the empowerment strategy within the READSI Program, whether through the establishment of cooperatives, marketing training, the use of digital technology, or the provision of transportation access and distribution infrastructure.

6. Lack of Participation by the Village Government in Facilitating the Program

In the implementation of the READSI Program in Bone Bolango Regency, success is not only determined by technical support and resources from the central and regency governments, but also heavily depends on the active participation of village governments as the frontline of governance closest to the community. Unfortunately, in practice, there remains a lack of involvement by village governments in fully supporting and facilitating the READSI program. Some village heads or village officials are considered not to fully understand the objectives and mechanisms of the READSI Program. They tend to position themselves merely as spectators or administrative bodies that simply receive reports, rather than as active partners in program implementation. According to Setiawan(2026) , this leads to a lack of structural support in the form of providing village facilities, mobilizing community participation, and fostering synergy between READSI activities and village development planning.

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Mitha & Sukmana(2025) explain that the lack of moral and logistical support from villages slows down program implementation, especially in villages with limited access that require facilitation from local authorities. In fact, in village development planning documents such as the RPJMDes and RKPDes, poverty alleviation and agricultural sector strengthening should be priorities. The lack of integration of the READSI Program into village development plans indicates weak coordination between sectoral programs and village policies. Consequently, the potential to allocate support from the Village Fund or align village programs with READSI activities has been overlooked

This lack of participation by the village government has resulted in weak institutional support for farmer groups, a lack of oversight of activities, and obstacles in mobilizing community members who are not yet members of the " " group (Rezkita et al., 2025). This situation underscores the importance of strengthening the capacity and commitment of village governments to support empowerment programs initiated by both the central and local governments. Village governments should serve as strategic partners in ensuring that these programs directly benefit the community and act as a bridge between farmer groups and higher levels of government.

By actively involving village governments in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the READSI Program, its sustainability and impact on farmers' incomes will be stronger and more enduring. The participation of village governments not only accelerates program implementation but also strengthens the program's legitimacy and fosters a sense of community ownership.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Factors hindering the implementation of the READSI Program include: low levels of technology adoption by farmers, limited production facilities and supporting infrastructure, delays in aid distribution, lack of support from village governments, and limited market access.
2. As for the evaluation of the READSI program's effectiveness, in terms of inputs, budget support, extension workers, and production facilities, these were available and utilized to support program implementation. In terms of process, the program was implemented using a participatory approach and group-based learning. In terms of outputs, farmers actively participating in the program experienced increased income, more efficient farm management, and improved agricultural productivity

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