



Original Article

The Dynamics of Rice Farmer Empowerment and an Evaluation of the Reads Program (Rural Empowerment and Agriculture Development Scaling-Up Initiative)

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Abstract:

With the decentralization of governmental authority in the implementation of regional autonomy, it is expected that the application of the concept of good governance in government administration, development, and public service can be realized, including in the field of education. The method used in this research is a literature study. The data used in this research are primary data sourced from various research reports and journals, as well as secondary data sourced from various books and legislation. The results of the research show that through the concept of educational decentralization, educational management is able to shift from a top-down to a participatory bottom-up management pattern. As a result, management develops and organizes educational administration in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Educational institutions, as the organizers of education, build networks and develop communication and cooperation with various elements, including the government, society, and the private sector. Through the concept of educational decentralization, schools are able to design school policies according to the school's vision and integrate them with their environment, both the social community and the natural environment.

Keywords: Farmer Empowerment, Farmer Participation, Program Effectiveness, The READSI Program, Rice Farmers

Introduction

Agriculture is a very strategic sector in Indonesia's economy. In addition to being the main provider of staple food for the population, especially rice, which is the primary food source for the majority of Indonesians, the agricultural sector also plays an important role in providing employment and driving rural economies. National food security heavily relies on the productivity of rice farming, supported by the



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empowerment of farmers as the main actors. Therefore, the government continues to strive to develop the rice farming sector through various programs and national development policies designed to improve farmers' welfare and agricultural productivity (Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

One of the strategic programs that plays a crucial role in empowering farmers is READSI (Rural Empowerment and Agriculture Development Scaling-up Initiative). This program is the result of collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and local governments, including in North Kolaka Regency. The main objective of READSI is to improve the capacity, independence, and active role of farmers through a participatory community empowerment approach. This program focuses not only on increasing production but also on strengthening farmer institutions, expanding access to technology and financing, and encouraging the involvement of marginalized groups such as women and youth in productive economic activities (IFAD, 2021).

The implementation of READSI emphasizes that farmers must be active subjects in development, not just beneficiaries. This approach is based on the principle of empowerment, which encourages active participation and the strengthening of local capacity to ensure that development outcomes are more sustainable ([Mardikanto, 2010](#)). One of the areas focused on in the implementation of this program is Porehu District, North Kolaka Regency. This district is a rice production center with unique social and geographical characteristics. The majority of the population depends on rice farming, but they still face various challenges, such as weak farmer institutions, limited access to modern agricultural technology, and lack of capital ([North Kolaka Agriculture Office, 2023](#)).

In this context, READSI becomes a strategic effort to address these structural problems through community-based empowerment. However, the success of empowerment programs does not only depend on good policies but also on the implementation process on the ground. The implementation involving various actors, from local governments, supporting institutions, to farmer groups and civil society, must be able to adjust the approach to local social and cultural conditions. Evaluating the implementation of the READSI program in Porehu District is crucial to understand the extent to which this program has had an impact on changes in behavior, skills, and the welfare of rice farmers ([Juliana, 2020](#)).

This evaluation also aims to identify the social dynamics that occurred during the program's implementation, such as changes in the structure of farmer institutions, the level of farmer participation, the role of women and youth, and the obstacles and opportunities present on the ground. A deep understanding of these dynamics will provide insights into whether the empowerment efforts have been successful in making farmers more independent and have a stronger bargaining position in the agricultural production and marketing chain ([Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005](#)).

Social transformation, which is one of the goals of empowerment, allows farmers to improve their productivity and critical abilities. In this regard, the research will examine how farmer groups, women, and youth can play a more active and independent role after the READSI program intervention. The study will also assess whether the program has succeeded in building collective awareness and a sense of community ownership in the agricultural development process.

In addition to the technical aspects, evaluating the READSI program is also important from a policy perspective. The evaluation findings can provide

recommendations to the government and other stakeholders in designing similar empowerment programs that are more suited to the local context. The top-down approach, which is often applied in various empowerment programs, often fails if it is not adjusted to local social and cultural conditions (Eriyanto, 2001). Therefore, the results of this evaluation are expected to serve as a basis for developing effective, sustainable, and participatory empowerment strategies.

Furthermore, this study is important because there has been a gap between administrative reports that highlight the success of the program in quantitative terms—such as the number of trainings or farmer groups formed—and the more complex social realities on the ground. Changes in farmers' quality of life, which are often substantial, are often overlooked. The qualitative approach used in this study allows for a more in-depth exploration of social dynamics, farmers' perceptions, and the factors that support or hinder the empowerment process (Yin, 2018).

This research will focus on how the READSI program is implemented in Porehu District, the actors involved, the forms of community participation in the program, as well as the barriers and supports that affect the success of empowering rice farmers. Additionally, the research will explore the experiences and perceptions of farmers regarding the program they participated in and the extent to which they feel a sense of ownership of the empowerment process. As such, the results of this research are expected to provide a comprehensive and in-depth overview of farmer empowerment in the local context, as well as provide input for improving policies and agricultural development strategies in the future.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach supported by quantitative data to provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of rice farmer empowerment through the implementation of the READSI Program in Porehu District, North Kolaka Regency. The qualitative approach is chosen because it aims to understand the social processes, perceptions, and factors influencing farmers' participation in the program, while quantitative data is used to measure the level of participation and visible impacts statistically (Yin, 2018).

The research is conducted in Porehu District, a major rice production area in North Kolaka Regency with distinct social, economic, and geographical characteristics. The location was chosen based on the scope of the READSI Program's implementation and the structural problems faced by farmers, such as weak farmer institutions, limited access to technology and financing (North Kolaka Agriculture Office, 2023). The research was carried out over five months in 2025, covering the planting season and the active period of program implementation.

The research population consists of all rice farmers participating in the READSI Program in Porehu District. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, with criteria for selecting farmers who are actively involved in the activities of the READSI program's farmer groups in several villages, such as To'Bela, Porehu, and Bangsala. A total of 23 samples were selected based on variations in age, education level, farming experience, and participation level to represent the actual condition of the local farming community (Primary Data, 2025).

The primary instrument is a semi-structured interview guide systematically designed based on empowerment and participation indicators, such as participation in meetings, decision-making, the adoption of new technologies, and the use of program

outcomes (Rukmana and Maulana, 2020). The observation instrument consists of a checklist to track attendance and activities during the planning, implementation, and utilization stages of the program.

Qualitative data from interviews and observations are analyzed using thematic analysis methods. The analysis stages include open coding to identify patterns of participation and empowerment dynamics, axial coding to examine relationships between themes, and selective coding to draw conclusions (Yin, 2018). Quantitative data obtained from documentation and observation are analyzed descriptively using frequency and participation scoring to generate a quantitative overview of farmers' involvement (Putri and Riyanto, 2022b).

This study is conducted with attention to ethical considerations. All participants are informed about the purpose and benefits of the research before providing voluntary consent (informed consent). The confidentiality of data and respondents' identities is strictly maintained to ensure that the research findings can be published without harm to any party (Sulaiman and Hall, 2004).

Due to the limited number of respondents and the geographic scope, the findings are directed toward the specific context of Porehu District and cannot be generalized to other areas. However, with purposive sampling techniques and data triangulation, the validity and reliability of the results are maintained.

Results

This study involves 23 rice farmers participating in the READSI Program in Porehu District, with variations in age, education, number of family dependents, and farming experience. Below is a brief overview of the respondent characteristics:

Age: The age range of farmers is relatively productive, between 30 and 73 years, with the majority in the 30-62 age group (87%). This age range indicates that most farmers are still active in farming and capable of absorbing new innovations in agriculture (Hayami and Ruttan, 1985).

Education: Most farmers have completed primary to secondary education, with 37.50% having graduated from elementary school, 26.09% from junior high school, 17.39% from senior high school, and 4.35% with a bachelor's degree. Formal education plays an important role in influencing farmers' ability to adopt new technologies and manage their farming businesses (Nasution, Harahap, and Lubis, 2020; Arifin and Sumarno, 2020).

Number of Family Dependents: The majority of farmers have 1-4 family dependents (78%), indicating a relatively light to moderate family burden to meet household needs and a focus on farming activities.

Farming Experience: Most farmers have 2-7 years of farming experience (95%), suggesting sufficient experience to understand the challenges and opportunities in rice farming as well as the innovation learning process (Nuryanti, Saptana, and Suhartini, 2018).

These characteristics are important assets for the successful implementation of empowerment programs because productive age, educational background, and sufficient farming experience are supporting factors for motivation and technical capability.

Farmers' Participation in the READSI Program: Farmers' participation is a key indicator of empowerment success in the READSI program. This study measures farmers' participation across three main stages: planning, implementation, and utilization. Each stage is analyzed based on operational indicators such as attendance, idea submission, active role in meetings, involvement in training, technology adoption, and dissemination of innovation information.

Planning Stage: The analysis score data shows that farmers' participation in the planning stage is generally high, with an average score of 2.33 on a 3-point scale (high = 2.33-3.0). Attendance in meetings to determine the types and schedules of READSI activities reached an average score of 2.40 and 2.50, while submitting ideas and feedback was also relatively high (2.35 and 2.20). However, the active role of farmers in planning meetings had a lower score (2.20), indicating that some farmers were still passive or followed the discussions without much contribution. This aligns with previous research (Syahyuti, 2014) and (Putri and Riyanto, 2022b), which state that farmers' attendance does not always coincide with active participation if the forum does not provide a conducive space for dialogue.

Discussion: The high participation in the planning stage shows that the program has successfully facilitated farmers' involvement, especially in the initial phase, which determines the direction and policies of the group. This is important because the Planning Development Consultation (Musrenbang) is a key stage in empowerment to build a sense of ownership and responsibility (Mardikanto, 2010). However, the low score in active participation suggests the need for improved communication capacity and forum management to encourage farmers to express opinions, critique, and propose solutions.

Implementation Stage: In the implementation stage, farmers' participation also showed a good average score of 2.30 (moderate to high category). Participation in training reached a score of 2.43, while active involvement in READSI guidance was 2.39. However, the score for the adoption of technological innovations and participation in farmer group development was slightly lower, at 2.22 and 2.17, respectively.

Discussion: High participation in training and guidance shows that the program is capable of attracting and involving farmers intensively to acquire new knowledge and skills. However, the low adoption of technological innovations and group development indicates a gap between training reception and implementation in the field. This may be due to low education levels, limited production resources, and barriers to adapting technology (Saragih and Puspitasari, 2021; Putri and Riyanto, 2022b). Support to overcome these barriers could include more practical follow-up training, provision of incentives, and more personalized assistance so that farmers not only attend training but are also able to implement innovations effectively in their farming businesses (Sulaiman and Hall, 2004). The involvement of extension workers and facilitators is crucial in strengthening this technology transfer.

Utilization Stage: The level of participation in the program's utilization stage showed an average score of 2.31 (moderate category). The use of farming facilities from the READSI program (machinery, seeds, fertilizers, processing tools) scored high (2.33), but the dissemination of information and the use of technological innovations among other farmers remained below expectations (2.30).

Discussion: The high score for the utilization of facilities indicates that the program effectively provided the necessary resources for farmers, and they tend to use them. However, the low dissemination of information and innovation among farmers suggests a lack of mechanisms or a knowledge-sharing culture, which is an important aspect of

the sustainability of empowerment ([Sulaiman and Hall, 2004](#)). Strengthening the role of change agents and farmer leaders to disseminate innovations is necessary so that the program's benefits can spread more widely within the community. It is also important to develop a farmer group model based on social networks so that technological information can spread organically ([Fukuyama, 1995](#)).

Factors Affecting Farmers' Participation Level: This study identifies several key factors affecting farmers' participation in the READSI program, including:

- **Formal Education:** Higher education contributes to the ability to understand training material and adopt new technologies. Farmers with low formal education tend to be more passive and struggle to optimize the benefits of the program ([Nasution, Harahap, and Lubis, 2020](#)).
- **Number of Family Dependents:** A high family burden reduces the time and resources available for farmers to actively participate in training and group activities ([Putri and Riyanto, 2022a](#)).
- **Farming Experience:** Farmers with longer experience have better managerial and technical skills to follow and implement the program ([Nuryanti, Saptana, and Suhartini, 2018](#)).
- **Farmer Group Institutions:** A strong institutional structure influences coordination and support among members, encouraging better participation ([Mawarni, Eka, and Dkk, 2017](#)).

Discussion: These factors align with the empowerment concept, which emphasizes that human resource capacity and institutional structure are the foundation of program success ([Slamet, 2003](#)). Therefore, increasing non-formal education, such as continuous extension services and practical training, is very important for farmers with lower education levels. Incentive schemes for farmers with heavy family burdens could also improve participation levels.

Impact of the READSI Program on Farmers' Welfare: Data shows that the READSI Program has had a positive impact on:

- **Farmers' Income:** There has been a significant increase in income through improved harvests and production efficiency after attending training and adopting technology ([Rukmana and Maulana, 2020](#)).
- **Knowledge and Skills:** Farmers have gained increased technical knowledge and managerial skills in farming, improving overall farm management ([Riyanto, 2022](#)).
- **Independence and Bargaining Position:** Farmers are now more capable of making better decisions and strengthening farmer group institutions, which allows them to access better markets and financing ([Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005](#)).

Discussion: These results are consistent with the empowerment theory, which places social transformation as a main goal, enabling farmers not only to receive aid but also to build long-term capacity ([Dunn and N, 2018](#)). However, the sustainability of welfare improvements depends on strengthening farmer institutions and continued access to markets and financing ([Eriyanto, 2001](#)).

Barriers and Challenges in Program Implementation: The study identifies several barriers in the implementation of the READSI Program in Porehu District:

- **Limited Extension Worker Resources:** There is an inadequacy of extension workers in terms of both background and numbers ([North Kolaka Agriculture Office, 2023](#)).

- Geographical and Socio-Cultural Barriers: These barriers affect farmers' access and participation.
- Knowledge-Implementation Gap: Some farmers depend on external assistance and struggle with adopting new technologies independently.

These barriers require a more holistic and adaptive empowerment approach, tailored to local contexts and community capabilities. Strengthening the capacity of extension workers, involving local actors, and improving institutional structures are key to the long-term success of the program ([Slamet, 2003](#); [Yin, 2018](#)). Additionally, strengthening social networks and empowering women and youth should be given more attention to ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of empowerment ([Dunn and N, 2018](#)).

Conclusion

The implementation of the READSI program in Porehu District, North Kolaka Regency, has demonstrated effectiveness in increasing the participation and income of rice farmers. The profile of farmers, who are relatively productive in terms of age and have a basic education background, influences technology adoption and active participation. Although participation in planning and implementation is high, the quality of participation still needs to be strengthened, particularly in terms of feedback and substantial involvement. The program has brought positive socio-economic changes and enhanced the capacity of farmer groups in a sustainable manner.

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