

Policy–Practice Gaps in Extreme Poverty Alleviation: Evidence from South Bolaang Mongondow, North Sulawesi

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the implementation of Indonesia's extreme-poverty alleviation policy in South Bolaang Mongondow Regency, North Sulawesi, focusing on centrally funded programs that provide housing construction and residential land for households classified as extremely poor. Guided by Dunn's policy-implementation lens covering policy action, regulative, allocation, agencies, program, and project the study adopts a qualitative descriptive design. Primary data were gathered through non-participant observation and in-depth interviews with key informants; secondary data consist of village and district policy documents. Findings indicate that, while the policy is associated with a downward trajectory in extreme-poverty incidence, program execution remains uneven. Targeting errors persist: benefits are frequently captured by kin networks of village elites and diverted to poor households that do not meet the "extreme" threshold. Across Dunn's dimensions, the most salient gaps include ambiguous regulatory criteria, weak allocation procedures, fragmented inter-agency coordination, and limited project-level transparency and accountability. We conclude that effectiveness is constrained less by policy design than by implementation failures. Strengthening beneficiary identification, instituting public verification and transparent quotas, improving cross-agency data sharing, and embedding social audit and grievance-redress mechanisms are recommended to close the policy practice gap.

Keywords: public policy; extreme poverty; policy implementation; elite capture; Indonesia; targeting accuracy

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Indonesia through the Office of the Vice President allocated fiscal incentives to selected local governments to accelerate the reduction of extreme poverty in 2024 [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]. In the Indonesian policy framework, *extreme poverty* is institutionally distinguished from general poverty: while poverty is defined by the national poverty line calculated by Statistics Indonesia (BPS), extreme poverty refers to households whose per-capita expenditure falls below the international extreme-poverty threshold (USD 1.90 PPP) and is operationalized nationally through the *Targeted Acceleration of Extreme Poverty Reduction* agenda coordinated by TNP2K and mandated in Presidential regulations. This distinction frames extreme poverty as a priority policy category requiring targeted, time-bound interventions beyond conventional poverty alleviation.

South Bolaang Mongondow Regency (Bolsel) in North Sulawesi is among the recipients, reflecting its persistently high poverty profile. According to the 2024 statistics of North

Sulawesi's provincial bureau, Bolsel ranks fourth in poverty incidence; its extreme-poverty burden is particularly salient in remote villages, encompassing 1,883 households ($\approx 9,455$ individuals) classified as extremely poor. In response, the regency programmed the construction of decent housing for 58 households and the provision of

residential land for 32 landless households, financed in part by an allocation of IDR 6,313,683,000 from the central fiscal incentive and the local budget.

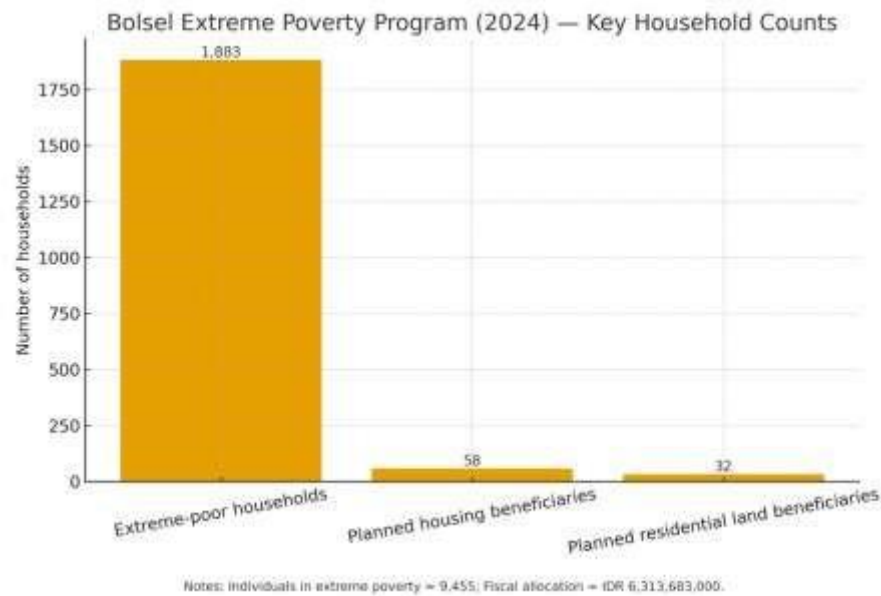


Figure 1. Extreme-poverty programme in South Bolaang Mongondow (Bolsel), 2024: key household counts.

Notes: Bars report households. Extreme-poor households = 1,883 ($\approx 9,455$ individuals). Planned beneficiaries: 58 households for decent housing; 32 landless households for residential land. Fiscal allocation = IDR 6,313,683,000 (central incentive + local budget).

Source: Authors' compilation from North Sulawesi Provincial Statistics (2024) and Bolsel local government programme documents.

Abbreviations: Bolsel = South Bolaang Mongondow Regency; IDR = Indonesian rupiah.

Provincial comparisons show wide heterogeneity across districts **Table 1** Against this backdrop, South Bolaang Mongondow (Bolsel) exhibits a gradual decline in headcount alongside persistent double-digit rates.

Table 1. Poor population and poverty rate by regency/city in North Sulawesi (2017–2021)

No.Regency/City		Number of poor population ('000)					Poverty rate (% of population)				
		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	Bolaang Mongondow	19.05	18.49	18.30	18.07	19.08	8.02	7.67	7.47	7.27	7.58
2	Minahasa	26.34	24.49	24.32	24.95	26.30	7.90	7.30	7.18	7.30	7.67
3	Sangihe Islands	15.38	15.11	14.26	14.64	14.55	11.8	11.18	11.1	11.93	11.4
4	Talaud Islands	8.24	8.68	9.10	8.84	8.37	8	9.77	9.50	9.86	9.00
5	South Minahasa	20.26	19.54	19.49	19.38	19.77	9.78	9.34	9.26	9.14	9.41
6	North Minahasa	14.93	13.14	14.90	14.33	14.49	7.46	6.99	6.93	7.00	7.11
7	North Bolaang Mongondow	6.95	6.84	6.77	6.82	6.53	8.89	8.64	8.45	8.41	8.03
8	Sitaro Islands	6.81	6.53	6.35	5.95	6.00	10.33	9.87	9.56	9.84	8.94
9	Southeast Minahasa	15.57	14.73	14.22	13.73	13.31	14.08	13.29	12.78	12.30	12.47
10	South Bolaang Mongondow	9.05	9.05	8.82	8.74	8.63	14.16	13.60	13.27	12.77	12.85
11	East Bolaang Mongondow	4.37	4.29	4.41	4.30	4.47	6.20	6.03	6.10	5.88	6.10
12	Manado City	23.39	23.21	23.89	25.55	26.78	5.46	5.38	5.51	5.86	6.19
13	Bitung City	14.00	14.34	14.10	14.18	14.33	6.62	6.67	6.49	6.41	6.43
14	Tomohon City	6.69	6.25	5.99	6.06	6.18	6.47	5.95	5.62	5.60	5.69
15	Kotamobagu City	7.28	7.49	7.31	7.06	7.56	5.90	5.96	5.71	5.42	5.47
	North Sulawesi (total)	198.88	193.31	191.70	192.37	196.35	8.10	7.80	7.66	7.62	7.77

Notes: “Number of poor population” in thousands of persons; “Poverty rate” as share of total population. Minor rounding to two decimals follows the source.

Source: BPS North Sulawesi (2022), cited in RKPD 2023, pp. II-34–II-35.

Rural targeting is policy-critical because villages are the upstream suppliers of primary staples (e.g., rice, vegetables, secondary crops, fruits) for urban consumption. Distress at the rural source can propagate to urban welfare through supply constraints and price pressures [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12]. Recent empirical work underscores a rural paradox: inequality is lower in rural than in urban areas, yet rural poverty rates are higher, suggesting that low incomes are more evenly distributed in villages [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20]. This paradox strengthens the case for a rural-first approach in national poverty-reduction architecture.

Prior studies illuminate three complementary angles [21], [22], [23], [24]. Causality to probe the rural urban nexus between poverty and inequality. Community empowerment programs at the village level as instruments for alleviating extreme poverty and assess their implementation [25], [26], [27], [28], [29]. Map the spatial distribution of extreme poverty, inequality, and economic growth across 34 provinces (2021–2022), finding a strong association between extreme poverty and inequality, while growth used as a control exhibits limited leverage on extreme-poverty dynamics.

Despite these contributions, three gaps remain. First, existing work does not sufficiently unpack the micro-level policy implementation gap in remote rural contexts i.e., how centrally funded programs translate into household-level outcomes [30], [31], [32], [33], [34]. Second, there is limited systematic analysis of targeting accuracy, cross-agency coordination, and project-level accountability as causal mechanisms mediating effectiveness [35], [36], [37], [38]. Third, empirical evidence on elite capture the diversion of benefits to local elite kinship networks remains under-integrated into implementation audits, even though it plausibly shapes beneficiary selection and delivery [39], [40], [41].

This article advances the literature in three ways. Conceptually, it operationalizes Dunn’s implementation framework policy action, regulative, allocation, agencies, program, project as an

audit tool to trace failure points from regulatory design to project execution. Empirically, it provides site-specific evidence from a regency receiving 2024 fiscal incentives, testing beneficiary targeting (extreme poor vs. poor), inter-agency coordination, and transparency in housing and land-provision interventions. Normatively, it distills actionable recommendations public verification and transparent quotas, interoperable data sharing, social audit, and grievance-redress mechanisms to close the policy practice gap.

Guided by a qualitative descriptive design, the study integrates primary data (non-participant observation and in-depth interviews with key informants) and secondary data (village and district policy documents). It addresses the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent are the housing and land-provision programs in Bolsel aligned with the eligibility of the extreme-poor households they intend to serve?

RQ2: Which dimensions of Dunn’s framework most strongly explain implementation performance or failure (regulation, allocation, agencies, program design, project management)?

RQ3: What local contextual factors (e.g., elite-network dynamics) mediate targeting accuracy and accountability?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public policy is commonly framed as purposive state action (or deliberate inaction) addressing matters of public concern. Classic definitions emphasize intent, authority, and consequence: Anderson describes policy as a purposive course of action or inaction undertaken by an actor or set of actors to address a problem [42]; Policy as the study of governmental decisions and actions directed at public issues, noting that outcomes reflect distributional struggles over “*who gets what*” [42]; Peters views policy as the sum of government activities direct or through agents that shape citizens’ lives [43]; Dye’s succinct formulation “*what governments choose to do or not to do*” adds an analytic agenda: what governments do, why they do it, and with what effects [44]. These definitions converge on two anchors: authoritative intent and public consequences.

The pivot from policy intent to real-world effects is implementation. O’Toole characterizes implementation as the sequence linking governmental intention to tangible impact [45]. Birkland similarly treats policy statements at any level and in varied forms as governmental intentions toward public problems [46], while public policy as a course of action adopted in response to public problems [47], [48], [49], [50], [51]. Across this literature, implementation is the mechanism translating authority into outcomes.

Implementation failure is a persistent concern. Several pathways to failure, including external conditions incompatible with policy design and limitations in foresight during formulation [52]. Hill and Hupe remind us that implementation presupposes a specifiable object *what, precisely, is being implemented?* underscoring the need for clear policy content and instruments. In practical terms, implementation spans a wide repertoire of governmental acts. Edwards III lists actions such as issuing directives, disbursing funds, awarding grants, contracting, data collection, and negotiation with multiple stakeholders, all mediated by communication, resources, dispositions, and bureaucratic structures [53]. Bowman situates implementation midstream in the policy cycle, connecting formulation/adoption to evaluation/redesign; to implement is to carry out authoritative decisions toward desired results.

Competing schools offer complementary lenses. View implementation as perfect administration, policy administration, evolution, learning, structure, outcome, perspective, backward mapping, symbolism, ambiguity, and coalitions signalling both the complexity and multi-level nature of the process [54], [55], [56], [57]. Top down models, specify six interlocking variables policy standards and objectives, resources, inter-organizational relations, characteristics of implementing agencies, socio-economic and political environments, and implementers' dispositions (cognition, response direction, and intensity) that jointly shape performance [58], [59]. Three macro categories: problem tractability, statutory leverage over the implementation process, and the net political support for statutory objectives [60], [61]. Bottom-up and interactive approaches, as in Grindle, urge attention to **content** (affected interests, benefit types, output magnitude, decision locus, implementers, and resources) and **context** (power, interests, and strategies of actors; institutional/regime characteristics; and compliance/responsiveness) [62], [63], [64]. Together, these frameworks stress that targeting accuracy, actor coordination, resources, and accountability environments co-determine outcomes.

For the present study, implementation rubric offers a parsimonious and auditable bridge from policy design to street-level practice. Dunn distinguishes two primary **purposes** of policy action **regulation** and **allocation** which may yield distributive or redistributive effects; he then extends the analysis down to **agencies**, **programs**, and **projects** as loci where compliance and resource use are operationalized. This layered structure is analytically useful for extreme-poverty programs because it aligns normative instruments (eligibility rules, standards, SOPs) with resource decisions (funds, time, personnel, equipment) and with the concrete tasks of program and project delivery.

Applied to Indonesia's 2024 extreme-poverty initiative in South Bolaang Mongondow

(Bolsel), Dunn's framework yields an empirical audit template. **Policy action** is observed in the

central allocation of fiscal incentives and local enactments; **regulative** elements include eligibility criteria distinguishing the *extreme poor* from the *poor*, verification protocols, and public disclosure standards; **allocation** concerns the size, timing, and modality of transfers (e.g., IDR 6.313 billion) and their conversion into housing and land interventions; **agencies** span the Vice-Presidential coordination unit, provincial and regency governments, and village authorities; **program** refers to the housing and residential-land schemes; **project** denotes beneficiary selection, contracting, construction, and handover. This mapping enables systematic testing of hypothesized failure points mis-targeting (elite capture), weak inter-agency coordination, and limited transparency and grievance redress long identified in the implementation literature as proximate causes of policy shortfalls.

In sum, the literature positions implementation as the decisive channel through which authoritative intent produces (or fails to produce) public value. The selected frameworks especially Dunn's provide an operational structure to trace where, how, and why extreme-poverty programs deviate from design, and to generate actionable corrections (clearer rules, data-sharing across agencies, social audit, and enforceable accountability). This study leverages that structure to evaluate alignment between **policy design** and **on-the-ground delivery** in Bolsel's housing and land-provision interventions for the extreme poor.

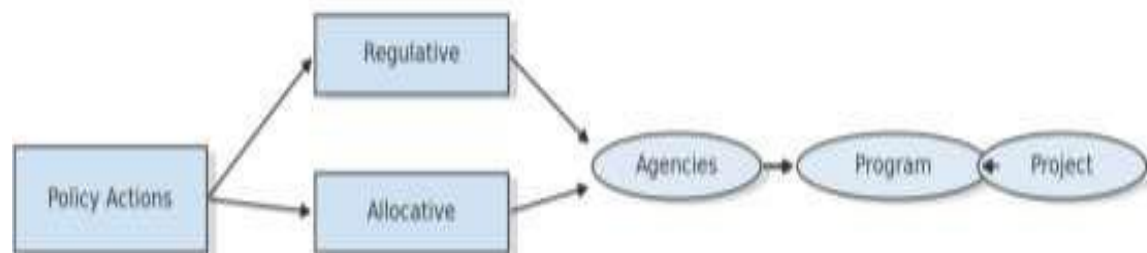


Figure 2. Regulative and allocative actions and their implementation through agencies, programs, and projects. Source: Dunn (1981)

Sumber: Dunn, 1981

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Setting

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive design aimed at portraying and summarizing social realities surrounding the implementation of extreme-poverty programmes [65], [66]. The empirical setting is South Bolaang Mongondow Regency, North Sulawesi (Indonesia), focusing on three villages in three sub-districts that constitute the programme locus. **Units of analysis**

The analysis concentrates on a bounded implementation unit how policy intentions are translated into actions at village level so as to surface the distinctive features, characteristics, practices, and signals of programme delivery.

Data Sources

Two complementary data streams were used:

1. Primary data from researcher-conducted non-participant observation and in-depth interviews [67], [68];
2. Secondary data from officially published documents and archives (e.g., village and district regulations, programme files, media reports, and records of Village-Owned Enterprises/Badan Usaha Milik Desa).

Sampling and Participants

Purposive, criterion-based sampling was applied to capture information-rich perspectives directly involved in policy execution. Planned participants numbered eight: (i) Head of the District Office for Community and Village Empowerment (Dinas Pemberdayaan Masyarakat dan Desa, DPMD); (ii) Head of the Division for Extreme-Poverty Programme Implementation within DPMD; (iii) village heads from extreme-poor villages; and (iv) five beneficiary households. This composition balances policy, managerial, and user perspectives.

Instruments And Interview Protocol

Interview materials and observation guides were developed from the study propositions (derived from the literature review on policy implementation) [69], [70]. Interviews were unstructured in style to elicit thick descriptions, while an interview guide ensured coverage of core topics (eligibility rules, targeting, inter-agency coordination, resource flows, and project-level procedures). Interviews were conducted at locations agreed with informants; researchers visited each informant individually.

Data Collection Procedures

Fieldwork combined (i) in-depth, unstructured interviews; (ii) direct observation of programme activities and administrative routines; and (iii) document review of village/district policy instruments and programme records. Field notes were compiled contemporaneously to preserve contextual detail.

Data Analysis and Validation

Analysis proceeded iteratively using triangulation as the central strategy [71], [72]. Newly obtained accounts and observations were cross-checked against documentary evidence and across informant types (source triangulation). Interpretive patterns were then compared with the theoretical frame employed in the study (the policy-implementation literature, especially Dunn), enabling theory-informed explanation building. Findings reflect the convergence of multiple sources rather than single-source testimony.

Quality Assurance

Credibility was strengthened through (i) source/method triangulation [73], [74], (ii) careful audit of documents to corroborate interview claims, and (iii) maintenance of an analytic memo trail linking raw data to emergent interpretations. Transferability is supported by thick description of setting and actors; dependability derives from explicit documentation of sampling, instruments, and procedures.

Table 2. Methods summary

Component	Description
Study design programmes.	Qualitative, descriptive design to portray and summarise implementation realities of extreme-poverty programmes.

Setting & locus South Bolaang Mongondow Regency (North Sulawesi, Indonesia); three villages across three sub-districts.

Unit of analysis Translation of policy intentions into actions at village level (implementation unit).

Data sources Primary: non-participant observation; in-depth interviews. Secondary: official documents/archives (village & district regulations, programme files, media reports, records of Village-Owned Enterprises/BUMDes).

Sampling strategy Participants (planned, n=8)

Purposive, criterion-based (information-rich actors directly involved in implementation).

1. Head of District Office for Community & Village Empowerment (DPMD);
2. Head of Division for Extreme-Poverty Programme Implementation (DPMD); 3) Village heads from extreme-poor villages; 4) Five beneficiary households.

Instruments Unstructured interview protocol (with guide to ensure coverage); observation checklist derived from study propositions.

Data collection In-depth, unstructured interviews at mutually agreed locations; direct observation of programme routines; document review; contemporaneous field notes.

Data analysis Iterative, theory-informed interpretation using triangulation; cross-checking interview/observation evidence against documents and across informant types; alignment with policy-implementation frameworks (esp. Dunn).

Validation & quality assurance

Source/method triangulation; documentary corroboration; analytic memo trail linking raw data to emergent claims; thick description to support transferability; explicit documentation of sampling, instruments, and procedures.

Abbreviations: DPMD = Dinas Pemberdayaan Masyarakat dan Desa (District Office for Community & Village Empowerment); BUMDes = Badan Usaha Milik Desa (Village-Owned Enterprise).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Findings

Table 3. Poverty in South Bolaang Mongondow Regency (2017–2021)

No.	Regency/City	*Number of poor population ('000)					**Percentage of poor population (%)				
		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	South Bolaang Mongondow	9.05	9.05	8.82	8.74	8.63	14.16	13.60	13.27	12.77	12.85

*Notes: *Values in thousands of persons. **Share of total population. Source: BPS North Sulawesi (2022), cited in RKPDP 2023, pp. 11-34–11-35.*

Table 4. Target coverage for the Extreme-Poverty Programme (housing construction and residential land), South Bolaang Mongondow

No.	Sub-district (Kecamatan)	Villages (n)	Households (n)
1	Bolaang Uki	8	15
2	Helumo	5	12
3	Pinolosian Tengah	6	18
4	Pinolosian Timur	4	12
5	Tomini	1	1
6	Pasigadan	8	13
7	Pinolisian	6	19
Total	7 sub-districts	38	90

Notes: Villages = desa; Households = KK.

Source: Authors' compilation from field observations.

Table 5. Ineligible beneficiaries in the Extreme-Poverty Programme (housing construction and residential land), South Bolaang Mongondow

No.	Sub-district (Kecamatan)	Village	Household (Head of HH)	Finding
1	Bolaang Uki	Tolondadu I	Alia Kinu	Not eligible
2	Bolaang Uki	Tolondadu I	Tika Liputo	Not eligible
3	Pinolosian Tengah	Deaga	Enda Makalalang	Not eligible
4	Pinolosian Timur	Perjuangan	Yulce Diamanis	Not eligible
5	Tomini	Milangodaa Barat	Risman Hagari	Not eligible

Notes: “Not eligible” indicates households that do not meet the extreme-poor criteria or otherwise fail programme eligibility checks.

Source: Authors’ compilation from field observations. (For journal ethics, consider anonymising names into respondent codes, e.g., HH-01 ... HH-05.)

RQ1. Alignment between programmes and eligibility of extreme-poor households

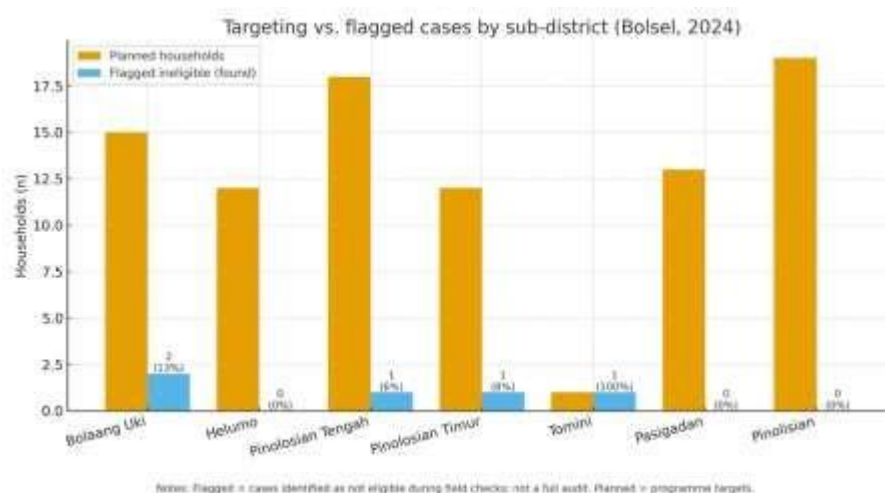


Figure 3. Comparing programme planned households vs flagged ineligible (found) per kecamatan, with %-of-target annotations

The evidence indicates partial and often weak alignment between intended eligibility criteria (extreme-poor households without decent housing and/or land) and actual beneficiaries. Field observation across a purposive set of villages documented:

1. Mis-targeting: several named recipients did not meet the “extreme poor” threshold; some
2. were merely poor, not extreme poor.
3. Questionable additionality: houses were constructed within already serviced village cores rather than in remote settlements where extreme deprivation concentrates.
4. Land grants lacking integrity: in multiple cases, parcels purchased with public funds belonged to the beneficiary or close family members, undermining the intent to provide new residential access.
5. Opacity in beneficiary data: the formal recipient list was reportedly withdrawn from researchers, limiting independent verification and public scrutiny.

Given these patterns, the overall alignment is low: although the regency programmed 58 housing units and 32 residential plots (and identified 90 target households across 7 sub-districts/38 villages), the realised targeting frequently failed to reach the intended extreme-poor group, with benefits diverted to ineligible recipients.

RQ2. Dunn’s dimensions explaining implementation performance/failure

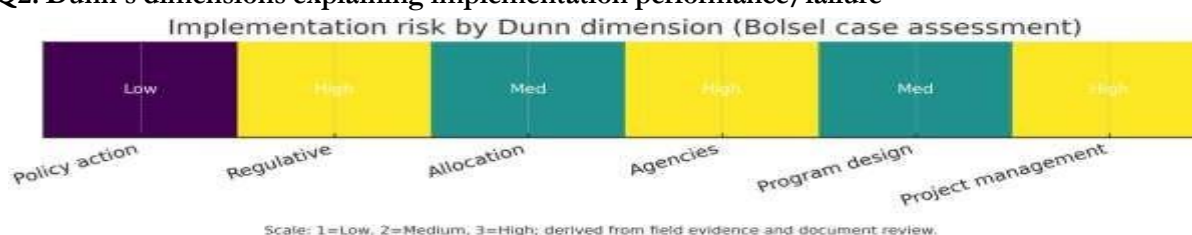


Figure 4. Scoring where failures concentrate (Regulative, Agencies, Project high; Allocation medium; Policy action low)

Applying Dunn's implementation rubric isolates the proximate drivers of under- performance:

1. Policy action (central and local acts): The Vice-Presidential fiscal incentive and the Regent's Decree established the programme and targets. This created an enabling mandate but did not, by itself, secure delivery integrity.
2. Regulative: Ambiguous/weak eligibility rules and SOPs, absence of open verification, and the withdrawal of beneficiary lists curtailed transparency and third-party oversight a primary locus of failure.
3. Allocation: Resources were available (IDR 6.313 billion) and disbursed. However, the conversion of funds into outputs (housing/land) suffered from limited cost transparency (e.g., the unusual assignment of house construction to the local military/Kodim) and insufficient checks on land transactions. Allocation problems are secondary to regulative and agency issues.
4. Agencies: Fragmented roles between the Community & Village Empowerment Office (DPMD), village governments, and Kodim diluted accountability. Monitoring and evaluation were weak, and conflict-of-interest safeguards were not operationalised a major contributor to failure.
5. Program design: The twin instruments (housing and land provision) lacked built-in public verification, social audit, and grievance redress, allowing mis-targeting to persist.
6. Project management: At the point of delivery beneficiary selection, site choice, contracting, and handover there were documented anomalies (ineligible recipients; land bought from beneficiaries/relatives; siting in non-priority areas). Project-level controls were therefore another critical failure point.

RQ3. Local contextual factors mediating targeting accuracy and accountability

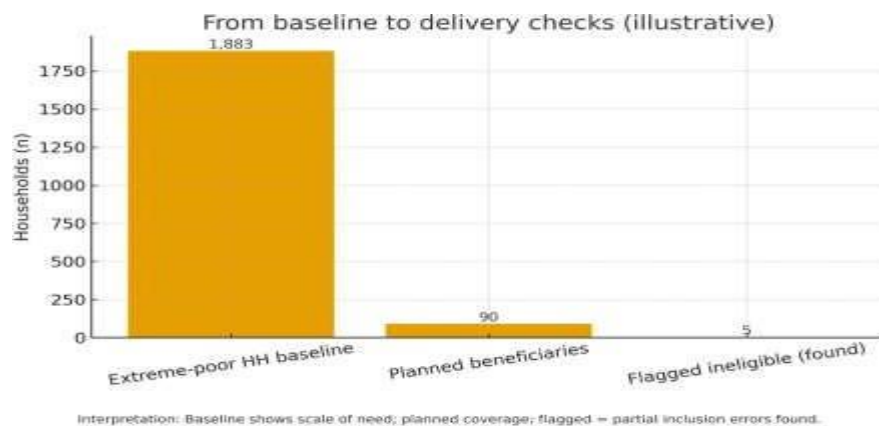


Figure 4. Contrasting extreme-poor baseline (1,883 HH), planned beneficiaries (90 HH), and flagged ineligible cases found (5 HH) to show scale vs coverage vs issues.

Three contextual mechanisms shaped outcomes:

1. Elite-network dynamics (elite capture). Beneficiaries were frequently kin or close associates of village elites, producing systematic selection bias and weakening downward accountability.
2. Land-tenure norms and small-community collusion. Prevailing inheritance patterns (parent-to-child) render the observed child-to-parent "grant" cases atypical, suggesting collusive transactions that mimic eligibility while preserving private control.
3. Information and oversight asymmetries. Remoteness, limited digital integration with national social registries, and the retraction of official lists constrained community monitoring and external auditing; the use of Kodim as implementer may have reduced public contestation but did not address targeting integrity.

ANALYSIS

RQ1. Alignment between programmes and eligibility of extreme-poor households

Field evidence shows systematic mis-alignment between the programme's formal eligibility (extreme-poor households lacking both a decent dwelling and residential land) and the actual beneficiaries recorded in villages.

Inclusion errors were observed in several sub-districts: housing units were sited within already-serviced village centres rather than remote hamlets where

deprivation concentrates; multiple land grants were transacted on parcels already owned by the beneficiary or close relatives; and the beneficiary roster was not publicly disclosed for community verification [75], [76], [77], [78]. Taken together, these patterns indicate that the programmed coverage (58 housing units and 32 parcels) did not consistently reach households meeting the “extreme poor” threshold, despite the regency’s high baseline burden.

This mis-alignment mirrors broader evidence that designated anti-poverty resources often leak to non-eligible households when local verification is opaque. In contrast, [79], [80], [81] report better fit between targets and outcomes in empowerment-based village programmes when eligibility criteria are explicit and co-verified with communities. At the macro level, that extreme poverty is tightly coupled with inequality, implying that precise targeting is necessary but not sufficient for structural reduction [82], [83], [84]. Community-targeting studies in Indonesia likewise find that local information can improve identification, provided safeguards against elite influence and ex-post public review are present; absent those, inclusion errors rise and programme legitimacy falls.

RQ2. Dunn’s dimensions explaining performance or failure

Applying Dunn’s rubric isolates three dominant failure points. First, the Regulative dimension: eligibility rules and standard operating procedures were insufficiently operationalised (e.g., no public shortlists, no third-party verification, weak grievance channels) [85], [86], [87]. The withdrawal of beneficiary lists from external scrutiny directly undermined transparency. Second, the Agencies dimension: accountability was diluted by fragmented roles between the Community & Village Empowerment Office, village governments, and an unusual execution arrangement with the district military command (KODIM) for housing construction limiting competitive procurement and civilian oversight [88]. Third, Project-level management suffered: site selection, contracting, and handover controls were not robust enough to prevent land transactions within beneficiary families or the siting of houses away from priority locations [89]. By contrast, Allocation (the presence of funds) was not the binding constraint; the bottleneck lay in rules, roles, and delivery controls.

Comparative studies reach similar conclusions. Emphasise that clear standards, routinised inter-organisational relations, and monitoring are pivotal to performance; where these are weak, programmes fail even when resources are ample. Village-level empowerment cases [90], [91], [92]. Tend to perform better when public verification, social audit, and grievance redress are embedded ex-ante. The present findings align with that literature: regulative clarity and agency coordination, not budget size, are the decisive levers for implementation quality.

RQ3. Local contextual factors mediating targeting and accountability

Three contextual mechanisms mediate outcomes. First, elite-network dynamics: beneficiary lists show clustering among kin or associates of village elites [93], [94], consistent with classic patterns of elite capture in rural social programmes. Second, land-tenure norms: the discovery that government-purchased plots were owned by the beneficiary or their children contradicts the common “parent-to-child” inheritance flow in North Sulawesi villages, signalling collusive arrangements designed to simulate eligibility while retaining private control. Third, information and oversight asymmetries remoteness, limited integration with national registries, and the non-disclosure of lists reduced community monitoring and external audit capacity.

These mechanisms echo findings across Indonesia’s village and social-assistance literature: local power structures can reallocate benefits toward connected households unless disclosure, verification, and conflict-of-interest rules are enforced. Where programmes instituted open beneficiary rosters, public meetings, and independent monitoring, targeting accuracy increased and perceived fairness improved; where they did not, inclusion errors and contestation rose [95], [96], [97], [98], [99], [100], [101]. The present study thus reinforces a broader lesson: context-aware institutional safeguards not merely better budgets determine whether anti-poverty programmes translate policy intent into equitable outcomes.

Strengthening the Discussion: Elite Capture, Street-Level Bureaucracy, and the Implementation Gap **Elite Capture and Targeting Failure**

The empirical evidence from South Bolaang Mongondow indicates that a substantial share of programme benefits was allocated to households connected to village elites rather than to those meeting the extreme-poverty threshold. This pattern is consistent with the extensive literature on *elite capture* in rural development and social assistance programmes, which documents how local power holders appropriate public resources when information asymmetries and weak accountability prevail [102], [103], [104]. In small rural communities, social proximity and kinship ties often substitute for formal eligibility criteria, allowing elites to redefine programme objectives in practice while maintaining procedural legitimacy [105].

In Bolsel, the diversion of housing and land assistance to elite-affiliated households illustrates a form of *relational elite capture*, where benefits are redistributed within dense social networks rather than extracted through overt corruption. Prior studies show that such capture is particularly likely in targeted poverty programmes when beneficiary lists are not publicly disclosed and verification is conducted exclusively by local authorities [106], [107]. The findings therefore suggest that targeting errors observed in this study are not random implementation mistakes but systematic outcomes of local power structures interacting with opaque delivery mechanisms.

Street-Level Bureaucracy and Discretionary Implementation

These outcomes can be further explained through the lens of *street-level bureaucracy*. Village officials and frontline implementers operate as street-level bureaucrats who exercise considerable discretion in interpreting eligibility rules and translating policy intent into action [108], [109]. While such discretion is often justified as necessary to adapt policies to local contexts, the Bolsel case demonstrates how, in the absence of strong oversight, discretion becomes a conduit for preferential treatment.

The evidence shows that implementers prioritized social harmony and informal obligations over strict compliance with extreme-poverty criteria, a behavior widely documented in street-level bureaucracy research [110]. When implementers face competing incentives—meeting administrative targets, maintaining local legitimacy, and preserving elite relations—they tend to apply rules flexibly, particularly in settings where monitoring is weak and sanctions are unlikely [111]. As a result, discretion that is theoretically meant to enhance responsiveness instead undermines targeting accuracy and policy equity.

The Implementation Gap between Policy Design and Local Practice

Taken together, elite capture and discretionary behavior contribute to a pronounced *implementation gap* between nationally designed policies and village-level outcomes. Although Indonesia's extreme-poverty agenda provides clear definitions, funding instruments, and performance targets, the Bolsel case shows that policy effectiveness is constrained primarily at the implementation stage. This finding aligns with implementation scholarship emphasizing that policy failure often arises not from flawed design but from weak institutional arrangements governing delivery [112], [113].

The implementation gap identified in this study is multi-dimensional. Regulatively, eligibility rules were insufficiently operationalized through transparent procedures. Organisationally, fragmented responsibilities across agencies diluted accountability. At the project level, weak controls over beneficiary selection, land acquisition, and site choice allowed deviations from policy objectives to persist. Similar patterns have been reported in other decentralised anti-poverty programmes, where local autonomy without commensurate accountability mechanisms leads to systematic mis-targeting [114], [115].

Policy Implications of Mis-Targeting Practices

The findings carry clear policy implications. First, beneficiary selection processes must be insulated from elite influence through mandatory public disclosure of preliminary beneficiary lists and eligibility scores. Empirical studies show that *ex ante* transparency significantly reduces elite capture by enabling community scrutiny and peer monitoring [116].

Second, discretionary power at the street level should be bounded through standardized operating procedures that explicitly regulate conflicts of interest, including mandatory disclosure of kinship ties between implementers and beneficiaries [117]. Rather than eliminating discretion altogether, policies should channel it within clearly defined and auditable limits.

Third, implementation integrity should be treated as a core performance indicator. Shifting evaluation metrics from budget absorption and output counts toward targeting accuracy, grievance resolution, and independent audit results would realign incentives toward policy effectiveness rather than administrative compliance. Without such institutional safeguards, additional funding or programme expansion is unlikely to improve outcomes for the extreme poor.

Overall, the Bolsel case reinforces a broader lesson in poverty policy: extreme-poverty reduction hinges less on policy ambition and fiscal capacity than on the governance of implementation. Embedding transparency, accountability, and verifiable oversight at the point of delivery is essential to closing the persistent gap between policy intent and lived outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to assess whether Bolsel's housing and land-provision programmes are aligned with the extreme-poor households they are intended to serve (RQ1), to identify which elements of Dunn's implementation framework best explain performance or failure (RQ2), and to understand the local contextual factors that mediate

targeting accuracy and accountability (RQ3). Three conclusions follow. First, alignment is partial and often weak: inclusion errors were observed across several villages, with benefits captured by households that do not meet the “extreme-poor” threshold and with assets (land/house sites) occasionally traced to beneficiaries’ own or relatives’ parcels. Second, under-performance concentrates in the Regulatory, Agencies, and Project dimensions: eligibility rules and SOPs were not operationalised transparently; roles across implementing bodies were fragmented (including the unusual delegation of construction to the district military command); and project-level controls over site selection, contracting, and handover were insufficient. Third, outcomes are strongly mediated by elite-network dynamics, atypical land-tenure transactions that simulate eligibility, and information/oversight asymmetries in remote settings.

Conceptually, the article demonstrates the value of operationalising Dunn’s rubric as an audit tool linking policy action and regulatory instruments to resource allocation, organisational roles, and street-level delivery. Empirically, it provides site-specific evidence from a fiscal- incentive recipient district, showing that design and funding are necessary but not sufficient: what matters most is how rules are enacted, by whom, and under what accountability constraints. Normatively, the analysis clarifies that closing the policy–practice gap requires institutional safeguards, not merely larger budgets or additional programme instruments.

Policy implications are direct. Beneficiary identification should be re-verified independently against national registries (e.g., DTKS/P3KE) using transparent scorecards; shortlisted names and locations ought to be disclosed for village verification; and conflict-of-interest rules (including disclosure of kinship ties) must be enforced through rotating committees and sanctions. Programme SOPs should embed social audit and grievance-redress mechanisms, mandate open data on unit costs, geotagged sites, and land titles, and require routine cross-agency data sharing. Procurement and delivery arrangements should revert to civilian, competitively procured contractors subject to public oversight, while monitoring and evaluation (M&E) functions are assigned to an independent unit with authority to pause or cancel tainted projects.

The findings also carry wider relevance. In rural districts where poverty is spatially dispersed and social ties dense, elite capture is a predictable risk; without ex-ante transparency and ex-post verification, targeting errors will persist even under well-designed policies. Embedding community scorecards, randomized spot audits, and geo-referenced dashboards can help local governments demonstrate that scarce anti-poverty resources reach those in greatest deprivation.

Limitations should be acknowledged. As a single-case, qualitative study, results are analytically generalisable but not statistically representative. Restricted access to official beneficiary lists reduced opportunities for third-party triangulation, and the cross-sectional design cannot capture longer-term welfare effects. These constraints, however, do not negate the documented implementation patterns; rather, they signal where institutional data openness must improve.

Future work can build on this study by (i) combining quasi-experimental or matched- comparison designs to estimate causal impacts on household welfare; (ii) testing anti-capture safeguards (public lotteries, blinded scoring, community verification) through pilot trials; (iii) integrating administrative and spatial data to model risk of mis-targeting ex-ante; and (iv) conducting multi-district comparisons to map how organisational configurations shape outcomes.

Advancing along these lines would consolidate a replicable implementation science for extreme- poverty programmes and help convert policy intent into verifiable social gains.

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