

Eradicating Extreme Poverty in Bengkalis Regency: A Strategic Breakthrough with Holistic Approach

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Abstract. *Extreme poverty in Bengkalis Regency is one of the main challenges of regional development, especially in coastal and island areas. This article analyzes strategies to accelerate the elimination of extreme poverty by using a holistic approach of socio-economic programs and government intervention innovations. The study focuses on programs such as Gerakan Desa Mandiri and Direct Cash Assistance that are designed to improve the welfare of extreme poor households through entrepreneurship training, cash transfers, and basic infrastructure development. Using data from the 2023 Integrated Database Updating (PBDT) and 2024 BPS, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to identify the determinants of program success. Results show an extreme poverty reduction of 7% between 2023 and 2024, with the highest achievements in Mandau (31%) and Rupert (23%) sub-districts. However, major challenges remain in remote areas such as Bengkalis sub-district. This article suggests intensification of community-based programs, improving access to employment, and cross-sector coordination to achieve the target of eliminating extreme poverty by 2025.*

Keywords: *Extreme Poverty, Holistic Approach, Community Based Programs*

Received: October 19, 2024

Revised: November 27, 2024

Accepted: December 30, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Extreme poverty, defined by the World Bank as individual income below USD 1.90 per day, is still a major issue in Indonesia. Bengkalis Regency, as one of the regencies in Riau Province, has complex geographical characteristics with land, coastal, and island areas. In 2023, around 6,368 people or 0.9% of the population lived in extreme poverty. Coastal and island areas, such as North Rupert and Bantan sub-districts, face major challenges in the provision of basic infrastructure such as clean water, electricity, and access to transportation. These conditions are exacerbated by limited access to education and health services, thus exacerbating the cycle of poverty in the extreme poor.

Extreme poverty is one of the most pressing issues in Bengkalis Regency, with widespread impacts on people's quality of life. The region faces complex geographical and socio-economic challenges, such as difficult access to basic services, low levels of education, and limited infrastructure. These factors exacerbate poverty conditions and create disparities in people's well-being. Bengkalis Regency has diverse geographical conditions, including remote areas that are difficult to reach and lack of connectivity between regions. This causes the distribution of social assistance and the implementation of community empowerment programs to run slowly, especially in areas inhabited by remote indigenous communities, which are the main group of beneficiaries of poverty alleviation programs (Wijaya & Prabowo, 2021). In addition, another challenge faced is the lack of optimal collaboration across sectors in efforts to overcome extreme poverty, resulting in fragmented policy implementation in the field (Healey, 2020).

This problem is all the more pressing given the high unemployment rate and limited economic opportunities, which are exacerbated by educational barriers and infrastructure deficits. These conditions demand close attention to programs designed to reduce poverty. The Bengkalis Regency Government has launched a number of flagship programs such as the Independent Village Movement and Direct Cash Assistance (BLT) to tackle extreme poverty. These programs combine cash transfers, entrepreneurship training, and basic infrastructure development. This strategy is aligned with the holistic approach, which blends socio-economic interventions to create greater and sustainable impact. However, the effectiveness of this program requires an in-depth evaluation to identify implementation barriers and ensure interventions are well-targeted (Arbeni et al., 2024; Hermansyah & Said, 2024).

Various studies have shown that a holistic-based approach, which integrates social and economic programs, has significant potential to reduce extreme poverty more effectively. One government initiative that implements this strategy is the “Gerakan Desa Mandiri and Direct Cash Assistance” program, aimed at poor households in Bengkalis. The program combines financial assistance with entrepreneurship training to empower extreme poor families to increase their income independently (Alvarez & Barney, 2014). In addition, the holistic approach also involves interventions in the health and education sectors, by integrating stunting reduction and nutrition improvement programs for extreme poor families, which are often closely related to the socioeconomic conditions of the community (Yusriadi et al., 2024; Black et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2013). This study aims to evaluate the impact of the program on reducing extreme poverty, identify factors that influence the success of the program and provide evidence. As such, this study aims to provide relevant policy recommendations to improve the sustainability and long-term impact of such interventions. Evidence-based policy recommendations to accelerate the elimination of extreme poverty in Bengkalis.

METHODS

The data used in this study comes from the 2024 By Name by Address (BNBA) Data for Direct Cash Assistance Recipients, official statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) 2024, and program implementation documents from the Targeting the Acceleration of the Eradication of Extreme Poverty (P3KE) of Bengkalis. The main data includes: Distribution of the number of extreme poor in each district, Coverage of intervention programs such as social assistance, entrepreneurship training, and infrastructure development, and also Socio-economic indicators, such as access to clean water, unemployment rate, and education participation. An analytical descriptive approach was used to evaluate program implementation. In addition, multiple linear regression analysis was applied to measure the effect of independent variables on the reduction of extreme poverty rates. The variables analyzed include Extreme poverty reduction (Y), Clean water access (X1), Unemployment rate (X2), Social assistance recipients (X3), and Educational participation (X4). The regression model used is:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To obtain information on the distribution and changes in the extreme poverty rate in Bengkalis Regency, a descriptive analysis of secondary data was conducted. This became the starting point to conduct a deeper study analyzing the level of program effectiveness and the factors that drive high levels of extreme poverty. Based on the data (Tabel 1), the overall poverty rate in Bengkalis Regency decreased by 7% from 2023 to 2024, with the total number of poor households declining from 6,818 to 6,343. This reduction indicates a positive impact of various social intervention programs, although not all sub-districts showed similar trends. Several sub-districts recorded significant reductions, such as Mandau with a 31% decrease, Rupert with 23%, and Bandar Laksamana with 18%. Other sub-districts, including Bukit Batu (-16%), Siak Kecil (-15%), and Bantan (-15%), also demonstrated substantial progress in poverty alleviation efforts. These reductions reflect the effectiveness of policies and programs focused on these areas.

However, not all sub-districts reported positive outcomes. Bengkalis Sub-district experienced a 4% increase in poverty, with the number of poor households rising from 1,530 to 1,598, while Bathin Solapan saw an increase of 6%. Other sub-districts, such as Pinggir (-1%) and Talang Mandau (-5%), recorded minimal reductions, indicating that the impact of poverty alleviation programs has not been evenly distributed. This data highlights the need for greater attention to sub-districts experiencing an increase in poverty or only minor improvements to ensure that poverty alleviation efforts are felt comprehensively throughout Bengkalis Regency.

Table 1. Development of the extreme poverty rate in Bengkalis Regency in 2023-2024

Sub-district	2023	2024	Number of Change	Change (%)
Bengkalis	1530	1598	68	4%
Bantan	950	805	-145	-15%
Bandar Laksamana	292	238	-54	-18%
Bathin Solapan	857	907	50	6%
Bukit Batu	456	385	-71	-16%
Mandau	84	58	-26	-31%
Pinggir	519	515	-4	-1%
Rupat	451	349	-102	-23%
Rupat Utara	392	350	-42	-11%
Siak kecil	844	719	-125	-15%
Talang Mandau	443	419	-24	-5%
Total	6818	6343	475	-7%

Based on the data, the distribution of the number of extreme poor in various sub-district in Bengkalis Regency in 2024 shows significant variation (Figure 1). Bengkalis and Bathin Solapan sub-districts have the highest number of extreme poor people compared to other sub-districts. This indicates that these areas require more intensive and strategic intervention efforts to reduce extreme poverty. This high number can be caused by various factors, such as limited access to basic services, lack of economic opportunities, or less than optimal implementation of social programs in the area. Therefore, more targeted approaches, such as strengthening infrastructure, creating jobs, and increasing access to education, need to be prioritized to achieve the target of alleviating extreme poverty in these districts.

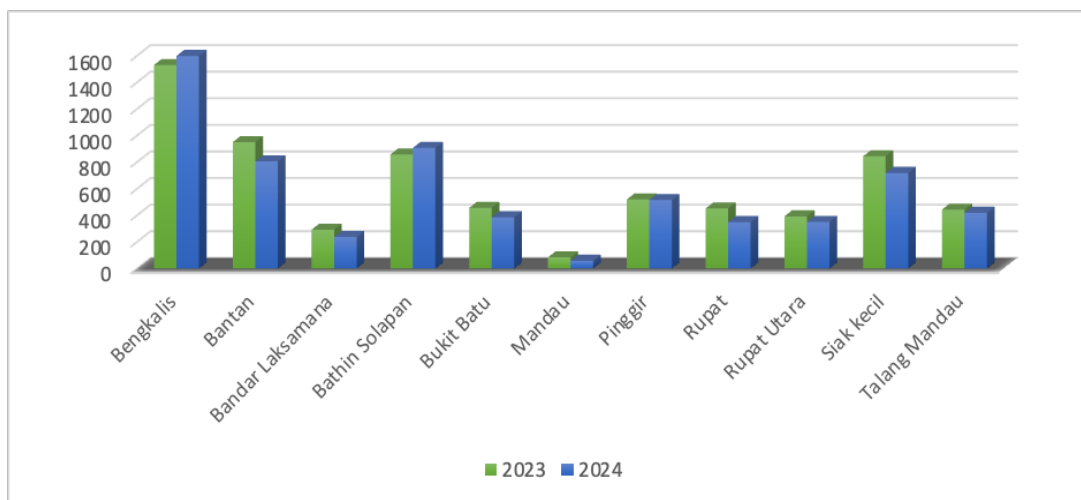


Figure 1. Distribution of Extreme Poverty in Bengkalis Regency

Source: Targeting the Acceleration of the Eradication of Extreme Poverty (P3KE)

Furthermore, based on the multiple linear regression statistical analysis, it shows that each independent variable has a different influence on extreme poverty reduction at the sub-district level. Access to clean water has a positive impact with a coefficient of 0.00127, while the

number of people not working has a negative impact with a coefficient of -0.00235. In addition, recipients of social assistance (0.000031) and the population not attending school (0.00584) also show positive contributions, albeit on a small scale. The intercept of 0.539 reflects the poverty rate when all independent variables are zero. This analysis indicates that a 1% increase in access to clean water can lead to a 0.00127% decrease in extreme poverty. Conversely, an increase in the number of people not working tends to hinder the reduction of extreme poverty, as indicated by the negative coefficient of -0.00235. In other words, the more people who are not working, the slower the progress of extreme poverty reduction. The regression equation can be written as follows:

$$Y=0.539+0.00127X_1-0.00235X_2+0.000031X_3+0.00584X_4+\varepsilon$$

In addition, the distribution of the extreme poor shown in Table 1 highlights the greater challenges in certain sub-district. Bengkalis sub-district recorded the highest number of extreme poor, at 1.530 in 2023, rising to 1.598 in 2024. The study by Gunawan et al. (2021) emphasizes that areas with high concentrations of extreme poverty are usually located in remote areas, where access to public services, education, and health is limited. This is also driven by the fact that Bengkalis Sub-district, which is located in Bengkalis Islands, is one of the causes. Therefore, interventions should focus on improving infrastructure access and integrating social assistance programs with local economic development programs.

The reduction in the poverty rate in Bengkalis Regency during the 2023–2024 period highlights the positive outcomes of intervention programs implemented by the regional government. According to the data in Table 1, the majority of sub-district showed a notable decrease in poverty levels. For instance, the Bantan and Siak Kecil sub-districts recorded reductions of 145 and 125 individuals, respectively, representing a 15% decline compared to the previous year. These findings align with Prakoso (2019), who emphasized that labor-intensive programs, such as those conducted in Bengkalis, have a short-term impact on boosting poor households' incomes by providing temporary employment opportunities in the infrastructure sector. Overall, the various programs implemented in Bengkalis Regency have yielded positive results in reducing poverty. However, a more holistic approach is needed to achieve sustainability. This includes the integration of social assistance and economic empowerment, as well as infrastructure development to improve the extreme poor's access to basic services (Kusuma & Prasetyo, 2023). With a more coordinated strategy, it is hoped that the target of eliminating extreme poverty by 2024 can be achieved.

This research shows that access to employment is very influential in reducing extreme poverty. This supports previous research which found that employment improves people's quality of life, health and productivity, helping them to move out of poverty. Sub-districts with better access to employment, such as Mandau and Bandar Laksamana, have the lowest extreme poverty rates.

Conversely, high unemployment rates have a negative impact on poverty reduction. While social assistance programs such as Gerakan Desa Mandiri and Direct Cash Assistance have reached the community, sustaining the results requires greater job creation. Areas with high unemployment rates, such as Bengkalis Sub-district, show slow poverty reduction. Programs such as the Direct Cash Transfer, which focuses on providing food assistance through the P3KE 2023 framework, require additional efforts in creating sustainable jobs (Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture, 2023). The positive contribution of the Direct Cash Transfer program to extreme poverty reduction can be enhanced by adding an employment skills training component. This would help beneficiaries gain independent income in the long term (Bengkalis Local Government, 2024). Low levels of education are also a factor, although the impact is long-term and not immediately apparent in a short period of time. This research recommends that local governments prioritize basic infrastructure development and sustainable job creation, while ensuring that social assistance programs provide long-term benefits for extreme poverty reduction.

It is not enough to reduce extreme poverty by relying on cash transfers or labor-intensive programs. Improving access to basic services, such as health and education, is crucial. Data shows that sub-districts such as Bengkalis and Bathin Solapan have a large number of extreme poor people, who also face limited access to services. Sen (2014) emphasizes that poverty is not only measured by income, but also by limited access to basic rights. Therefore, combining cash transfers with improved access to basic services is more effective in reducing extreme poverty. Convergence-based strategies, such as the “Every Day Children Eat Fish” program in Bengkalis, show promising results. Setiawati and Hendrawan's (2021) research found that stunting reduction is closely related to improvements in household welfare. Thus, in addition to increasing income, these efforts also improve the nutritional and health status of the community.

The success of the Independent Village Movement program in Bantan also provides a positive example. The program supports extreme poor households by accessing productive activities such as agriculture and fisheries, which are oriented towards increasing income. Bantan sub-district recorded a 15% reduction in extreme poverty in the period 2023-2024, thanks to targeted and community-based interventions. In addition, the BUMDESA program promotes economic independence through skills training, capital assistance, and market access for household businesses. This approach has proven effective in sustainably increasing income (Aziz & Shohib, 2024). However, its success requires continuous training and adequate technical assistance (Wulandari & Tohir, 2024).

The main obstacles to implementing these programs include limited infrastructure and geographical challenges. The islands of Bengkalis district face transportation barriers that complicate aid distribution and program implementation. Wijaya et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of infrastructure investment, especially in the road and transportation sectors, to improve access to public services in these areas (Ritonga & Dompok, 2024; Sahetapy & Macpal, 2024). Coordination between sectors is also a challenge. For example, the provision of clean water infrastructure is often not followed by relevant health or education programs, resulting in suboptimal impact on extreme poverty reduction. Therefore, a convergent approach, improving the social and economic sectors simultaneously, is required for sustainable results. In conclusion, while the various intervention programs in Bengkalis Regency have had a positive impact, long-term success requires economic and social sector synergies, infrastructure improvements, and comprehensive program integration. Improving remote area connectivity and basic services are key to eliminating extreme poverty by 2024.

CONCLUSION

The analysis revealed that increased access to employment and the synergy of socioeconomic programs, such as the Independent Village Movement, Direct Cash Assistance, Every Day Children Eat Fish, and BUMDESA, had a significant impact on reducing extreme poverty in Bengkalis Regency. However, sustainable efforts are needed to create jobs because the high number of unemployed people hampers the acceleration of poverty alleviation. Program innovations based on economic empowerment have proven effective, although the impact is smaller in remote areas such as Bengkalis and Bathin Solapan Sub-districts. These areas still have a high concentration of the extreme poor, so program intensification is needed there. The main obstacle to program implementation lies in the difficulty of access to remote areas, which interferes with the equitable distribution of assistance. Therefore, it is necessary to improve regional connectivity and expand program coverage to achieve the target of eliminating extreme poverty by 2025.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A big thank you to the Ministry of Education and Culture's matching fund program 2024 and the Head of the Bengkalis Regency Community and Village Empowerment Office for their support in conducting this research. In addition, to the leaders and coworkers who participated in this research.

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