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The Indonesian Government's Policy in the Free Nutritious Meal Program

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Abstract

The MBG is a strategic initiative to support human resource development toward Golden Indonesia 2045 by providing free nutritious meals in Indonesia. The study aims to assess the governance structure, administrative setup, and stakeholder engagement processes in the program implementation. The present study is a qualitative research work that pays attention to the operational dynamics in different regions in Indonesia. The analysis indicates that the main governance challenges at the regional level are bureaucratic fragmentation and lack of cross-sector coordination. Furthermore, the mass poisoning incidents reflect a systemic failure in the implementation of food safety standards and supervision in the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Units. Community involvement is currently still symbolic, although the empowerment of local SMEs has proven to strengthen the economic sustainability of the program. Finally, budget constraints and the uncertainty over funding mechanisms threaten the long-term operational stability of islands and rural areas. Overall, the literature points to a large gap between national policy aspirations and practical experiences on the ground. The implications of the findings emphasize the need to strengthen integrated regulation, invest in cold chain infrastructure, and transform community participation into full empowerment to ensure the accountability and sustainability of the national program.

Introduction

One of the national strategic programs of Indonesia in overcoming the problems of malnutrition and stunting which threaten the quality of human resources in Indonesia in 2045 is MBG (Program Makanan Bergizi Gratis) (Rahmawati et al., 2026). The MBG program was successful in reducing the prevalence of stunting by 7.8% and anemia by 5.4% in elementary school students and increased students' attendance by 12% and learning concentration by 15% (Yelvianti, 2025). This program has transformed from a small-scale school-based nutrition intervention to a large-scale national policy that serves millions of beneficiaries since its inception (Fikri, 2025). This program can improve student attendance and academic achievement and stimulate the local economy through partnerships with farmers and SMEs (Agustini et al., 2025). The program is the manifestation of the state's commitment to realize the constitutional right of children to safe and nutritious food with a budget allocation of Rp420 trillion (Adnyana et al., 2025).

However, the implementation of MBG faces serious systemic obstacles such as bureaucratic fragmentation, differences in logistics infrastructure in the archipelagic regions, and poor cross-sector coordination (Angga Prabowo & Ghina Ghaliya, 2026). This results in a knowledge gap because of the differences between national policies and regional operational realities and the lack of consistent technical regulations (Amril & Sazali, 2025). Other literature mentions the governance failure that led to the mass poisoning incidents (Arafanditama Najim Hidayat et al., 2025). Successful adaptive local cooperation is according to some studies (Febryanti et al., 2025). Unclear oversight mechanisms and funding sustainability have created accountability gaps that threaten the program's long-term effectiveness (Nafiatul Habibah et al., 2025).

This program's governance framework is based on the concept of collaborative governance between the government and the synergy of the private sector and community (Nugroho et al., 2025). The theory that underlies the determination of safe and sustainable food distribution is the relationship between the administrative structure, such as the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG), and stakeholder participation (Hikmah et al., 2025). The combination of logistics management, technology-based supervision, and local economic empowerment is considered crucial to turn short-term interventions into long-term investments in human capital (Hansiden et al., 2025).

The aim of this systematic literature review is to review the governance framework, administrative structure and stakeholder engagement dynamics in the MBG program. This research brings together the results of a number of qualitative and evaluative studies. It connects the macro policies and the operational challenges in the field. The review findings are expected to be a strategic reference point for the policymakers to enhance inter-agency coordination and maximize community participation to attain sustainable national development targets (Moroki et al., 2026).

This study uses a systematic literature review approach by analyzing relevant policy documents, official reports, and scientific articles. The analysis was performed within the framework of collaborative governance for identifying managerial challenges and best practices and was thematically organized to generate extensive policy recommendations (Moroki et al., 2026). This study aims to evaluate the governance system, the administrative structure, and the stakeholder interaction dynamics in the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia. The study acknowledges the difficulty of cross-sector implementation and logistical challenges in the archipelagic region. In addition, this research is important to identify the gap between the national policies and operational realities at the regional level. This research contributes to the development of a more adaptive, accountable, and sustainable governance model in relation to the synthesis of findings from diverse qualitative and evaluative studies. The results of this review are expected to serve as strategic references for policymakers to improve inter-agency coordination, improve food safety standards, and optimize community participation to achieve the target of Golden Human Resources Development 2045 of Indonesia.

Research Method

The quantitative research technique of the study of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) policy in Indonesia aims to collect qualitative data from diverse stakeholders and to provide systematic strategy for the collection and analysis of valid numerical data. The research methods utilised by the researchers are quantitative research methods in an effort to quantify the efficiency of the program. The approach can be applied in nonprofit organisations to attempt to measure program outcomes, evaluate interventions and enhance accountability through providing evidence for program development, resource allocation and advocacy (Kazanskaia, 2025). Quantitative research is a research strategy that employs the use of surveys, experiments and statistical tools to detect trends, relationships and patterns in data that can be used to assess programs and measure public satisfaction (Enoghase Itua, 2005). Logic models are useful in program evaluation because they provide a visual map that shows the link between program

activities and outcomes and help in identifying the right operational measures for monitoring progress (Rassel et al., 2022). The Goals Measurement System is also useful in assessing the performance of complex initiatives over time concentrating on goals and benefits to the community (Golding, 1972). Quantitative methods also enable organizations to perform statistical analyzes, test for differences between groups and assess the success of treatments or interventions (Hagan, 2014).

This method can be resource light and can be supported by open source software and mobile based data collecting The study stresses the need of creating credibility through cultural understanding and informed consent (Kazanskaia, 2025). Therefore, quantitative research methodologies are not only scientific tools but also strategic assets to show impact, raise funding, and support sustainable development goals (Kazanskaia, 2025) (Kazanskaia, 2025b).This research uses document analysis approach. This qualitative approach is a systematic procedure on the policy of Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) in Indonesia, which seeks to gather qualitative data from different stakeholders through examining and assessing documents for the purpose of identifying, selecting, and synthesising significant material (Ji, 2024). (Kutsyuruba, 2023). Personal and public documents (e.g., diaries, letters, news stories, educational policies) can be used to establish the historical and institutional contexts of inquiry. The documents used in the examination of the Indonesian government policy on MBG program are (1). The effective governance of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) policy in Indonesia is expected to gather qualitative data from many parties on the free nutritious food program in Indonesia: policy, administrative and stakeholder viewpoints. (2). Governance mechanism of MBG and cross-sector collaboration in school nutrition in Indonesia: inter-agency coordination, involvement of local governments and community participation in 3T districts. (3). In Indonesia, cross-sectoral implementation of MBG involves coordination between agencies, the involvement of local governments, stakeholder engagement and accountability systems in providing regional MBG. (5). The accountability method of Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG) in Indonesia is decentralisation and inter-sector collaboration involving schools, health services, local government and community. Mechanisms for accountability include data systems, stakeholder involvement, One Health perspective and digital monitoring.

The number of papers analysed was 136, of which 50 were significant, consisting of MBG program reports and online media in Indonesia.Document analysis can also help researchers to overcome obstacles that may arise in field study such as ethical difficulties and accessibility and can also supply existing data that can enhance findings from other methodologies (Morgan, 2022). The research methodologies of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia cover several qualitative and quantitative analysis of government policies. The qualitative descriptive method is used in this investigation. We show the analysis results of the collaboration between the government and the community in implementing the MBG program. Must be involved in the community and have a two-way communication mechanism (Maruapey et al., 2026) Suprapto et al. (2025) examined the policy from a multidimensional approach, i.e. health, education, economic, and socio-environmental dimensions. To determine the major tactics to implement the program, SWOT analysis was employed.In the investigation of Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) policy in Indonesia, the interview approach aims to collect

qualitative data from multiple stakeholders such as beneficiaries, school administrators, religious leaders, and local government officials. The objective is to obtain a complete picture on the implementation and the effect of the MBG program, which is expected to improve community welfare, particularly among the low income groups who are vulnerable to malnutrition. The data obtained was augmented by field observations and face to face interviews by the researchers. The study also reviews literature and policy to provide a wider context for the challenges encountered such as delays in distribution and lack of transparency in the administration of funds (Maruapey et al., 2026). Such an approach is consistent with the values of justice and community well-being, and highlights the need for participation and accountability in the administration of public policy.

Results and Discussion

Effectiveness of Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program

The expected impact of the MBG program implementation on food security is that dependence on food imports will be reduced and local food production will be improved. Studies show that by using more healthy local products, Indonesia could increase its food security and reduce dependence on foreign products. The use of local food items in the MBG program can also increase food diversification and optimal utilization of underutilized local food resources. The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia has great potential to improve the quality of life of children in various ways. The program is designed to address the problem of malnutrition and stunting, which still remains the biggest public health issues in Indonesia, particularly for school-aged children (Andini, 2025). MBG not only helps to meet the nutritional needs of children with balanced nutritious meals at schools but also helps to improve nutritional status, learning concentration and student attendance in school (Wahyuniar & Iman Pustakasari, 2025). This program has been shown to work because it has lowered the rates of stunting by 7.8% and anemia by 5.4% among elementary school students (Yelvianti, 2025). The MBG also has a function in enhancing children's mental health by reducing stress and the risk of depression, as well as aiding the development of the brain and emotional stability. This program also reflects the Pancasila concept of social justice because it gives the same access to all students without differentiating the economic or social background (Andin et al., 2024). However, the long-term viability of MBG is highly dependent on cross-sector support, food quality monitoring and sustainable funding strategies. However, the program is facing challenges such as the lack of food storage infrastructure, irregular distribution, and the lack of technical regulations (Marzulina et al., 2025).

These hurdles can only be overcome by effective intersectoral coordination, local food procurement networks and constant nutrition education for the population. Successful implementation of MBG is one of the main pillars for the development of healthier and productive human resources and national development targets in education, health and social welfare (Meka et al., 2025). Furthermore, the MBG program had a significant impact on students' nutritional status, but the increase in the concentration of

learning was not significant like a study in South Jakarta (Wahyuniar & Iman Pustakasari, 2025). However, this program also increases the average academic achievement scores, such as in mathematics, with a significant increase in learning achievement scores (Emelia Yesi & Annur, 2025). This program also helps to increase student enthusiasm and participation in class which shows a direct relationship between adequate nutrition and cognitive development (Sri Sarwati et al., 2025). Yet, implementation of this program still faces issues such as uneven food distribution and poor storage infrastructure (Yelvianti, 2025). Another study notes that the free school meal program has the potential to improve the nutritional health of pupils, such as BMI (Body Mass Index) and a reduction in prevalence of anemia (Desiani & Syafiq, 2025). The MBG program has the potential to significantly improve students' well-being and academic achievement. However, to make this program effective and sustainable, the implementation and cross-sector coordination need to be improved (Yelvianti, 2025; Sinaga & Syarief, 2025; Rassanjani & Rahmi, 2025).

Compliance with Food Safety in the Free Nutritious Meal Program

Research findings revealed that food safety issues are one of the most significant operational risks. In the program, there have been many cases of food poisoning with thousands of MBG beneficiaries since the program started. Data show that in November 2025, 16,109 pupils were affected by MBG poisoning and 5,914 MBG recipients were affected by different events (National, 2025). These cases of poisoning raise serious questions about the food safety certification system of the MBG program. BGN has set up an investigation team with diverse experts to investigate thoroughly the reasons of MBG poisoning cases and to develop corrective actions. However, these instances are a wake-up call for a comprehensive upgrading of the food safety surveillance system.

In Indonesia, the Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG) has a number of substantial issues related to food safety compliance. In District X, a different study showed that food managers' knowledge and attitude on cleanliness and sanitation were good, but handwashing and personal protective equipment (PPE) practices were inconsistent, and there were issues related to food storage and serving time after the standard (Chantika Kharisma Ramadhani et al., 2025). The SIGAP Program has been implemented by South Tangerang to enhance food safety awareness through HACCP-based training and the participation of volunteers, however, there are still problems concerning compliance in the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (Humayrah & Nuraelah, 2025). In the legal perspective, the accountability mechanisms that the state holds on food poisoning cases do not need better regulatory harmony and law enforcement (Emirza Nur Wicaksono, 2025). Another hurdle to the implementation of the Halal Product Assurance (HPA) in East Medan is the lack of halal certification and suitable infrastructure (Rayhan & Zulham, 2025). The occurrence of mass poisoning due to microbiological contamination and insufficient supervision shows the legal and ethical problems of the operation of this program (Arafanditama Najim Hidayat et al., 2025).

One Health research revealed hidden health hazards with many food poisoning events due to some pathogens such as Bacillus cereus and Salmonella spp., absence of cold chain infrastructure, and

fragmented monitoring (Adnyana et al., 2025). The lack of control and cooperation between agencies is also a significant factor in mass poisoning episodes in some places (Candra et al., 2025). The integration of IoT technology in program monitoring has the potential to improve surveillance accuracy and reduce food waste, although this field is still in its infancy (Dedi et al., 2025). In East Lombok, concerns with kitchen cleanliness and ineffectiveness in food distribution management have decreased the parents' trust in this program (Irawan et al., 2025). MBG in Indonesia still needs to improve the funding mechanism, cross-sector coordination, and community participation to enhance the program's performance and sustainability compared to similar programs in other countries such as India and Scotland (Rahmawati et al., 2026). Though food security has been addressed in the MBG program, the remaining challenges reflect a need for continued improvements in training, supervision, and inter-agency coordination to ensure the success and sustainability of the program.

Assessing the Impact of Cross-Sector Collaboration in the MBG Program

The implementation of the MBG Program is still weakly coordinated among many ministries and agencies, including the National Nutrition Agency, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the BKKBN, and local governments. The effectiveness of the program hinges on effective cooperation of these institutions. However, in fact, inter-agency cooperation is typically confronted with different challenges including disparities in priorities, working mechanisms, and reporting systems. Poor coordination may result in inefficiencies, duplication of programs and difficulty in monitoring and evaluation (Free Nutrition Agency Data Analyst, 2026).. The success of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia is a result of inter-sectoral collaboration. This program aims to tackle the problems of malnutrition and stunting, as well as to improve the quality of education and health for Indonesian children. However, the key problems include insufficient inter-agency cooperation, low finance, and uneven logistical distribution (Rahmawati et al., 2026).

Research indicates that the power of cross-sector collaboration among the central and regional governments, educational institutions, the health sector, the business world and the community can improve synergy in the delivery of quality food, logistics distribution, nutrition education and the monitoring of children's health. This multi-sector approach also promotes program sustainability and prevents dependence on a single financing source (Multi-Sector Approach in Succes, 2025). Furthermore, local populations, including farmers, can be involved to improve regional food security and support early detection of nutritional problems via connections with school health services (Maruapey et al., 2026). Studies of similar programs in other countries such as India and Scotland show that the success of the program is highly correlated with a stable funding system, a structured monitoring mechanism, and strong collaboration among the government, schools, communities and the private sector (Rahmawati et al., 2026). Therefore, there is a need to strengthen financial structures, cross-sector cooperation, and stronger community participation for better effectiveness and sustainability of MBG (Marzulina et al., 2025). Therefore, good cross-sector coordination not only improves program

implementation but also helps to achieve sustainable development goals in the areas of health and education (Marzulina et al., 2025).

Community Participation Rate in the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG)

Indonesia has tens of thousands of islands and widely distributed places. Indonesia has a Community Participation Rate Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). Research shows there are variations in regional distribution. The MBG program is distributed unevenly by region and it is very difficult to ensure that the program reaches all target groups, especially in isolated, impoverished and border regions. Poor infrastructure, poor accessibility and difficult geographical conditions in some regions may hamper the nutritional status and raise awareness of the importance of nutrition, and thus increase the timely and proper distribution of nutrient-dense foods. Research Findings (2026) may lead to different access to programs at rural vs. urban sites. The MBG has enhanced nutritional status and raised community awareness about the importance of nutrition, leading to greater participation in health and fitness maintenance in the community. According to studies, the program offers healthy food and applies strategic efforts for long-term human resource development by improving students' physical and mental well-being. This further improves their academic performance and involvement in school activities (Prasetyo et al., 2025). The implementation of MBG and nutrition counseling in Sekotong Barat Village significantly strengthened the knowledge of the community, the cooking of healthy food, and the adherence to the kitchen hygiene regulation (Kurniawan et al., 2025).

In addition, there has been an improvement in family nutrition practices, parents' understanding of nutrition, and institutional cooperation through nutrition counseling and the synchronization of beneficiary data in Lembar District (Gede Panji Santika et al., 2025). This program has a positive effect on the nutritional status of students in South Jakarta. However, the improvement of concentration in learning is not statistically significant (Wahyuniar and Iman Pustakasari, 2025). The free nutrition education and health check in Jayalaksana has improved the community's knowledge about nutrition and health that is beneficial for disease prevention and early diagnosis (Faqih et al., 2023). The program provides food and builds a sustainable ecosystem to improve the health of children and realize Indonesia's vision of a healthy generation (Andini, 2025). Therefore, the free nutrient-dense meal program can successfully increase community involvement in preserving health and well-being when it is backed by sustainable nutrition education and community engagement.

Sustainability of Fiscal Resources for the Gratis Nutritious Meal Scheme

Research findings show that a major obstacle in the implementation of the MBG Program is the substantial fiscal burden. The budget for this program was Rp 335 trillion from the state budget (APBN) for the 2026 fiscal year and Rp 223 trillion from the education budget allocation (Free Nutrition Agency

Data Analyst, 2026). Moreover, the high amounts of this funding bring up the question of the economic sustainability of the program, especially considering the financial situation of the country, which is still experiencing many difficulties. Such fiscal responsibility may reduce resources for other important projects such as existing education and health projects. Several interconnected elements determine the sustainability of funding for the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia. “A big factor is a reliable and transparent funding system, which was a big challenge for the early implementation of the program (Rahmawati et al., 2026). Also, government, schools, communities, and businesses need to collaborate to ensure fair distribution of logistics and quality management (Suprapto et al., 2025).

Infrastructure is a key factor, particularly in rural and disadvantaged regions (3T), considering the topographical obstacles that may lead to program failure (Erlinawati, 2025). Engaging the community, local farmers, and SMEs in the supply chain can help strengthen the local economy and ensure the program’s sustainability (Julian & Pranata, 2025). Other important factors for the long-term effectiveness of the program are the instruction on sustainable nutrition and the participation of the community in the promotion of food diversity and security (Andini, 2025). The technology of real-time data can be used to create a robust monitoring and evaluation system for measuring effectiveness and optimizing program approaches to local needs (Marzulina et al., 2025). Diversification of supply channels and management of inventory can improve operational efficiency and effectiveness of the program, reduce cost and improve food quality (Setiawan, 2024).Therefore, for funding sustainability and long-term prosperity, an integrated and collaborative approach with multiple stakeholders and contextual policy adjustments reflecting the geographical and socio-economic realities of Indonesia is a necessity (Rassanjani & Rahmi, 2025).

Government Policy on Implementation of MBG in Indonesia

Research results on Indonesia’s Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) show that the success of the program is highly dependent on the integration of cross-sector governance, upgrading food safety standards, and active community participation. The opportunities for improving nutritional status and educational attainment are enormous, but implementation is hampered by systemic challenges such as bureaucratic fragmentation, inequities in remote infrastructure, and susceptibility to food security disasters. This synthesis calls for more flexible, transparent and evidence-based policy reforms to improve the long-term sustainability of the program toward Golden Indonesia 2045. This synthesis calls for more adaptive, transparent, and evidence-based policy reforms to make the program sustainable toward Golden Indonesia 2045.

Source: Free Nutrition Agency Data Analyst (2026)

The findings of the analysis presented in Fig. 1 indicate the deployment of the MBG program in implementing the state’s policies in Indonesia as follows: (1). The principal barrier to the execution of the MBG strategy in Indonesia lies in the cooperation across sectors and the fragmentation inside bureaucracy. The implementation of MBG policy in West Bandung Regency showed that there was no

collaboration between schools, food vendors, and the relevant parties (Setiadi et al., 2025); there was no collaboration between the government and the community; and there were obstacles such as lack of workforce and low participation in the area (Maruapey et al., 2026). Research in this domain reveals that the absence of inter-agency collaboration results in vague roles and challenging operations at the regional level. It points to the need to inventory local capacity to address the fragmentation of the MBG service bureaucracy in Indonesia and to integrate and align national priorities. Therefore, the MBG program, in implementing the state's policies, utilizes a multi-sector mode of service (Nugroho et al., 2025), which affects community participation in the implementation of the MBG policy in Indonesia by contributing to a lack of knowledge, insufficient technical skills, and challenges related to the formation of the MBG structure in certain regions; these factors can negatively impact strategies for reciprocal communication, transparency, and proactive community engagement in the implementation of the MBG policy in Indonesia. (2) Food safety and quality standards must be established to ensure access to nutritious food. The food quality benchmarks are an integral part of the MBG program developed in Indonesia. The Internet media discussed the events of mass poisoning, which have exposed the shortcomings in the application of quality standards and the regulation of food quality. These well-documented deficiencies point to systemic challenges, implementation of HACCP standards, and monitoring of food quality.

Hence, there is a need to enhance the quality of competency through sanitation training for culinary management and the addition of technology-oriented supervision to ensure food safety. Therefore, the joint and strategic service model involving stakeholders may enhance the MBG policy implementation and ensure food safety in Indonesia (Syska et al., 2025). Thirdly, community engagement and local empowerment are vital factors that guarantee the effectiveness of the MBG initiative in Indonesia. The success of the MBG application depends on a combined effort of the government as the facilitator and the community as the primary actor. Community participation in the implementation of MBG policy in Indonesia faces problems such as lack of knowledge, lack of technical skills, and issues related to the formation of MBG structures in several areas. It can have a negative impact on community participation in the implementation of MBG policy. The level of participation at sub-district level is termed as "tokenism" and there is a need to improve the participation literacy to make way for sustainable development (Imam et al., 2025). 2024. Ilyas. Abdul Sahid and Ambo Mass. Capacity building of the community includes digitizing information, increasing transparency and training. Fourth, there is evidence of logistical and geographical differences (e.g., remote areas, islands without infrastructure and fragmented institutional coordination) that make it difficult to obtain an efficient and sustainable distribution throughout the nation. The Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) was involved in the distribution of the MBG food to the remote areas in Indonesia (Sekianti & Sucipto, 2024). (Sekianti, 2024) One of the major challenges is the geographical inequalities in the remote, outermost, and underdeveloped 3T areas (Sekianti & Sucipto, 2024). Hence, the MBG Policy has significant potential to improve the nutrition, health, and educational attainment of children in Indonesia. The key to success is predominantly reliant on governance and joint initiatives in successful logistics management in locales with pronounced geographical differences.

Fifth, the dimension of financial sustainability and budget management constitutes a primary obstacle, marked by continuous funding frameworks and dependency on regional fiscal allocations and execution expenses. The study results indicate that the implementation of the MBG project has been met with resistance from different groups because it is funded by educational resources. • Financial constraints and funding mechanisms limit long-term planning. We should build digital fiscal cooperation to strengthen local fiscal capacity (Suwanda & Suwanda, 2025) Lee et al describe the limitations of the MBG Initiative. The authors include the sources of funding and the need for creative and coordinated management of budgets by all stakeholders to achieve nutritional and sustainable development goals in Indonesia. 2026). Therefore, funding and budget oversight of MBG need to be done in a more creative and unified way, involving all stakeholders to achieve nutritional and sustainable development goals in Indonesia. Sixth, the MBG program in Indonesia aims to improve transparency, efficiency, and public participation through technological innovation in program surveillance.

The findings of this study indicate the low use of digital innovation in reporting the MBG program in Indonesia, especially in the 3T areas with low networks and digital resources. In line with the recommendation by Hakiki et al. (2025) of one integrated digital platform to enhance transparency and efficiency. (2026). Technological advances are needed to improve the accuracy of data in decision-making (Zakariyah et al., 2024), while evidence-based decision-making is important to strengthen the accountability of the MBG program at the operational level (Adnyana et al., 2025). The results of the research allow summarizing the operation model of the MBG program in Indonesia, as shown in Table 1. The findings of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) research demonstrate the positive impact of the program on students' nutrition, school attendance, and financial empowerment of the local community. However, the implementation of the MBG policy has some shortcomings in coordinating the sector among institutions (Jalaludin et al., 2026). It also requires better coordination between sectors and better governance to ensure the sustainability of the program (Nugroho et al., 2025). Nevertheless, there are contrasting perspectives on the existing operational readiness and effectiveness of the oversight frameworks, where some research accentuates the success of local adaptation, while others highlight governance shortcomings that have precipitated food security issues (Candra et al., 2025).

Table 1
Model of MBG Program Policy Implementation in Indonesia

Dimension	Existing Conditions	Policy Model
Effectiveness of Cross-Sector Coordination	The weak coordination between institutions is the main obstacle to the implementation of the MBG policy in Indonesia.	Facilitative leadership at the regional level
Food Safety Compliance	Food safety is not yet optimal and requires strict supervision.	Improvement of quality standards through mentoring and training
The Role of Community Participation	Community participation is still symbolic and has not yet reached full empowerment.	Model of digital literacy services and information openness
Implementation Readiness	Program MBG menghadapi tantangan infrastruktur dan logistic di berbagai wilayah	Readiness of Human Resources, availability of local infrastructure, and support from regional regulations

Source: Free Nutrition Agency Data Analyst (2026)

The findings in Table 1 suggest that the success of MBG policy implementation in Indonesia depends on several factors such as the requirement to meet the food safety standards and the mass poisoning incidents, showing the extensive absence of food monitoring. The surveys in the Labuhanbatu Regency and Jayapura City still show the inadequacies of infrastructure and geographical constraints that affect the efficiency of program deployment (Rambe et al., 2025). The implementation of the program is hampered by the absence of technological standards and proper communication methods (Amril & Sazali, 2025), limited human resources and lack of culinary facilities (Yelvianti, 2025). Another challenge can be the logistical challenges in remote and island areas, as well as limited educational and health resources that may hinder the fair implementation of the program (Arwimbar et al., 2025).

Free Healthy Meal Program Framework in Other Countries

Significant differences exist in the implementation and effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia and comparable programs in other countries such as India, Ghana, and Scotland. The MBG program was formulated in Indonesia as a strategic program to improve the nutritional status of children, reduce stunting, and strengthen human capital development in accordance with the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045. However, this scheme has challenges such as limited financial support, poor cooperation among agencies, irregular delivery of food logistics, and poor local quality monitoring (Rahmawati et al., 2026). Similarly, programs in India, Ghana and Scotland have been very successful in improving child nutrition, increasing school attendance, strengthening the local economy and ensuring sustainability of the program. This victory is based on a stable funding model, systematic monitoring strategies and robust engagement of the government, educational establishments,

communities and the commercial sector. In India, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme has been associated with significant improvements in children's school attendance and nutritional status (Rahmawati et al., 2026).

The provision of Universal Free School Meals in Scotland has benefited the social and economic status of children. The School Feeding Program has been implemented in Ghana and this resulted in improvement in nutritional status and increased school attendance (Rahmawati et al., 2026). To improve the performance of the MBG program in Indonesia, it is necessary to improve finance strategies, intersectoral cooperation and community participation (Suprapto et al., 2025). Moreover, nutritional education must be combined with community engagement for the program's long-term success (Andini, 2025). This analysis emphasizes the need for budget transparency, quality control procedures, and integrated governance from the national to the local level for the long-term effectiveness of the program (Rassanjani & Rahmi, 2025). Regarding Table 2, it illustrates a global assessment of MBG policies, specifically:

Table 2
Global MBG Policy

Country	Main Policy	Implementation Results
India	Mid Day Meal Scheme: free meals for over 120 million children, centrally funded, involving both central and state governments, as well as community participation.	Significant improvements in nutritional status, school attendance, and local economic empowerment through the purchase of foodstuffs from local farmers (Rahmawati et al., 2026)
Ghana	School Feeding Program: focus on rural areas, mixed funding (government + donors), and integrated monitoring mechanisms.	Results similar to India in terms of nutrition improvement and attendance, but with distribution challenges in remote areas (Rahmawati et al., 2026).
Skotlandia	Universal Free School Meals: a national policy that guaranties free meals for all primary school-aged children, supported by a stable public budget and strict nutritional standards.	High satisfaction levels, reduction in nutritional gaps, and improved concentration in learning (Rahmawati et al., 2026)
Belanda	Legal Basis & Constitutional Right: policy based on constitutional rights, with regulations binding all public and private schools.	Consistent implementation, maintained food quality, and strong support from legal institutions (Mulyosudarmo et al., 2025)
Brazil	National School Feeding Program (PNAE): 100% funding from the federal budget, prioritization of local products, and a data-based evaluation system.	Reduction of stunting and anemia, as well as an increase in local farmers' income (Suprapto et al., 2025)
Finlandia	Free School Meals: free meals for all students, managed by local education authorities with European nutritional standards.	Optimal child health, low obesity rates, and high academic achievement (Suprapto et al., 2025)

Source: Research Analysis Results, 2026

The Free Nutritious Meal Policy has a great potential to help addressing malnutrition, support education participation and promote human development but is in the infancy stage with big challenges in funding, cross-sector coordination, food quality and monitoring (Yelvianti, 2025). Table 2. Indonesia is still lagging behind other countries such as India, Ghana, Scotland, the Netherlands, Brazil and Finland on budget stability, institutionalized coordination and strong regulatory standards. However, best practices on integrated funding schemes, evidence-based nutrition standards, community participation, and digital information systems may be used to accelerate the achievement of national nutrition objectives and make MBG a central pillar of social policy in line with Pancasila values and the sustainable development agenda (Rassel et al., 2022). The implementation of these recommendations will enhance the effectiveness of MBG and will also serve as a model for other countries of the Southeast Asian region that are looking for innovative solutions to the problem of child nutrition.

Research Implications

Theoretical Implications

The Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG) in Indonesia has theoretical implications and public policy in the fulfillment of constitutional rights and the quality of human resource improvement. The implications of the findings on the constitutional aspect: the MBG policy reflects the responsibility to fulfill the right to nutritious food for all Indonesian people as regulated in the 1945 Constitution Articles 24A-28J. Results of research by Fikri (2025) state that the regulation of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law (PERPU) is necessary to provide legal certainty and accountability (Fikri, 2025). Economically, the MBG policy has long-term economic impacts on productivity and national competitiveness (Nababan et al., 2025). The MBG policy research findings have constitutional, economic and health implications which call for a holistic, collaborative and strategic strategy to address the challenges of infrastructure in 3T regions, inconsistent institutional capacity, food security and need for monitoring and evaluation of the MBG policy in Indonesia. Thus, the policy of MBG in Indonesia has implications that touch upon constitutional, economic, and health aspects which need a holistic, collaborative, and strategic strategy. Constitutional, economic and health aspects need a holistic, collaborative and strategic plan. Holistic, collaborative and strategic strategy for sustainable success. In addition, the MBG policy is a government program that is designed to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty in a systematic manner, improve community food security, and enhance the health of future generations.

The research results of the Free Nutritious Food Program Policy in Indonesia can strengthen the theory of Collaborative Governance by Ansell and Gash through the mechanisms of collaboration, suboptimal coordination between institutions, and the integration of conducive MBG program policies with active stakeholder participation (Angga Prabowo & Ghina Ghaliya, 2026). Jalaludin (2025) also states that in Bojonegoro Regency, the research contribution of the MBG program's cross-sector collaboration develops adaptively, and formal and digital communication can improve the coordination and trust between sectors (Jalaludin et al., 2026). Kamil's (2025) research, which supports the Multi-stakeholder Governance and Sustainable Livelihoods framework, claims that the success of nutrition interventions is

inseparable from local economic integration and community empowerment as main actors (Kamil et al., 2025).

Theoretical investigations of the IoT technologies are needed to monitor food temperature and quality in real time to help reduce health risks and improve the transparency of the traditional hypotheses. Additionally, we should employ more IoT technologies for this monitoring. The hierarchical implementation models are not valid, while the adaptive network structures are more effective in overcoming logistical and geographical challenges in archipelagic areas than bureaucratic methods (Erlinawati, 2025). Empirically; It adds to the Policy Transfer debate by emphasizing the significance of adequate contextualization of the local social, cultural, and infrastructural context to translate international policies to prevent implementation failure (Rassanjani & Rahmi, 2025). The analysis shows that governance failures, such as cases of food poisoning, are a crisis of state accountability, which needs to strengthen the theory of state responsibility in fulfilling the basic right of children to safe food (Riyanto & Sinaga, 2025). The research findings, therefore, support the theory of Collaborative Governance by showing that multi-actor collaboration and a horizontal network approach may improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the implementation of the MBG program in Indonesia.

The Indonesian government policy through the MBG program has practical implications for improving nutritional resilience and the quality of education for students. In practice, policymakers must apply strong, comprehensive and binding technical rules to ensure the certainty of operation, determine the roles of institutions, and avoid bureaucratic fragmentation (Amril & Sazali, 2025, Implementing the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) Policy in Biak Numfor Regency). Secondly, the monitoring system will be integrated with IoT technology, to enable real - time monitoring of food quality and temperature. This will reduce health risks and increase transparency in the supply chain" (Dedi et al., 2025). Thirdly, the managerial capacity and sustainable nutrition literacy of the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) needs to be increased because the remaining technical competency gaps are a major obstacle in the field (Oktarina & Setiawan, 2025).

The fourth is the shift in the partnership model from consultative to community empowerment and strategic alliances with the private sector and local producers for supply chain sustainability and budget efficiency (Moroki et al., 2026). Fifthly, we need a data-based and integrated evaluation system to monitor the impacts of the program on nutritional status and academic achievement so that the significant investment in this program will have substantial returns for human resource development (Hansiden et al., 2025). Sixth, there needs to be a geospatial and adaptive implementation approach to bridge the possible gap between national policies and operational realities in 3T regions (frontier, outermost, and least developed) because of local infrastructure limitations (Erlinawati, 2025). Thus, the MBG policy in Indonesia has enormous potential to improve the nutritional status and education of Indonesian children. Strengthening the monitoring, evaluation, and effective collaboration systems among various stakeholders determines the long-term success factors.

Gaps and Directions for Future Research

Research on government policies related to the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia shows gaps and future research directions that need to be addressed. One of the main gaps is the logistical and infrastructure challenges that hinder the distribution of nutritious food in remote and island areas, as well as the complex inter-sectoral coordination (Marzulina et al., 2025; Maruapey et al., 2026). Additionally, there are concerns regarding the sustainability of long-term funding and the capacity of human resources at the district level (Marzulina et al., 2025) (Arifia et al., 2026). Future research can be focused on the development of sustainable financing models and robust monitoring and evaluation systems with real-time data to ensure program effectiveness (Marzulina et al., 2025). Collaboration between the government and the community is also an important element that needs to be strengthened through two-way communication, transparency, and active community participation in the supervision and provision of local food supplies (Maruapey et al., 2026). Co-creation governance-based strategies and the utilization of digital technology are recommended to strengthen sustainable collaboration (Maruapey et al., 2026). Furthermore, further research could explore the integration of MBG policies with other sustainable development initiatives, such as the transition to clean energy and sustainable natural resource management, to support the achievement of broader national development goals (Ardiansyah et al., 2024). Thus, future research should consider Indonesia's unique geographical, cultural, and institutional context to ensure that global nutrition interventions can be effectively and sustainably adapted to the local context (Marzulina et al., 2025).

The gaps in government policy research regarding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia lie in several critical aspects that affect its implementation effectiveness. Although this program aims to address malnutrition and stunting, significant challenges arise from logistical issues, food quality, and weak inter-sectoral coordination (Marzulina et al., 2025). Cases of mass food poisoning indicate a failure to meet food safety standards, which threatens public trust and the sustainability of the program (Nafiatul Habibah et al., 2025). Additionally, the lack of systematic outcome monitoring and evaluation hinders the ability to accurately measure the program's impact (Suprapto et al., 2025). Despite strong political commitment and the potential for collaboration between the government and the community, low participation in several areas and limited human resource capacity are the main obstacles (Maruapey et al., 2026). Therefore, regulatory improvements, infrastructure strengthening, and sustainable financing models are needed to ensure the success of MBG in achieving fair and equitable nutrition goals (Habibah et al., 2025).

Conclusion

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia is considered a strategic instrument to improve nutritional status, to support educational achievements, and to strengthen human capital toward the Golden Indonesia 2045. Literature consistently shows that the success of this program heavily depends on the effectiveness of collaborative governance involving synergy between the government, the private sector, and the community. Although the program has a great potential, the current implementation of the program still has big gaps between the national policies and the operational realities at the regional level. The main problems identified were unclear distribution of roles, poor coordination between sectors

and fragmentation of bureaucracy. This resulted in inefficiencies in logistical distribution and inequalities in service coverage, especially in remote and island areas.

The main management and operational challenge is poor food safety supervision. Documented mass poisoning incidents across regions are indicative of a crisis of accountability and a failure to implement hygiene standards and standard operating procedures at the level of Nutritional Fulfillment Service Units. These health risks are compounded by the limited managerial capacity and nutritional literacy of program managers. The literature, therefore, stresses the need to enhance binding technical regulations, make investments in cold chain infrastructure, and use digital technology to monitor food quality in real time. The use of IoT sensors and data-driven dashboards is considered capable of enhancing transparency, distribution accuracy, and response speed to potential health risks.

The sustainability of the program also heavily depends on the shift in the model of community participation from being symbolic to full empowerment. The involvement of SMEs, farmers, and local fishermen not only strengthens a more resilient food supply chain but also provides a positive economic impact for the community. However, uncertainty about the funding mechanisms and dependence on the national budget still threaten long-term sustainability. To summarize, systemic reforms are needed to link nutrition policies with the strengthening of local institutions. Future research needs to focus on evaluating the long-term impact of the program on nutritional status and academic achievement, as well as on the development of a more stable hybrid financing model to ensure that significant investments in this program yield tangible results for the development of Indonesian human resources.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study does not require ethics approval.

Disclosure statement

The author(s) declare no potential conflict of interest.

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Author Contribution

CRediT: Marno Wance: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing-original draft, writing-review & editing. Jusuf Madubun: Conceptualization, validation, supervision, writing-review & editing. Muhtar: Conceptualization, methodology & validation.

Data Availability

This study uses secondary data obtained from publicly available online sources, which have been duly cited in the manuscript. The data information was obtained from the National Nutrition Agency's website as follows: https://www.bgn.go.id/juknis and https://www.bgn.go.id/news/laporan-kinerja/laporan-kinerja-badan-gizi-nasional-tahun-anggaran-2025, and https://www.bgn.go.id/news/artikel/, and https://www.bgn.go.id/news/siaran-pers/, and https://www.bgn.go.id/news/foto/.

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Figures

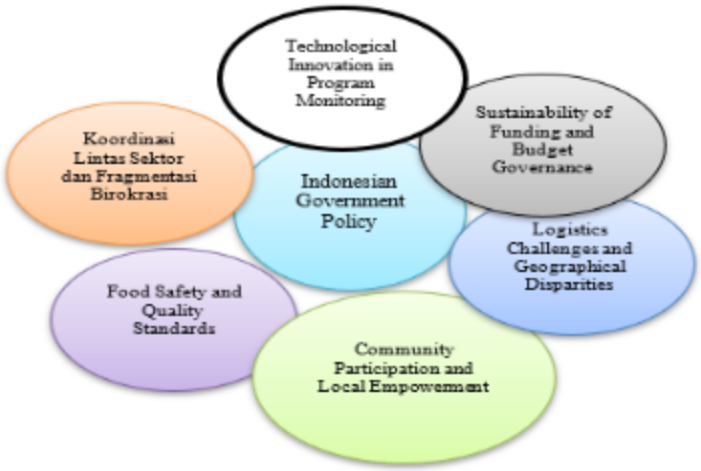


Figure 1

Analysis of the Implementation of the MBG Program in Indonesia

Source: Free Nutrition Agency Data Analyst (2026)