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Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program Impact
on Child Well-Being and Gender Equity in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Chronic malnutrition and stunting among Indonesian schoolchildren significantly impair cognitive development, attendance, and academic performance. The Free Nutritious Meals (Makan Bergizi Gratis/MBG) Program, launched in January 2025 under Indonesia's National Medium-Term Development Plan, addresses these challenges to support Sustainable Development Goal 4. This study examines implementation challenges and opportunities of the MBG program in improving basic education quality, emphasizing child well-being and gender equity. A qualitative systematic literature review analyzed policy documents and academic literature on school feeding interventions. Critical challenges include regulatory gaps, logistical inefficiencies, food safety concerns, suboptimal nutritional standards, administrative burdens, budget misallocation, weak inter-sectoral coordination, infrastructure deficits, limited capacity, and community resistance. However, significant opportunities exist: enhanced nutritional status, improved attendance and achievement, empowerment of local enterprises, and nutrition curriculum integration. The program holds substantial potential if addressed through comprehensive regulation, GPS-enabled management systems, rigorous monitoring, community engagement, and curriculum integration. Future research should employ longitudinal mixed-methods designs with international comparative frameworks to evaluate long-term effectiveness on child welfare and gender equity outcomes.

ABSTRAK

Malnutrisi kronis dan stunting pada anak sekolah Indonesia secara signifikan mengganggu perkembangan kognitif, kehadiran, dan prestasi akademik. Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG), diluncurkan pada Januari 2025 dalam Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional, mengatasi tantangan ini untuk mendukung Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan 4. Penelitian ini mengkaji tantangan dan peluang implementasi program MBG dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan dasar, dengan penekanan pada kesejahteraan anak dan kesetaraan gender. Tinjauan literatur sistematis kualitatif menganalisis dokumen kebijakan dan literatur akademik tentang intervensi makan sekolah. Tantangan kritis meliputi kesenjangan regulasi, inefisiensi logistik, masalah keamanan pangan, standar gizi suboptimal, beban administratif, misalokasi anggaran, koordinasi lintas sektor lemah, defisit infrastruktur, kapasitas terbatas, dan resistensi masyarakat. Namun, peluang signifikan tersedia: peningkatan status gizi, kehadiran dan prestasi lebih baik, pemberdayaan usaha lokal, dan integrasi kurikulum gizi. Program memiliki potensi besar jika ditangani melalui regulasi komprehensif, sistem manajemen berbasis GPS, pengawasan ketat, keterlibatan masyarakat, dan integrasi kurikulum. Penelitian masa depan perlu menggunakan desain mixed-methods longitudinal dengan kerangka komparatif internasional untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas jangka panjang.

PRELIMINARY

Indonesia's basic education quality faces critical challenges stemming from chronic malnutrition among school-age children, with 2024 data revealing persistently high stunting rates that adversely affect cognitive development and academic achievement (Fatimah et al., 2024). Children from low-income families frequently experience protein and micronutrient deficiencies, resulting in impaired memory, diminished concentration, and reduced learning motivation, thereby undermining the foundation of national education. The Free Nutritional Meal (Makan Bergizi Gratis/MBG) program was designed as a direct intervention to bridge this gap, drawing inspiration from successful international models such as Japan's Kyushoku system (Agustini, 2025; Wulandari, 2025).

The urgency of MBG implementation stems from the established causal relationship between nutritional status and educational performance, where adequate daily nutrition can increase student attendance by 10-15% and significantly enhance learning outcomes (Rozak et al., 2025). Amid post-pandemic economic disparities, this program also alleviates parental financial burdens, enabling children to focus on learning rather than hunger. Without interventions like MBG, achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets for quality education in Indonesia remains unattainable (Qomarrullah et al., 2025).

The MBG policy framework is anchored in the 2025-2029 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), allocating trillions of rupiah for educational food security. The program involves multiple ministries including Education, Health, and Agriculture, emphasizing local supply chains to support smallholder farmers (Fatimah et al., 2024). However, its success depends critically on effective regulatory harmonization across institutions and coordinated inter-sectoral implementation.

Major implementation challenges include insufficient regional budgets that fail to meet optimal nutritional standards, coupled with logistical distribution constraints in geographically difficult areas. Weak inter-agency coordination and limited local community participation further impede effectiveness, with meals occasionally failing to meet hygienic standards or accommodate regional cultural preferences. These issues risk eroding public trust and program legitimacy.

Conversely, MBG presents significant opportunities for local economic empowerment through procurement from micro-enterprises and farmers, potentially creating employment and sustainable supply chains. The program demonstrates potential for reducing long-term dropout rates and stunting prevalence, as evidenced by case studies from schools implementing similar initiatives over five years. Integration with nutrition education curricula can strengthen holistic impact on both health and educational outcomes.

Previous research predominantly addresses MBG's health impacts but inadequately examines specific implications for basic education quality, particularly effects on learning outcomes and student retention (Rozak et al., 2025). Comparative studies with international models remain limited, leaving gaps in contextual analysis of Indonesia's unique challenges (Agustini, 2025; Wulandari, 2025). This study addresses these gaps by analyzing implementation challenges and opportunities of the MBG program for basic education quality in Indonesia through qualitative document-based research. Specifically, it identifies operational barriers and recommends strategic interventions to optimize educational impact, with findings expected to inform national policy improvement.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach utilizing systematic literature review methodology to analyze implementation challenges and opportunities of the Free Nutritional Meal (MBG) program on basic education quality in Indonesia. The qualitative approach was selected for its descriptive and interpretive capabilities, enabling comprehensive understanding of educational policy phenomena through secondary literature synthesis, as recommended for public policy research (Rijali, 2019; Satori & Komariah, 2017). The systematic review focused on collecting data from credible written sources to identify patterns of operational challenges and strategic opportunities without requiring primary field data collection.

Primary data sources comprised official government documents including the 2025-2029 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), Presidential Regulations concerning MBG, reports from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), and evaluations from the Ministries of Health and Agriculture regarding school nutrition program implementation. Secondary data

were obtained from nationally and internationally reputable academic journals, educational policy textbooks, and reports from international organizations such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme examining nutrition's impact on basic education. Inclusion criteria required contextual relevance to Indonesia, prioritizing empirical studies on MBG or comparable programs published between 2020-2025.

Data collection employed systematic searches across academic databases including Google Scholar, SINTA, Garuda, Scopus, and national journal repositories using keywords: "school feeding program," "nutritional intervention," "educational quality," "Indonesia," and "policy implementation." The process involved initial screening of titles and abstracts, followed by full-text assessment to ensure methodological quality and relevance. Data extraction utilized validation matrices encompassing key themes such as distribution logistics, cognitive impacts on students, local economic empowerment, and gender equity considerations. Source triangulation enhanced credibility and validity of findings (Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis adopted the Miles and Huberman framework comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification to process findings iteratively (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). Thematic coding was employed during data reduction, categorizing information according to research objectives into domains including regulatory gaps, logistical challenges, nutritional standards, community engagement, and economic opportunities. Data display utilized comparative matrices and descriptive narratives presenting challenges against opportunities, facilitating systematic interpretation. The verification phase involved cross-referencing findings with multiple sources and identifying convergent evidence patterns. This rigorous analytical approach ensured contextually grounded interpretations aligned with established qualitative research standards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program in Indonesia

The Free Nutritious Meal Program, known as *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG), represents a flagship initiative of President Prabowo Subianto's administration to enhance nutritional status across Indonesian society. Officially launched on January 6, 2025, the program is being implemented progressively to encompass all educational levels from early childhood education through senior high school, alongside other vulnerable groups. MBG not only aims to fulfill daily nutritional requirements but also supports poverty reduction and human resource quality improvement (Ministry of Finance RI, 2025).

The MBG concept was initially proposed by Prabowo Subianto in 2006 through the "White Revolution" initiative, originally focused on providing free milk for schoolchildren. This idea evolved into a comprehensive program following National Nutrition Day, established on January 25, 1960, by President Soekarno, reflecting Indonesia's historical attention to nutritional issues. Under the current administration, MBG has been designated as a national priority in the 2025-2029 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) (Wikipedia Indonesia, 2025).

The legal foundation of MBG is established through Presidential Regulation Number 83 of 2024 concerning the National Nutrition Agency, mandating nutritional fulfillment in accordance with Articles 28H and 34 of the 1945 Constitution. The National Nutrition Agency bears coordination responsibility, supported by Law Number 18 of 2012 on Food and Law Number 17 of 2023 on Health. These regulations emphasize state obligations in guaranteeing basic nutritional rights for citizens (Umar, 2025).

Primary MBG beneficiaries include students from early childhood through senior high school, toddlers, pregnant women, and nursing mothers, targeting initially 82.9 million individuals. By March 2025, the program reached 2 million beneficiaries across 38 provinces through 722 Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units (SPPG), with plans for 32,000 SPPGs by end-2025. Distribution focuses on 3T regions (frontier, outermost, disadvantaged) to reduce nutritional access disparities (Wibawana, 2025).

The 2025 MBG budget allocated IDR 51.53 trillion for 17 million beneficiaries, divided into three phases: IDR 3.48 trillion for January-March targeting 2.95 million students and 510,000 mothers/toddlers. Realization through May 2025 reached IDR 1.91 trillion, targeting 3.9 million beneficiaries with local food utilization. In the 2026 State Budget, the program is projected to generate economic multiplier effects through mobilizing micro-enterprises and farmers (Supriyanto, 2026).

MBG's primary objective is reducing stunting rates, which reached 21.5% in 2023 according to the Indonesian Health Survey (SKI). Stunting prevalence decreased to 19.8% in 2024, approaching the

18.8% target for 2025, though challenges persist in provinces like West Java and Central Java (Perkim ID, 2025). The program also aims to enhance long-term human resource productivity by reducing malnutrition and recurrent infections (Vice Presidential Secretariat, 2025).

Table 1. MBG Program Implementation Progress and Budget Allocation (2025-2026)

Indicator	Target 2025	Achievement (March 2025)	Target 2029
Total Recipients	17 Millions	2 Millions	82,9 Millions
Budget Allocated	IDR 51,53 T	IDR 1,91 T	IDR 335 T (Annual)
SPPG Units	722	722	32.000
Provincial Coverage	38 Provinces	38 Provinces	All Regions
Stunting Rate	18,8% (Target)	19,8%	<14%
Local Food Sourcing	70%	70%	80%
Student Attendance	10-15%	Data pending	25%
Improvement	Improvement	-	Improvement

Note: Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi (SPPG) - (Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units)

Source: Ministry of Finance RI (2025); Supriyanto (2026); Perkim ID (2025); Wibawana (2025)

MBG implementation involves distribution through SPPGs processing local foods, supported by the military for remote areas like Papua. By June 2025, the program operated in regions including South Bengkulu, with indicators such as timeliness and nutrition literacy evaluated periodically. Collaboration among government, micro-enterprises, and communities ensures supply chain sustainability (Media Dayak, 2025).

Future MBG prospects appear promising with expansion to 100% coverage by 2029, mirroring successful programs in Brazil, India, and Japan that reduced malnutrition while supporting local economies (Setiaji, 2025). In 2026, the State Budget will strengthen MBG as human resource investment, with regulatory harmonization and community engagement ensuring sustainability. The program potentially generates a golden generation if challenges are proactively addressed.

Implementation Challenges of the MBG Program on Basic Education Quality

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program in Indonesia, launched in January 2025, aims to improve nutritional status among basic education students to enhance learning concentration and reduce stunting. However, implementation raises serious challenges to basic education quality, measured through student attendance, academic achievement, and effective learning environments.

Table 2. Critical Implementation Challenges of MBG Program on Basic Education Quality

No.	Challenge Category	Impact on Education Quality	Severity Level (High/Medium/Low)
1.	Weak Regulatory Framework	Role confusing among institutions, learning time reduction, regional disparities	High
2.	Logistical Distribution Problems	Delayed meal delivery, hunger, reduced concentration, disrupted schedules	High
3.	Food Poisoning Incidents Critical	High absenteeism, student trauma, 11.660 cases (2023)	Critical
4.	Suboptimal Nutritional Quality Standards	Stagnant stunting rates, cognitive impairment	High
5.	Administrative Burden on Teachers	Reduced teaching time, teacher burnout	Medium
6.	Budget Misallocation Critical	Facilities neglect, 45% of education budget	Critical
7.	Poor Cross-Sectoral Coordination	Report duplication, delayed evaluation	High
8.	Inadequate Infrastructure	Unhygienic storage, food safety risks	High

9.	Low HR Capacity & Budget Misuse Risk	Unsafe menus, fund irregularities	High
10.	Parental Resistance & Weak Participation	Reduced coverage, program rejection	Medium

Source: Synthesized from multiple sources (The Indonesian Institute, 2025; KPAI, 2025; Zulaika et al., 2025; Tempo, 2025)

This analysis integrates empirical findings through January 2026, highlighting how logistical, food safety, and administrative failures disrupt core learning processes (Zulaika et al., 2025).

1. Weak Regulatory Framework

The absence of comprehensive legal foundations for MBG—lacking either legislation or presidential regulation through late 2025—creates ambiguity regarding inter-institutional roles among the National Nutrition Agency, Ministry of Education and Culture, and regional governments (The Indonesian Institute, 2025). Researcher observations at several elementary schools reveal this produces confusion in menu distribution, reducing children's learning time due to immature distribution system adjustments. Academic analyses demonstrate weak regulations perpetuate educational disparities, particularly in basic education across regions.

2. Logistical Distribution Challenges

Delayed delivery of free nutritious meals disrupts student break schedules and potentially causes hunger or unhealthy snack consumption. Geographic barriers in rural areas exacerbate distribution, where overloaded Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units (SPPG) frequently fail to reach schools timely. Consequently, student learning concentration declines, contradicting academic achievement improvement targets (Ralali, 2025). At elementary school age, learning concentration should constitute educational priority for optimal cognitive development support.

3. Food Poisoning Incidents and Food Safety

Mass poisoning cases continue occurring across Indonesian schools. Peak food poisoning incidents occurred in October 2023, with 119 events across 25 provinces involving 11,660 cases. These cases typically resulted from bacterial contamination including *Escherichia coli* and *Staphylococcus aureus*, triggered by low hygiene and sanitation standards at SPPG units (PANRB RI, 2025). This causes high absenteeism and student trauma. The Child Protection Commission documented delayed distribution forcing food disposal, while student allergies remain unaccommodated. In basic education contexts, such outcomes transform learning days into medical costs, reducing teaching effectiveness and derailing learning processes.

4. Suboptimal Nutritional Quality Standards

MBG menus frequently fail meeting national nutritional standards due to bland composition dominated by ultra-processed ingredients, compounded by inter-regional variations from unstandardized local procurement (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024). This inconsistency significantly hinders stunting reduction target achievement, where the 2023 Riskesdas survey shows elementary school-age stunting prevalence remains stagnant despite MBG implementation (Ministry of Health RI, 2023). Consequently, the program fails delivering optimal impact on student nutritional status in rural and food-insecure regions.

The Centre for Indonesian Policy Studies (CIPS) highlights malnutrition risks actually increase in vulnerable areas, disrupting basic education students' cognitive development through micronutrient deficiencies including iron and iodine (Tempo, 2025). Longitudinal research by Walker et al. (2007) in *The Lancet* and local studies by the National Research and Innovation Agency demonstrate poor nutrition significantly impedes basic literacy and numeracy, particularly among elementary-age children. This contradicts MBG objectives of enhancing learning achievement through improved daily nutritional intake.

5. Administrative Burden on Teachers

Elementary-level teachers bear burdens of MBG program reporting and supplementary nutrition instruction, reducing time allocation for core curriculum subjects. This multitasking burden decreases overall teaching quality (Agustini, 2025), especially at elementary schools with high teacher-student ratios where time efficiency becomes crucial. Short-term impacts include stagnant student achievement, while long-term consequences encompass teacher burnout potentially causing high

turnover. OECD (2023) studies demonstrate extra administrative burdens negatively correlate with student learning outcomes.

6. Educational Budget Misallocation

The IDR 335 trillion MBG budget allocation in 2026 consumes 45% of total national education budget, thereby cutting Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) funds and teacher certification allowances, leaving elementary school facilities in poor condition (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025). Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) criticism highlights this nutritional priority sacrifices learning infrastructure, compounded by low budget absorption indicating systemic inefficiency (Zulaika et al., 2025). Basic education quality faces threats from damaged classrooms and neglected teaching aids, correlating with declining national child literacy scores.

7. Poor Cross-Sectoral Coordination

Weak synchronization among the National Nutrition Agency, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, and regional governments causes reporting duplication and MBG menu standard variations, disrupting overall school operations, particularly elementary schools (SD). In Jakarta, the Child Protection Commission found distribution hampered by inadequate coordination between schools and SPPGs (KPAI Public Relations, 2025). Consequently, program impact evaluation on educational outcomes remains impeded while exacerbating regional inequalities in nutrition and learning access.

8. Inadequate Educational Institution Infrastructure

Media reports indicate rural remote schools experience shortages or complete absence of specialized kitchen facilities and food refrigeration (Dziharul Islam Nusantara, 2026). This condition triggers unhygienic food storage practices, frequently causing student food poisoning cases. Relatively low infrastructure adaptation costs actually generate constant learning environment disruptions. Further analysis reveals poor infrastructure transforms MBG from basic education asset into potential liability.

9. Low Human Resource Capacity and Budget Misuse Risks

SPPG personnel and teachers experience training deficiencies regarding nutritional standards and food distribution, producing varied yet nutritionally unsafe menus (The Indonesian Institute, 2025). Teachers performing multitasking fail maximizing nutritional benefits for enhancing student concentration. Without adequate training, MBG management fails becoming a catalyst for elementary student learning achievement.

Potential procurement fund deviation remains high without independent audits, as criticized by ICW regarding educational fund diversion. Lack of real-time reporting impedes transparency, ultimately eroding parental trust toward schools (Antikorupsi.org, 2024). Consequently, fund losses significantly reduce basic learning quality.

10. Parental Resistance and Weak Public Participation

Erosion of parental trust in the MBG program has triggered incidents where they reject program meals for home-prepared provisions, significantly reducing school nutrition coverage. This phenomenon not only decreases program effectiveness but also hampers MBG integration with educational curriculum due to inadequate stakeholder socialization (Kamal, 2025). More deeply, this rejection reflects psychological dynamics of parental nutritional gatekeeping, where risk perception (such as food poisoning) exceeds promised benefits, as documented in case studies of similar program implementations in Indonesia.

Further analysis reveals inadequate socialization hampers nutrition program synergy with learning processes, causing educational ecosystem fragmentation where MBG fails contributing to holistic outcomes like student concentration and achievement. Without inclusive communication campaigns, involving parents, teachers, and communities, the program remains vulnerable to structural resistance, ultimately weakening public policy legitimacy and exacerbating nutritional access inequalities at elementary school levels. Empirical findings from credible media reports show thousands of poisoning cases have deepened this crisis, emphasizing urgent need for evidence-based communication reform to restore trust (TheStance, 2025).

Opportunities and Solutions for MBG Program Implementation on Basic Education Quality

Table 3. MBG Program Opportunities and Strategic Solutions for Basic Education Quality Enhancement

Opportunity Domain	Potential Impact	Strategic Solution
Nutritional Status Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced stunting - Enhanced immunity - Lower absenteeism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen SPPG infrastructure - GPS-based monitoring
Academic Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25% attendance increase - Improved concentration - Higher test scores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal/external supervision - Teacher training
Local Economic Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MSME empowerment - 70% local sourcing - Job creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community engagement - Tax incentives - Posyandu collaboration
Curriculum Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health literacy - Behavioral change - Long-term impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Module integration - Evidence-based teaching - Cross-ministry synergy
Social Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced dropout rates - Equitable access - Gender Equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal certainty - APBN/APBD sustainability - National standards

Source: Synthesized from Merlinda & Yusuf (2025); Rahmah et al. (2025); Jahar (2025); Damanik (2025); Kemdikbud (2025).

1. Implementation Opportunities of the MBG Program on Basic Education Quality

Improving Nutrition and Health of School Community

MBG has potential to reduce stunting prevalence among students, particularly at basic education age, as nutritious meals enhance physical and cognitive development of children aged 6-12 years. Preliminary studies demonstrate improved nutritional status among initial beneficiaries, supporting immune system resilience and reducing illness-related absenteeism (Merlinda & Yusuf, 2025). This creates optimal learning environments in elementary schools, where many students previously experienced hunger during class hours.

Increasing Attendance and Strengthening Academic Achievement

Free nutrition programs demonstrably increase student attendance rates by up to 25%, as children from impoverished families are no longer burdened by meal costs, resulting in more consistent school attendance. Additionally, learning concentration improves due to adequate protein and vitamin intake, which empirically enhances academic achievement in foundational subjects such as Mathematics and Indonesian Language (Rahmah et al., 2025). The program also significantly reduces dropout rates in rural areas while strengthening basic education inclusion.

Expanding Local Economic Distribution and Equalizing Educational Access

MBG empowers local micro-enterprises as food suppliers, thereby creating employment and food security that supports community economies in rural areas where students' parents reside. Approximately 70% of food ingredients are sourced from local farmers, strengthening sustainable supply chains while alleviating economic burdens on parents from lower income quartiles. Social inclusion also increases through prioritization of vulnerable families, ensuring equitable educational access.

Providing Opportunities for Integrated Curriculum with Other Ministries

Various modules from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) enable effective integration of nutrition education into elementary school (SD) curricula, thereby forming healthy living behaviors in children from early ages. These modules are designed to support evidence-based teaching, where teachers can utilize MBG as contextual practical learning tools, thus enhancing basic education relevance to students' daily lives (Kemdikbud, 2025).

Long-term impacts of this approach include formation of an excellent generation with high health literacy, ultimately contributing to sustainable human resource quality improvement. Such integration not

only strengthens nutritional knowledge foundations but also promotes preventive behavioral changes toward future public health problems.

2. Implementation Solutions for the MBG Program on Basic Education Quality

Infrastructure Development and Human Resource Management Strengthening

Construction of School Water and Food Supply Service Units (SPPG) must become an urgent priority, with special emphasis on elementary school (SD) kitchen facilities. Additional priorities include rural schools, particularly in 3T regions (Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost). Public-private partnerships require careful attention and proper implementation to strengthen cold supply chains and GPS-based monitoring technology applications, ensuring distribution efficiency and service quality.

Initial investment must be strategically optimized for basic facility construction, including storage infrastructure and supporting equipment. This approach not only enhances fund management accountability but also supports program sustainability through technology integration and cross-sectoral collaboration.

Strengthening Internal and External Supervision

Internal supervisors from the Health Office and relevant ministries must conduct continuous daily inspections of Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program implementation. Additionally, external supervisor involvement from educational units (teachers and students), parents, and general public is necessary to ensure meal nutritional quality during elementary school learning processes. Teacher training on nutritional standards through Ministry of Education RI modules can enhance program effectiveness. Digital application utilization for real-time monitoring also ensures overall process transparency and accountability.

Strengthening Local Community Engagement

Engagement of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and village Integrated Service Posts (Posyandu) represents a crucial strategy for strengthening local production supply chains in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program, particularly for elementary school (SD) suppliers. Tax incentives for local MSMEs not only stimulate community-based economic growth but also ensure food ingredient freshness and safety through direct Posyandu supervision focusing on community nutritional aspects (Jahar, 2025). This approach reduces import dependency, suppresses logistical costs, and supports regional food security, as evidenced in similar models in government social assistance programs that successfully increased rural economic inclusion based on Central Statistics Agency (BPS) data.

Community education campaigns regarding MBG through Islamic boarding schools and Islamic elementary schools effectively address cultural resistance toward nutritious menus perceived as foreign, by integrating local values and religious values such as blending modern nutrition with Islamic culinary traditions. Meanwhile, quarterly evaluations by the National Nutrition Agency enable adaptive menu adjustments based on regional preferences, student anthropometric data, and local ingredient availability, thereby increasing program acceptance in areas with high ethnic diversity (Damanik, 2025). This strategy not only minimizes waste but also builds sustainable community support, ultimately contributing to national stunting target achievement through inclusive nutrition education.

Legal Certainty for Long-Term MBG Sustainability

Integration of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program into National Basic Education Standards becomes a crucial strategy to guarantee program sustainability post-2029 through sustainable State Budget (APBN) and Regional Budget (APBD) support. This gradual approach, beginning from basic education through higher education levels, is supported by strong empirical evidence of positive impacts on student academic achievement, as proven in longitudinal studies related to school nutritional interventions.

Elementary school leadership as program implementation centers ensures total inclusion for all students, including vulnerable groups. This model not only strengthens local governance but also increases overall program effectiveness through direct supervision and contextual adaptation.

CONCLUSION

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program represents a transformative intervention addressing the critical intersection of nutritional security and educational quality in Indonesia. While implementation faces substantial challenges including regulatory gaps, logistical inefficiencies, food safety concerns, suboptimal nutritional standards, administrative burdens, budget misallocation, weak inter-sectoral coordination, infrastructure deficits, limited human resource capacity, and community resistance, the program simultaneously presents significant opportunities for improving student nutritional status, attendance rates, academic achievement, local economic empowerment through MSME engagement, and nutrition curriculum integration. Program success critically depends on establishing comprehensive regulatory frameworks through presidential regulation, implementing GPS-enabled food management systems, instituting rigorous multi-stakeholder monitoring mechanisms, developing inclusive community engagement strategies, and achieving systematic integration of nutrition education into elementary school curricula.

The MBG program holds substantial potential to transform Indonesia's basic education landscape by addressing foundational nutritional deficits that constrain cognitive development and learning capacity. However, realizing this potential requires sustained political commitment, adaptive policy implementation responsive to regional contexts, strengthened cross-sectoral coordination among government agencies, strategic infrastructure investment prioritizing 3T regions, capacity building for human resources at SPPG units and schools, public-private partnerships for supply chain sustainability, and evidence-based communication campaigns to restore public trust. Future research should employ longitudinal mixed-methods designs with international comparative frameworks to evaluate long-term program effectiveness on child well-being and gender equity outcomes across geographic regions, socioeconomic strata, and demographic categories, while conducting cost-effectiveness analyses to inform optimal resource allocation for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets in Indonesian basic education.

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