

## ARTICLE

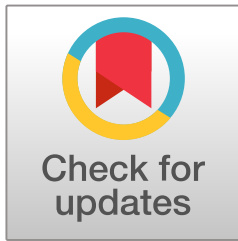
# Free Nutritious Meal Policy in Indonesia under President Prabowo

A Policy, Fiscal, and Political Analysis Grounded in International Evidence

Markus Hadinata ✉

Krida Wacana Christian University, Jakarta, Indonesia

✉ [markus.hadinata@gmail.com](mailto:markus.hadinata@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** The Free Nutritious Meal (*Makan Bergizi Gratis* [MBG]) program is a strategic government policy introduced under President Prabowo Subianto of Indonesia, aimed at improving children's nutritional status, reducing stunting, and strengthening human resource quality. Although the benefits of school feeding programs are well established globally, comprehensive studies on the effectiveness of the MBG program within Indonesia's regulatory and institutional capacity context remain limited. This article analyzes the MBG program using an evidence-based public policy approach and a political economy lens, drawing on a review of Scopus-indexed international journal articles, academic books, and the national regulatory framework. The analysis indicates that school feeding programs have positive effects on children's nutritional status, school attendance, and learning outcomes; however, their effectiveness is strongly influenced by governance quality, food safety, cross-sectoral coordination, and fiscal sustainability. In light of these findings, this article argues that the MBG program holds considerable potential as a transformational policy. Nonetheless, without sound fiscal design, strengthened institutional capacity, and robust public accountability mechanisms, the policy risks becoming a costly and unsustainable populist intervention.

**Keywords:** Free Nutritious Meal Program; Makan Bergizi Gratis; MBG; School Feeding; Child Nutrition; Stunting; Public Policy; Political Economy; Governance; Indonesia.

## 1. Introduction

Child malnutrition remains a global challenge with direct consequences for health, education, and long-term productivity (Black et al., 2013; Victora et al., 2021). Numerous studies indicate that nutritional deficiency during school-age years is associated with reduced cognitive capacity, higher school dropout rates, and diminished economic potential in adulthood (Black et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2021). From a public policy perspective, this issue extends beyond health to encompass the quality of human development and the effectiveness of social policies pursued by the state (Syauqan & Muzayanah, 2024; Taufiqurokhman, 2023).

School feeding—the provision of nutritious meals in school settings—has long been deployed as a public policy instrument in many developing and developed countries (Alderman & Bundy, 2012). Meta-analyses indicate that school meal programs can improve micronutrient intake, school attendance, and learning outcomes, particularly among lower socioeconomic groups (Kristjansson et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021). School-based approaches also play a role in shaping healthy behaviors and creating environments that support children's growth and development (Istiqomah et al., 2025).

Indonesia, which continues to grapple with stunting and inter-regional nutritional disparities (Beal et al., 2018), launched the Free Nutritious Meal (*Makan Bergizi Gratis* [MBG]) program as a flagship national policy at the outset of President Prabowo's administration. These challenges are compounded by structural factors including institutional capacity, cross-sectoral coordination, and variation in policy implementation at the regional level (Duadji et al., 2018; Sutanto & Putra, 2021). Indonesian public policy studies also indicate that the success of social programs is strongly influenced by governance quality and bureaucratic readiness in managing cross-sectoral policies (Hamudy, 2015; Puspitasari & Arifa, 2023).

This article is not intended as a performance evaluation of the policy (ex-post evaluation) but rather as an ex-ante policy analysis aimed at examining the potential benefits, risks, and implementation challenges of the MBG program based on international empirical evidence and a public policy theoretical framework. Using this approach, the analysis focuses on the fiscal, governance, and political economy implications of the policy prior to its full implementation and the generation of measurable outcomes. This approach aligns with the Indonesian public policy literature, which emphasizes the importance of implementation design and institutional capacity in determining the success of social policies (Sutanto & Putra, 2021).

Although the global literature has addressed the effectiveness of school feeding programs, most research is either experimental or ex-post in nature, with a limited focus on nutrition, education, or health outcomes in isolation. No ex-ante study has yet comprehensively analyzed the potential implementation of the MBG program in Indonesia, particularly one that integrates the dimensions of school feeding, fiscal implications, and political economy. In the domestic context, studies also indicate that cross-sectoral policy integration and community-based approaches remain primary challenges in the implementation of social policies in Indonesia (Syauqan & Muzayanah, 2024; Taufiqurokhman, 2023).

This article aims to fill that gap by providing an integrative analysis grounded in international evidence and relevant to the national policy context. Its principal contribution lies in the development of an integrative analytical framework that synthesizes global empirical evidence on school feeding with fiscal and political economy analysis of the MBG program in the context of post-transition Indonesia. In

this way, the article moves beyond a literature review to produce a new conceptual framework that can be used to assess the potential benefits, risks, and implementation challenges of the MBG program prior to its execution.

This framework integrates the nutritional, educational, fiscal, and governance dimensions of the policy and provides a policy typology for the MBG program based on design characteristics, institutional capacity, and fiscal sustainability. Theoretically, this article contributes by synthesizing diverse theories of public policy, political economy, and nutritional intervention analysis into a single integrative framework applicable to public policy studies in Indonesia and other developing countries, particularly in the context of strengthening human development and child-focused policies (Duadji et al., 2018; Istiqomah et al., 2025).

## 2. Methods

This article employs a semi-systematic literature review to analyze school feeding policies and nutrition interventions based on Scopus-indexed international publications. An initial search using the keywords *school feeding and nutrition policy* yielded 1,015 documents (2006–2026). Restricting the publication range to 2016–2026 reduced the corpus to 558 articles. Further filtering by subject area (social sciences, multidisciplinary, economics, and economics and finance) produced 109 articles, and limiting the document type to articles yielded 97. Language restriction to English produced 85 articles, and the application of an open-access filter resulted in a final set of 54 articles for in-depth analysis.

The selection process followed a stepwise procedure modeled on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) workflow, although it does not constitute a full systematic review. The initial stage involved screening titles and abstracts to verify thematic relevance, followed by full-text review. Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) articles addressing school feeding interventions or nutrition policy; (2) articles presenting empirical findings related to nutritional, educational, or human development outcomes; and (3) articles relevant to national or global policy contexts. Exclusion criteria included non-scholarly publications, duplicate articles, and studies lacking clear empirical analysis.

To minimize selection bias, several strategies were employed: restricting the search to Scopus-indexed journals, using consistent search terms, and applying transparent inclusion and exclusion criteria. In addition, findings were compared across studies to avoid over-reliance on any single source or context.

Beyond international journals, this article also draws on academic books and Indonesian national regulations to enrich the contextual analysis. Synthesized findings are presented in a summary table that includes information on study location, method, sample, policy focus, and key findings. This approach is intended to enhance transparency, replicability, and analytical rigor relative to traditional narrative reviews.

Overall, the analyzed literature indicates that school feeding programs have positive effects on children's nutritional status, including improvements in height, weight, hemoglobin levels, and dietary diversity. These programs also contribute to improved school attendance, noncognitive skills, and academic achievement, although the magnitude of effects varies across contexts. Economic and behavioral impacts are also evident, including healthcare cost savings, increased meal frequency, and improved hygiene practices. However, program effectiveness depends heavily on implementation quality, policy design, and intervention duration, necessitating integrated and sustained implementation strategies.

To clarify these literature findings, [Table 1](#) presents a summary of key studies on school feeding programs covering diverse national contexts, methodological approaches, and empirical results. The table indicates that, despite variation in program design and implementation, most studies find positive effects on nutritional status, educational participation, and economic well-being.

**Table 1.** Summary of Key Studies on School Feeding Programs

No.	Author(s) & Year	Study Location	Sample/Method	Policy Focus	Key Findings
1	<a href="#">Bundy et al. (2020)</a>	Global	Policy review	Global school feeding	Program improved nutrition, education, and local economies
2	<a href="#">Kristjansson et al. (2015)</a>	Global	Meta-analysis	Food supplementation	Improved micronutrient intake and health status
3	<a href="#">Wang et al. (2021)</a>	Global	Meta-analysis	Educational impact	Improved attendance and learning outcomes
4	<a href="#">Alderman et al. (2025)</a>	Developing countries	Program evaluation	Food for Education	Improved school participation
5	<a href="#">Afridi (2010)</a>	India	Empirical study	Midday Meal Scheme	Significant improvement in children's nutritional status
6	<a href="#">Chakraborty and Jayaraman (2019)</a>	India	Quasi-experimental	School feeding	Improved learning outcomes
7	<a href="#">Fang and Zhu (2022)</a>	China	Longitudinal study	School meal reform	Long-term impact on education
8	<a href="#">Gelli et al. (2016)</a>	Ghana	Policy evaluation	Home-grown school feeding	Economic impact on local farmers
9	<a href="#">Aurino et al. (2019)</a>	Mali	Quasi-experimental	School feeding vs. food aid	School feeding more effective for education
10	<a href="#">Spill et al. (2024)</a>	Global (predominantly developed countries, particularly the US and Europe)	Systematic review	Universal Free School Meals	Program improved student meal participation and diet quality, and positively affected school attendance; however, findings on academic outcomes remain mixed, and efficiency concerns such as food waste and fiscal implications were noted
11	<a href="#">Powell et al. (1998)</a>	Jamaica	Randomized trial	Nutrition & education	Improved cognitive outcomes in children
12	<a href="#">Gallegos et al. (2025)</a>	Global	Review	Childhood obesity	School meals support prevention of childhood obesity

[Table 1](#) summarizes key studies on school feeding programs spanning diverse national contexts and methodological approaches—ranging from meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and randomized trials to quasi-experimental and longitudinal studies. Overall, the majority of studies demonstrate a consistent finding: school meal programs generate positive effects on children's nutritional status, particularly through improvements in micronutrient intake, health outcomes, and diet quality.

Educational impacts are also notable, particularly in the form of improved school attendance and, in several cases, improved learning outcomes and cognitive development. Studies conducted in India, China, and Jamaica indicate that nutrition interventions integrated with educational systems can produce long-term effects on learning capacity. Similarly, approaches such as home-grown school feeding in Ghana demonstrate that these programs benefit not only children directly but also generate broader economic effects, including support for local farmers.

Nevertheless, the table also indicates that program effectiveness is not uniform. More recent studies, such as the systematic review by [Spill et al. \(2024\)](#), show that, although meal participation and diet quality improved, impacts on academic

achievement remain variable, and challenges related to program efficiency—such as food waste and fiscal implications—are evident.

Taken together, the table affirms that school feeding is a multidimensional intervention contributing to nutritional, educational, and economic outcomes; however, its success depends critically on policy design, implementation quality, and the institutional context of each country.

## 2.1. Background

Structurally, Indonesia's nutritional challenges extend beyond poverty to encompass access to nutritious food, nutrition education, and cross-sectoral policy governance (Oddo et al., 2019; Rachmi et al., 2017). Although various nutrition programs have been launched previously, their outcomes have remained partial and insufficiently integrated at the systemic level.

International experience shows that large-scale free meal programs frequently encounter challenges related to infrastructure unpreparedness, weak food safety oversight, and the risk of budget waste in the absence of robust monitoring systems (Alderman & Bundy, 2012; Drake et al., 2016). A critical analysis of the MBG program is therefore essential to ensure that the policy moves beyond populism toward effectiveness and sustainability.

## 2.2. Research Objectives

This article aims to:

- Analyze the MBG program in Indonesia from an evidence-based public policy perspective.
- Compare the MBG program with empirical findings from Scopus-indexed international studies on school feeding.
- Identify the principal implementation challenges of the MBG program in Indonesia.
- Formulate policy recommendations grounded in the scholarly literature and international best practices.

## 2.3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the MBG program in this article is constructed through a synthesis of empirical findings from the international literature and the Indonesian policy context, with the aim of producing an integrative theoretical framework. Public policy is not merely a technocratic process; it is also the product of interactions among political interests, institutional capacity, and governance dynamics. Accordingly, the effectiveness of the MBG program is substantially determined by the state's capacity to manage cross-sectoral coordination and the complexity of policy implementation.

The literature indicates that school meal programs serve a dual function as nutrition interventions and investments in human capital. Interventions during school-age years have been shown to correlate with improved cognitive capacity, educational participation, and long-term economic productivity. However, these benefits are not automatic; their realization depends on the presence of enabling environments, including sanitation, health services, and education quality (Bundy et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). In the Indonesian context, these findings align with public policy studies emphasizing that improvements in child quality cannot be

separated from cross-sectoral approaches and policy integration (Syauqan & Muzayanah, 2024; Taufiqurokhman, 2023).

Furthermore, nutrition policy constitutes a political arena involving multiple actors with divergent interests. The political economy literature affirms that program success is strongly influenced by governance structures, power relations, and accountability mechanisms. Programs such as the MBG program carry a strong redistributive character and high electoral legitimacy, yet risk becoming ineffective if implementation is not supported by adequate institutional capacity. Studies published in *Jurnal Bina Praja* similarly indicate that the success of social policies depends heavily on government organizational capacity and the quality of local-level implementation (Sutanto & Putra, 2021).

From a development perspective, the home-grown school feeding approach introduces an additional dimension by linking nutrition interventions to local economic systems. This integration not only improves the quality of children's food consumption but also generates economic multiplier effects through the empowerment of local farmers and the strengthening of food security (Gelli et al., 2016). A similar approach is relevant to findings on community-based policy in Indonesia, which emphasize the importance of local engagement in the success of development programs (Istiqomah et al., 2025).

Based on this synthesis, the MBG program can be understood as a multidimensional policy situated at the intersection of four core domains: human capital investment, fiscal redistribution, state governance, and political contestation. Without the integration of all four dimensions, the policy risks becoming a high-cost intervention with limited impact.

To clarify the relationships among these dimensions, this article proposes an integrative policy model of the MBG program that depicts the chain of linkages from program inputs to final outcomes—from the MBG program to fiscal design, then to political dynamics, followed by institutional governance, and ultimately to outcomes. Within this framework, fiscal design constitutes the foundational element that determines the extent to which the program can be operated sustainably and at an appropriate scale, while political dynamics shape policy direction through the influence of electoral legitimacy, actor interests, and priorities that emerge within the space of power. Institutional governance, in turn, serves as the primary determinant during the implementation phase, as the quality of coordination, bureaucratic capacity, and accountability and transparency will significantly affect the program's on-the-ground effectiveness. The entire process culminates in outcomes encompassing improvements in children's nutritional status, increased educational participation, and broader socioeconomic impacts. This model thus affirms that the success of the MBG program is determined not by program design alone, but by the dynamic interaction among fiscal, political, and state capacity dimensions in managing the policy effectively and accountably.

Figure 1 presents an integrative policy model of the MBG program arranged in a vertical flow from initial inputs to final outcomes, illustrating the policy as a layered and interconnected process. The flow begins with the MBG program as an input—a state intervention in the form of providing nutritious meals to children free of charge. From this starting point, attention is directed to fiscal design, which underscores the importance of budget allocation, efficient fund utilization, and fiscal sustainability as the primary foundation for the program to operate consistently without placing an undue burden on state finances over the long term.

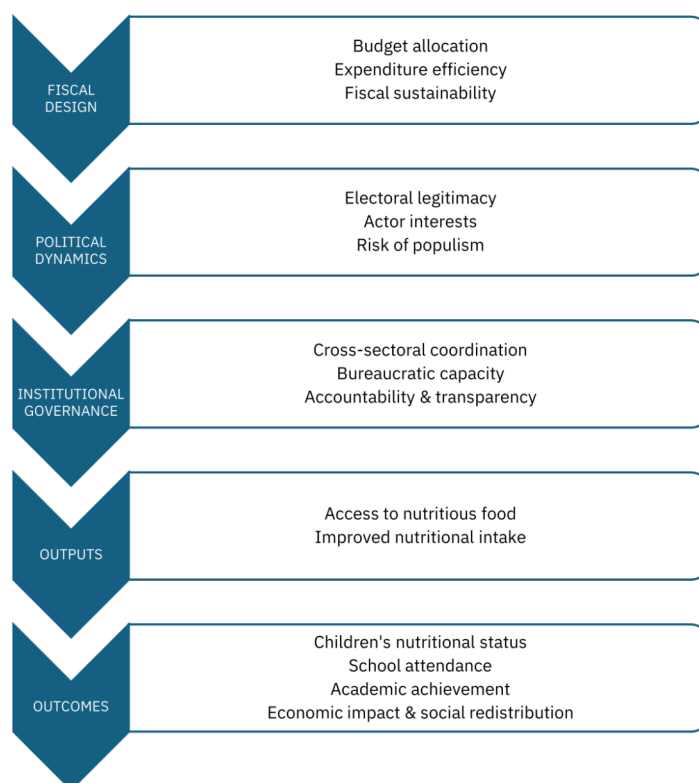


Figure 1. Integrative Policy Model of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program

Fiscal design then interacts with political dynamics, reflecting the fact that public policy never operates in a neutral space. Within this domain lie the electoral legitimacy the policy seeks to achieve, the varying interests of different actors, and the potential emergence of populist tendencies—all of which mean that the direction and priorities of the policy may be subject to political considerations that can either accelerate or undermine effective implementation.

From political dynamics, the flow continues to institutional governance, which serves as the primary determinant of implementation success at the ground level. At this stage, bureaucratic capacity, cross-sectoral coordination, and accountability and transparency become the key factors determining whether the policy can be executed effectively and equitably. Without strong governance, even a well-designed policy risks distortion in practice.

These processes generate direct and measurable outputs—namely, improved access to nutritious food and enhanced nutritional intake among children. These outputs subsequently develop into broader outcomes with medium- to long-term implications, including improvements in children's nutritional status, school attendance, academic achievement, and wider economic and social redistribution effects. Figure 1 thus affirms that the success of the MBG program is determined not by a single factor, but by a chain of interconnected processes—spanning fiscal design, political dynamics, and the quality of institutional governance—which together shape its tangible impact on human resource development.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Fiscal Analysis of the MBG Program

##### 3.1.1. Fiscal Burden and Budget Priorities

From a fiscal standpoint, the MBG program is one of the most resource-intensive social policies in Indonesian history. Within the framework of public expenditure analysis, this spending may be classified as productive social expenditure; however, it must be assessed against the principle of fiscal sustainability (Stiglitz & Rosengard, 2015; Whalley et al., 1975).

To provide a more concrete picture, illustrative estimates can be derived from the international literature. Global studies on school feeding programs indicate that the average cost per student in developing countries ranges from \$40 to \$70 per year, depending on menu quality and program scale (Bundy et al., 2020; Gelli et al., 2016). Applying a conservative assumption of \$50 per student per year—converted to Indonesian rupiah (approximately IDR 800,000 per student per year) and multiplied by an estimated 50 million students across Indonesia (from early childhood to senior secondary level)—the total annual budget requirement could reach approximately IDR 400 trillion.

Although this figure is illustrative, it suggests that the MBG program has the potential to absorb a significant share of the State Budget (*Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara* [APBN]). By comparison, the national education budget has historically stood at approximately 20% of the APBN, while the health budget is around 5%. Full implementation of the MBG program could therefore make it one of the largest expenditure components of the state, necessitating careful budget prioritization.

In this context, the risk of fiscal crowding out becomes relevant—that is, the possibility that MBG budget allocations reduce funding for other sectors such as primary healthcare, sanitation, and education quality improvement, all of which are complementary factors for the success of nutrition interventions. Without careful fiscal planning and transparent cost–benefit evaluation, the MBG program risks becoming a high-cost policy that is suboptimal in generating development impact.

The public economics literature affirms that large-scale social spending must meet three primary criteria: (1) allocative efficiency, (2) outcome effectiveness, and (3) distributive equity (Stiglitz & Rosengard, 2015). Without a transparent cost–benefit evaluation mechanism, the MBG program risks becoming a high-cost, low-impact policy, particularly if budget leakages, logistical waste, or duplication with existing nutrition programs occur. Experience from developing countries shows that poorly managed school feeding programs can absorb large budgets without producing significant improvements in nutritional status (Alderman & Bundy, 2012).

##### 3.1.2. Crowding-Out Risks and Fiscal Dependency

A critical fiscal analysis must also address the risk of crowding out, whereby MBG expenditure reduces fiscal space for other important sectors such as primary healthcare, sanitation, and quality education (Todaro & Smith, 2020). Yet the nutrition literature emphasizes that improvements in children's nutritional status cannot be separated from environmental factors such as clean water and sanitation (Black et al., 2013).

Furthermore, long-term dependence on APBN financing without diversification of funding sources may undermine program sustainability, particularly during periods of economic slowdown or fiscal crisis.

## 3.2. Political Economy Analysis of the MBG Program

### 3.2.1. The MBG Program as a Populist Policy

From a political economy perspective, the MBG program can be interpreted as a form of redistributive populism—that is, a policy that visibly and directly benefits broad segments of the population (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Free meal programs carry high political appeal because their benefits are easily understood and immediately experienced by the public.

However, the policy literature cautions that populist policies often prioritize symbolic and electoral dimensions over long-term effectiveness (Piketty, 2021). The attendant risk is a tendency to accelerate implementation for the sake of political legitimacy, without adequate institutional readiness.

### 3.2.2. Power Relations and Policy Actors

The MBG program involves a large number of actors: central government, local governments, private-sector food suppliers, and communities. Within the policy network framework (Howlett et al., 2009), imbalances in power relations among actors can generate conflicts of interest—for example, in the procurement of food ingredients and catering services.

Without transparent governance, the MBG program risks becoming an arena for rent-seeking behavior, as is frequently observed in large-scale public procurement policies in developing countries (Johnston, 2021).

### 3.2.3. Decentralization and Political Implementation Challenges

As a decentralized state, Indonesia faces distinctive political challenges in policy implementation. The decentralization literature shows that national policies often undergo distortion at the local level due to variations in bureaucratic capacity and local political interests (Smoke, 2015). This can produce disparities in the quality of MBG program implementation across regions, contradicting the principle of social equity.

## 3.3. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Integrating fiscal and political analysis, the MBG program should not be understood merely as a technocratic program but rather as a strategic policy arena that requires:

- political legitimacy accompanied by public accountability,
- long-term fiscal design, and
- strengthened state capacity.

As Wright and Evans (1996) affirm, the success of developmental policies is substantially determined by the state's institutional capacity to manage political and economic interests in a balanced manner.

## 3.4. Analysis of Policy Challenges

### 3.4.1. Nutritional Effectiveness and Educational Impact

The Scopus-indexed literature consistently demonstrates that school meal programs can improve children's nutritional status, particularly in terms of protein and micronutrient intake (Jomaa et al., 2011; Kristjansson et al., 2015). Indirect effects are evident in improved learning concentration and school attendance (Adelman et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2021).

However, this effectiveness depends critically on menu quality, caloric adequacy, and alignment with local dietary needs (Neumann et al., 2007). Without strict nutritional standards and professional oversight, the program risks becoming little more than food distribution without meaningful health impact.

#### 3.4.2. Governance and Cross-Sectoral Coordination

Policy studies indicate that the primary failures of school feeding programs frequently occur at the level of inter-institutional coordination (Drake et al., 2016). In Indonesia, the MBG program involves the education, health, agriculture, and state finance sectors, making a clear and integrated governance framework essential.

Without a robust coordination system, the policy risks fragmented implementation across regions, as documented in studies of decentralized health policy implementation in Indonesia (Rachmi et al., 2017).

#### 3.4.3. Food Safety and Infrastructure

Food safety is a critical concern in large-scale meal programs. Studies from various countries show that inadequate hygiene standards and logistics can introduce new health risks (Gelli et al., 2016). In the Indonesian context, limited kitchen facilities, nutrition specialists, and cold-chain infrastructure represent concrete challenges to the success of the MBG program.

#### 3.4.4. Fiscal Sustainability

Economic policy analysis indicates that school feeding constitutes a sound long-term investment but requires careful fiscal planning (Alderman & Bundy, 2012; Hoddinott et al., 2013). Without transparent cost-benefit evaluation, the MBG program risks burdening the state budget without producing optimal outcomes.

### 3.5. Evidence-Based Policy Recommendations

Based on an analysis of Scopus-indexed international literature and a critical reading of the institutional, fiscal, and political context of Indonesia, this article presents five principal policy recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the MBG program.

#### 3.5.1. Evidence-Based National Menu Standardization with Local Adaptation

A national menu standard should be developed on the basis of evidence-based nutrition guidelines referencing the energy, protein, and micronutrient requirements of school-age children, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and supported by the international school feeding literature (Jomaa et al., 2011; Kristjansson et al., 2015). This standard must ensure that the food provided is not only quantitatively sufficient but also nutritionally adequate, including critical micronutrients such as iron, zinc, and vitamin A for children's cognitive development (Black et al., 2013).

However, the literature also affirms that overly rigid national standards can reduce program effectiveness in regions with high dietary diversity and varied food consumption practices (Bundy et al., 2020). The MBG national standard must therefore be complemented by local adaptation mechanisms that permit the use of locally available food ingredients without compromising nutritional quality. This approach not only increases social acceptance of the program but also strengthens local food systems and reduces logistical costs.

### 3.5.2. Strengthening the Role of Nutrition Professionals in Program Planning and Evaluation

The Scopus-indexed literature identifies the involvement of nutrition professionals as a critical determinant of school feeding program success (Drake et al., 2016; Neumann et al., 2007). Nutrition professionals play a vital role in designing balanced menus, ensuring food safety, and conducting periodic evaluations of the program's impact on children's nutritional status.

In the Indonesian context, the empowerment of nutrition professionals must be institutionalized rather than addressed solely at the technical level. This means that nutrition experts must be engaged from the policy planning stage, not only at the implementation stage. This approach aligns with the principle of nutrition-sensitive policy, which positions nutrition expertise as an integral component of cross-sectoral public policy (Gillespie et al., 2016). Without adequate professional involvement, the MBG program risks experiencing what may be termed nutrition dilution—the provision of food that is symbolically "nutritious" but substantively fails to meet children's needs.

### 3.5.3. An Integrated, Data-Driven Monitoring and Evaluation System

Various studies demonstrate that the success of school feeding policies depends greatly on the existence of a robust and sustained monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system (Alderman & Bundy, 2012; Wang et al., 2021). An M&E system functions not only to oversee implementation compliance but also to assess the policy's impact on nutritional status, school attendance, and learning outcomes.

For the MBG program, the M&E system should be data-driven and integrated with the health and education sectors. This integration enables the use of more comprehensive indicators, such as changes in body mass index (BMI), anemia status, and student academic performance. This data-based approach aligns with the principle of evidence-informed policymaking (Dunn, 2017) and is essential for preventing the policy from operating without adequate empirical feedback.

### 3.5.4. A Home-Grown School Feeding Approach for Food Security and Local Economic Development

The home-grown school feeding (HGSF) approach emphasizes the use of locally produced food in school meal programs. Gelli et al. (2016) demonstrate that HGSF not only improves children's nutritional quality but also generates positive economic impacts for smallholder farmers and strengthens local food security.

In the Indonesian context, implementing HGSF is highly relevant given the scale of the smallholder agricultural sector and the diversity of local food production. Integrating the MBG program with local agricultural systems can create economic multiplier effects while simultaneously reducing dependence on long supply chains that are vulnerable to logistical disruption. From a public policy perspective, this approach expands the function of the MBG program from a nutrition intervention to an instrument of rural economic development.

### 3.5.5. Periodic Fiscal Evaluation Based on Long-Term Cost–Benefit Analysis

The public economics literature affirms that large-scale social spending must be evaluated periodically through cost–benefit analysis to ensure fiscal sustainability and policy effectiveness (Stiglitz & Rosengard, 2015; Whalley et al., 1975). In the school feeding context, Alderman (2010) and Hoddinott et al. (2013) demonstrate that the long-term benefits—such as increased productivity and reduced health

burdens—often exceed program costs, but only when implementation is conducted efficiently.

The MBG program therefore requires a fiscal evaluation mechanism that goes beyond assessing annual budget levels to measure long-term impacts on human resource development. Such evaluation is essential to prevent the MBG program from becoming trapped in the logic of short-term populist policy and to ensure that the program genuinely functions as a strategic state investment.

#### 4. Conclusion

The MBG program is a strategic policy that aligns with global scientific evidence on the importance of nutrition interventions during school-age years. However, its success depends critically on governance quality, fiscal design, and the state's institutional capacity. Without strengthening these dimensions, the MBG program risks becoming a high-cost populist policy with limited impact. Conversely, with an evidence-based approach and robust public accountability, the MBG program has the potential to serve as an important foundation for Indonesia's human resource development on the path to Golden Indonesia (*Indonesia Emas*) 2045.

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