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Implementation of the MBG Program in reducing stunting and improving nutrition in West Java within the framework of the SDGs

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) as an effort to reduce stunting in West Java within the framework of the SDGs, specifically the Zero Hunger goal. Although the prevalence of stunting in West Java has decreased to 15.9% in 2024, the MBG program faces a number of challenges. Based on interviews with kindergarten teachers, junior high school students, and the West Java Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), it was found that the objective of the MBG is understood as providing nutritious food to improve children's health. However, the program's target is not appropriate because stunting mainly occurs in children under five years of age, while the MBG targets elementary to high school levels. The implementation of the MBG program varies between schools and regions, including differences in menus, distribution, and coordination.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global development program established by the United Nations in 2015 as a comprehensive development framework to be achieved by 2030 (Sridhar et al., 2023). This sustainable development program covers 17 main objectives that are integrated and designed to create an inclusive, fair and sustainable future. The objectives of the



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SDGs are: No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being , Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life on Land, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and Partnerships for the Goals. These sustainable development programs aim to address interconnected social, economic and sustainability aspects. The role of government and cross-sector partnerships is essential in implementing the SDGs (Ashida, 2023).

The second SDG is zero hunger, which aims to end hunger, improve nutrition and ensure sustainable agriculture as a source of nutrition for the country. This is done as an effort by countries to improve the quality of human resources through nutritious intake. This is an indicator of the success of the SDGs goal of zero hunger. One of the indicators includes meeting the nutritional needs of communities such as pregnant women, infants, children and adolescents. Indonesia currently remains a country with a relatively high national prevalence of stunting. According to data from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for 2023, Indonesia ranks 27th out of 154 countries worldwide and 5th in Asia (Kemenko PMK, 2023). The prevalence rate reached 21.5% in 2023 and fell to 19.8% in 2024 (TPPS, 2025). The government is committed to continuing its efforts to reduce this rate to a target of 14.2% in 2029, in line with the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). The national target set by the Minister of Health for 2025 is 18.8% of the previous prevalence rate (SSGI, 2025). Rapid action is needed from the government to prevent a surge in stunting in Indonesia to ensure the formation of a healthy, productive, and highly competitive generation.

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Stunting (Quamme & Iversen, 2022) is a serious form of chronic malnutrition that hinders optimal growth and development in children. One of the characteristics of stunting is that a child's height is below the standard for their age according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). This condition is often caused by a continuous lack of essential nutrients, illness, or repeated infections. Stunting affects millions of children worldwide, resulting in long-term consequences such as cognitive development disorders that cause difficulties in learning and achieving education, a weakened immune system, and reduced productivity. Children who experience stunting are more susceptible to various infections, viruses and diseases, and even the risk of death. This condition is mostly found in low socioeconomic backgrounds, where access to proper nutrition and health services is limited. In addition, babies born to mothers with nutritional deficiencies are at higher risk of stunting. Ultimately, stunting not only compromises immediate survival but also hinders future opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. According to WHO standards, stunting rates are considered high if the prevalence is between 20% and less than 30%. Therefore, the stunting situation in West Java is considered relatively low, with a prevalence of 15.9% in 2024 following a decline (Lestari, 2025). The prevalence of stunting reduction can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Prevalence of stunting in West Java

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Implementation	24.5	20.2	21.7	15.9%

Source: West Java Regional Development Planning Agency, 2025

West Java has been consistent in its efforts to reduce the prevalence of stunting every year. West Java is close to achieving the government's 2024 target of 15.52%, which is below the national target of 14%. Although in reality West Java is still below the target, it has experienced a significant decline. Previous studies have conducted research related to stunting. As seen in the following image, tracing was conducted using VosViewer:

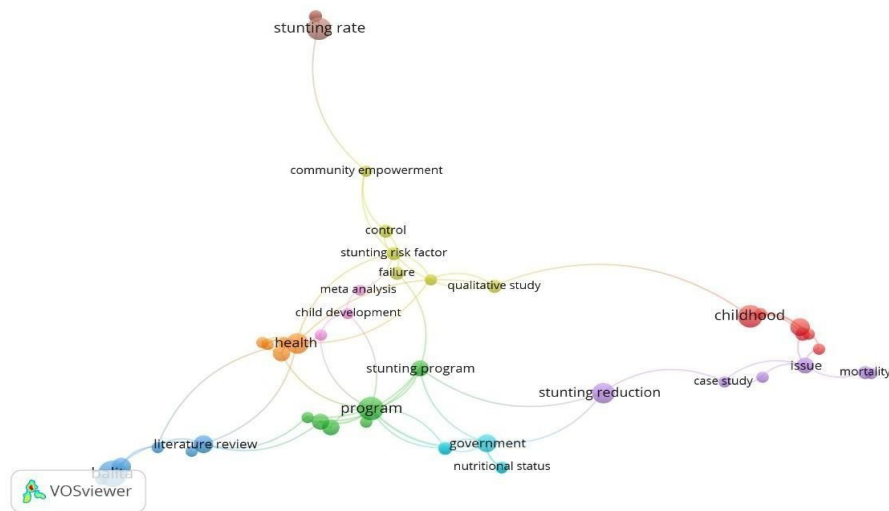


Figure 1. Bibliographic Stunting

Source: Vosviewer, 2025

Based on the analysis using Vosviewer, the issue of stunting remains an interesting topic for further research. The data analysis is derived from 200 Google Scholar journals from 2021 to 2025 on stunting. Based on previous research data, this study fills a gap and offers new insights (state of the art) related to the analysis of the implementation of the National MBG Program in reducing stunting in West Java. In 2025, Indonesia will have the opportunity to face a demographic bonus known as Indonesia Emas. The government is striving to promote productivity in order to create superior human resources. With this goal in mind, the West Java Provincial Government is working to reduce stunting as one of the factors hindering the birth of a golden generation. The President of the Republic of Indonesia has launched a breakthrough national program called Free Nutritious Meals, referring to Presidential Regulation No. 83 of 2024 concerning the National Nutrition Agency, which supports the West Java government's efforts to reduce stunting. This program is a strategic effort by the government to ensure the optimal growth and development of Indonesian children, both in terms of health and intelligence. This initiative does not only focus on solving nutritional problems, but is also positioned as a long-term investment to improve the quality of human resources and determine the direction of the nation's development in the future.



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The data analysis is derived from 200 Google Scholar journals from 2021 to 2025 on stunting. Based on previous research data, this study fills a gap and offers new insights (state of the art) related to the analysis of the implementation of the National MBG Program in reducing stunting in West Java. In 2025, Indonesia will have the opportunity to face a demographic bonus known as Indonesia Emas. The government is striving to promote productivity in order to create superior human resources. With this goal in mind, the West Java Provincial Government is working to reduce stunting as one of the factors hindering the birth of a golden generation. The President of the Republic of Indonesia has launched a breakthrough national program called Free Nutritious Meals, referring to Presidential Regulation No. 83 of 2024 concerning the National Nutrition Agency, which supports the West Java government's efforts to reduce stunting.

This program is a strategic effort by the government to ensure the optimal growth and development of Indonesian children, both in terms of health and intelligence. This initiative does not only focus on solving nutritional problems, but is also positioned as a long- term investment to improve the quality of human resources and determine the direction of the nation's development in the future. President Prabowo said that the MBG program originated from concern for the condition of Indonesian children and was adapted from countries that have had similar successful programs, such as India and Brazil. By mid-October 2025, the government had built 11,900 MBG kitchens that operate daily to provide services to 35.4 million children and pregnant women, equivalent to around 35 per cent of the national target. The President emphasised that although implementation in the field still faces a number of obstacles, efforts to strengthen the monitoring system and implement standard operating procedures continue to be carried out to ensure that food quality and safety are maintained (Sekretariat Presiden, 2025).

The study aims to analyse the implementation of the national Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program as one of the ways to reduce stunting in West Java and how the MBG can reduce the prevalence of stunting. This is done by using the MBG program implementation analysis tool.

METHOD

This research is descriptive qualitative research. This qualitative study investigates social phenomena by capturing the perspectives and experiences of research informants. This study produces descriptive data in the form of findings from observed behaviour and provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the problem. This approach emphasises subjective insights and contextual details, so that offers a comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied.

Meanwhile, according to (Creswell & David Creswell, n.d.), qualitative research investigates social phenomena by conducting interviews, observing behaviour, analysing documents, and exploring participants' perspectives to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of complex human experiences and interactions. Using an approach based on the MBG nutrition intervention and the SDGs zero hunger goal, this study analyses the realisation of the MBG program, which has had an impact on reducing stunting in West Java. The data collection technique was conducted through interviews with the West Java Regional Development Planning Agency (BAPPEDA). In addition, we also conducted a documentation study of various data to support the primary data. The primary data in this study was sourced from interviews conducted by the West Java Regional Development Planning Agency, junior high school students, and kindergarten teachers, as clearly shown below:

Table 2.
Research Informants

No.	Informant Code	Position	Type of Interview
1.	I ₁	Technical assistant to the team for the acceleration of stunting reduction in West Java Province West	Directly
2.	I ₂	Teacher Kindergarten Muhammadiyah	Online
3.	I ₃	Student State Junior High School Cicalengka	Online

Source: Research, 2025

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Understanding, Objectives, and Targets of the Program

All three informants understood that the main objective of the MBG program is to provide nutritious food to school children to improve their nutritional status and support the prevention of stunting. The teacher from the kindergarten explained that the MBG was created by the government to reduce and prevent stunting because it calculates the nutritional intake in food. Meanwhile, junior high school students understood the MBG as free nutritious food provided by the president. On the other hand, the informant from Bappeda emphasised that the MBG was a national program to meet nutritional consumption standards, especially for school-age children and pregnant women, in the prevention of stunting.

However, there are inaccuracies in the targets. According to BAPPEDA, stunting is calculated in children under 5 years of age, while MBG targets elementary to high school students, so it does not directly reach the most at-risk groups.

b. Implementation, Distribution, and Coordination Mechanisms

The implementation of MBG shows variations between schools and regions. At the kindergarten level, it is as follows:

Table 3
Mechanism for Realising MBG

Level	Implementation Components	Interview Findings
Kinder	Schedule & Menu	Schedule Menu Weekly distributed to schools, complete with nutritional values
	Coordination	Involving the School Nutrition Program (SPPG), school principals, health centres, and community health posts. Includes data collection on, allergies, and food of students.
	Distribution & Monitoring	MBG distributors deliver food, take photos if there is leftover food even though there is actually not allowed.
	Supervision & Evaluation	Evaluation based on student records through distributor/driver.
		Coordination is carried out through the MBG internal group.

Source: Research, 2025

c. Effectiveness of the Program on Nutrition, Consumption Behaviour and Economics

Kindergarten teachers stated that the MBG was ineffective, mainly because children are not interested in the appearance of the food, so they do not consume it optimally. Many still rely on packed lunches from home. Junior high school students also reported no significant changes in nutrition or health, but the food is still considered "economically helpful" because it reduces students' daily expenses. Bappedda informants assessed that there is no empirical evidence that MBG has a direct impact on stunting. This is because the MBG target is not the relevant age group, and there is no integration of stunting data with program coverage.

d. Issues, Challenges, and Stakeholder Responses Issues at School

The issues and responses from BAPPEDA JABAR, kindergarten teachers, and junior high school students are as follows:

Table 4
Issues and Challenges

Level	Issue
Kinder	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Food is not visually appealing to young children. 2. The texture of the food is sometimes hard and considered unsuitable. 3. Some parents do not allow their children to consume MBG.
Junior High School	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The menu variety is inadequate. 2. The predominance of eggs causes negative perceptions among students.
Local Government	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There have been several cases of poisoning in certain areas.

Source: Research, 2025

e. Social Impacts and Improvement Recommendations

The social impacts of the free nutritious meal program can be summarised as follows:

1. MBG helps the economy of students' families, especially at the junior high school and high school levels
2. Kindergarten teachers acknowledge that MBG provides real food, not fast food, so it still has positive value despite low consumption in kindergarten.
3. From the government's perspective, MBG assists underprivileged children in accessing nutritious food, although it has not yet had a significant impact on stunting indicators.

f. Recommendations for improvement were made based on an analysis of the three informants from BAPPEDA JABAR, junior high school students, and kindergarten teachers.

1. Improvements in governance and coordination across levels (central government-provincial government-district government-SPPG).
2. Standardisation of menus, nutrition and supply chains to prevent extreme variations in quality.
3. Adjusting menus and food presentation, especially for young children, to make them more appealing.
4. Improvement of SPPG reporting mechanisms so that local governments can conduct data-based monitoring.



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5. Alignment of objectives with stunting reduction programs to ensure interventions are age-appropriate and risk-appropriate.
6. Involving nutrition experts and the community to ensure the quality and acceptance of the program in the field.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) in West Java shows that this program is understood as a government effort to improve children's health and nutritional intake within the framework of the SDGs, particularly Zero Hunger. However, the program's targets are not entirely appropriate because the MBG focuses more on primary and secondary school levels, whereas stunting epidemiologically occurs in the under-five age group. This mismatch in targets means that the impact of MBG on reducing stunting has not yet been significantly observed.

The implementation of MBG in the field shows variations between schools and regions, in terms of menu, distribution, and coordination mechanisms. At the kindergarten level, the main problem is low consumption due to a lack of visual appeal of the food, while at the junior high school level, complaints about the monotony of the menu are the dominant issue. At the local government level, governance challenges are still evident through the lack of SPPG reporting, weak standardisation of supply chains and kitchens, and the emergence of poisoning cases, which indicate the need for stricter supervision. These variations in implementation show that the MBG implementation system is still not optimally coordinated at all levels.

Nevertheless, the MBG continues to have a positive social impact, particularly in helping to ease the economic burden on families and providing access to nutritious food for children from various backgrounds. To improve the program's effectiveness, it is necessary to strengthen governance and standardisation, food quality, menu adjustments for young children, and improved reporting and cross-sector coordination mechanisms. In addition, program targets need to be aligned with stunting risk groups so that interventions are more effective and contribute significantly to reducing the prevalence of stunting in West Java.



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