

Evaluation of the Impact of the Government's Free Nutritious Meal Program on the Community and the State Budget

Erlizar Martiwi Hatmi
Eky Widiyanti
Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Jawa
Timur, Indonesia
lieza@unesa.ac.id

Abstract—This research aims to evaluate the impact of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) launched by the Government of Indonesia in 2025 on the community and the state budget. The research uses a qualitative approach with an evaluative method, where data is collected through in-depth interviews with three main groups: the community/beneficiaries (students, parents, and teachers), food/kitchen providers, and program managers at the local government level. The results of the study show four main themes, namely: (1) public access and understanding of the program, (2) food quality and availability, (3) impact on health, education, and socio-economic life, and (4) governance, budget, and program coordination. The MBG program has been proven to provide real benefits in improving children's nutrition and enthusiasm for learning, reducing the economic burden on families, and strengthening local economic empowerment. However, challenges are still encountered in terms of late payments, inconsistent distribution, and coordination between institutions that are not optimal. This study concludes that the MBG program has been effective, but it requires strengthening governance, budget transparency, and monitoring mechanisms so that program goals are achieved sustainably.

Keywords—Free Nutrition, program evaluation, child nutrition, public policy, education, state budget, local economy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of malnutrition in Indonesia is still unsolved to this day. In 2022, there were 95,504 children under five who were malnourished, 584,232 children under five who were malnourished, and 931,836 children under five. In 2023, the 2023 Indonesian Health Survey (SKI) shows that there are still many toddlers in Indonesia who experience nutritional problems, including stunting, wasting, and underweight. By 2024, it is estimated that 90% of malnourished children in Indonesia will be stunted, and one in five children will be stunted. The impact of malnutrition will continue to be sustained if there is no right strategy to control its impact. The

Indonesian government has taken one of the strategies so that malnutrition can be improved from the age in the womb to school age. (Koesbardiati et al., 2014) (Agency Policy Health Development, 2024) (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025)

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program launched by the Government of Indonesia is one of the programs that aims to provide healthy and nutritious food to groups in need, with a focus on children or other vulnerable groups, so that it is expected to improve the quality of life of the community, especially for those below the poverty line. In addition, the program initiated by President Prabowo Subianto aims to eliminate hunger and ensure that no Indonesian child goes hungry. Indirectly, this program is also to cut the chain of poverty through improving the nutrition of children from poor and vulnerable families. According to the Head of the National Nutrition Agency, Dadan Hindayana, the MBG program is very important because 70% of the Indonesian population cannot access food with balanced nutrition. In addition, this program can also help increase student attendance in schools and affect the improvement of the quality of education. The MBG program was launched on January 6, 2025, and has targeted 19.47 million beneficiaries. This program will provide free nutritious food to children from early childhood education to high school/equivalent, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. (Tambunan et al., 2025) (Trisno Aji, 2025) (BGN, 2025)

This program is a flagship program from the President of the Republic of Indonesia to strengthen human resource development and is expected to overcome the problem of malnutrition and stunting in Indonesia. This program also helps to address one of the health issues, namely, nutritional adequacy. This program is targeted at school children and

pregnant and lactating mothers to avoid malnutrition in producing the nation's children who grow and develop healthily. The projected budget for the MBG program is large enough that the Government needs to prepare a budget for the program. At the beginning of the discourse of this program, the budget per portion was planned to be Rp. 15,000, but it was revised to Rp. 10,000, - with the understanding that this figure is still considered to be able to meet the nutritional adequacy according to the needs of each region. In overcoming budget needs, the Government designed this program to be implemented gradually, selectively starting from the outermost and poorest regions in Indonesia for 5 years, by increasing the budget every year by 20%. (BGN, 2025) (Ministry of Finance) Finance , 2025) (Ministry of Finance) Finance , 2025)

The projected budget for the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program is IDR 71 trillion, which is allocated in the 2025 State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN). This budget is used to fund the MBG program, whose target is 19.47 million beneficiaries, which includes students ranging from early childhood education to high school/equivalent, toddlers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. With this budget, it is hoped that the MBG program can meet the nutritional needs of the Indonesian population, especially children and pregnant women, as well as improve the quality of education and community welfare. In addition, the MBG program is also expected to increase regional productivity through land empowerment, farmers, breeders, and local fishermen, MSMEs, as well as the absorption of labor from the community around the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG). However, because this program was carried out with fairly short preparation, today there have been several negative news reports related to the implementation of the program. Therefore, based on the background that has been described above, the author is interested in conducting research entitled "Evaluation of the Impact of the Government's Free Nutritious Meal Program on the Community and the State Budget" (Ministry of Finance) Finance , 2025) (Coordinating Ministry Polhukam RI, 2025)

Based on the background that has been described above, the formulation of the problem in this study is: 1. What is the impact of the free nutritious meal program on the community? 2. What is the impact of the free nutritious meal program on Indonesia's state budget?

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is an evaluative research, namely, research that evaluates an activity/program that aims to measure the success of an activity/program. Schuman (1967) defines evaluative research as the determination of results obtained by several activities made to obtain a goal about the value or performance of students. In general, evaluative research

objectives are types of research that aim to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of a program, policy, or intervention. To design, improve, and test the implementation of an educational practice. In addition, evaluative research is designed to evaluate the success of activities specifically and evaluate the benefits of those activities. Evaluative research describes the existence of research activities that evaluate an object, which is usually the implementation and plan of the learning program. (Sujima)

There are 3 objectives of Evaluative Research as a method in this study: 1) Improving the program; 2) Assessing the achievement of objectives; 3) Ensuring accountability in the use of funds The purpose of the Evaluation is to assess the learning process, results, and influencing factors to improve the system and be accountable to stakeholders, in this case the government. Specifically, the evaluation aims to assist with planning, decision-making, and assessment of program benefits.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews with various parties, including beneficiaries in the form of students, parents, and teachers, food provider kitchens, and MBG program managers at the regional level, this study found several key findings that reflect the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). First, in terms of public access and understanding, most parents and students know about the existence of the MBG program through schools and social media. They stated that the procedure for obtaining food is relatively easy because distribution is done directly through the school, so it does not require complicated requirements. Some teachers said that there are additional administrative burdens, such as admission and distribution reports, but this is considered important to ensure program accountability.

From the side of the kitchen or food provider, technical information related to menu standards and portion sizes is always conveyed through the school or related office. Obstacles arise when there are sudden changes to orders or delays in distribution information, which makes food providers have to adjust operations quickly. Meanwhile, managers at the local government level explained that the planning of the MBG program was carried out in a short time because of the national implementation target. Various administrative documents, ranging from reports of receipt of raw materials to proof of food distribution, must be prepared, which, although adding to the workload, are considered necessary to maintain accountability for the implementation of the program.

In terms of food quality and availability, most students and parents consider that the food provided through MBG is more varied than the food they usually consume at home. The taste of food is considered quite good, although some respondents consider that the portion is still insufficient for

junior high school to high school children. Food packaging is generally neat and clean, although there are some cases where the food is not fresh or less attractive. From the kitchen side, maintaining menu variety is a challenge due to the limited local raw materials. However, food providers are working hard to meet the nutritional standards set by the government. Delays in distribution due to logistical problems sometimes have an impact on the quality of food when it arrives at school. The program manager also acknowledged the challenges in ensuring uniform food quality throughout the region. The monitoring mechanism is carried out through random inspections and reports from schools, but the difference in conditions in each region, from access to raw materials to labor, makes food quality not always consistent.

The impact of the MBG program on health, education, and socio-economic life is quite real. From the community's perspective, many parents and students report positive changes after the program has been running. Children become more enthusiastic about taking lessons, less sleepy, and have a better appetite, including eating vegetables and fruits. Parents are also aware of a reduction in the burden of household expenses for children's lunch. For food supply kitchens, the large demand provides more stable business opportunities for local farmers, breeders, and traders. Several MSMEs involved as material suppliers felt an increase in revenue. Meanwhile, managers at the local government level see an increase in student attendance at school and a decrease in cases of children who are often sick. Socially, the program encourages community participation, especially women's groups involved in food provision and distribution, although managers are also aware of the risk of dependency if the program is not sustainable.

Aspects of governance, budget, and coordination are also important concerns. Some parents question the appropriateness of the large budget allocated and the quality and quantity of food received, which creates a lack of transparency. From the kitchen side, the delay in payment from the local government is a significant operational obstacle, so they hope for a faster payment system so that they do not have to cover their own costs. The program manager admits that the limitations of the regional budget and coordination between agencies, such as Education, Health, and Social Services, are sometimes not synchronized, so it has the potential to cause duplication or delay in distribution. However, they emphasized that the MBG program has succeeded in opening up opportunities for local economic empowerment and becoming an important instrument in national nutrition policy.

Overall, the study shows that the MBG program has a positive impact on children's health, increases school attendance, and strengthens the local economy. However, a number of challenges remain, especially related to governance, inter-agency coordination, and consistency of food quality. From an evaluative perspective, these findings

are in line with program evaluation theory that emphasizes effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. The MBG program has proven to be effective in providing real benefits to children and families, although there are still cost, payment, and supervision constraints. Therefore, even though the program is on the right track to reduce nutrition problems, it is necessary to improve the implementation mechanism, quality control, involvement of local MSMEs, and transparency in the use of the budget so that the impact is more sustainable.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) has a positive impact on the community, especially in improving children's nutritional quality, enthusiasm for learning, and reducing the burden of family expenses. In terms of food providers, this program encourages the involvement of MSMEs, farmers, and local business actors to contribute to improving the regional economy. From the manager's perspective, the MBG program is considered important in improving nutritional status and education quality, although it still faces obstacles in terms of governance, distribution, late payments, and consistency of food quality between regions. Thus, the MBG program can be considered effective but requires improvements in implementation mechanisms, inter-agency coordination, and budget transparency so that the benefits are more sustainable and accountable.

REFERENCES

- [1] Health Development Policy Agency. (2024). *Indonesian Health Survey (SKI) 2023*.
- [2] BGN. (2025). The Benefits of MBG Begin to Appear from Improved Nutrition to Soaring Student Attendance.
- [3] Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. (2025). Coordinating Minister for Political Affairs: Free Nutritious Meal Program Continues to Expand, Nutritional Security, the Foundation of National Resilience.
- [4] Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia. (2025). *Indonesia's Stunting Prevalence Drops to 19.8%*.
- [5] Ministry of Finance. (2025). Looking at the Existence of the MBG Program or Free Nutritious Eating.
- [6] Koesbardiati, T., Artaria, M. D., Ernawan, Y., Joko Haryono, T. S., Budiono, B., Arianto, N. T., Hendrawati, L. D., Endah Kinasih, S., & Instructor, S. (2014). *Building Balanced Nutrition Guidelines (PGS) for Undernourished Children in Urban Areas through a Bio-Socio-Cultural Approach: Vol. III* (Issue 1).
- [7] Tambunan, K. A. H., Nababan, R., Siagian, R. A., Naiborhu, R., Harianti, S., & Jamaludin. (2025). A critical review of free nutritious meal programs on student learning productivity. *Education Catalysts: Journal of Education and Mathematics*, 2(2), 21–31. <https://doi.org/10.62383/katalis.v2i2.1428>
- [8] Trisno Aji, W. (2025). Free Nutritious Eating in the Prabowo-Gibran Era: A Solution for the People or a New Burden? *NAAFI: STUDENT SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.62387/naafijurnalilmiahmahasiswa.v2i2.134>