

OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE A SUSTAINABLE FREE NUTRITIONAL FOOD PROGRAM IN INDONESIA: A SCIENTIFIC IDEA

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ABSTRACT

Efforts to realize the national goals enshrined in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution must be carried out collaboratively, involving all elements of the nation, and prepared holistically, integrally, and comprehensively through the swift and appropriate utilization of national resources. In this regard, the state must play a significant role in managing the country based on the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution and for the greatest prosperity of the Indonesian people. The challenge is not insignificant, especially given its geographical location, which stretches from Sabang to Merauke, from Miangas Island to Rote Island, connected by waters and oceans. The existence of this archipelago demands a strong commitment to national development within the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). It is through this diversity that the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) becomes stronger and more advanced. Development should be able to achieve a balance between the planet, people, and profit, as outlined in the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory, introduced by John Elkington. This theory is a framework that measures company performance not only in terms of profit but also social (People) and environmental (Planet) impacts, to achieve long-term business sustainability, not just financial gain. Over time, TBL became the basis for the 1987 global framework for sustainable development established by a commission established by the United Nations (UN). This research design uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a thematic narrative approach to identify and describe research variables. Data were collected using a literature review method, then analyzed using qualitative methods based on similar themes and presented in narrative form. Hadiningrat et al. (2025) explain that qualitative research is a systematic, non-numerical method/technique or procedure for comprehensively and in-depth description of social phenomena in research. The study concluded that implementing the Sustainable Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program in Indonesia offers significant potential because: a) the objectives of MBG align with sustainable development goals; b) MBG is part of an effort to prepare future generations for quality nutrition; c) MBG is a government intervention to address community nutrition issues to reduce disparities. And the most crucial challenge is to create a National Nutrition Law that includes provisions regarding the MBG, so that it continues regardless of who is president.

Keywords: Free Nutritious Meals, Astacita Program, Sustainable Development

A. INTRODUCTION

Enhancing the nation's intellectual development is one of Indonesia's national goals, enshrined in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution. It must be realized collectively, led by the President, and encompassed by all citizens from Sabang to Merauke. The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), launched by President Prabowo Subianto on January 6, 2025, is a state intervention to address the community's nutritional issues. It also represents a comprehensive effort to meet nutritional needs and prepare a superior generation, especially as Indonesia approaches its Golden Indonesia in 2045.

This well-intentioned MBG program remains chaotic in its implementation, with quality falling below expected standards. In fact, cases of mass poisoning occurred throughout 2025. According to the Data Center of Economic and Law Studies (Celios), 15,117 cases of mass poisoning were recorded in several regions from January to November 2025. This demonstrates that much remains to be improved, including planning, professional human resources, budget support, transparency, and broad public participation. Furthermore, from a legal perspective, a law must be established as the legal umbrella governing various provisions regarding national nutrition, ensuring the MBG program remains sustainable and sustainable, regardless of the president.

The issue of nutritional adequacy must be addressed effectively, as the current situation remains concerning. National stunting prevalence data is 19.8%; wasting prevalence is 5.3%; anemia is 48.9%; and anemia in pregnant women is 17.9%. (Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey or SSGI Data, 2024). UNICEF also noted that children in Indonesia currently experience the Triple Burden of Malnutrition (TBM): undernutrition, overnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies. School children aged 5-12 years are stunted by 18.7%. Wasting/thinness is 11%, obesity is 19.7%, and anemia is 16.3%. Meanwhile, nutritional issues for toddlers include underweight at 15.7%, and the prevalence of stunting remains at 21.5%. This figure is still considered high according to WHO criteria. Other nutritional issues experienced by Indonesian children include school-age children not eating a healthy breakfast before school (65%), children aged 5-14 years old consuming insufficient fruits and vegetables (97.7%), and schoolchildren choosing unhealthy snacks, such as excessive consumption of sweets per day (54%). (www.unicef.org).

Similar benchmark programs in various countries, such as Finland, Japan, Brazil, Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have long been implemented, including legal frameworks. These countries are now reaping the benefits, including the achievement of high-quality and competitive human resources (Hilery et al. 2024). Therefore, Indonesia, specifically the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), must strengthen proper governance based on good governance, transparency, and accountability, and open up opportunities for public participation as widely as possible. This research is urgently needed to ensure the MBG program remains viable, given that preparing a healthy and high-quality generation requires continuity and strong commitment from all elements of the Indonesian nation. The goal is to identify and describe Indonesia's opportunities for making the MBG program sustainable.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Free Nutritious Meal Program is a public policy that has been binding on all Indonesian citizens since its inception by President Prabowo Subianto. According to Badjuri and Yuwono (2002), public policy is a decision made by public authorities that is binding on the public. In this case, it relates to public policy theory, which focuses on efforts to improve public health through disease prevention and health promotion. In the context of the nutritious food program, the prevention of malnutrition and stunting is crucial. This approach involves an understanding of the social, economic, and environmental factors that influence public health. Specifically, it relates to nutritional theory, which states that a balanced nutritional intake is crucial for the growth and development of individuals, especially children. Good nutrition can contribute to improved cognitive and physical function. A nutritious food program needs to be based on sound nutritional principles implemented by experts.

The MBG program also relates to the theory of behavior change, where the MGB will provide literacy and education about the importance of nutrition for the community, especially for children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. The MBG program is expected to change behaviors related to diet and healthy living habits, so that people are more aware of the importance of good nutrition. In the current era of global development, it is crucial that the MBG program is also directed towards achieving sustainable development goals, which emphasize the integration of economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social welfare. In the context of the MBG, this program can promote sustainability by empowering local farmers, reducing poverty, and improving the quality of life of the community. Its implementation must be accompanied by collaboration between various stakeholders based on the pentahelix, involving government, academia, industry, the community, and the media. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a social-community-based MBG ecosystem. In relation to this research, it is crucial to integrate various theories in planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring to facilitate the determination of more effective, efficient, and sustainable policies and strategies to address nutrition issues in Indonesia.

The global development paradigm follows the sustainable development paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of preparing future generations to be able to meet their own needs. This aligns with John Elkington's Triple Bottom Line theory, which states that a balance must be struck between the planet (environment), people (society), and profit to achieve optimal and long-lasting carrying capacity and benefits. The term sustainable development was coined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), a UN agency chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, in its report "Our Common Future."

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, by balancing three main pillars: economic, social, and environmental. This concept aims to create equitable and sustainable growth by integrating these aspects into development strategies, ensuring long-term prosperity for all, as reflected in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Source: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>

Image: Sustainable Development Goals

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (MBG) Program must begin with a government political decision, followed by implementation by the National Nutrition Agency (BNPB) through a series of activities, including planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling. This is explained by George Terry. In his book, he explains that the POAC management functions are a series of interconnected cycles that form a system to achieve goals effectively and efficiently.

Furthermore, it must be understood that the MBG program also aims to strengthen national resilience, encompassing the *astagatra* (scientific conditions in the form of geography, natural resources, and demographics), as well as dynamic conditions encompassing ideology, politics, economics, socio-culture, and defense and security (*ipoleksosbud hankam*).

According to Lemhannas R.I., national resilience is a dynamic condition of a nation that contains tenacity and toughness that is able to develop resilience in facing and overcoming all challenges, obstacles and threats both from within and from outside or within which directly or indirectly can endanger the integrity, identity and survival of the nation and state. This dynamic condition which consists of 8 elements must be maintained in balance in order to have resilience in maintaining existence, sovereignty and national development.

C. METHODS

This research design is descriptive qualitative with a thematic narrative approach. The aim is to identify and describe efforts to strengthen school-based MBG governance in Indonesia to accelerate services and equitable distribution of nutritional needs for communities throughout Indonesia. The thematic narrative approach is used to structure narratives according to research variables and analyze them in the form of meaningful narratives or stories based on similar themes, presented in a script using correct Indonesian spelling.

Hadiningrat et al. (2025) suggest that research is necessary when a gap is identified between current and desired conditions. Qualitative research uses a descriptive or thematic narrative approach that aims to understand social phenomena through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data. The focus is on uncovering the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of individuals or groups within social, cultural, and environmental contexts. Qualitative research provides a rich and in-depth approach to understanding social phenomena, allowing researchers to explore individual perspectives and the contexts that influence their behavior. This method is especially valuable in situations where a deep and nuanced understanding of context is crucial.

Data collection uses a literature review method by accessing credible official publications and journals so that the data obtained is accurate. Then it is analyzed using qualitative analysis with a thematic narrative approach. Data regarding aspects of sustainable development, especially the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, are compared with the objectives to be achieved by the MBG program in Indonesia. The steps taken are: a) Identifying the main themes in the narrative data; b) Data Coding: Coding is carried out to organize information into certain categories, thus facilitating the drawing of conclusions; c) Presenting findings in the form of narratives that describe the experiences and views of participants, and connecting them with existing literature; and d) Drawing conclusions and recommendations.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The MBG program, launched by President Prabowo Subianto on January 6, 2025, has served 55.1 million beneficiaries across Indonesia. While some achievements have met standards, numerous shortcomings remain, including a mass food poisoning case that reached 15,117 people. Forget thousands of people, even a single case of food poisoning is a very serious problem, as it involves human life. This case must be thoroughly investigated to prevent future cases of food poisoning from the services and nutritional fulfillment provided by the National Nutrition Agency's Nutrition Service and Fulfillment Units (SPPG). MBG regulations, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and governance must be strengthened through various corrective actions and improvements to enhance the duties, core functions, and functions of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) from the central government down to the SPPG.

From a national resilience perspective, the MBG program will enhance national resilience, particularly across demographic, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. Nutritional interventions for communities in need will ensure they meet their nutritional needs, enabling them to grow and develop in a healthy physical and mental state, enabling them to carry out their daily activities. Coupled with efforts to educate the nation, they will be fit throughout the day, enthusiastic about learning, and achieve high levels of achievement. From a sustainable development perspective, the MBG program aims to intervene in nutritional needs to ensure fitness and quality, preparing them for the future and meeting their needs. This is appropriate, considering that the results of the MBG program will only be felt after a continuous implementation of more than 10 years.

Benchmarks in other countries such as Finland, Brazil, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, South Korea, India, and others have been implemented for a long time and are generally regulated by law, ensuring ongoing and sustainable implementation.

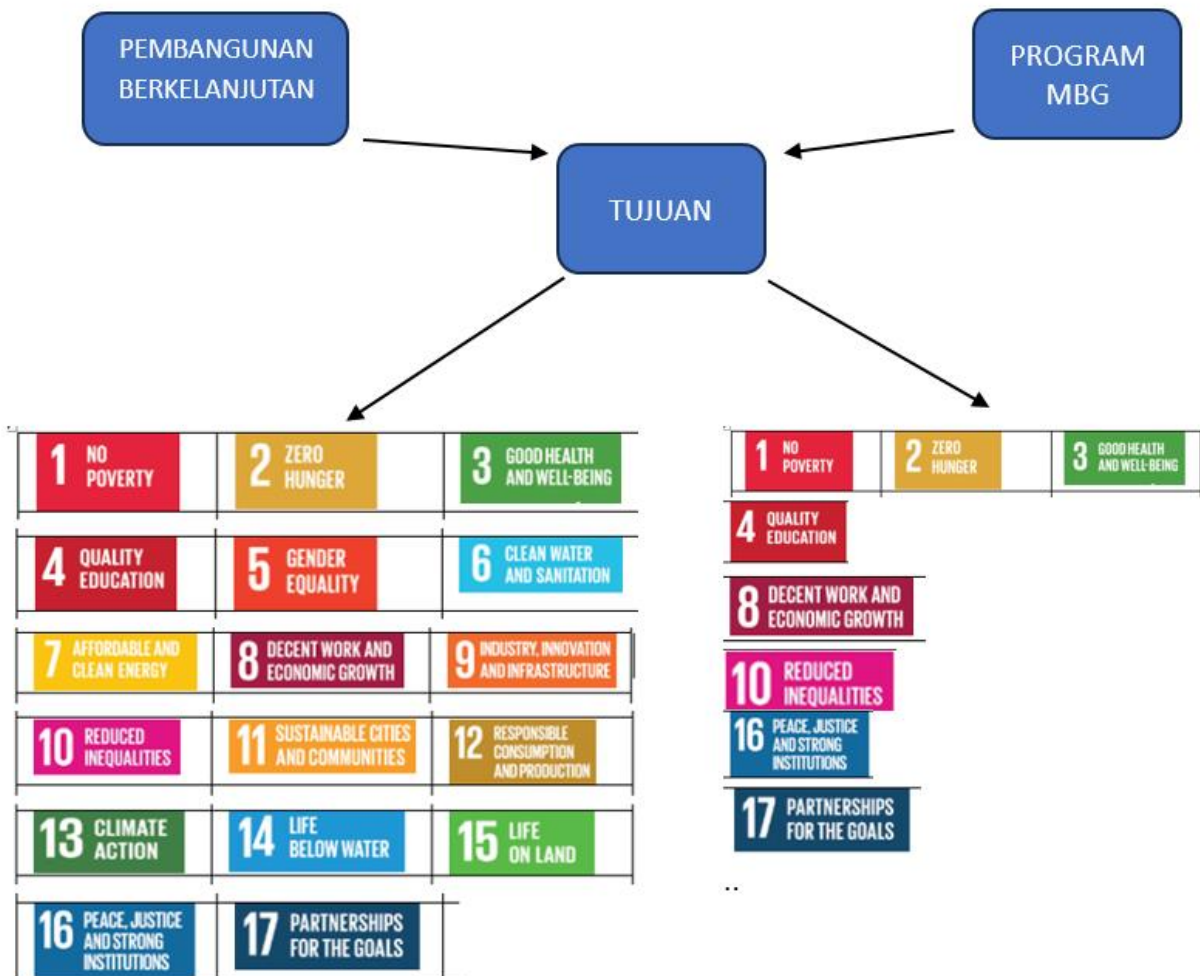
For Indonesia, successful experiences from other countries must serve as lessons learned so that the MBG program can truly be enjoyed by the community and achieve its goals. The MBG program has several main objectives, namely: a) Addressing the problems of malnutrition and stunting; b) Improving the quality of human resources; c) Supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 2 (Ending Hunger), Goal 3 (Healthy and Prosperous Lives), and Goal 4 (Quality Education); d) Empowering the local economy by involving local farmers and MSMEs in the food supply chain; e) Reducing the economic burden on poor households.

Referring to the MBG objectives mentioned above, in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals, there are similarities, so the opportunity to make the MBG program sustainable is very possible, depending on the commitment and policies of the government. In general, it can be said that the opportunity to make the MBG sustainable can be stated that the MBG program has implemented: a) Public-private partnership patterns in pentahelix collaboration between government, academia, industry, communities, and the media; b) Empowering local farmers, cooperatives/SMEs: Involving local farmers and MSMEs in the food supply chain can create an inclusive and sustainable local economic ecosystem; c) Nutrition intervention and education, especially for beneficiaries and their parents; d) Standardization of menus and food quality; e) Utilization of digital technology; g) Lessons learned from other countries that have implemented free lunches; and others.

The MBG program has great potential to improve children's nutrition and support sustainable development in Indonesia. However, to achieve success and sustainability of the program, effective management, inter-agency synergy, strict supervision, and community involvement are needed. By overcoming challenges and capitalizing on existing opportunities, the MBG program can become a long-term investment in Indonesia's human resources and contribute to Indonesia Emas 2045. Many challenges must be faced, including: a) Legislation governing national nutrition; b) Logistics and distribution considering Indonesia's geographical location as an archipelagic country; c) food ingredient standards and nutritional value; d) monitoring and evaluation with a very broad reach; e) sanitation and hygiene; f) food waste management; g) ensuring the sustainability of the MBG program; h) suitability of food menus with local food availability; i) cross-sectoral coordination; and others.

The sustainable MBG program has enormous opportunities, including: a) the objectives of the MBG are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals 1: No poverty; 2: Zero hunger; 3: Good health; 4: Quality education; 10th: Reducing Inequality; 16th: Peace and Justice; and 17th: Partnerships to Achieve Goals.

Schematically, these can be presented in the following diagram:



Source: Compilation of researchers, 2025.

Figure: Correlation between Sustainable Development Goals and Free Nutritious Meals Goals

The qualitative data analysis revealed that the MBG Program has significant potential for sustainability, including: a) the MBG's objectives align with Sustainable Development Goals 1: No poverty; 2: Zero hunger; 3: Good health; 4: Quality education; 10: Reduced inequality; 16: Peace and justice; and 17: Partnerships to achieve goals.

E. CONCLUSION

From the data analysis above, it can be concluded that the MBG Program has significant potential for sustainability, including: a) the MBG's objectives align with Sustainable Development Goals 1: No poverty; 2: Zero hunger; 3: Good health; 4: Quality education; 10: Reduced inequalities; 16: Peace and justice; and 17: Partnerships to achieve the goals. Based on the above conclusions, it is recommended that the Government and the House of Representatives (DPR) establish a national nutrition law, BAPPENAS integrate the MBG program into Indonesia's Sustainable Development Policy and Program; and the

National Nutrition Agency, together with cross-sectoral ministries/agencies, support the implementation of the Sustainable MBG Program.

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