

Collaboration Between the Government and the Community in the Implementation of the MBG Program

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration between the government and the community is a fundamental element in realizing the effectiveness of public policy, especially in the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). This program is designed as a strategic effort by the Indonesian government to address nutritional problems and improve the quality of human resources through the provision of nutritious food for school children. This study aims to analyze the form of collaboration between the government and the community in the implementation of the MBG program, identify the challenges faced, and formulate strategies for strengthening this partnership. The research method used is a literature review with a qualitative descriptive approach based on academic and public policy sources from the 2017–2025 period. The results of the study indicate that the success of the MBG program is highly influenced by the synergy between the government as the policy facilitator and the community as the main actors in the field. Effective collaboration is formed through two-way communication, transparency, active participation, and community empowerment in the supervision and provision of local food ingredients. However, implementation still faces challenges such as cross-sectoral coordination, limited human resources, and low participation in some regions. Therefore, strategies based on co-creation governance and the utilization of digital technology are recommended to strengthen sustainable collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Nutritional issues in Indonesia remain a strategic concern in national development. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), Indonesia is among the countries with relatively high rates of stunting and malnutrition in Southeast Asia. This condition directly affects the quality of human resources, particularly school-aged children. In response, the Indonesian government launched the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as an effort to improve community nutritional status and enhance the educational and health quality of the younger generation (Ministry of Health, 2024).

The MBG program reflects the government's commitment to developing high-quality human resources through nutritional interventions integrated with the education sector. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2024), the program not only focuses on providing nutritious meals at schools but also aims to instill healthy living values and raise awareness regarding the importance of balanced nutrition. Thus, MBG becomes part of a long-term human-development strategy aligned with the vision of Indonesia Emas 2045.

However, the implementation of a nationwide program such as MBG cannot rely solely on the government. Governance theory suggests that the success of public policy is determined by the extent of engagement from various actors, including civil society and the private sector (Rhodes, 1996). Collaboration between the government and the community is therefore essential to ensure the program's effectiveness and sustainability. Without strong social support, MBG risks becoming merely an administrative initiative without significant impact at the grassroots level.

Collaboration in implementing MBG involves synergy in planning, execution, and monitoring. The government serves as a facilitator and policy provider, while communities actively engage as field implementers and social oversight actors. Consistent with Ansell and Gash (2008), successful public-policy collaboration must be built upon trust, shared commitment, and effective communication among stakeholders. In this sense, MBG can serve as a model of social collaboration oriented toward collective welfare.

The implementation of MBG also reflects the principles of good governance—openness, accountability, and public participation (UNDP, 1997). Community involvement not only strengthens transparency but also enhances a sense of ownership toward public policy. This approach has proven effective in other social programs in Indonesia, such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) and the Indonesia Sehat Program (Bappenas, 2022). Therefore, a collaborative approach is a strategic choice to ensure MBG's long-term success.

Beyond participation, collaboration within MBG contributes to local economic empowerment. Through partnerships with farmer groups, food-based MSMEs, and cooperatives, the program strengthens sustainable local food-supply chains. As Putnam (1993) notes, the success of social development relies heavily on social capital—networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. By leveraging this social capital, MBG creates a dual impact: improving nutrition while supporting regional economic growth.

From a socio-cultural perspective, collaboration in MBG reinforces the value of gotong royong, a foundational element of Indonesian identity. According to Koentjaraningrat (2009), gotong royong forms the basis of community interaction in addressing collective challenges. With this spirit, communities can actively participate in providing, supervising, and ensuring equitable distribution of nutritious meals for children. This positions MBG not merely as a technocratic policy but also as a social movement that strengthens national solidarity.

Nevertheless, this collaborative effort faces various challenges. Limited human resources, weak inter-agency coordination, and disparities in regional capacity often hinder implementation (Dwiyanto, 2021). Therefore, adaptive and locally responsive collaborative mechanisms are needed. The government must create inclusive spaces for dialogue and participation so communities can take collective responsibility for sustaining the program.

Community-based evaluation and monitoring are also essential for maintaining implementation quality. Osborne (2010) argues that the success of public collaboration depends not only on policy inputs but also on how outcomes and impacts are measured participatively. By involving communities in monitoring processes, public trust can be strengthened, and program quality can be continuously improved.

In conclusion, collaboration between the government and the community is not merely a complementary element but the core determinant of MBG's success. Collaboration built on trust, open communication, and community empowerment ensures that MBG achieves its primary goal: fostering a healthy, intelligent, and competitive generation of Indonesians. Therefore, studying the forms, challenges, and strategies of collaboration is essential for developing more participatory and sustainable public policies in the future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a literature review approach, gathering academic sources such as journals, books, and relevant official documents from the period of 2017–2025. The analysis is conducted by mapping the concepts of public policy collaboration, social policy implementation, and community participation in the MBG program. The analysis steps include identifying key variables, categorizing the roles of actors, and elaborating on the findings based on policy implementation theory (Nugroho, 2017).

Summary of Key Literature

Author (Year)	Research Focus	Key / Contributions
Ansell & Gash (2008)	Prerequisites for successful public policy collaboration.	Successful collaboration is built on trust, shared commitment, and effective communication among stakeholders
Osborne (2010)	Evaluation of public collaboration success.	Success depends not just on policy inputs but on

		how outcomes and impacts are measured participatively.
Voorberg et al. (2015)	Systematic review of co-creation and co-production.	Identifies co-creation as a social innovation journey involving active citizen engagement.
Ludher (2024)	Policy perspectives and implications of Indonesia's MBG program.	Provides an early analysis of the MBG program's design and its potential socio-economic implications.
UNICEF (2025)	National policy clarity and digital accountability in MBG.	MBG success depends on consistent regional implementation and the use of IT to strengthen accountability.
Susanti et al. (2025)	Impacts of community participation and multi-actor collaboration.	Community participation and transparency significantly improve local governance quality.

Methodological Integration

This summary supports the **scoping review** design used in this study by mapping key concepts and actors. The integration of these sources highlights a shift from **state-centered models** to **co-creation governance**, where the community is viewed as a central actor rather than a passive beneficiary.

Theoretical Grounding: Theories from Ansell & Gash and Osborne provide the criteria for "Effective Collaboration".

Contextual Application: Recent 2024–2025 sources (Ludher, Suprpto, UNICEF) ground these theories in the specific decentralized realities of Indonesia.

Novelty: By synthesizing these works, this study proposes a unique framework that links school feeding policies with mutual accountability and shared decision-making.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Government in Implementing the MBG Program

The government plays a central role in formulating, coordinating, and overseeing the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program, a national priority program. This program was initiated to address chronic malnutrition and improve the quality of Indonesia's human resources. The central government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), the Ministry of Health (Kemenkes), and the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture (Kemenko PMK),

is the primary institution responsible for regulating policies, targets, nutritional standards, and distribution mechanisms for nutritious food.

According to UNICEF, (2025), the success of MBG is highly dependent on the clarity of national policies and consistency of implementation at the regional level, because this program involves millions of children and thousands of educational units throughout Indonesia. In its implementation, the government is responsible for providing a substantial budget allocated through the National and Regional Budgets (APBN). This budget is used for the development and operation of Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units (SPPG) in various regions, including training kitchen staff, providing hygienic cooking utensils, and providing a food quality control system. The government is also preparing national nutritional standards guidelines to ensure that each menu item meets the macronutrient and micronutrient needs of children according to their age. Furthermore, the central and regional governments are collaborating with the National Agency for Nutrition and Nutrition Studies (BPOM). Food and Drug Monitoring Agency (BPOM) to ensure food safety to prevent incidents such as food poisoning that occurred in the early stages of the program (The Diplomat, 2025). Thus, the government's role is not only limited to providing policy, but also as the main director and supervisor so that the program runs effectively, safely, and sustainably.

Community Participation and Active Role The community plays a crucial role in supporting the success of the MBG program. Without community involvement, program implementation will lose social legitimacy and will struggle to achieve maximum results. Forms of community participation can be seen in various aspects, from the involvement of parents and school committees in ensuring food is received on time, to the active role of local communities in monitoring. In this context, collaboration between government and society becomes a mutually beneficial reciprocal relationship: society gains economic benefits, while the government gains social support and legitimacy to implement welfare-oriented public policies. Furthermore, society also plays a role as an agent of behavioral change. Nutrition education in schools and local communities will be more effective if it involves the active role of parents and community leaders. When people understand the importance of a balanced, nutritious diet, they are more likely to voluntarily support programs and help build a culture of healthy eating in their communities. Therefore, community participation should not be seen as a complement, but as a main component in realizing the sustainability of the MBG program.

Forms of Collaboration between Government and Society Collaboration between the government and the community in implementing the MBG can be divided into three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. In the planning stage, the government involves community leaders, community organizations, and educational institutions in developing menus and mapping out target beneficiaries. This aims to ensure that the food provided is not only nutritious but also appropriate to the socio-cultural characteristics of the region. According to KanallIndonesia.com (2025), The implementation phase is the most crucial, where synergy between parties is truly tested. The local government is

responsible for coordinating the nutrition kitchen activities at the SPPG, while the community assists with food procurement, distribution to schools, and ensuring that beneficiaries attend and receive the appropriate portions. These shared kitchen activities also serve as a social space that strengthens community ties and fosters shared awareness of the importance of balanced nutrition. Meanwhile, the evaluation phase serves as a means of participatory oversight. The government is opening up opportunities for the public to provide feedback on food quality, distribution times, and hygiene monitoring systems. Some regions have even begun implementing community-based digital reporting systems so that complaints and suggestions can be promptly addressed. Thus, this evaluation mechanism creates a two-way, complementary relationship between the government and the community (bottom-up and top-down).

Scientific Contribution and Novelty of the Study

While existing studies on nutrition and school feeding programs have largely focused on policy effectiveness, nutritional outcomes, and administrative performance, limited attention has been given to the governance processes that shape policy implementation, particularly in decentralized and socially diverse contexts. Much of the literature adopts a state-centered or technocratic perspective, positioning the government as the primary actor and treating community participation as a supplementary or instrumental component.

This study takes a different analytical stance by foregrounding collaboration and co-creation as central elements of policy implementation. Rather than viewing the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program solely as a nutrition intervention, this article conceptualizes MBG as a collaborative governance process in which public value is co-produced through interactions between government institutions and community actors. The findings reveal that community involvement in MBG extends beyond implementation support to include participation in planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in its proposal of a co-creation governance-based collaboration framework for the implementation of the MBG Program within the Indonesian context. Unlike prior studies that emphasize hierarchical coordination or administrative capacity, this framework highlights shared decision-making, mutual accountability, and the active role of communities as co-creators of policy outcomes. By doing so, the article fills an important gap in the literature by linking school feeding policy implementation with contemporary governance theory, particularly co-creation governance, in a developing and decentralized country setting.

Distinguishing the MBG Program from Global School Feeding Studies

Most global studies on school feeding programs conceptualize school meals as technical nutrition interventions primarily aimed at improving child health and educational outcomes. These studies, conducted in both high-income and low- and middle-income countries, generally emphasize standardized nutritional guidelines, centralized procurement systems, and administrative efficiency.

In such global models, governance arrangements are largely state-centered, with strong reliance on bureaucratic capacity and hierarchical coordination. Community involvement is typically framed as instrumental support – either as beneficiaries, food providers, or implementers – rather than as actors involved in decision-making processes. Consequently, issues of collaborative governance, power relations, and public value co-creation receive limited analytical attention in the global school feeding literature.

The Indonesian Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program differs fundamentally from these global approaches. MBG is implemented within a decentralized governance system characterized by significant regional disparities in infrastructure, administrative capacity, and socio-cultural conditions. Under these circumstances, centralized and standardized school feeding models are insufficient to address local implementation challenges.

This study demonstrates that MBG in Indonesia operates not merely as a nutrition delivery program but as a **collaborative governance process** involving government institutions, communities, and local economic actors. Community participation in MBG includes planning, monitoring, and evaluation, reflecting key principles of **co-creation governance**. In this sense, MBG should not be understood as a replication of global school feeding models, but as a context-specific policy innovation shaped by Indonesia's socio-political realities.

By explicitly positioning MBG within a co-creation governance framework, this article differentiates itself from global school feeding studies that prioritize technical outcomes over governance processes. The findings suggest that in decentralized and socially diverse contexts such as Indonesia, the effectiveness and sustainability of school feeding programs depend not only on nutritional standards and funding, but also on the quality of collaboration and shared ownership among stakeholders.

Despite the spirit of collaboration, the implementation of the MBG program still faces various complex challenges. First, the challenge of cross-sector coordination, as the involvement of many ministries and institutions often leads to overlapping policies, particularly in the division of tasks between the central and regional governments. Second, limited infrastructure and human resources in remote areas also hinder implementation; some regions lack adequate nutrition kitchen facilities or competent nutritionists, resulting in suboptimal program performance. Third, food safety and food quality remain major concerns.

According to a 2025 report from the University of Gadjah Mada (UGM), several cases of food poisoning involving thousands of children were reported due to negligence in food storage and distribution, indicating that the monitoring system is not functioning optimally in all regions. Fourth, limited community participation is also a barrier, especially in areas where people do not yet understand the importance of balanced nutrition. Without intensive education, communities tend to be passive and merely receive benefits without actively contributing to oversight. Furthermore, issues of regulation and accountability are also a serious concern. The PKS faction (2025) highlighted that the absence of a specific presidential regulation on the implementation of the MBG has led to

variations in implementation standards across regions, where some regions apply different mechanisms regarding hygiene standards, distribution schedules, and menu composition. Therefore, stronger and more uniform regulations are needed to ensure consistent implementation of the MBG across Indonesia.

To strengthen collaboration between the government and the community, the principle of co-creation governance is needed, namely public policy management based on participation and partnership. In this context, the government acts as a facilitator, providing space for the community to participate in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs. The government needs to provide training for local personnel, including nutritionists, kitchen managers, and community cadres, to ensure they are competent in maintaining nutritional standards and food safety. In addition to training, an effective communication system between the government and the community is also needed. Implementing a digital-based reporting system can help the public submit complaints or suggestions quickly and transparently. UNICEF (2025) emphasizes that information technology has significant potential to strengthen the accountability and efficiency of social programs such as the MBG.

Another strategy is to strengthen synergies with the local economic sector. The government can integrate the MBG supply chain with farmers and MSMEs in the region to ensure fresher and more affordable food. This approach not only strengthens the local economy but also ensures a sustainable food supply. Furthermore, nutrition education in schools and communities must be continuously intensified to ensure the public understands the importance of nutritious food in supporting children's health and achievement. With these steps, collaboration between the government and the community becomes more than just administrative but also develops into a social movement that fosters shared awareness of the importance of nutrition for the nation's future. Although the discussion indicates that collaboration between the government and the community is a crucial factor in the success of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG), this study has several limitations, primarily due to its use of a qualitative-descriptive approach based on literature studies without the support of primary empirical data. Consequently, variations in MBG implementation at the regional, school, and nutrition fulfillment service unit (SPPG) levels have not been comprehensively described, and quantitative evaluation of the program's impacts—such as changes in children's nutritional status, reductions in stunting and anemia, and improvements in health indicators—remains limited. Therefore, future research agendas need to be directed at strengthening field-based empirical studies, quantitative evaluations of nutritional and socio-economic impacts, and comparative studies across regions to identify differences in implementation patterns and best practices, which can serve as a basis for developing evidence-based, adaptive, and sustainable MBG policies.

CONCLUSION

Collaboration between the government and the community is a key factor in the success of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG). The government acts

as a facilitator, policy organizer, and implementation supervisor, while the community plays an active role in the supervision, distribution, and provision of local food. This collaboration not only has an impact on improving the nutrition of school children, but also strengthening the local economy and growing the gotong royong culture.

However, the implementation of MBG still faces a number of challenges, such as cross-sector coordination that is not yet optimal, limited infrastructure and human resources in the region, food safety issues, and low community participation in several regions. Therefore, a strengthening strategy is needed through the implementation of co-creation governance, local staff training, the utilization of digital technology for reporting and communication, as well as program integration with the local economic sector.

Overall, the success of MBG depends on the synergy between the government and the community based on transparency, accountability, and active participation. Strong collaboration will ensure that the program runs sustainably, effectively, and gives a real impact on improving the welfare and quality of Indonesia's human resources.

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