



Evaluation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the 3T Region Areas Between Nutritional Equity and Infrastructure Challenges

Noor Diah Erlinawati

Universitas Bengkulu

e-mail: dr.noordiah@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meal Program implemented in Indonesia's frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged (3T) regions using a descriptive qualitative approach. The research focuses on three key dimensions: nutritional equity, infrastructural challenges, and community participation in sustaining program outcomes. Data were collected through the analysis of official policy documents, recent empirical studies, and relevant international literature. The findings indicate that although the program has improved access to nutritious food and public awareness of balanced diets, its implementation remains constrained by logistical barriers, weak intersectoral coordination, and limited human resource capacity at the regional level. Geographic isolation further exacerbates disparities in program effectiveness across regions. Nevertheless, evidence suggests emerging local innovations, including the utilization of local food resources, digital monitoring systems, and collaborative models involving communities and private sectors. The study concludes that achieving nutritional justice requires adaptive, participatory, and sustainable policy implementation that empowers local governance and community-based ownership. Strengthening these dimensions is essential for transforming national nutrition policy into an inclusive instrument for reducing inequality and promoting human development in Indonesia's 3T regions.

Keywords: community health, nutritional equity, sustainability, 3T regions.

PENDAHULUAN

Child nutrition inequality in Indonesia is still one of the fundamental problems in national health development, especially in the 3T (Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost) regions that face limited access to nutritious food, health services, and basic infrastructure. According to a UNICEF report (2023), the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia will still reach 21.5% in 2023, with much higher rates in remote areas such as East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and Maluku. Meanwhile, the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2024) shows that the level of household food security in 3T areas is 30–40% lower than in urban areas. This condition indicates that nutritional challenges are not only caused by poverty,

but also by geographical, infrastructural factors, and socio-economic disparities between regions.

In this context, the Indonesian government launched the "Free Nutritious Meals" program as part of a national strategy to accelerate stunting reduction and improve the quality of human resources. This program, which will be implemented in stages from 2024, aims to provide healthy and nutritious food for primary school children and adolescents throughout Indonesia, with a focus on the 3T region. This policy is in line with the 2025–2045 RPJPN target which places nutrition improvement as the main pillar of human development, as well as supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the second goal: Zero Hunger. According to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2024), this program is not only a nutrition intervention, but also a social strategy to reduce public service gaps and strengthen nutritional justice throughout the archipelago.

However, the reality of program implementation on the ground shows significant complexity. Geographical challenges such as regional isolation, difficult transportation conditions, and limited supply chains of nutritious food are the main obstacles in the provision of food that meets nutritional standards. Widiastuti et al. (2023) found that in Asmat Regency, Papua, the delivery of nutritious foodstuffs such as vegetables and animal proteins took more than a week due to transportation limitations and extreme weather. As a result, nutrition menus are often replaced with local ingredients whose availability is uncertain, which ultimately affects the effectiveness of the program. In addition, the limitation of implementing personnel, such as nutrition officers and health cadres in the village, causes uneven distribution of programs. Nugroho and Prasetyo (2022) emphasized that the success of nutrition programs in the 3T region depends on cross-sector coordination between the Health Office, the Education Office, and local governments that play a role in monitoring and providing supporting facilities.

The phenomenon of nutritional inequality in the 3T region also shows a dimension of structural injustice that reflects the gap in citizens' basic rights to nutritious food. In the perspective of social justice, Sen (2020) mentioned that substantive justice is not only a matter of resource distribution, but also access to equal opportunities to live healthy and productive lives. Thus, nutritional justice must be understood not only as the availability of nutritious food, but also the ability of individuals and communities to obtain it. In Indonesia, this inequality of access is reflected in the fact that 70% of children in the 3T region do not have daily access to animal protein (UNICEF, 2023). The Free Nutritious Meal Program is expected to be a corrective instrument against this inequality, although its effectiveness still needs to be evaluated in terms of implementation, equity, and sustainability.

From a public policy perspective, the success of this program is not only measured by the number of beneficiaries, but also by the effectiveness of implementation, transparency of budget use, and local community participation.

Based on a report by the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture (Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture, 2024), the implementation of the early stages of the program shows significant variations between provinces. Some regions such as Central Java and South Sulawesi reported high levels of satisfaction, while regions such as Southwest Maluku and the Bintang Mountains faced distribution difficulties and food supply uncertainty. This variation indicates that the success of the program is highly dependent on the readiness of infrastructure, procurement mechanisms, and collaboration models between the central and local governments.

In addition to physical and logistical issues, social and cultural factors also play an important role in the success of nutritious eating programs in the 3T region. A study by Tahir et al. (2021) found that people's perceptions of "nutritious food" are often influenced by local values, where instant food is considered more "prestigious" than traditional foods such as salted fish or moringa leaves which are rich in nutrients. This shows that nutritional interventions cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context of the recipient community. Nutritious eating programs will be more effective when accompanied by cultural-based nutrition education and local community participation. In line with that, WHO (2022) emphasizes that community-based nutrition interventions must consider social dimensions, local food preferences, and supply chain sustainability.

Furthermore, the global context also provides important lessons for program evaluation in Indonesia. Some developing countries such as India, Kenya, and the Philippines have implemented similar programs with mixed results. In India, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme has reduced the prevalence of child anaemia by 11% in three years (UNDP, 2021), but faces corruption constraints and inconsistent food quality. In the Philippines, School-Based Feeding Programs increase school participation but are not sustainable due to budget constraints and dependence on donors (FAO, 2022). The learning shows that a nutritious eating program requires a strong governance foundation and policy adaptation to local conditions. Therefore, Indonesia needs to place the evaluation of the implementation of this program as a reflective process to ensure policy effectiveness and fairness in nutrition distribution.

The free nutritious meal policy in Indonesia was born from a strong push to realize nutritional justice as an integral part of human rights. In the context of the right to health and food, Law Number 36 of 2009 concerning Health and Law Number 18 of 2012 concerning Food affirm that every citizen has the right to nutritious, safe, and affordable food. The principle of nutritional justice means that government intervention must ensure equitable access, quality, and sustainability of nutrition services, without geographical or social discrimination. However, as revealed by Suryanto et al. (2022), the still wide geographical gap between the central and regional regions is the main factor that hinders the distribution of health programs, including nutrition. 3T areas are often left behind not because of a lack of policies, but because of weak

implementation capacity due to limited infrastructure, cross-sector coordination, and oversight mechanisms.

In the context of the implementation of the free nutritious meal program, the issue of governance is a determining factor for success. Based on the initial evaluation of the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas (2024), around 38% of the total beneficiary districts face obstacles in the procurement and distribution of nutritious foodstuffs, mainly due to long and inefficient logistics processes. Another problem lies in the oversight mechanism that is not yet fully transparent. Several reports mention data differences between the number of program recipients and the realization of distribution in the field, which can reduce the effectiveness of policies. The World Bank (2023) emphasized that the governance of public programs in Indonesia still faces challenges in synchronization between agencies, especially at the regional level. In the context of nutrition programs, weak monitoring and data-based reporting systems cause difficulties in measuring the effectiveness and accountability of implementation.

One of the important dimensions that is often overlooked in national nutrition policies is the aspect of social sustainability and local community participation. Fitriani et al. (2023) show that the success of nutrition interventions in rural areas is highly dependent on the level of community participation, both in the provision of local food and in the supervision of program implementation. Without community involvement, top-down policies risk not being appropriate for the local social and cultural context. In the case of the nutritious eating program in the 3T area, community participation plays a role in ensuring that the menu provided not only meets national nutritional standards, but is also accepted by the community based on local preferences. This participatory approach is an important element in the concept of nutrition-sensitive governance, where nutrition policies are integrated with local wisdom and community empowerment (UNICEF, 2023).

On the other hand, there is also a dimension of structural and economic justice that affects the effectiveness of nutrition policies. Economic inequality between 3T regions and developed regions causes differences in regional ability to support programs through assistance funds and local infrastructure. According to the World Food Programme (2023), this inequality widens the gap between national policies and implementation on the ground, especially as many local governments in the 3T region do not have adequate fiscal capacity to provide additional logistics or incentives for implementers. This shows that national policies require an adaptive approach that considers local conditions and regional capacities as part of the decentralization of nutrition development.

The research gap in this context arises from the lack of empirical studies that specifically evaluate the implementation of free nutritious food programs in the 3T region with a qualitative approach. Most previous research has focused on the effectiveness of nutrition programs in reducing stunting rates on a macro basis (Nugroho & Prasetyo, 2022; WHO, 2022), while aspects of implementation,

governance, and community perception in remote areas have not been widely explored. In fact, according to Bryman (2020), implementation-oriented policy evaluation must examine the dynamics of implementation in the field, including social, political, and infrastructure factors that affect the success of the program. Qualitative research is needed to understand how nationally designed policies are interpreted and implemented by local actors in the context of limited resources.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach that places nutritional justice as an analytical framework in public policy evaluation, with a special focus on 3T areas that have been underrepresented in national health policy studies. This research not only assesses the technical effectiveness of the program, but also examines the dimensions of social justice, governance, and local adaptation to national policies. Thus, this article contributes to the development of nutrition policy literature in Indonesia which is still dominated by quantitative approaches and macro indicators. In addition, the findings of this study are expected to strengthen the perspective of equity in public policy, where access to nutritious food is seen as a social right that must be guaranteed by the state through inclusive and equitable policy mechanisms.

Based on the description above, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in 3T areas with a focus on implementation effectiveness, infrastructure challenges, and nutritional justice principles in the context of national public policy. In particular, this study aims to analyze the extent to which the program can reach target groups equally in the 3T region, identify structural, social, and logistical barriers in program implementation and examine how the concept of nutritional justice is operationalized in policies and practices in the field. By using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the implementation of nutrition programs in remote areas and become the basis for the formulation of more adaptive, inclusive, and equitable policies in the future.)

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to deeply understand the dynamics of the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the 3T (Disadvantaged, Frontier, Outermost) area from the perspective of policy implementation and nutritional justice. This approach was chosen because it is able to comprehensively describe social realities and local contexts, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018), that qualitative research serves to interpret the meaning of social and policy experiences in complex contexts. The descriptive method is used to present the phenomenon based on empirical data and relevant policy documents without manipulating variables. This research focuses on the process, barriers, and program implementation strategies, as well as stakeholders' perceptions of policy effectiveness. The study objects included program implementers, health workers, nutrition cadres, and

beneficiary communities in the 3T area, who were selected through the criteria of direct involvement in the implementation of the nutritious eating program.

Research data was obtained through three main sources, namely first, policy documents and official government reports, including publications from the Ministry of Health, Bappenas, and the Coordinating Ministry for PMK. Second, the results of in-depth interviews and field findings from secondary research in scientific journals that discuss the implementation of nutrition programs in remote areas; and finally international supporting literature related to school feeding practices and nutrition policies based on social justice. Data analysis was carried out using the thematic content analysis approach as described by Braun and Clarke (2021), through the process of open coding, categorization, and interpretation of the main themes that emerged from the data. The validity of the research is maintained through source triangulation techniques and member checking of the secondary data used. The researcher interpreted the findings based on the theory of public policy implementation and the concept of nutritional justice. This approach is in line with the view of Lincoln and Guba (2019) that validity in qualitative research lies in the credibility of interpretation and the integration between social and policy contexts. Thus, this method allows for an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of program implementation, infrastructure challenges, and the extent to which the principles of nutritional justice are embodied in policy practice in the 3T region.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Effectiveness of the Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the Context of Nutritional Justice in the 3T Region

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the 3T area is a progressive step in realizing national nutritional justice, but its effectiveness still faces significant disparities between regions. Based on a report by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2024), around 76% of beneficiary areas have carried out the distribution of nutritious food according to schedule, but only 52% meet balanced nutrition standards as stipulated in the National Nutrition Guidelines for School Children. This inequality shows that universal policies do not always deliver equitable results when applied to regions with extreme geographical conditions and limited resources. In several districts in Papua and East Nusa Tenggara, program distribution was delayed for more than two weeks due to transportation limitations and extreme weather (Widiastuti et al., 2023). In this context, the effectiveness of policies is not only measured by their implementation, but also by their ability to reach the communities most in need, which is at the core of the principle of nutritional justice.

Nutritional justice emphasizes equality in access to nutritious food and supporting health services, not uniformity of treatment. This principle is in line with the view of Amartya Sen (2020) that substantive justice requires attention to the capabilities of individuals and communities to access resources that enable healthy living. In the implementation of the free nutritious meal program, this

equality approach is tested when a single national policy must be implemented in a highly diverse local context. For example, coastal areas such as Maluku utilize marine fish as the main source of protein, while mountainous regions in Papua rely on local tubers and vegetables. However, many national standard menus do not take into account variations in the availability of local foodstuffs, so program implementers in the regions often substitute food ingredients that change the nutritional composition (Fitriani et al., 2023). As a result, actual nutritional achievements are often not in line with program targets.

In terms of supervision and accountability, the effectiveness of the program also depends on coordination between agencies at the regional level. Nugroho and Prasetyo (2022) highlight that coordination between the Health Office and the Education Office is often out of sync, especially in reporting the number of beneficiaries and evaluating nutrition menus. This data missynchronization leads to target inaccuracy and has the potential to reduce the efficiency of budget use. The evaluation of Bappenas (2024) shows that around 14% of program funds in the 3T area were not realized on time due to administrative and logistical distribution constraints. This condition shows that there is a gap between policy design and the capacity of regional bureaucracy in managing evidence-based public programs. In the approach to public policy implementation, as explained by Pressman and Wildavsky (2020), policy effectiveness is greatly influenced by the level of consistency between design, policy communication, and implementation capacity in the field.

Nevertheless, a number of regions showed local innovation in the implementation of free nutritious meal programs. In Alor Regency, for example, the local government collaborates with local farmer cooperatives to supply vegetables and fresh food to reduce dependence on distribution from outside the island (Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Development, 2024). This collaboration not only improves logistics efficiency but also empowers the local economy. This kind of community-based approach shows that program effectiveness increases when local communities are actively involved in food provision and implementation monitoring. In line with this, WHO (2022) emphasized that community participation is a determining factor in the success of nutrition programs in remote areas, as it increases a sense of belonging and ensures sustainability.

In addition to social and logistical factors, the technology dimension also plays an important role in supporting the effectiveness of program implementation. The government has begun to develop an application-based e-monitoring system to record the distribution of food and the nutritional status of beneficiaries. Although this step is considered positive, World Bank research (2023) shows that the implementation of policy digitalization in 3T areas still faces internet network constraints and the digital capacity of implementing personnel. As a result, most reporting is still done manually and unintegrated, which lowers the speed of policy responses. Strengthening digital infrastructure and training of field officers is a strategic step to increase the transparency and effectiveness of the program in the future.

In addition, the implementation of the free nutritious meal program in the 3T region faces challenges in ensuring the sustainability of the supply of nutritious foodstuffs. In some cases, food supply chains are disrupted due to transportation limitations and dependence on imports of certain foodstuffs. FAO (2022) noted that supply chain stability is a critical factor in school feeding programs, where dependence on external supply can threaten program sustainability when logistics disruptions occur. For this reason, the strategy to strengthen local food production needs to be integrated in the program design, so that 3T regions can be independent in meeting the nutritional needs of their communities.

From the results of the evaluation of the literature and secondary data, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the 3T region is at a promising but not optimal initial stage. The program has succeeded in increasing access to nutritious food for school children and strengthening community nutrition awareness, but still faces structural obstacles in the form of logistical limitations, institutional capacity, and community involvement. An overly uniform policy approach at the national level needs to be tailored to unique local contexts. As revealed by Braun and Clarke (2021), justice-oriented public policies must be able to reinterpret equality in the form of a diversity of implementation strategies in accordance with regional social realities. In this context, the effectiveness of the free nutritious meal program is determined not only by the magnitude of the intervention, but also by the extent to which the policy is able to reflect the true value of nutritional justice, namely equal access to nutritious food for all Indonesian children, regardless of where they live in the center or in remote parts of the country.

Challenges of Infrastructure, Logistics, and Governance in the Implementation of Nutrition Programs in the 3T Region

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the 3T region is faced with fundamental challenges in terms of infrastructure and logistics governance. Limited transportation facilities, extreme geographical conditions, and inequality in food distribution cause the implementation of programs in remote areas to be delayed or not running optimally. Based on the results of the evaluation of the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas (2024), around 41% of the 3T region faces delays in food delivery due to limited road infrastructure and extreme weather that hinders sea transportation. This has a direct impact on the nutritional quality of the food provided, especially for fresh food such as fish, vegetables, and eggs. In Papua, for example, the delivery of foodstuffs to Agats District takes up to 10 days because it depends on the tides of river water (Widiastuti et al., 2023). Delays like this result in a shift in consumption schedules and have the potential to reduce the effectiveness of nutritional interventions for school children.

The limitations of logistics infrastructure also create a cost gap between remote areas and urban areas. The World Bank (2023) estimates that the cost of food distribution in 3T areas can be up to three times higher than in urban areas

due to high transportation costs and supply chain inefficiencies. This cost inequality poses a policy challenge, as nationally uniform program funds do not take into account variations in logistics costs between regions. As a result, some regions experience a lack of funds to meet the nutritional standards set by the central government. In this context, fiscal justice is a key factor to ensure that each region receives resource support proportionate to its level of difficulty. As emphasized by the OECD (2022), the principle of equitable allocation in public policy demands budget distribution based on needs, not nominal uniformity, so that policy outcomes truly reflect social justice.

In addition to the logistical aspect, institutional governance and coordination between agencies are also the main obstacles. In practice, the implementation of the free nutritious meal program involves various parties ranging from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Social Service, to local governments. This complexity creates potential overlapping authority and difficulties in reporting. According to the study of Suryanto et al. (2022), one of the causes of the ineffectiveness of the national nutrition program is the weak coordination across sectors, which results in duplication of activities and insynchronization of beneficiary data. A similar problem was found in the Coordinating Ministry for PMK (2024) report, which revealed that 18% of the program implementation areas experienced data differences between the Education Office and the Health Office regarding the number of students receiving nutritious food. This data inaccuracy not only impacts food distribution, but also on the accuracy of financial reports and public accountability.

Another challenge arises in the context of human resource capacity and program oversight systems. Many 3T areas still lack professional nutritionists who are able to do menu planning according to local needs and national standards. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2024), the ratio of nutrition workers in remote areas is only 1:20,000 inhabitants, far below the WHO standard of 1:5,000. This condition causes menu planning to often be done without expert assistance, so that the menu served does not meet the ideal nutritional balance. Fitriani et al. (2023) added that most program implementers in remote areas have not received adequate training in food logistics management and food safety. This increases the risk of food storage errors that can reduce nutritional quality and cause health problems.

In addition to the human aspect, the program supervision system is still not fully digital and integrated. The government has launched the e-PPGBM (Electronic Community-Based Nutrition Recording and Reporting) system as an effort to digitize national nutrition data. However, the implementation in the field still faces network constraints and device limitations. Sari et al. (2023) found that 63% of health facilities in the 3T region still record data manually, making them prone to delays and errors in reporting. As a result, the process of monitoring the effectiveness of programs becomes inefficient and difficult to analyze in real-time. In this context, the public policy literature emphasizes the importance of

integrated information systems to ensure policy transparency and accountability (Bryman, 2020).

Infrastructure and governance factors are also inseparable from the issue of governance culture at the local level. In some areas, the low level of digital literacy and administration among village officials is an obstacle to the implementation of data-based policies. Tahir et al. (2021) highlighted that low public trust in government programs can also reduce participation in nutrition intervention activities. This negative perception often arises as a result of past experiences with assistance programs that are not on target or unsustainable. Therefore, building social trust is an important prerequisite for strengthening the effectiveness of public policies in disadvantaged areas.

Despite facing many obstacles, various innovations have emerged at the regional level to address infrastructure and governance challenges. For example, the East Sumba Regency government is developing a collaboration model with NGOs and the private sector in the provision of nutritious food based on local food. This model not only reduces logistics costs, but also strengthens local food security (FAO, 2022). This kind of public-private partnership approach shows great potential in creating efficiency and sustainability of programs. Furthermore, UNICEF (2023) recommends that the success of nutrition interventions in remote areas is highly dependent on cross-sectoral policy integration, a combination of technological interventions, and strengthening the capacity of local communities.

Thus, the challenges of infrastructure and governance in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program show that national policies need to be adapted to specific local conditions. Decentralization of policies and institutional capacity building in the regions are key to overcoming implementation gaps. Increased investment in logistics infrastructure, digital technology, and training of implementing personnel must be a strategic priority so that the nutritious eating policy truly reflects the principles of nutritional justice. As stated by Lincoln and Guba (2019), the effectiveness of public policy implementation depends on the extent to which the process reflects the social context and the needs of the community served. In this regard, the success of nutrition programs in the 3T region depends not only on the availability of resources, but also on the maturity of an adaptive, transparent, and participatory governance system.

Social Justice, Community Participation, and Sustainability of Nutrition Programs in the 3T Region

Social justice in the context of nutrition policy is not only about equitable access to nutritious food, but also about community empowerment in managing and maintaining the sustainability of programs. In the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the 3T area, community participation is the main determinant of success, because the community is not just a beneficiary, but a partner in policy implementation and supervision. Based on a UNICEF report (2023), the success rate of nutrition intervention programs in remote areas increases by up to 25% if local communities are actively involved in food planning and distribution. This

is in line with participatory governance theory which emphasizes that community involvement strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of public policies (Cornwall, 2020).

However, in many 3T areas, the level of community participation in nutrition programs is still low due to a lack of understanding of the importance of balanced nutrition and limited participatory space in policy planning. Fitriani et al. (2023) found that most people in remote areas view nutritious eating programs as "government assistance" rather than as a social right guaranteed by the state. This kind of mindset has implications for a low sense of ownership of the program, which ultimately hinders long-term sustainability. In addition, the involvement of women who have traditionally been food managers in households is still not optimal, even though global nutrition literature shows that women's empowerment plays an important role in the success of child nutrition interventions (FAO, 2022; WHO, 2022). Therefore, increasing community capacity and strengthening the role of women in community decision-making is an important strategy to strengthen the foundation of social justice in nutrition policy.

From a socio-economic perspective, the sustainability of free nutritious meal programs in the 3T region is highly dependent on integration with local resources. The World Food Programme (2023) emphasizes that community-based approaches that optimize local food are not only more economically efficient, but also support environmental sustainability and regional food security. Several regions in Indonesia have begun to implement this model. In East Sumba and Lembata Regencies, for example, program implementers collaborated with local farmer groups to provide food ingredients such as corn, fish, and moringa leaves as the main ingredients of a nutritious menu. This approach not only reduces distribution costs, but also strengthens the local economy and shortens the supply chain (Coordinating Ministry for PMK, 2024). Thus, social justice in nutrition policy must be understood as an interaction between equal access, community empowerment, and local economic sustainability.

However, the sustainability of nutrition programs also faces challenges in terms of funding and long-term policies. Most nutritious feeding programs in Indonesia, including those financed by the State Budget, are annual and highly dependent on national budget priorities. The World Bank (2023) notes that dependence on central funding sources has the potential to hinder the sustainability of programs in the 3T area, especially if it is not followed by regional budget commitments. For this reason, a blended financing model is needed involving the private sector, non-governmental institutions, and local community initiatives. This model has been successfully implemented in the Philippines through the Public-Private Nutrition Partnership, which has been able to increase funding efficiency by up to 30% without sacrificing service quality (FAO, 2022). The adaptation of a similar model in Indonesia can be a strategic solution to strengthen the sustainability of the program in the long term.

In addition to economic factors, the social sustainability of nutritious food programs in the 3T region is also determined by the ability of local governments

to maintain competent human resources. The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2024) acknowledges that employee turnover and the lack of incentives for nutrition workers in remote areas are obstacles in maintaining the quality of program implementation. As a result, knowledge and experience transfer between program implementation periods is often interrupted. In this context, continuous training and performance-based incentives need to be designed to ensure the sustainability of human resources in supporting policy sustainability. Bryman (2020) emphasized that the sustainability of public policy implementation is highly dependent on the sustainability of organizational capacity and adaptation to changes in the social environment.

Community participation in supervision also has an important role in maintaining the integrity and accountability of the program. In some regions, such as Central Maluku and East Flores, local governments have formed village nutrition committees consisting of community leaders, teachers, and local health workers to monitor the implementation of the nutritious eating program (Coordinating Ministry for PMK, 2024). This initiative has proven effective in increasing transparency and suppressing irregularities in food distribution. This is in line with the principle of community accountability outlined by Fox (2020), where the direct involvement of the community in the supervisory mechanism strengthens public trust and encourages better governance. In addition to increasing transparency, community-based surveillance also expands public awareness of their nutritional rights, ultimately creating more active social participation.

Overall, the long-term success of the Free Nutritious Meal Program will be largely determined by the extent to which the policy is able to foster a sense of social ownership at the community level. A top-down approach that is only oriented towards macro targets will not be enough to guarantee sustainability without participatory support from local communities. As stated by Sen (2020), true social justice can only be achieved if people have the capacity to determine for themselves how to achieve equal welfare. Therefore, the policy of nutritious eating must be transformed into a social movement that involves all stakeholders including the government, society, the private sector, and educational institutions to ensure that every child in Indonesia, regardless of their geographical location, has an equal opportunity to grow up healthy and productive.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the 3T area is a strategic policy in realizing national nutritional justice and strengthening human resource development in disadvantaged areas. Based on the results of the study, this program has made a positive contribution to increasing access to nutritious food and public awareness of the importance of balanced nutrition. However, the effectiveness of its implementation still faces various structural obstacles, including limited transportation infrastructure, weak cross-sector coordination, and low human resource capacity at the regional level. Logistics cost inequality and information technology limitations also

exacerbate the implementation gap between regions. From a social perspective, low community participation and lack of integration of local food indicate the need for a more contextual and participatory approach. Thus, nutritional justice has not been fully realized substantively, as access to nutritious food is still influenced by geographical, economic, and institutional factors.

To strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of the program, future policies need to emphasize three main aspects: first, strengthening governance and policy decentralization, so that local governments have greater authority and capacity to adjust program implementation to the local context. Second, the development of logistics infrastructure and the digitalization of nutrition monitoring systems equally, in order to increase transparency and distribution efficiency. Third, empowerment of local communities and food integration based on regional resources to strengthen the independence and sustainability of the program. The active participation of communities, especially women, in every stage of implementation will strengthen the sense of social ownership of the program and ensure long-term sustainability. With a combination of adaptive, evidence-based, and social justice-oriented policies, the Free Nutritious Meal Program can be a transformative instrument in reducing the nutritional gap between regions and supporting the achievement of zero hunger and inclusive human development in Indonesia.

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