

# Cross-Sector Communication Strategy in Supporting the Implementation of the Food Security and Free Nutritious Food (MBG) Program in Majene Regency

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze cross-sector communication strategies to support the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) while strengthening food security in Majene Regency. As a new national program requiring multi-actor coordination, the MBG faces potential information and perception gaps between actors, necessitating planned cross-sector communication. This study used a case study method with a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, field observations, and policy document reviews. The results show that communication practices involve three main actors: the local government, food businesses and UMKM, and local communities including farmer groups and PKK cadres. Initially, communication patterns were formal and one-way through coordination meetings but have since transformed into faster and more responsive digital communication. Several challenges were encountered, including limited communication infrastructure in remote areas, differing interests in the food supply chain, and low public nutrition literacy, which results in uneven absorption of policy messages. To address these challenges, the local government implemented four communication strategies: an information strategy to expand dissemination, a participatory strategy through village deliberations and community involvement, a collaborative strategy with the private sector and civil society organizations, and an education strategy to improve nutritional understanding and encourage behavioral change. These findings confirm that the success of the MBG program lies not only in the distribution of nutritious food, but also in the synergy of communication between actors to build an inclusive, sustainable, and local potential-based food ecosystem.

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## 1. Introduction

Prabowo and Gibran's community-centered leadership is a concrete manifestation of the state's presence in promoting a just and prosperous society. As stated in the Prabowo-Gibran Astacita, the issue of food security is outlined in point 2, "Strengthening the national defense and security system and promoting national independence through self-sufficiency in food, energy, and water, the creative economy, the green economy, and the blue economy." Placing food security within the broader framework of the national agenda demonstrates the government's commitment to meeting food needs as an integral part of national defense and security. In general, the concepts of food security, sovereignty, and independence are realized through the Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG), which targets the education sector, particularly school students. This program demonstrates the state's commitment to ensuring the fulfillment of balanced daily nutritional intake for students, thereby supporting children's physical growth, increasing school attendance rates, and encouraging student focus in teaching and learning activities (Adnan, 2023; Zhao et al., 2025a). However, the success of this program is not only determined by the quality of the policy, but also by a cross-sectoral communication strategy that connects the government, educational institutions, communities, and local economic actors.

The evaluation of the Free Nutritional Meals (MBG) Program has significantly improved student nutritional intake. However, several issues remain, such as delayed food distribution and a lack of menu variety. This indicates the need for increased cross-sector communication and special attention. These findings provide input for improving the implementation of the MBG program to make it more equitable, efficient, and timely.

Various studies have shown that effective communication plays a crucial role in the success of programs like MBG. A study by (Bryson et al., 2006) and (Brimblecombe et al., 2017) which focuses on political communication strategies in public services, such as MBG, has not yet addressed the formal and structured regulatory aspects of communication in the context of cross-sectoral policies. Similarly, research (Jelahut et al., 2021) highlighting the differences in policy interpretation between sectors (stakeholders) does not specifically examine how communication regulations are formulated, socialized, and implemented in this social program.

Government policies or programs will be successful when they receive a positive and constructive response from the community as the direct beneficiaries. In the context of food security and the MBG program, success will be achieved if supported by an appropriate communication strategy. In this case, communication requires a strategic plan so that existing messages can be managed and received effectively and optimally by recipients. Given that food security and MBG are related to the community, cross-sectoral communication is necessary (Nurjanah et al., 2022). Effective cross-sectoral communication enables the public to obtain clear information, build trust, and strengthen the legitimacy of policies in accordance with social norms and Pancasila values, so that government programs can be directed towards the broader public interest.

Cross-sectoral communication is a crucial mechanism for addressing the complexities of public policy planning and implementation. A case study of regional government agencies in West Sulawesi found that formal communication between agencies often encounters obstacles due to the dominance of "sectoral egos," disrupting the flow of information and failing to coordinate policies. In response, government actors have begun utilizing informal communication, such as face-to-face meetings or personal networks, which have proven more effective in synergizing cross-sectoral programs (Clapp et al., 2025a). Theoretically, cross-sectoral communication refers to the extent to which strengthening communication points that function as brokers (liaisons) and opinion leaders (issue determinants) is crucial in maintaining the smooth flow of information between agencies. In the case of the Marasa Program in West Sulawesi, the Bappeda (Regional Development Planning Agency) as a broker and the Regional Development Planning Agency (DPMD) as a gatekeeper play a crucial role in the structure of the government communication network (Dinata, 2023).

Food security and the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) are two interrelated public policy issues with distinct characteristics. Food security is understood as a region's ability to ensure the availability, affordability, and consumption of food that meets nutritional standards for all levels of society (Maliati, 2023). In the context of Majene, food security challenges are multidimensional, ranging from geographical constraints in coastal areas, dependence on certain agricultural commodities, to limited food distribution in remote areas (Ariani et al., 2023). Beyond production issues, food security depends on the ability of local governments and communities to build cross-sector collaboration, mobilize local food potential, and strengthen distribution networks and public education (Leroy et al., 2015). Thus, strengthening food security in Majene is not only a technical issue, but also a socio-communicative one that requires intensive interaction between the government, business actors, and the community.

On the other hand, the MBG Program presents itself as a new policy intervention aimed at improving nutritional quality and preventing stunting by providing healthy food for students (Yusriadi, 2025). As a national program implemented at the local level, MBG faces implementation challenges such as institutional readiness, cross-agency policy harmonization, partnerships with local food-providing UMKM, and variations in nutritional literacy within the community (Zhao et al., 2025b). These obstacles indicate that the success of MBG depends not only on food provision but also on effective cross-sector communication as a means of policy synchronization, shared perceptions, and fostering public participation (Clapp et al., 2025b). Furthermore, the relationship between MBG and food security is interdependent. MBG requires a strong foundation for food security to ensure the sustainability of local food supplies, while MBG can be a catalyst for strengthening the local food economy through the absorption of products from farmers, UMKM, and communities (Febryanti et al., 2025). Therefore, research on cross-sector communication strategies is crucial to understanding how these two issues can be integrated into regional-based policy practices.

The Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG) is a national priority policy aimed at improving food security, education quality, and the health of the younger generation. In Majene Regency, this program is expected to support access to healthy food for students and strengthen the local economy through the involvement of UMKM and local farmers. Several previous studies have emphasized the critical role of nutrition programs in supporting human resource development, both in terms of health and community productivity. However, most existing research focuses on the economic, nutritional, and macroeconomic impacts of food policies. Few studies have specifically examined how cross-sectoral communication strategies influence the acceptance and effectiveness of MBG programs at the local level (Santoso et al., 2025).

Majene was chosen as the research location due to its unique social, cultural, and geographical characteristics. Majene is known as one of the centers of Mandar civilization, possessing strong local wisdom in consumption patterns, social solidarity, and traditional agricultural practices integrated with modern policies. Furthermore, Majene's geographical location, located on the coast with its maritime potential, and inland with its agricultural base, presents unique challenges and opportunities in ensuring food distribution and the sustainability of the free nutritious food program, which requires a cross-sectoral communication strategy that adapts to this socio-cultural and geographical diversity.

On the other hand, the food security and nutritional status of the Majene community still face various challenges, such as limited access to nutritious food in inland areas and the high dependence of coastal communities on fluctuating marine resources. This makes Majene an interesting social laboratory to study how coordination between local government, health and education sectors, and the community can be integrated through effective communication strategies. This uniqueness makes Majene not only a research location but also a concrete example of how cross-sectoral interactions can strengthen the implementation of locally based food security programs and support the success of the MBG.

The theoretical framework used in this study can be explained through the integration of development communication theory and food security theory. Development communication theory emphasizes the role of communication as an instrument of planned social, economic, and cultural

change. From this perspective, communication strategies are not only about conveying messages, but also encompass how actors (government, educational institutions, the health sector, and the community) interact, select appropriate communication channels, and encourage active participation to achieve development goals (Basit & Ramadani, 2025). In the context of Majene, this theory is relevant to explaining how cross-sector coordination can be strengthened through communication patterns that align with the local wisdom of the Mandar community, which upholds deliberation and mutual cooperation.

Meanwhile, food security theory focuses on three main aspects: food availability, accessibility, and quality (utilization), which must be achieved to ensure that people's nutritional needs are met sustainably (Arif et al., 2020). Majene's unique reliance on a combination of marine resources and traditional agriculture is crucial to analyze through this theoretical framework, as the distribution of nutritious food is influenced not only by local production but also by the ability of intersectoral communication to overcome geographic and social barriers. By combining these two theories, this study views Majene not only as a research location but also as a representative region with unique communication and food security complexities. This opens up opportunities to generate best practice models that can be replicated in other regions in Indonesia with similar conditions.

However, a study of cross-sectoral communication strategies in supporting the implementation of the Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG) in Majene Regency is crucial. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing how communication patterns between the government, the community, and other stakeholders can influence the program's effectiveness, acceptance, and sustainability. Focusing on the public communication dimension at the local level is expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions, both in strengthening public information literacy, increasing active participation, and forming more adaptive synergies between sectors in supporting food security and improving nutrition in the region.

## 2. Method

This research uses a case study method with a qualitative approach to explore cross-sector communication strategies in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG) in Majene Regency. This method was chosen based on the need to comprehensively understand the interaction and communication patterns between local governments, communities, and local economic actors in supporting food security and improving nutrition. The paradigm used is constructivism, which emphasizes understanding the subjective meanings constructed by individuals and groups in a social context. With this paradigm, researchers can explore how cross-sector communication strategies are formed and implemented at the local level by involving government, communities, and stakeholders to ensure the success of the food security program through MBG (Cresswell, 2013).

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory nature to describe and examine in depth the phenomenon of cross-sector communication without manipulation of research variables (Miles, 2014). Informants were determined through a purposive sampling technique, with the criteria of direct involvement or in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Free Nutritional Meal Program (MBG) and regional food security. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews and documentation studies, involving as many as 5 informants from local government elements, schools, local food UMKM, farmer/fisher groups, and community cadres.

The research analysis unit includes individuals and organizations that play a role or are affected by the implementation of MBG in Majene Regency, including technical agencies, educational institutions, local food production communities, as well as supporting policy documents and secondary data. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis, through the following stages: (1) transcription of interviews and field notes, (2) coding and categorization based on themes, (3) identification of cross-sector communication patterns and implementation barriers, and (4) drawing conclusions that align with the research focus (Moleong, 2000). To maintain data validity, the study applied triangulation of sources and methods by comparing the results of interviews, official

documents, and field observations. In addition, member checking was carried out by confirming the findings with informants to ensure compliance with empirical conditions. The reliability of the findings was maintained by compiling an audit trail that documented each step of the research process, so that the analysis flow could be traced and replicated by other researchers.

### 3. Results and Discussion

As a strategic element in the life of the nation and state, food security is strengthened in Law Number 18 of 2012 concerning Food, which explains that food is a basic human need, the fulfillment of which is a human right, cannot be postponed and cannot be replaced. Consumption of quality food will produce quality Human Resources which will have an impact on the implementation of National Development (Dedy Sutrisno, 2022) Food security was initially interpreted as the extent to which a country's population meets its food needs, both at the individual and community level. Food sufficiency has several indicators, including quality, quantity, safety, diversity, and equal access to nutritious food (Zhao et al., 2025b).

According to the 2023 National Food Security Index, one of the indicators measured to evaluate food and nutrition security achievements in districts/cities and provinces, Majene Regency scored 66.33 (ranked 321st out of 416 districts/cities in Indonesia), while West Sulawesi Province scored 73.03 (ranked 21st out of 34 provinces). Interviews indicated that the cross-sectoral communication strategy for implementing the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program in Majene Regency has not yet fully generated widespread understanding at the community level. Informants from schools, community leaders, and some parents assessed that program messages have been routinely conveyed through formal mechanisms, such as coordination meetings and inter-agency text messaging groups. However, informants from coastal and mountainous communities revealed that the information received tends to be technical, uses policy terms, and has not been translated into contextual and easily understood language. This condition has given rise to differences in perception and gaps in understanding regarding the objectives, implementation mechanisms, and benefits of the MBG program.

These findings indicate that local government communication patterns are still dominated by a one-way, administrative-oriented approach, making them less responsive to the diversity of social, cultural, and literacy backgrounds of the community. The implemented cross-sectoral communication strategies have not fully accommodated the needs of grassroots audiences, particularly communities in remote areas. This suggests the need for adaptation of communication strategies through message simplification, more inclusive media selection, and a dialogic approach so that policy implementation is not only communicated formally but also understood and responded to effectively by all beneficiary groups (Sulbar, 2025).

One focus of food security in Majene is the coastal area, with a focus on fisheries and maritime affairs as a strategic aspect of regional potential in Majene Regency. The goal is not only to meet food needs but also to preserve the environment and improve the welfare of coastal communities through the sustainable use of marine resources. Nationally, this aligns with the blue economy concept, where the marine and fisheries sector is a key driver of food security and sustainable development. The Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) has initiated training to strengthen the role of local governments in this sector as part of downstream efforts and to achieve food self-sufficiency. Furthermore, Indonesia's vast marine resources, such as sustainable fisheries potential of up to 6.5 million tons per year, are a key asset for sustainable agriculture and food production.

*"That is why food security programs in coastal areas usually focus on fisheries and maritime affairs, which aim to improve the welfare of coastal communities, preserve the environment, and ensure sufficient food availability." (Fauzan, Head of the Community Empowerment Division of Majene Regency, Interview, July 11, 2025)*

The food security strategy in Majene is holistic, leveraging local agricultural potential and incorporating the maritime sector into the regional food ecosystem, although it needs to be supported

by technical capacity, policy support, and more strategic program interventions. As is known, Majene Regency has strong agricultural potential, including commodities such as coconut, chocolate, rice, vegetables, and fruits due to its fertile geographical conditions and favorable tropical climate. Furthermore, the agricultural sector contributes the largest portion of Majene's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GDP), at around 37.74%, confirming its vital role in the local economy. Despite its significant potential, strengthening local food security faces various challenges such as limited resources or village technical capacity. Budget limitations and adequate human resources are obstacles to optimizing food production and distribution. To improve food security, various programs have been launched. A coordination meeting between the BRMP West Sulawesi and the Majene Agriculture Service encouraged the distribution of 10 tons of shallot seeds, as well as tractor and goat assistance as an effort to increase local agricultural productivity. Furthermore, the Majene Regional Police are also strengthening the agricultural sector through a simultaneous corn planting program to strengthen national food security and strengthen local participation.

*"To improve food security in Majene Regency going forward, PMD's perspective can be seen from several aspects, including regional potential, challenges faced, and efforts undertaken. Majene has sufficient agricultural resources, but this needs to be improved to meet its food needs." (Fauzan, Head of Community Empowerment, Majene Regency, Interview, July 11, 2025)*

The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program is closely linked to food security by ensuring nutritional intake for vulnerable groups (school children, pregnant women, and toddlers). This directly addresses nutritional issues such as stunting, while simultaneously boosting the local economy by absorbing farmers' harvests and creating new jobs, making it a dual strategy for human resource welfare and national food stability. This policy serves as a direct intervention to improve human resource quality through nutrition, while strengthening the domestic food supply chain.

Food security in Indonesia is not only related to food availability, but also to the proper utilization and consumption of nutrients by the community. One of the main issues in this context is the high prevalence of stunting, which directly impacts children's physical, cognitive, and learning development (Zhang et al., 2025). Under these conditions, the need to strengthen national food security encompasses not only food production and distribution but also ensuring that nutritional intake reaches the most vulnerable groups, especially elementary school students. The Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program exists to bridge this gap by leveraging regional food systems to provide quality nutrition for students. With this approach, MBG is not just a nutrition intervention but also a strategy to accelerate community-based food security.

Through the implementation of the MBG, the government strives to ensure that the agenda for meeting the nutritional needs of the younger generation aligns with long-term national development targets. Providing nutrition through schools is seen as the foundation for developing a healthy, intelligent, and productive generation, as capital for achieving Indonesia Emas 2045 (Arif et al., 2020). Thus, food security and the Food Security Program (MBG) are not two separate programs, but rather two components of a single, mutually supportive policy ecosystem: food security provides the basis for local food supply and self-sufficiency, while the MBG ensures that nutrition reaches beneficiaries through education and health interventions. Both serve as sustainable mechanisms that strengthen the quality of human resources while strengthening the regional food structure.

The Free Nutritious Food Program is expected to encourage and increase the competitiveness of the Indonesian people in international relations. By improving the nutrition of the community, especially school-age children from an early age, the Indonesian government seeks to utilize the demographic bonus to produce a superior, forward-thinking, intelligent, healthy, and productive golden generation of Indonesia in 2045. This program, with its vision of health in the world of education, is also in line with the targets set for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically how to create a society free from hunger and (SDG number 2) and improve the quality of education (SDGs 4) in building innovative national economic growth (Aldi & Djakman, 2020).

One of the main obstacles in implementing food security programs in villages is limited resources, both human resources and budget. This challenge results in the implementation of MBG in some areas being less effective and uneven. Regulatory support is in place, but its implementation is hampered by several aspects such as limited managerial and technical capacity of villages which causes program management to be less professional and effective; (2) Complex bureaucracy and lack of transparency in budget management, which slows down the disbursement of funds and reduces the effectiveness of program implementation; (3) Large budget allocations for MBG can risk neglecting other important sectors such as infrastructure and more sustainable village economic empowerment. Another problem is the varying level of community understanding, depending on the socialization and nutritional literacy received by each.

*"Some aspects include limited resources and budget, as well as a lack of capacity and skills among village officials. The MBG program is already well-known among the community, including in villages, although levels of understanding vary." (Fauzan, Head of the Community Empowerment Division of Majene Regency, Interview, July 11, 2025)*

The Majene Regency Government has taken concrete steps to address stunting and strengthen food security. One key step is to increase the capacity of village cadres through training and technical guidance. The goal is to equip cadres with adequate knowledge and skills to provide stunting education to the community, thereby spearheading local nutrition outreach. Furthermore, village food security, which refers to a village's ability to independently and sustainably meet its food needs, can be strengthened through community-based programs. Interventions such as cadre training and the utilization of local foods not only increase village nutritional independence but also ensure resource sustainability and active community participation.

*"The Village Community Empowerment Service has taken steps related to the issues of stunting and food security, one of which is increasing the capacity of cadres for training and technical guidance to improve their knowledge and skills in providing education about stunting to the community. Food security in villages refers to the village's ability to meet the food needs of its residents independently and sustainably and can be improved through various strategies and programs that involve active community participation" (Fauzan, Head of the Village Community Empowerment Division of Majene Regency, Interview July 11, 2025)*

The research results show that cross-sectoral coordination in Majene Regency involves three main actors: the local government (the Food Security Agency and the village community empowerment agency), the private sector (local food UMKM, logistics providers), and the community (farmer groups, PKK cadres, and civil society organizations). The local government, represented by the Food Security Agency, plays a strategic role as a regulator, facilitator, and policy controller. This agency is responsible for formulating program policy directions, regulating food distribution mechanisms, and ensuring integration with national food security programs. Furthermore, the local government acts as a bridge between sectors, enabling more integrated coordination across agencies such as the Education Agency and the Health Agency.

To ensure the program implementation runs optimally and on target, the government and the ranks of regional apparatus involved in the implementation of MBG, cross-sector communication synergy or communication between organizations is needed in implementing the program which requires strong collaboration between regional governments in the education, health, local economic actors, and the community, continuous evaluation and communication mechanisms so that program implementation can continue to be improved. Continuous intensive communication so that program implementation can run smoothly, without continuous intensive communication between organizations this program will not run smoothly.

Regarding the implementation of the MBG, the Majene Regency Food Security Agency plays a role not only as a food quality controller and regulator, but also as a key-actor in coordinating the flow of information across sectors. Field findings indicate that the agency employs several communication strategies, ranging from formal communication through regular coordination meetings with the

education and health agencies, to the use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups between agencies and food providers to expedite the distribution of information regarding menus, ingredient procurement, distribution schedules, and technical challenges in the field. Furthermore, the Food Security Agency also sends written instructions and technical guidelines to schools and food providers in an effort to establish a common understanding of food safety standards and the use of local ingredients. However, several informants noted that the technocratic format of policy communication makes it difficult for community actors such as farmer groups and PKK cadres to fully understand the procedures.

Nevertheless, the agency's communication approach demonstrates an adaptive communication pattern that is beginning to embrace local partners. Direct outreach efforts to farmer groups, food safety training for UMKM, and facilitation of dialogue at the sub-district level demonstrate a shift in government strategy from one-way communication to participatory communication based on needs and feedback. By ensuring a safe and standardized supply of local food, the agency not only ensures the sustainability of the MBG program but also strengthens local food security through the integration of local economic actors into the MBG value chain. This approach confirms that the Food Security Agency's communication strategy serves as a bridge between budget-based national policies and the local food production ecosystem, as well as an instrument for building trust, transparency, and cross-actor coordination in supporting program implementation.

*"In fact, the coordination of the food security and Free Nutritious Meals program will be successful by involving cross-sector collaboration. The participation of many parties, such as us from the Food Security Service representing the local government, as well as those from the private sector and the community. The key is how cross-sector communication and coordination must be realized so that the program can run effectively. Meanwhile, regarding the MBG, the Food Security Agency is tasked with ensuring the availability, safety, and quality of food to be used in the MBG program. It is also involved in drafting regulations related to the supervision of procurement and optimization of local food utilization, as well as inspection of MBG raw materials." (Musrifah, Head of the Food Security Agency of Majene Regency, July 12, 2025)*

Interview results indicate that the successful coordination of the Food Security and Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program is highly dependent on cross-sector collaboration between regional actors. Information from an informant from the Food Security Agency emphasized that, "coordination of the food security and Free Nutritious Meals program will be successful by involving cross-sector collaboration, the key is that cross-sector communication and coordination must be realized so that the program can run effectively." This statement is in line with field practice, where the Food Security Agency coordinates communication through several strategies, starting from formal coordination meetings with technical agencies and schools, as well as the use of digital media such as WhatsApp to expedite the delivery of information regarding menus, procurement standards, and distribution of food ingredients. Written communication strategies through circulars and technical guidelines are used to standardize understanding among the actors involved, while direct socialization to farmer groups and UMKM is carried out to translate policies into local languages and contexts.

In addition to its role as a food regulator and quality controller, the Food Security Agency actively provides technical guidance to food providers and facilitates feedback from the field. The agency's primary duties include ensuring the availability, safety, and quality of food included in the MBG system, including drafting procurement oversight regulations, inspecting raw materials, and optimizing local food sources to support community economic resilience. With communication patterns shifting from instructive to dialogic through training, discussion forums, and regular interactions with the private sector and the community, a transformation in the local government's communication strategy toward a participatory model is evident. These findings demonstrate that communication serves not only as a means of administrative coordination but also as an instrument for building trust, synchronizing roles, and ensuring policies are translated into concrete actions at the community level.

Interviews with managers of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program revealed their strategic position as the primary coordination point for program implementation at the regional level. Managers not only play a role in technical operational aspects but also carry out cross-sector communication functions that connect various policy actors, from local government agencies to school-level implementers and local food providers. These findings indicate that the success of MBG implementation depends heavily on the managers' ability to align food planning, procurement, and distribution through effective and coordinated communication mechanisms.

*"As managers, we are responsible for coordinating the implementation of the MBG, from menu planning and food procurement to distribution to schools. We also serve as a liaison between relevant agencies, such as the Food Security Agency, the Education Agency, the Health Agency, schools, and local food suppliers," (Anna, East Banggae SPPG Manager, August 7, 2025).*

Furthermore, interviews with UMKM involved in the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program indicate that cross-sector communication begins through formal mechanisms, including official meetings and outreach activities organized by local governments. As the program progresses, communication patterns become more flexible and intensive through the use of digital media. This shift reflects the government and program partners' efforts to adapt to the need for rapid and dynamic coordination in the implementation of the MBG, particularly regarding food procurement, quality standards compliance, and technical adjustments in the field.

*"Initial communication took place through official meetings and outreach. After that, communication became more frequent through a WhatsApp group with MBG managers and relevant agencies. Through this group, we received information about food needs, quality standards, delivery schedules, and any menu and administrative changes that needed to be prepared" (Imam, MSME, August 9, 2025)*

Meanwhile, interviews with principals and teachers implementing the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program indicate that schools are key actors in ensuring the smooth implementation of the program at the operational level. In carrying out this role, schools actively engage in cross-sector communication mechanisms that combine formal and informal communication patterns. Formal communication is conducted to ensure policy alignment and the division of roles between agencies, while digital media-based communication is utilized to address daily, technical and dynamic coordination needs.

*"Communication is conducted regularly through coordination meetings with the Education Office and the MBG administrators. We also use a WhatsApp group for daily coordination regarding delivery schedules, student numbers, and technical issues." (Helni, Principal of an MBG Recipient School, August 10, 2025)*

Another sector supporting the success of food security through the free nutritious food program in Majene is the private sector, particularly local food micro, small, and medium enterprises (UMKM) and logistics service providers, which are crucial elements in ensuring the availability and smooth distribution of food. Local food UMKM not only serve as providers of nutritious food based on local products but also help stimulate the regional economy. Meanwhile, logistics providers play a role in ensuring the supply chain runs effectively to reach schools and communities in remote areas. The presence of the private sector underscores the importance of public-private partnerships in strengthening the implementation of food security programs.

*"Currently, in Majene, many local food UMKM have emerged and are being directed to become the main suppliers of nutritious food ingredients based on regional products, while logistics partners ensure distribution to remote schools. There is a mutually beneficial collaboration, where local food UMKM certainly feel greatly helped by the free nutritious food program, because local products such as vegetables, fish, and traditional processed foods can be directly absorbed for school needs. In addition to opening market opportunities, UMKM have a real contribution to improving children's nutrition. From a distribution perspective, fellow logistics providers also play a significant role because they ensure that these food ingredients can reach*

*schools in remote areas. Therefore, the partnership between UMKM and the government is supported by business factors and social responsibility in supporting regional food security." (Musrifah, Head of the Majene Regency Food Security Office, July 12, 2025)*

Finally, various community groups represented by farmer groups, Family Welfare Movement (PKK) cadres, and civil society organizations play a fundamental role at the grassroots level. Farmer groups are the primary supporters of locally based food provision, making the MBG program more sustainable and less reliant on supplies from outside the region. PKK cadres, with strong social networks at the village and sub-district levels, serve as communication agents and support families in improving nutritional literacy. Meanwhile, civil society organizations play a role in advocating, monitoring, and ensuring that the program truly addresses community needs equitably.

*"We also see the importance of the role of farmer groups, PKK cadres, and civil society organizations, as they ensure that the program is truly accepted and utilized by the community. Farmer groups are certainly happy because local crops can be used directly for the free nutritious food program, thereby increasing income and improving the health of children in schools. Furthermore, the role of PKK cadres and civil society organizations is very helpful in providing families with an understanding of the importance of nutrition, while ensuring that this program is implemented fairly and equitably." (Musrifah, Head of the Food Security Office of Majene Regency, July 12, 2025)*

Stunting is a nutritional problem with multi-sectoral roots, including food access at the household level, which is influenced by economic factors such as purchasing power and availability. The Food Security Agency addresses the problem of stunting by conducting educational activities on balanced diets for the community. The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) plays a crucial role in addressing stunting by providing essential nutrients that prevent malnutrition, especially in vulnerable groups such as pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and toddlers, as stunting is caused by deficiencies in critical nutrients such as protein and energy during the First 1,000 Days of Life (HPK); however, MBG requires integrated support with sanitation, nutrition education, and individual medical care for optimal results, as MBG alone is insufficient to address existing stunting cases.

Research in Sweden shows that children from low-income families who received free school meals for nine years experienced a 6% increase in lifetime earnings, with a benefit-cost ratio of 7:1. Meanwhile, a similar program in Colombia demonstrated long-term impacts not only on school attendance but also on secondary school graduation and access to higher education. The MBG program must be understood in the context of Indonesia's fight against stunting, which remains a significant challenge. Data from the 2024 Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey (SSGI) showed a national stunting prevalence of 19.8%, down from 21.5% in 2023. While this trend shows a positive trend, it remains far from the government's target of 14.2% by 2029.

The government also has an integrated approach encompassing education, healthcare, and improving access to clean water and sanitation. However, there are no specific initiatives addressing food security as a whole. However, Bank Indonesia has initiated public awareness campaigns regarding the requirement that at least 20% of Village Funds be allocated for food security. However, village heads' understanding of this allocation remains limited. Many are unsure how to use the funds for various programs, such as improving food availability, affordability, and nutrition education.

*"Stunting is related to nutritional issues caused by multi-sectoral issues. One example is food access, which also affects people's purchasing power. Therefore, we provide education on balanced nutrition. To date, there have been no specific activities on food security. However, there are activities from Bank Indonesia that have focused on village funds, which must allocate 20%. Regarding the 20% funding for the community, especially village heads, there is still a lack of understanding, resulting in many programs being hampered." (Musrifah, Head of the Food Security Office of Majene Regency, July 12, 2025)*

Addressing stunting in Majene Regency cannot be seen as solely the government's responsibility, but rather as a collective effort involving various parties. Two key actors playing a significant role are

the private sector and the community. The private sector, particularly local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (UMKM), plays a crucial role in ensuring the availability of nutritious food based on local products. Food products such as processed fish, vegetables, and tubers are more accessible to the community because they are produced directly at the local level. Furthermore, logistics providers ensure that food is properly distributed to remote villages, where most families vulnerable to stunting reside. Without smooth distribution support, nutrition intervention programs will not run optimally.

*"We, the local government, have also been helped by the presence of UMKM, which have played a role in addressing the stunting problem in Majene. UMKM play a strategic role in providing nutritious, easily accessible local food products, while ensuring their distribution through collaboration with logistics providers to reach families in remote areas. They actively coordinate with us to provide healthy and affordable local food products to help children avoid stunting." (Musrifah, Head of the Majene Regency Food Security Office, July 12, 2025)*

On the other hand, communities also play an equally important role. Farmer groups play a key role in ensuring a sustainable supply of healthy food, ensuring that the nutritional needs of the community, particularly toddlers and pregnant women, are met. Family Welfare Movement (PKK) cadres spearhead education, providing counseling on the importance of a balanced diet, exclusive breastfeeding practices, and how to properly prepare nutritious food. Meanwhile, civil society organizations engage in advocacy, encourage community participation, and ensure that stunting treatment programs extend beyond food distribution to include changes in family consumption behavior.

*"We also see how various farmer groups, PKK cadres, and civil society organizations within the community are continuously working to provide education and assistance to ensure that nutritious food is consumed effectively to prevent stunting in children. The combination and contributions of the local government, the private sector, and the community make the stunting management strategy in Majene more comprehensive. This collaboration creates a more sustainable stunting management ecosystem, based on local wisdom, and aligned with the community's real needs." (Musrifah, Head of the Majene Regency Food Security Office, July 12, 2025)*

In a democratic system, communication between the public and the government is a vital element in determining the success of public policy. Communication is not merely a one-way process of conveying information from the government to citizens but also involves a feedback loop in the form of public input, criticism, and support. The changing communications landscape means that citizens are no longer merely recipients of policy, but are now actively involved in monitoring, evaluating, and influencing policy direction. Social media, public forums, and online complaint channels are new tools that expand the space for participation, enabling citizens to express their aspirations quickly and widely. However, this complexity also brings challenges, such as the spread of inaccurate information, opinion polarization, and low policy literacy in some circles. Therefore, the success of public policy communication depends heavily on the government's openness to dialogue, clarity of messages delivered, and the public's capacity to respond critically and constructively. Synergy between the two parties will create a policy process that is more participatory, accountable, and responsive to the true needs of the community.

The Indonesian government has developed various channels to accommodate public feedback, such as Lapor.go.id, official social media channels, development planning forums (musrenbang), and rapid complaint services at the regional level. These channels provide broader opportunities for the public to provide input, express complaints, or propose policy improvements directly. In the context of the Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG), this participatory mechanism is crucial to ensuring the program is on target and aligned with local needs. Through these public feedback channels, the public can report obstacles to food distribution, inadequate menu quality, implementation delays, or even propose innovations based on regional potential. For example, local farmers and UMKM can use these channels to offer fresh food products as part of the MBG supply chain, so that the program not only meets the nutritional needs of schoolchildren but also stimulates the local economy. Furthermore, the

government can use this feedback to conduct rapid evaluations, address technical issues in the field, and foster more open two-way communication. Thus, the existence of public participation channels serves not only as a formal means but also as a strategic instrument to strengthen community engagement and ensure the sustainability of the MBG program in various regions, including Majene Regency.

However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms still faces challenges, particularly in terms of response speed, follow-up quality, and transparency in decision-making. Therefore, building a two-way communication ecosystem between the public and the government is inevitable. A transparent, participatory, and adaptive public communication approach is needed, empowering the public as dialogue partners, not simply recipients of information. Furthermore, the public is also required to improve their critical thinking and communication literacy to provide constructive responses that impact public policy improvements.

However, food security plays a crucial role in supporting the success of the Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG), particularly in areas like Majene, West Sulawesi, which face geographical challenges, limited distribution infrastructure, and a reliance on local food sources. Without a robust food security system, a sustainable food supply will be difficult to achieve, especially in the face of emergencies such as extreme weather or natural disasters that frequently hit the region.

In the context of the MBG Program, cross-sector communication involving local governments, the private sector, and community groups is crucial. Community expectations for the sustainability of the Free Nutritional Meals (MBG) Program are reflected in the views of parents and community leaders, who emphasize the importance of more open and inclusive communication. Informants assessed that community involvement in the communication process is not optimal and is still dominated by one-way information delivery. This situation has prompted the need for more regular outreach programs, using simple and easy-to-understand language, so that the community is not only a beneficiary but also plays an active role in supporting and maintaining the program.

*"We hope for more open communication and the involvement of parents and community leaders. With regular outreach and simpler language, the community will be more supportive and help maintain the program's sustainability." (Farhan, Community Leader/Parent, August 14, 2025)*

However, the success of this program cannot be separated from a number of challenges that can hinder cross-sector communication in supporting the food security and free nutritious food program in Majene Regency as follows:

First, the lack of digital communication infrastructure in remote rural areas remains a serious obstacle. The MBG program demands effective coordination between the government, the private sector, and communities. However, in some villages, weak internet access and limited digital devices often disrupt communication. As a result, information regarding food distribution schedules, nutritious menu lists, and outreach on the benefits of nutrition do not always reach the community in a timely manner. This situation demonstrates that food security through MBG requires not only food availability but also adequate communication facilities for efficient coordination.

Second, there are conflicting interests between sectors, particularly between local food suppliers and distribution service providers. Local food farmer groups and UMKM want their products to be prioritized in the provision of MBG food supplies, while logistics providers emphasize distribution efficiency, sometimes oriented towards low costs and speed, even if they have to source supplies from outside the region. This tension has the potential to disrupt the synergy needed in the program. If not managed properly, conflicts of interest can undermine efforts to make local food a pillar of food security. Therefore, a space for dialogue and fair communication mechanisms are needed to ensure that economic interests do not override the program's primary objective, namely fulfilling balanced nutrition based on local food.

Third, the lack of nutritional literacy in the community is a fundamental challenge affecting the effectiveness of the MBG program. Although nutritious food is provided, not all families understand

the importance of a balanced diet and how to prepare food to maintain its nutritional value. In some cases, people still prefer instant foods or ignore the diversity of menus provided. This shows that food security is not simply about ensuring food availability; it must also be accompanied by changes in community consumption behavior. Family Welfare Movement (PKK) cadres, teachers, and civil society organizations have a strategic role in providing ongoing nutrition education so that the messages of the MBG program are truly understood and internalized.

To address these conditions, serious efforts are needed to ensure the success of the Cross-Sector Communication Strategy to Support the Implementation of the Food Security and Free Nutritious Food (MBG) Program in Majene Regency. Some of the cross-sector communication strategies implemented include:

First, information strategies play a crucial role in expanding the reach of the MBG program's message to the public. Local governments use community radio, village billboards, and official social media to promote the program's objectives, mechanisms, and benefits. The use of these various information channels increases public awareness of the MBG program as a concrete effort to support food security and prevent stunting. However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on the extent to which the message is simple, easy to understand, and relevant to the needs of the local community.

Second, a participatory strategy is key to ensuring the program's sustainability. Through village deliberations, the community not only becomes the beneficiary but also determines the MBG menu based on local foods. By involving farmer groups, PKK cadres, and parents, this strategy strengthens community ownership of the program. Furthermore, community participation ensures that the MBG program not only provides nutritious food but also strengthens the basis of local food security by prioritizing local agricultural and fishery products.

Third, the collaborative strategy is realized through the formation of a cross-sectoral coordination team. This team serves as a liaison between various agencies, such as the Food Security Agency, the Education Agency, the Health Agency, the private sector, and civil society organizations. This collaboration is crucial because food security cannot be achieved by one sector alone but requires integration between policy, food distribution, and nutrition education. Through cross-sectoral coordination, conflicts of interest can be minimized and the food supply chain for the MBG can run more effectively.

Fourth, the educational strategy is implemented by providing training to teachers, parents, and students on the importance of balanced nutrition. This strategy is an important foundation in building public awareness that food security is not only about food availability but also understanding how to consume it properly. Through early nutrition education, elementary school children not only receive nutritious food but are also equipped with the knowledge to maintain a healthy diet at home. Parents are also encouraged to be more selective in choosing and preparing food for their families. These four communication strategies complement each other. Information raises awareness, participation creates engagement, collaboration ensures synergy between sectors, and education encourages behavioral change. If implemented consistently, this communication strategy will strengthen food security in Majene, because the MBG program is not only seen as a government agenda, but as a collaborative movement of all elements of society. Ultimately, the success of the MBG is measured not only by the amount of food distributed, but by the ability of the Majene community to build a healthy, independent, and sustainable food ecosystem.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Food Program (MBG) in Majene Regency demonstrates that program effectiveness is highly dependent on the quality of cross-sector communication established between the local government, the private sector, and the community. The evolving communication pattern demonstrates a combination of formal approaches through inter-agency coordination meetings and digital-based communication mechanisms that enable faster and more responsive information dissemination. However, the communication process is not yet fully

optimized and still faces significant challenges, such as limited communication infrastructure in remote areas, differing interests among actors in the food supply chain, and low levels of public nutrition literacy. Research findings indicate that the most relevant communication strategies for strengthening program implementation include information strategies to ensure clear message delivery, participatory strategies to open up space for dialogue and feedback, collaborative strategies to synergize cross-sector roles and responsibilities, and educational strategies to increase public understanding and awareness of nutrition. By utilizing these strategies, communication serves not only as a technical coordination instrument but also as a tool for empowering and strengthening local food networks. Overall, the success of the MBG in Majene demonstrates that strengthening cross-sector communication is a crucial prerequisite for achieving program objectives and serves as a catalyst for sustainably improving regional food security.

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