

IMPLEMENTATION OF INDONESIA'S FREE NUTRITIOUS MEAL (MBG) PROGRAM IN A BORDER REGION: ANALYZING ACTOR POWER, INSTITUTIONS, AND IMPLEMENTER COMPLIANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) in East Tasifeto District, East Nusa Tenggara Province, based on three indicators of the implementation context: (1) the power, interests, and strategies of actors; (2) the characteristics of implementing institutions; and (3) the level of compliance and responsiveness of implementers. The findings indicate that MBG implementation is characterized by the concentration of operational authority within the Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) under a relatively clear hierarchical structure, while horizontal coordination and inter-institutional linkages among local actors remain limited. This condition indicates an uneven distribution of authority among actors. However, policy implementation is not entirely rigid, as implementers make adjustments to changing conditions and operational constraints while remaining aligned with the provisions of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN).

Keywords: *Policy implementation; Grindle framework; Free nutritious meal program; Border region; Actor coordination*

INTRODUCTION

School feeding programs are public policy instruments for improving child nutrition, educational participation, and human resource development (Verguet et al., 2020). These programs also support better food consumption, healthy weight, social engagement, and student attendance (Suprpto et al., 2025), while simultaneously strengthening local food systems through linkages with agricultural producers (Cupertino et al., 2022; Locke et al., 2025; Silva et al., 2023). However, their implementation is influenced by institutional and geographical contexts, institutional capacity, coordination, infrastructure, regulations, and community participation (Mainje et al., 2024; Sadag, 2025). Therefore, the success of the program depends not only on its benefits but also on the ability to translate policy into organizational practices and implementation routines (Kroth et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program is a national policy aimed at improving the nutrition of school-age children and pregnant women, as well as supporting human resource development (Sarjito, 2024). Its implementation involves schools, healthcare facilities, local governments, food providers, and communities in the procurement and distribution of food (Eliza et al., 2024; Jamal & Adinda, 2026). In addition to the nutritional aspect, the MBG Program involves farmers, small businesses, and local communities in the supply chain, which has the potential to support the regional economy (Mursalin et al., 2026). Therefore, its implementation depends on the translation of rules, authority, resources, and responsibilities by various actors at the local level.

The implementation of national policies into practice faces differences in institutional contexts, organizational capacity, and conditions across regions. The implementation of the MBG Program still faces regional disparities, limited infrastructure, coordination, distribution, and monitoring challenges (Putra et al., 2026). Dependence on technical guidelines also has the potential to create gaps in food safety and emergency response, while the involvement of security actors raises issues of checks and balances and the division of authority (Kiftiyah et al., 2025). This shows that the implementation of the MBG Program is determined not only by the substance of the policy, but also by the context of its implementation, particularly the power relations, interests, and strategies among actors, the characteristics of implementing institutions, as well as compliance and responsiveness to local conditions (Ningsih, 2025; Yasar & Suparman, 2026).

These issues become increasingly important in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions, which have geographical, infrastructure, institutional capacity, and socioeconomic characteristics that differ from those of other regions. Belu Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, provides a strategic context because it directly borders Timor-Leste while also facing serious nutritional challenges, with a stunting prevalence of 44.3% based on SSGI 2024. In this context, Tasifeto Timur District is a relevant location for examining the implementation of the MBG Program in a geographical and institutional environment with certain limitations. Through SPPG Knaha Moris, the MBG Program served 3,165 beneficiaries in June 2025. This condition makes Tasifeto Timur an important case for understanding how local context shapes relationships among actors, institutional capacity, as well as implementation and responses to the demands of national policy.

Several previous studies have shown that the MBG Program has a multidimensional character and involves various interests in its implementation (Suprpto et al., 2025) view the MBG Program as a cross-sectoral policy that integrates the dimensions of nutrition, education, and local economic development. (Fadli et al., 2026)(Fadli et al., 2026) places the MBG Program as a social welfare policy that requires effectiveness and sustainability in its implementation. Meanwhile, Kurniawan et al. (2026) shows that the implementation of the MBG Program is also related to household conditions, employment opportunities, and food security at the local level. These findings demonstrate that the MBG Program is a policy that goes beyond the function of food provision because it involves various actors, interests, resources, and institutional arrangements in the implementation process.

Although previous studies have discussed the benefits, socioeconomic impacts, and challenges of MBG implementation (Fadli et al., 2026; Kurniawan et al., 2026; Suprpto et al.,

2025), research on how the implementation context shapes policy implementation at the local level remains limited. It has not been sufficiently explained how power and interests among actors, the characteristics of implementing institutions, as well as compliance and responsiveness interact in the implementation of the MBG Program in areas with geographical, institutional, and resource constraints. This gap is important in the context of 3T border regions, as local conditions can influence authority, organizational capacity, and the ability of implementers to respond to policy demands. Therefore, an analysis is needed that positions the implementation context as a factor shaping the implementation of the MBG Program at the local level.

To analyze this gap, this study uses Grindle (1980) policy implementation perspective, particularly the dimension of the context of implementation. In Grindle's perspective, policy implementation takes place within a political and institutional environment that can influence how the policy is implemented. The context of implementation encompasses the power, interests, and strategies of actors; the characteristics of institutions and the governing regime; as well as the level of compliance and responsiveness of implementers Grindle (1980). This perspective enables an analysis not only of the formal rules governing the MBG Program, but also of the distribution of authority, the positions and interests of actors, the characteristics of implementing organizations, as well as the ability of actors to implement and respond to the policy within a particular local context.

This perspective is relevant for understanding the implementation of the MBG Program in Tasifeto Timur because the program brings together various actors and organizations with different authorities, interests, and capacities under geographical and institutional conditions that are not straightforward. Limited access, infrastructure, human resources, and institutional capacity can influence how actors exercise their authority, establish coordination, comply with program requirements, and respond to various implementation challenges. Therefore, this study focuses on the institutional context and relationships among actors that shape the implementation of the MBG Program in the 3T border region, by analyzing three main aspects of Grindle: the power, interests, and strategies of actors; the characteristics of implementing institutions; and compliance and responsiveness in policy implementation.

This study aims to analyze the implementation context of the Free Nutritious Meals Program in Tasifeto Timur District, Belu Regency, using Grindle (1980) policy implementation perspective. Specifically, the study examines how the power, interests, and strategies of actors; the characteristics of implementing institutions; as well as compliance and responsiveness shape the implementation of the MBG Program in the local context. This study contributes to the policy implementation literature by explaining how institutional contexts and relationships among actors influence the translation of national policies into practice in areas with limited geographical conditions and resources, particularly in the context of 3T and border regions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Policy implementation is explained through top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The top-down approach emphasizes policy objectives, resources, communication, institutional arrangements, and administrative control (Jeffrey L. Pressman, 2023; Van Meter & Van Horn,

1975; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989). Conversely, the *bottom-up* approach emphasizes the role of implementing actors, discretion, and local conditions (Lipsky, 1980; Elmore, 2012). Although important, both perspectives have limitations in explaining implementation involving multiple actors and levels of government, particularly when the process is simultaneously influenced by power, interests, institutional relationships, and local conditions.

These limitations are relevant to the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) Program, which involves central and local governments, implementing units, schools, suppliers, and communities. Program implementation depends not only on compliance with policy standards or the discretion of implementers, but also on relationships among actors and institutional capacity in translating the policy at the local level. Therefore, a framework is needed that is capable of connecting policy structures with political and institutional contexts. The selection of the theory in this study is based on this need, particularly to understand policy implementation that is multiactor, multilevel, and contextual.

Grindle (1980) offers a framework that connects policy content (*policy content*) and the context of implementation (*context of implementation*). Unlike approaches that place greater emphasis on administrative control or implementer discretion, Grindle incorporates the power, interests, and strategies of actors; the characteristics of institutions and regimes; as well as implementer compliance and responsiveness. These dimensions are consistent with the characteristics of the MBG Program, which involves various institutions and must be implemented under different geographical and resource conditions. Therefore, Grindle was selected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional contexts and relationships among actors shape the implementation of the MBG Program at the local level. This study specifically uses Grindle (1980) context of implementation dimension, which includes (1) the power, interests, and strategies of actors; (2) the characteristics of implementing institutions; and (3) the level of compliance and responsiveness of implementers. This focus enables the study to explain how the context of power, institutions, and adaptive capacity shapes the implementation of the MBG Program, rather than merely assessing the achievement of policy objectives. Applying this framework to Tasifeto Timur as a 3T region and border area contributes by demonstrating how national policy is translated and adapted within a local context characterized by specific geographical and institutional conditions and resource limitations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the implementation of the MBG Program within the local institutional and social context (Yin, 2015). The research was conducted in Tasifeto Timur District, Belu Regency, as a 3T and border area with geographical, infrastructure, and institutional limitations. A qualitative approach was chosen not to quantitatively measure the program's coverage or effectiveness, but to explain how implementation takes place, including how actors exercise authority, pursue interests, and respond to local conditions. A total of 22 informants were purposively selected from local government, schools, SPPG, students, farmers, and the community.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The interviews explored the experiences, interests, strategies, compliance, and

responses of actors, while observation and documentation were used to examine implementation practices. The researcher adopted a critical and reflexive position by not directly accepting statements from implementers or policy documents as evidence of success. The information was compared with the results of observations, documents, and the perspectives of other actors to identify gaps between formal provisions and implementation practices.

Data analysis used the model developed by Miles & Huberman (2014) which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data were coded based on the three dimensions of Grindle (1980) *context of implementation*: (1) the power, interests, and strategies of actors; (2) the characteristics of implementing institutions; and (3) the level of compliance and responsiveness of implementers. The analysis focused on tensions and gaps between policy and local practices. Source and method triangulation were used to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Thus, this study does not merely describe implementation but critically explains how authority, resource limitations, relationships among actors, compliance, and adaptation shape the implementation of the MBG Program in the context of a 3T border region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Power, Interests, and Strategies of the Actors Involved

Power in the implementation of the MBG Program is reflected in the authority of actors to determine and adjust operational decisions. The interview findings indicate that operational authority is more concentrated within the SPPG, particularly in managing production, task allocation, and food distribution to schools. Decisions refer to technical guidelines while being adjusted to field constraints. The involvement of local government is relatively limited. The Health Office plays a role in food safety inspections and periodic monitoring, while coordination with the SPPG has not yet been intensive. Local government primarily functions in supervision and technical support, while the main operational authority lies with the SPPG.

The Education Office primarily plays a role in providing school data and supporting formal activities, while the district government is more involved in the inauguration or *launching* of the MBG kitchen. Neither has direct authority over day-to-day operational implementation. Overall, the implementation of the MBG Program involves various actors, but the distribution of authority is not yet evenly distributed. The SPPG occupies the primary position in operational decision-making, while the Health Office, Education Office, and district government perform supporting, administrative, supervisory, and formal participation functions.

The actions of the actors are reflected in the division of responsibilities between the SPPG and schools. The SPPG is responsible for managing the kitchen, including menu preparation, procurement of ingredients, food processing, packaging, and food distribution in accordance with nutritional, hygiene, and food safety standards. The quantity of food is adjusted to the number of beneficiaries through coordination with schools. Schools are responsible for receiving, distributing, monitoring consumption, and returning food containers. At the elementary school level, teachers are more actively involved in assisting students, while at the junior high school level, the mechanism is more independent, involving teachers on duty and class representatives under teacher supervision.

These findings indicate that the actions of the actors take place through the division of roles at each level of implementation. The SPPG serves as the main implementer of food provision and distribution, while schools translate the program through mechanisms for receiving, distributing, monitoring, and consuming the meals. The differences in mechanisms between elementary and junior high schools demonstrate adjustments based on the characteristics of the beneficiaries, while remaining within the framework of program procedures.

The implementation strategy of the MBG Program at the SPPG level is directed toward compliance with BGN regulations, professionalism, quality, and program sustainability. Compliance serves as the basis for implementation, while professionalism is demonstrated through the consistent provision of quality meals. External strategies are carried out by building public understanding and acceptance through the quality and benefits of the program to strengthen support for and the sustainability of the MBG Program.

Thus, the strategies of the actors have two orientations: internal, through compliance and professionalism, and external, through public acceptance and trust. The implementation of the MBG Program depends not only on formal regulations but also on the implementers' ability to maintain program quality and build social legitimacy for its sustainability.

Characteristics of Institutions and the Governing Regime

Institutional characteristics in the implementation of the MBG Program can be seen from the division of roles and authority among the organizations involved in program implementation. The interview findings indicate a hierarchical authority structure, ranging from the central level to implementers in the field. The National Nutrition Agency (BGN) has the authority to establish regulations and technical guidelines and to determine implementing partners. Subsequently, the partners appoint the SPPG as the unit responsible for carrying out the operational functions of food provision.

At the implementation level, the SPPG is responsible for the food preparation and provision process, starting from ingredient preparation and production to food distribution to schools in accordance with the established provisions and schedule. Meanwhile, the PIC performs a supervisory function over SPPG operations, ensuring that implementation follows BGN technical guidelines and coordinating with schools and other relevant actors in carrying out activities in the field.

These findings indicate that the vertical distribution of authority is relatively clear, with BGN serving as the rule-making and policy-directing institution, the partner acting as the intermediary for implementation, and the SPPG serving as the operational implementer. This structure provides relatively clear boundaries of authority in the implementation of the MBG Program and facilitates the assignment of responsibilities at each level.

However, when these findings are considered together with the previous findings on the aspect of power, there is a difference between the clarity of the vertical authority structure and the involvement of local government institutions in operational implementation. This means that clarity in the division of tasks within the MBG structure does not necessarily indicate a broad distribution of authority among organizations at the local level. The institutional structure more clearly demonstrates a strong pattern of vertical control, while the

scope for involvement of local government institutions in operational decision-making remains relatively limited.

Thus, the institutional characteristics of the MBG Program in Tasifeto Timur are characterized by a clear hierarchy of authority from BGN to the SPPG, but with operational authority concentrated within the program implementation unit. These findings indicate that clarity of the institutional structure and coordination among organizations are two distinct aspects. The authority structure may be clearly organized vertically, while at the same time, horizontal coordination with local government institutions may remain limited in the operational implementation of the program.

Level of Compliance and Responsiveness of Implementers

Implementer compliance in the implementation of the MBG Program is reflected in the use of BGN regulations and technical guidelines as references at each stage of the program. The interview findings indicate that the SPPG carries out activities ranging from menu preparation, ingredient preparation and processing, to distribution in accordance with applicable provisions. Menus are prepared based on nutritional standards, while food ingredients are cleaned, cut, and weighed according to requirements and the guidance of managers and nutrition personnel. Subsequently, the production team processes the food according to the established menu and guidelines, while distribution is carried out based on the schedule and operational directions of the SPPG.

The findings indicate that compliance with the regulations occurs at every stage of MBG implementation, with BGN technical guidelines serving as the primary reference, from nutrition personnel and the preparation and production teams to distribution staff. However, these findings primarily reflect compliance as reported by the implementers and therefore do not directly demonstrate the conformity of all practices with the program requirements. Therefore, the interview findings need to be considered together with observations and documentation to assess the consistency between implementation practices and the established standards.

In its implementation, this orientation toward compliance occurs alongside various operational problems in the field. The interview findings indicate that the implementation of the MBG Program faces several challenges, particularly related to the availability and suitability of food ingredients, changes in the number of beneficiaries, changes in distribution schedules, and technical difficulties in the food processing process. These problems arise at several stages of implementation, ranging from ingredient preparation and the production process to food distribution to schools.

At the preparation, production, and distribution stages, implementers respond to challenges by adjusting processes, schedules, and coordination among teams. Discrepancies in the quantity or quality of ingredients are addressed through inspection, cleaning, and reprocessing in accordance with the directions of managers and nutrition personnel. Changes in ingredient requirements, distribution schedules, and equipment-related problems encourage adjustments to production processes and schedules. At the distribution stage, changes in school schedules or delivery delays are addressed through schedule adjustments and coordination with the relevant teams so that deliveries can continue according to the conditions at the schools.

In addition to addressing operational issues, implementers also respond to public concerns regarding food safety issues and reports of poisoning related to the MBG Program through education and socialization efforts. These efforts are aimed at providing an understanding of the implementation and benefits of the program, as well as reducing public doubts about the safety of the food provided.

Overall, the findings indicate that implementer responsiveness is not limited to resolving problems after challenges arise, but also involves adjusting implementation processes to changing conditions in the field. Implementers continue to refer to program guidelines when facing shortages of ingredients, schedule changes, or technical difficulties, while making adjustments to the methods and timing of implementation. This pattern demonstrates an adaptive response in the implementation of the MBG Program, namely efforts to maintain compliance with program requirements while simultaneously adapting implementation to the operational conditions encountered.

Hus, the level of compliance and responsiveness of implementers in the implementation of the MBG Program demonstrates a complementary relationship. Compliance with national standards serves as the main framework for implementation, while responsiveness enables implementers to adjust the way the program is carried out when facing conditions that cannot be fully predicted by formal procedures. These findings show that the implementation of the MBG Program in Tasifeto Timur does not occur through rigid compliance, but rather through compliance accompanied by the capacity to adapt to local conditions.

Discussion

Power, Interests, and Strategies of the Actors Involved

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the MBG Program in Tasifeto Timur District involves various actors, but the distribution of authority in decision-making is not yet evenly distributed. The SPPG has greater authority over operational decisions, while the Health Office, Education Office, and district government primarily perform supporting, supervisory, and administrative functions. This condition indicates that the involvement of multiple actors does not necessarily result in an equal distribution of influence. The SPPG's position as the implementing unit directly involved in operational activities provides it with greater decision-making space compared to local government actors.

These findings reinforce the issues identified in previous studies regarding the governance of the MBG Program. Suprpto et al.(2025) indicating weak cross-sectoral coordination as well as limited capacity and regulatory issues in the implementation of the MBG Program. Ichsan et al. (2026) also found issues concerning the distribution of authority, which encouraged implementers to make adjustments at the local level, while Hadinata (2026) indicates that the role of schools in MBG governance remains relatively limited and requires stronger interinstitutional collaboration. However, this study provides a more specific explanation of how this imbalance in roles occurs at the local level, namely through the dominance of SPPG's operational authority, while local government actors and schools have different scopes of involvement. Thus, coordination issues in the implementation of the MBG

Program are not only related to the presence of actors but also to the distribution of authority among these actors.

On the other hand, the distribution of authority does not eliminate room for adaptation in implementation. Differences in mechanisms between elementary schools and junior high schools indicate adjustments in implementation based on the characteristics of the beneficiaries, while the SPPG adjusts its operational activities when facing field conditions. These findings show that national policy is not implemented in a completely uniform manner but is translated through the practices of actors at the local level. This is in line with, Ichsan et al. (2026) which shows that limitations in operational guidelines and the distribution of authority can encourage implementers to make adjustments. In the context of this study, such adaptations take place within the framework of BGN regulations, indicating the need to connect national standards with implementation conditions in 3T regions.

The strategies of actors in the implementation of the MBG Program are reflected through a combination of compliance with BGN regulations, implementer professionalism, and efforts to build public acceptance. These strategies are directed not only toward fulfilling formal procedures but also toward maintaining the quality and sustainability of the program. These findings are in line with Hadiningrat et al. (2025) which emphasizes the importance of governance and collaboration in the implementation of the MBG Program. In the context of 3T regions, the implementation strategy demonstrates a relationship between the concentration of authority within operational actors, the relatively limited involvement of other actors, and the ability of implementers to adapt within the boundaries of national policy.

Characteristics of Institutions and the Governing Regime

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the MBG Program in Tasifeto Timur has a relatively clear vertical authority structure, but this clarity has not been fully accompanied by strengthened horizontal coordination at the local level. BGN occupies the position of rule-maker and policy director, the partner functions as an implementation intermediary, while the SPPG performs operational functions. This structure provides clarity regarding responsibility at each level, but at the same time, places operational authority primarily within the SPPG. This condition shows that institutional characteristics cannot be viewed solely in terms of clarity in the division of tasks, but also in terms of how authority is distributed and connected among organizations in policy implementation.

Hese findings share both similarities and differences with previous studies Ichsan et al. (2026) found that the distribution of authority in MBG implementation still faces challenges, including limited operational guidelines that encourage implementers to make adjustments at the local level. In this study, the issue takes a different form, as the hierarchy of authority from BGN to the SPPG is relatively clear, but this clarity does not automatically expand the authority of local government institutions in operational decision-making. Meanwhile, Hadinata (2026) shows that the role of schools in MBG governance remains limited and that stronger collaboration among BGN, the education sector, and the health sector is needed. These findings are consistent with the conditions in Tasifeto Timur, particularly in showing that the differentiation of formal roles has not yet fully resulted in strong horizontal engagement among actors.

This condition also reinforces the findings of previous studies Suprpto et al.(2025) regarding the importance of cross-sectoral coordination and institutional capacity in the implementation of the MBG Program. In the context of Tasifeto Timur, the issue is not primarily the absence of an institutional structure, but rather the gap between clear vertical control and horizontal coordination among organizations. A clear structure can facilitate control and the assignment of responsibilities, but it does not necessarily create strong collaborative mechanisms between the SPPG and local government institutions and other relevant organizations. Thus, this study demonstrates that the effectiveness of the institutional structure in implementing the MBG Program depends not only on the clarity of the hierarchy but also on the ability of the structure to connect the authority and functions of various actors at the local level.

From the perspective of Grindle (1980) *Context of Implementation*, these findings indicate that the characteristics of institutions and the governing regime shape the scope of action of implementers through a hierarchical authority structure. An important contribution of this study is demonstrating that clarity of vertical authority is not synonymous with strong horizontal coordination. In the context of 3T regions such as Tasifeto Timur, this condition is important because program implementation requires connectivity between the national structure and the capacity and functions of local institutions. Therefore, strengthening MBG governance cannot be achieved solely through reinforcing hierarchies and the division of tasks, but also through horizontal coordination mechanisms that enable local governments, schools, SPPGs, and relevant actors to contribute more effectively to program implementation.

Level of Compliance and Responsiveness of Implementers

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the MBG Program in Tasifeto Timur is characterized by implementers' compliance with BGN regulations and technical guidelines, accompanied by the ability to adapt implementation to field conditions. Such compliance is reflected in the use of BGN guidelines as a reference in menu planning, ingredient preparation, food processing, and food distribution. However, compliance does not occur rigidly, as implementers continue to make adjustments when facing changes in the number of beneficiaries, ingredient availability, changes in distribution schedules, and technical difficulties in food processing. This pattern indicates that MBG implementation is a process that takes place within a particular context and is influenced by operational conditions at the local level, as Babo & Sidi (2026) emphasizes the importance of understanding implementation through the process, the factors influencing it, and the context in which the policy is implemented.

These findings are consistent with various studies showing that the implementation of the MBG Program still faces challenges that may affect the capacity of implementers to carry out the policy. Suprpto et al. (2025) identifying regulatory gaps, logistical inefficiencies, capacity and infrastructure limitations, food safety issues, as well as weak cross-sectoral coordination as challenges to implementation. Nurmansyah (2025) also shows that food safety, logistical issues, and regulatory coherence are important issues that require multisectoral integration and strengthened monitoring. Meanwhile, in the context of different policies, shows that limited actor involvement and resources constrain resource exchange, while formal

decisions and the institutionalization of networks can function with institutional support. In the context of the MBG Program, this emphasizes that implementer responsiveness is influenced not only by compliance, but also by capacity, resources, and relationships among implementers.

In the context of Tasifeto Timur, this study shows that despite various operational challenges, implementers continue to use BGN regulations as the main framework for implementing the program. This condition indicates that the existence of formal standards can serve as an instrument for maintaining consistency in implementation, while adaptive capacity is required when field conditions do not fully correspond to the conditions assumed in the guidelines. This is closely related to Ichsan et al. (2026), the study found that limitations in operational guidelines, technical training, facilities, and clarity in the division of authority encouraged implementers at the school level to make adjustments to the implementation mechanisms. In contrast, the study in Tasifeto Timur shows that such adjustments were made while continuing to use BGN guidelines as the main reference.

In terms of responsiveness, this study shows that implementers do not merely resolve problems after challenges arise, but also make adjustments to processes, timing, and work mechanisms so that implementation objectives can still be achieved. Responses are made to changes in the availability of ingredients, the number of beneficiaries, school schedules, as well as technical difficulties in food processing and distribution. Thus, responsiveness in MBG implementation can be understood as the ability of implementers to translate policy provisions into actions that are appropriate to the dynamics of field conditions. In this regard, Babo & Sidi (2026) this emphasizes that implementation research needs to pay attention to the implementation process and strategies, rather than focusing solely on the final outcomes of the policy.

The responsiveness is also related to interinstitutional relationships in program implementation. Hadinata (2026) indicates that the limited role of schools and the suboptimal collaboration among BGN, the education sector, and the health sector remain challenges in MBG governance. In line with this, Hadiningrat et al. (2025) emphasizes the importance of strengthening school-based governance to improve the effectiveness of MBG implementation. In the context of Tasifeto Timur, responses to changes in distribution schedules and conditions at schools are carried out through communication and adjustments between the SPPG and schools. This indicates that although the program's authority structure is hierarchical, the continuity of implementation at the local level still requires interaction and responsiveness among implementers.

Although this study focuses on MBG, Molan (2022), in the context of policy networks, shows that limited actor involvement does not necessarily cause implementation mechanisms to cease functioning, as formal decision-making and the institutionalization of networks can still operate. This finding is relevant as a comparison for understanding the conditions of the MBG Program in Tasifeto Timur. Although the involvement of local government in daily operations is relatively limited and authority is more concentrated within the SPPG, implementation can still proceed through the division of roles and available coordination mechanisms. Thus, the study Molan (2022) this helps strengthen the argument that implementation effectiveness is not determined solely by the number of actors involved, but

also by how roles, resources, and mechanisms of relationships among implementers are institutionalized.

Compared with Nurmansyah (2025); Suprpto et al., (2025), as well as the findings Molan (2022) this study also shows that the adaptive capacity of implementers is an important mechanism for addressing regulatory, resource, logistical, food safety, and coordination challenges. Meanwhile, Ichsan et al. (2026) “demonstrates the importance of adaptive capacity at the implementer level, while (Hadinata, (2026) and Hadiningrat et al. (2025) emphasizes the importance of strengthening the role of schools and interinstitutional relationships. Thus, responsiveness cannot be separated from institutional capacity and patterns of relationships among actors in policy implementation.

From the perspective of Grindle (1980) *Context of Implementation*, this condition indicates that the level of compliance and responsiveness of implementers results from the interaction between policy demands and the implementation context. Compliance with BGN guidelines provides boundaries and standards for action, while local conditions create the need for adjustments in implementation. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate a pattern of adaptive compliance, in which implementers maintain an orientation toward policy standards while using their responsiveness to adjust the manner and timing of implementation to changing field conditions. These findings indicate that in the context of 3T regions such as Tasifeto Timur, MBG implementation is determined not only by the existence of formal regulations, but also by the ability of implementers to translate these regulations adaptively when facing limited resources, changing operational conditions, and coordination needs at the local level.

CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the MBG Program in Tasifeto Timur is characterized by the concentration of operational authority within the SPPG within a clear hierarchical structure, but with limited horizontal coordination and interinstitutional connectivity among local institutions. Nevertheless, implementation does not take place rigidly, as implementers adapt to changes and operational challenges while continuing to adhere to BGN regulations. Responsiveness is also demonstrated through adjustments to implementation processes, as well as education and socialization efforts to build public acceptance. The contribution of this study shows that the implementation of the MBG Program in 3T regions is influenced not only by compliance with the policy, but also by the concentration of authority, institutional characteristics, limited coordination among actors, and the ability of implementers to adapt the policy to local conditions.

These findings reinforce Grindle’s (1980) perspective that the context of power, institutions, and actor responsiveness are important elements in shaping the policy implementation process. Future research could use Elmore’s perspective to analyze MBG implementation as a process of conflict and bargaining among actors, particularly in relation to the distribution of power, interests, resources, and decision-making processes in policy implementation.

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