

The Role of the Subdistrict Government in the Implementation of the Foster Parent Program for Stunting Reduction

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to analyze the role of the Mook Manaar Bulat Sub-District Government in implementing the Foster Parent Program for stunting reduction in West Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its implementation. **Method:** This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving sub-district officials, village governments, health workers, community leaders, integrated health post cadres, foster parents, and beneficiary families. Data were analyzed using George C. Edward III's policy implementation framework, covering communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure, with source triangulation to ensure data credibility. **Results:** The findings show that the sub-district government plays a strategic role as a coordinator, facilitator, supervisor, mentor, and mobilizer of community participation. Cross-sector collaboration among village governments, health centers, integrated health post cadres, Family Welfare Empowerment groups, community leaders, and foster parents has strengthened program implementation. However, limited funding, fragmented data, geographical barriers, transportation constraints, inconsistent reporting, and low public awareness remain major challenges. **Novelty:** This study proposes a collaborative local governance perspective by highlighting the sub-district government as the key intermediary connecting government institutions, communities, and private stakeholders. The findings demonstrate that strengthening sub-district governance and cross-sector collaboration can improve the effectiveness and sustainability of stunting reduction programs in rural and geographically disadvantaged areas.

INTRODUCTION

Stunting remains one of the most critical public health challenges affecting child development and the quality of human resources, particularly in developing countries. Beyond impaired physical growth, stunting has long-term consequences for cognitive development, educational attainment, labor productivity, and economic growth. Recognizing these impacts, the Indonesian government has prioritized stunting reduction through Presidential Regulation Number 72 of 2021, which promotes a convergent approach involving multiple sectors, levels of government, and non-state actors [1], [2]. Although Indonesia's national stunting prevalence has declined to 19.8%, substantial disparities persist across provinces, especially in rural and geographically disadvantaged regions where access to health services, nutrition, and sanitation remains limited. These disparities indicate that reducing stunting requires not only nutrition-specific interventions but also effective local governance and cross-sector collaboration.

In East Kalimantan, West Kutai Regency represents one of the districts facing persistent stunting challenges. The prevalence of stunting reached 27.6%, exceeding both the national average and the threshold recommended by the World Health Organization.

The situation is compounded by dispersed settlements, difficult geographical conditions, limited health infrastructure, poverty, inadequate sanitation, and fragmented data on families at risk of stunting. To address these challenges, the West Kutai Government introduced the Foster Parent Program under Regent Regulation Number 1 of 2020, emphasizing collaboration between government institutions, communities, and private stakeholders. Within this framework, the sub-district government serves as the intermediary responsible for coordinating stakeholders, facilitating implementation, supervising activities, and mobilizing community participation.

Previous studies have demonstrated the potential of collaborative approaches in reducing stunting. Prawansa et al. reported that the Foster Parent Movement strengthened cross-sector coordination and community commitment through partnerships involving sub-district governments, health centers, security institutions, and the private sector [3], [4]. Similarly, Andayani et al and Imron et al. found that community participation and partnerships improved nutritional assistance and parental awareness [5]. However, Edes et al. concluded that program effectiveness remains constrained by limited financial resources, weak monitoring systems, and low participation among beneficiary families [6]. International evidence further suggests that differences in stunting reduction outcomes are influenced more by local governance capacity, policy coherence, and intersectoral coordination than by national policy alone [5]. Widyowati and Utomo also emphasized the strategic role of intermediate-level governments in coordinating collaborative governance for public health programs [7].

Despite these findings, existing studies have primarily focused on village-level implementation, technical interventions, or program effectiveness, while limited attention has been given to the strategic role of sub-district governments as collaborative governance actors, particularly in rural and geographically disadvantaged regions such as West Kutai Regency. Consequently, little is known about how sub-district governments coordinate stakeholders, mobilize local resources, and overcome implementation barriers in the Foster Parent Program.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of the Mook Manaar Bulat Sub-District Government in implementing the Foster Parent Program for stunting reduction and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its implementation. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) How does the Mook Manaar Bulat Sub-District Government implement its role in the Foster Parent Program for stunting reduction? and (2) What factors support and hinder the implementation of the Foster Parent Program in Mook Manaar Bulat Sub-District?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the role of the Mook Manaar Bulat Sub-District Government in implementing the Foster Parent Program for stunting reduction. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand policy implementation, stakeholder interactions, and governance processes within their real-life context rather than to measure causal

relationships statistically. The case study design enabled an in-depth exploration of how the sub-district government coordinated stakeholders, mobilized local resources, and addressed implementation challenges in rural communities [8].

The research was conducted in Mook Manaar Bulat Sub-District, West Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, where the Foster Parent Program has been implemented under Kutai Barat Regent Regulation Number 1 of 2020. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the program. The participants included the Sub-District Head, Sub-District Secretary, village officials, community health center personnel, village midwives, integrated health post (Posyandu) cadres, Family Welfare Empowerment (PKK) representatives, community leaders, foster parents, and beneficiary families [9], [10], [11].

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by semi-structured interview guides, observation checklists, and document review protocols. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and analysis of policy documents, program reports, health records, meeting minutes, and other relevant administrative documents.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was guided by George C. Edward III's policy implementation framework, which includes communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, source and method triangulation, member checking, and document verification were applied, ensuring the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study was conducted in Mook Manaar Bulat Sub-District, West Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The area was selected because it has implemented the Foster Parent Program as part of the regional strategy to reduce stunting. As a rural sub-district with dispersed villages and geographical challenges, Mook Manaar Bulat provides a relevant setting for examining the role of the sub-district government in coordinating stakeholders, mobilizing local resources, and facilitating cross-sector collaboration [12], [13]. The following sections present the findings on the government's role in implementing the Foster Parent Program, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation. The findings indicate that the implementation of the Foster Parent Program for stunting reduction in Mook Manaar Bulat District has involved collaborative efforts among the sub-district government, village administrations, community health centers (Puskesmas), integrated health service posts (Posyandu), the Family Welfare Movement (PKK), community leaders, foster parents, and beneficiary families. The implementation was analyzed using George C. Edward III's policy implementation framework, consisting of communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure.

Communication. The study found that communication has generally functioned through coordination meetings, cross-sector forums, Posyandu activities, and direct interaction between the sub-district government and implementing stakeholders. Information regarding the Foster Parent Program was disseminated through village governments, health workers, PKK members, and community leaders. However, community understanding of stunting and the objectives of the program remains uneven, particularly regarding the long-term behavioral changes expected beyond the provision of nutritional assistance [14], [15].

Resources. The program is supported by adequate human resources involving government officials, health personnel, community volunteers, and foster parents. The availability of beneficiary data, health facilities, Posyandu services, and coordination mechanisms has facilitated implementation. Nevertheless, limited operational funding, transportation constraints, geographical barriers between villages, and inconsistencies in data updating remain significant challenges affecting program effectiveness [16], [17].

Disposition. The findings demonstrate a positive commitment among implementing actors. The sub-district government actively coordinates stakeholders, facilitates beneficiary identification, mobilizes community participation, and responds to implementation challenges. Likewise, community leaders and beneficiary families expressed positive attitudes toward the program, reflected in increased participation in Posyandu activities, improved awareness of child nutrition, and greater attention to hygiene and childcare practices. However, sustaining this commitment requires continuous assistance and monitoring.

Bureaucratic Structure. The implementation has established a clear division of responsibilities among stakeholders. The sub-district government acts as coordinator and facilitator, village governments manage beneficiary data, health centers provide technical health services, while Posyandu cadres and PKK members conduct community assistance and health education. Although coordination mechanisms and reporting systems are already in place, the study identified weaknesses in standardized reporting formats, routine monitoring schedules, documentation, and periodic evaluation, indicating the need for stronger institutional arrangements to ensure program sustainability.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Foster Parent Program has been implemented through multi-stakeholder collaboration and has contributed to improving coordination, community participation, and awareness regarding stunting prevention. Nevertheless, strengthening communication strategies, operational resources, monitoring systems, and institutional coordination remains essential to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the program.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of the Foster Parent Program in Mook Manaar Bulat District generally reflects the four dimensions of George C. Edward III's policy implementation model: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Overall, the program has facilitated multi-sector collaboration

involving the sub-district government, village administrations, health centers, Posyandu cadres, PKK, community leaders, and beneficiary families, although several implementation challenges remain.

Effective communication was achieved through coordination meetings, cross-sector forums, Posyandu activities, and village-level outreach. However, the findings indicate that public understanding of stunting remains limited, with many beneficiaries perceiving the program primarily as food assistance rather than a comprehensive behavioral intervention. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that continuous communication and health education are essential for improving community participation in stunting prevention.

Regarding resources, the program benefits from strong community participation, adequate human resources, and available beneficiary data. Nevertheless, financial limitations, geographical barriers, transportation constraints, and inconsistent data updating reduce implementation effectiveness. These findings reinforce previous research that identifies resource availability and data quality as critical determinants of successful stunting interventions [18].

The positive disposition of implementers represents another strength of the program. Government officials, health workers, community leaders, and beneficiary families demonstrated commitment to supporting program implementation. However, sustaining stakeholder engagement remains challenging because assistance largely depends on voluntary participation and limited local resources [19].

Finally, although the bureaucratic structure has established clear roles among implementing agencies, weaknesses remain in standardized reporting, monitoring, documentation, and periodic evaluation. Strengthening institutional coordination and administrative procedures is therefore necessary to improve accountability and ensure the long-term sustainability of the Foster Parent Program.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This study reveals that the Government of Mook Manaar Bulat Sub-district plays a pivotal role in coordinating the implementation of the Foster Parent Program for stunting reduction. Beyond its administrative function, the sub-district government acts as a collaborative governance facilitator by integrating communication, resource mobilization, stakeholder commitment, and bureaucratic coordination among village governments, health centers, Posyandu cadres, PKK, community leaders, foster parents, and beneficiary families. Nevertheless, the program's effectiveness is still constrained by limited funding, inconsistent data management, insufficient monitoring, and uneven public understanding of stunting. **Implication:** These findings emphasize the importance of strengthening collaborative governance through improved cross-sector coordination, integrated beneficiary data systems, sustainable financial support, and institutionalized monitoring and evaluation. Such improvements are essential to ensure the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of community-based stunting reduction programs. **Limitation:** This study was conducted

in a single sub-district using a qualitative approach. Therefore, the findings reflect the local context and may not be fully generalizable to other regions with different institutional and socio-cultural characteristics. **Future Research:** Future studies should adopt comparative and mixed-method approaches across multiple regions to assess the long-term effectiveness of the Foster Parent Program, explore factors influencing implementation in different contexts, and develop evidence-based strategies for strengthening collaborative governance in stunting reduction initiatives.

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