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Public Governance Orchestration and Politics Agenda in Implementing Indonesia's Nutritious Meal Program

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ABSTRAK

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) programme offers significant nutritional and socio-economic potential, yet implementation weaknesses undermine its projected benefits. An ex-ante cost–benefit analysis over a five-year horizon (6% discount rate) estimates a net present value of IDR 439.26 trillion and a benefit–cost ratio of 1.76, but also reveals annual waste and loss of around IDR 47.18 trillion. To explain this gap between economic potential and field realities, a qualitative documentary analysis, guided by the innovation network orchestration framework, identifies four main governance barriers: fragmented and outdated beneficiary data, intermediary-controlled information flows limiting learning and verification, weak procedural justice and grievance systems, and the absence of collective incentive structures for fair value capture. These deficits reduce knowledge mobility and weaken innovation appropriability, converting theoretical gains into real losses. The study proposes a governance architecture integrating national databases, provincial command centres, and PKH-style transfer mechanisms (escrow payments, contractual SLAs, audit trails) to secure targeting, enable real-time monitoring, and embed feedback loops. Framed as post-populist orchestration, this approach aims to align political momentum with evidence-based delivery. The paper concludes that MBG's viability depends on sequenced governance reforms, recommending pilot implementation with process tracing and impact evaluation to validate its effectiveness.

Keywords: appropriability, cost–benefit analysis, governance orchestration

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, Indonesia enters an unusual and prolonged period of political transition between the presidential election in February and the inauguration in October, giving President-elect Prabowo Subianto and his team ample time to refine their economic agenda, including the flagship *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG) program (Thawley et al., 2024). The public debate has primarily

focused on the government's ability to finance the program within the 3% deficit limit of the legally set Gross Domestic Product, as the market's reaction to the potential increase in debt is reflected in the weakening of the rupiah exchange rate and rising bond yields (Thawley et al., 2024). In the midst of this fiscal discourse, the MBG initiative emerged as a strategic response to persistent nutritional challenges, where 21.5% of children under five years of age are stunted, accompanied by a significant prevalence of underweight, wasting, and anemia in pregnant women (Bappenas RI, 2025). It is designed to target more than 82 million beneficiaries, including students, preschoolers, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. The program aims not only to improve the quality of nutrition and school attendance, but also to stimulate local agricultural production and micro-business activities (INDEF, 2025). This convergence between public health urgency, fiscal constraints, and socio-economic ambitions highlights the need for an academic analysis of the feasibility, sustainability, and long-term impact of MBG.

Based on a review of previous studies, including Scopus-indexed international publications such as Evaluation of the Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) Impact on Student Attendance (Arina et al., 2025), it can be seen that the focus of the study so far is still focused on technical and sectoral aspects. Ida Arina's study, for example, documented an increase in student attendance from 75% to 90% within six months of MBG implementation, as well as highlighting students' and teachers' positive perceptions of the benefits of the program. Although it provides strong empirical evidence regarding direct achievements, this study limits the analytical space at the policy delivery level. It measures the success of visible outputs, without examining the relationship between implementation achievements and political contexts, policy design, or institutional capacity. A similar pattern was seen in the international literature they referred to, where attention was more directed to the relationship of free eating interventions

with indicators of nutrition, food security, and academic achievement, rather than to exploring political dynamics as causal factors (Thawley et al., 2024).

This technocratic tendency is also consistent with other studies in 2025 that discuss the MBG of the Prabowo era, such as the research of Kurniawati et al., (2025); Lestari et al., (2024); Pambudi, (2025); Sari et al., (2025). Although the thematic focus is diverse, ranging from projected nutritional impacts, logistical barriers, regional disparities, to the integration of local food supply chains, they all share the assumption that implementation problems are technical problems that can be solved through management and resource optimization. None of them integrates Cost-Benefit Analysis to test the economic feasibility of the program, let alone combine it with a qualitative approach capable of diagnosing governance failures as a consequence of the logic of electoral populism. In fact, in the context of MBG, the problems that arise are not solely due to technical limitations, but are closely related to policy designs that are projected as populist promises that demand quick proof, but are not accompanied by adequate institutional planning.

The literature on populism in the education sector reinforces this argument. Munandar & Susanti, (2024) Show that populist political promises in the field of education, including free meal programs, often sacrifice the sustainability of the quality of education if not accompanied by a long-term budget strategy. Baskara & Dahlan, (2024) Prove that an increase in budget allocation does affect the rise in the Human Development Index, but its effectiveness depends on the direction of distribution and utilization of funds. Meanwhile, Ananda et al., (2025) describes how political and budgetary decisions, such as the policy of including teacher salaries in the 20% component of the education budget, structurally limit fiscal space for additional programs such as MBG. While providing essential insights into the relationship between populism, budgeting, and education policy, none of these studies position the Prabowo-era MBG as a significant case study (Kurniawati et al., 2025; Lestari et al., 2024; Pambudi, 2025; Sari et al., 2025). Therefore,

there is a methodological and theoretical research space that has not been touched on to combine economic feasibility analysis and political diagnosis in examining the disconnect between populist political legitimacy and administrative capacity in the implementation of MBG (Miles, 2017).

The gap between das sollen and das sein in the implementation of MBG is evident when comparing the normative objectives contained in the Government Work Plan (Bappenas RI, 2025) with the initial reality of implementation(Arina et al., 2025; Celios., 2025; CCISDI, 2025; INDEF, 2025; Lestari et al., 2024). RKP emphasized that the free nutritious meal program is designed as a strategic intervention to reduce the prevalence of stunting, improve the quality of human resources, and encourage local food independence through an integrated supply chain across sectors. However, the results of Celios (2025), CISDI (2025), and IDEF's findings (2025) show that the implementation of MBG is more akin to the execution of political promises with a quick outcome-oriented approach than the implementation of programs based on long-term technocratic design. Instead of starting with a measurable pilot project, large budget disbursements are carried out directly on a national scale, forcing sudden adjustments that sacrifice some of the priority programs of other Ministries/Institutions for the sake of budget efficiency. As a result, the short time to achieve ambitious targets magnifies the risk of misalignment. At the same time, institutional capacity and cross-sector coordination are not yet ready to face the logistical and governance complexities required. This condition confirms that MBG not only faces technical obstacles, but also policy design problems born from the logic of electoral populism that is contrary to the principles of evidence-based development planning and sustainability.

The gap between das sollen and das sein in the implementation of MBG can be analyzed more sharply through the lens of the Orchestrating Innovation Networks (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006), which emphasizes three main dimensions: knowledge mobility, the ability to secure the benefits of

innovation, and network stability. In the initial assumption of this study, Cost-Benefit Analysis (Vining & Weimer, 2010) is used to test the economic feasibility of a program based on fantastic budgets, broad targets, and potential benefits across sectors by measuring direct, indirect, intangible costs, opportunities, and possible risks. Theoretically, if network orchestration runs optimally, a program as extensive as MBG should demonstrate economic viability.

However, the findings of Celios, CISDI, and IDEF (2025) indicate that knowledge mobility among central-regional-food-provider actors has not been established, resulting in the lack of consolidated data on food availability, nutrition standards, and logistics. In the dimension of innovation appropriability, the design of the benefit circle promised by the RKP (Bappenas RI, 2025) is actually distorted by the concentration of values in certain actors due to weak justice procedures and cross-supply chain coordination. Thus, although MBG is economically assumed, the failure of implementation reflects more of an orchestration strategy that can bridge populist top-down design with technocratic coordination across actors, so that the program loses its footing on the three essential pillars of orchestration.

Based on this description, this study is designed to answer the central question: To what extent is the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program economically feasible, and why is it not fully realized in field implementation? This question is divided into two focus analyses. First, at the quantitative stage, the research tests the economic feasibility of the program through Cost-Benefit Analysis by measuring the components of direct, indirect, intangible costs, opportunities, and potential risks, to test the assumption that, in terms of resources and projected benefits, the program can be run efficiently (Vining & Weimer, 2010). Second, at the qualitative stage, the research deepened the outcomes of CBA by tracing the reasons behind the gap between potential economic feasibility and implementation achievement, using the framework of Orchestrating Innovation Networks (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) to examine the

absence of adequate technocratic orchestration in these national-scale policies. Through the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, this study aims to show that the obstacles to the implementation of MBG do not solely stem from cost or benefit factors, but from the disconnect between electoral political legitimacy and the necessary administrative capacity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses an explanatory sequential design(Creswell, 2018) with a quantitative-qualitative sequence to obtain a comprehensive picture of the feasibility of implementing the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program. The first stage is a quantitative analysis with a prospective approach of Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA), adapted from the evaluation framework of large-scale public projects (Jong et al., 2019; Rajgopal et al., 2002). This analysis focuses on two categories of methods in the CBA, namely the calculation of Net Present Value (NPV) & Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR), to assess the economic feasibility of the program in the long term with a time horizon of five years, which represents one period of the Prabowo-Gibran administration. The discount rate considered is 6% based on the minimum SDR (Social Discount Rate) value required for projects in developing countries to analyze the economic feasibility of government investment in social projects (Wicaksono, 2022). Another consideration is to see Regulation of the Minister of National Development Planning Number 7 concerning the Implementation of Cooperation between the Government and Business Entities in the Provision of Infrastructure (2023) which determines an introductory discount of 7.7%. With this, the researcher selected the basic SDR for social projects that have a lower level of risk than infrastructure projects.

The CBA component includes four main categories: direct costs, indirect costs, direct benefits, and indirect benefits, as detailed in Table 1. Data related to CBA were obtained from official government documents, including

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the 2025 State Budget Memorandum, reports from independent research institutions and NGOs (Celios & ICW), and research by Ida Arina et al. (2025).

Table 1. Detailed Components of Direct and Indirect Costs and Benefits Used in the CBA of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG)

Category	Component	Description	Value (Rp trillion)
Direct Costs	Food procurement	Actual expenditure on rice, vegetables, animal protein, fruit, etc.	Rp. 52.5613
	Capital expenditure	Costs for transportation, storage, and distribution of meals to schools/target areas (from capital expenditure allocation).	Rp. 10.153
	Personnel expenditure	Salaries for cooks, kitchen managers, and nutrition monitoring staff (SPPG) (from personnel expenditure allocation).	Rp. 3.5287
	Supporting goods and services	Monitoring and evaluation, reporting systems, staff training, and supporting IT systems.	Rp. 4.757
	Opportunity cost	Cost of foregone opportunities, e.g. reduced compensation to workers in other sectors.	Rp27,03
Indirect Costs	Waste & loss	Potential budget leakage, estimated from average losses in national procurement cases.	Rp. 47,18
Direct Benefits	Improved attendance and concentration of pupils	Increased school participation and learning focus.	Rp. 1.716,0
	Local job creation	Employment generated in the MBG food and beverage sector, agricultural services, farming, and trade.	Rp46,24
Indirect Benefits	Strengthening local food	Increased demand for local agricultural and small-scale livestock products.	Rp. 22,19
	Economic redistribution to lower-income households through reduced food spending	Social benefits for low-income families via savings from the free nutritious lunch programme.	Rp. 171,6

Source: (Arina et al., 2025; Ditjen Kemenkeu 2025, 2025; Huda & Febriani, 2024; Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2024)

Based on official data and reports from independent research institutes (Table 1), direct costs include food spending (IDR 52.5613 trillion), capital

expenditure for distribution and logistics (IDR 10.153 trillion), employee expenditure such as chef and nutrition officer honorarium (IDR 3.5287 trillion), expenditure on supporting goods such as monitoring-evaluation and IT (IDR 4.757 trillion), and opportunity costs in the form of reducing workers' compensation in other sectors (IDR 27, 03 trillion). Indirect costs, in the form of waste & loss, are assumed due to potential budget leakage in the case of national procurement (Rp47.18 trillion). Direct benefits include increased student attendance and concentration (Rp1,716.0 trillion) and local job creation in the food, agriculture, and trade sectors (Rp46.24 trillion). Indirect benefits include strengthening local food security (Rp22.19 trillion) and economic redistribution to low-income households through savings in food spending (Rp171.6 trillion). This quantitative data was obtained from the 2025 State Budget Memorandum, the 2025 RKP, the Celios (2025) report, CISDI (2025), INDEF (2025), and ICW (2023).

The second stage is qualitative to answer the question of "why" there is a gap between the results of the NPV/BCR estimate and the actual achievements in the field. This analysis uses the framework of the Orchestrating Innovation Networks (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006)as a guide to explore two relevant and confirmed dimensions of the secondary findings, namely (1) barriers in knowledge mobility and (2) mechanisms for securing the benefits of innovation. Other dimensions of the original framework were not adopted, given that the focus of the research was on problems that corresponded to these two aspects.

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) programme carries strong nutritional and socio-economic potential, yet persistent implementation challenges hinder its anticipated gains. An ex-ante cost–benefit analysis over five years, using a 6% discount rate, projects a net present value of IDR 439.26 trillion and a benefit–cost ratio of 1.76, while also identifying annual waste and losses of approximately IDR 47.18 trillion. To account for the disparity between projected benefits and actual outcomes, a qualitative documentary analysis

grounded in the innovation network orchestration framework reveals four interrelated governance barriers: fragmented and outdated beneficiary data, intermediary-controlled information flows that constrain learning and verification, weak procedural justice and grievance mechanisms, and the absence of collective incentive structures to ensure equitable value capture. These weaknesses undermine knowledge mobility and reduce innovation appropriability, transforming theoretical benefits into tangible losses. In response, the study advances a governance architecture that combines national databases (DTKS/SIKS-NG), provincial command centres, and PKH-style transfer mechanisms (escrow payments, contractual SLAs, and audit trails) to strengthen targeting, enable real-time monitoring, and institutionalise feedback loops. Framed as post-populist orchestration, this strategy seeks to convert political legitimacy into evidence-based delivery, with the paper recommending sequenced governance reforms and pilot testing supported by process-tracing and impact evaluation.

The validity of the quantitative data on CBA is maintained through triangulation by comparing information sourced entirely from ex-ante documents and relevant benefit-cost estimates, as recommended in the prospective methodology of CBA (Jong et al., 2019; Rajgopal et al., 2002). The validity of qualitative data is strengthened through the consistency of findings between document sources and cross-checking between themes resulting from the analysis process (Terry et al., 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

FORECASTING ECONOMIC VIABILITY: EX-ANTE CBA RESULT

The cost–benefit analysis (CBA) reported in Table 2 constitutes the quantitative, ex-ante phase of this study and provides a forward-looking assessment of the *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG) program over a five-year horizon (one government term). The analysis adopts a social perspective and uses planned budget lines and coverage targets from the 2025 Government

Work Plan (RKP) and the 2025 State Budget (APBN) as primary inputs (Bappenas RI, 2025; Kemenkeu, 2025). All monetary values are expressed in constant 2025 prices and discounted at 6% per annum to reflect the social opportunity cost of capital (Wicaksono, 2022).

Cost items include direct expenditures (food procurement, capital investment, personnel, operational support, and explicit opportunity costs arising from reallocated public and community funds) and indirect costs (notably governance-related losses and waste). Benefits are classified into direct effects (anticipated improvements in school attendance and learning concentration, and local job creation) and indirect effects (strengthening of local food systems and household expenditure savings). The principal quantitative indicators computed are the Net Present Value (NPV) and the Benefit–Cost Ratio (BCR); these follow standard ex-ante CBA practice for large social programs.

In addition to these aggregate indicators, sensitivity testing highlights the vulnerability of the MBG program's economic viability to changes in assumptions about governance performance. If indirect costs from leakage and waste were to rise by just 25% above the base-case estimate (to approximately IDR 59 trillion annually), the Benefit–Cost Ratio would fall close to unity, effectively erasing the projected social surplus. Conversely, modest efficiency gains—such as reducing waste by 20% through integrated data systems and transparent transfer mechanisms—would push the NPV above IDR 500 trillion and raise the BCR well beyond 1.9. This demonstrates that the sustainability of economic returns is highly elastic to governance reforms, underscoring that fiscal allocations alone cannot guarantee net welfare gains without institutional mechanisms to safeguard efficiency and accountability. Moreover, distributional effects deserve particular attention. The largest quantified benefit category is household expenditure savings, valued at IDR 171.6 trillion, which disproportionately accrues to low-income households who otherwise allocate a significant share of income to food.

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Table 2. Ex-ante Cost–Benefit Analysis of MBG
(Rp trillion, constant 2025 prices, discount rate 6%, horizon: 5 years)

Label	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
DiscountRate	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
YEARS	0.0000	1	2	3	4	5
Direct Costs						
Food procurement	0.0000	52.5613	52.5613	52.5613	52.5613	52.5613
Capital expenditure	10.1530	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Personnel expenditure	0.0000	3.5287	3.5287	3.5287	3.5287	3.5287
Supporting goods and services	0.0000	4.7570	4.7570	4.7570	4.7570	4.7570
Opportunity cost	0.0000	27.0300	27.0300	27.0300	27.0300	27.0300
Subtotal Direct Costs	10.1530	87.8770	87.8770	87.8770	87.8770	87.8770
Indirect Costs						
Waste & Loss	0.0000	47.1800	47.1800	47.1800	47.1800	47.1800
Subtotal Indirect Costs	0.0000	47.1800	47.1800	47.1800	47.1800	47.1800
Total Costs (TC)	10.1530	135.0570	135.0570	135.0570	135.0570	135.0570
Faktor Diskonto (6%)	1.0000	0.9434	0.8900	0.8396	0.7921	0.7473
PV Costs	10.153	127.412	120.200	113.396	106.977	100.9224
Direct Benefits						
Improved attendance and concentration of pupils	0.0000	1.7160	1.7160	1.7160	1.7160	1.7160
Local job creation	0.0000	46.2400	46.2400	46.2400	46.2400	46.2400
Subtotal Direct Benefits	0.0000	47.9560	47.9560	47.9560	47.9560	47.9560
Indirect Benefits						
Strengthening local food	0.0000	22.19	22.19	22.19	22.19	22.19
Redistribusi/household savings	0.0000	171.6	171.6	171.6	171.6	171.6
Subtotal Indirect Benefits	0.0000	193.79	193.79	193.79	193.79	193.79
Total Benefits (TB)	0.0000	241.746	241.746	241.746	241.746	241.746
PV Benefits	0.0000	228.0623	215.1531	202.9746	191.4855	180.6467
Total PV Costs (5 Years)						579.0622
Total PV Benefits (5 Years)						1018.3221
NPV						439.2599
BCR						1.758571131

Source: *processed by researchers, 2025*

The ex-ante CBA (Table 2) projects a positive economic return for MBG over the five-year horizon: the present value of forecasted benefits exceeds the

present value of forecasted costs, yielding an NPV > 0 and a BCR > 1 under base-case assumptions. Interpreted strictly on these forward-looking financial metrics, the MBG program would be expected to generate net social welfare gains if implemented exactly according to the planned budget, coverage, and operational parameters.

However, the quantitative projection must be interpreted with caution. First, a substantial share of estimated benefits derives from household expenditure savings and other broad redistribution effects; such transfers, while socially meaningful, partly represent budgetary substitution rather than pure productivity gains. Second, the forecasts embed sizeable uncertainty from governance-related indirect costs and from the realisability of behavioral responses (attendance, dietary change). Therefore, while the ex-ante CBA supports the plausibility of economic viability, its policy relevance depends critically on implementation fidelity. The subsequent qualitative phase of this study is therefore essential: it examines institutional readiness, coordination mechanisms, and political incentives that can explain why an economically plausible program may nonetheless fail to deliver expected outcomes in practice.

Understanding Delivery Barriers in Indonesia's MBG Programme: A Knowledge Mobility Perspective

The *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG) Program presents a paradox of knowledge: relatively straightforward policy discourses and technical guidelines at the central level are not in line with the absorptive capacity and flow of information at the operational level, thus reducing the possibility of retentive and adaptive institutional learning. In many independent review reports, this problem is represented as three interrelated phenomena: fragmented recipient databases, filtered communication channels through non-public intermediaries, and weak field feedback mechanisms that together

undermine the ability of local actors to absorb, modify, and implement consistent nutritional standards (CISDI, 2025; Celios, 2024).

The first indicator is that knowledge absorption appears to be problematic when target data, menu guidelines, and monitoring protocols are not easily accessible or incompatible between levels of government. A documentary analysis revealed that many allocation decisions still use old population databases or unvalidated recipient lists. Hence, schools and local suppliers often receive outdated information about nutritional needs and serving amounts. This data misalignment is not just technical; It has a direct impact on practice: vendors preparing food experience a mismatch between the number of orders and the allocation of funds, while local agencies miss out on the opportunity to make quick corrections based on real-time data. These findings are consistent with recommendations that emphasize the need for layered M&E (monitoring & evaluation) mechanisms and national–subnational data integration to strengthen regional absorptive capacity (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; CISDI, 2025).

Furthermore, the indicator of network identification, namely the formation of common identities and goals among central actors, regions, schools, and food providers, is shaken by the unclear objectives of different programs and implementation practices. When MBGs are simultaneously positioned as nutrition interventions, socio-political programs, and MSME empowerment instruments, subnational actors interpret their priorities differently: some see it as an effort to combat stunting (a long-term health intervention), others see it as a school lunch program (a daily welfare intervention), and some see it as a large logistics project that requires a specific procurement model. The results of public perception surveys and policy analyses show that these differences in interpretation undermine the sense of shared mission necessary for networks to work as a collective learning system; Without normative agreement on key goals, incentives to

share best practices and adopt nutrition standards become weak (CELIOS, 2025; CISDI, 2025).

The role of intermediaries as information filters exacerbates the problem of knowledge flow. Documented field studies illustrate how some foundations/intermediaries take over logistics and reporting functions, so that the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) and regional offices only receive reports that the intermediaries have formatted. This creates a single point of failure in knowledge flow: independent verification is difficult, empirical learnings at the activity level (e.g., about local food preferences, supply chain constraints, or raw material quality) are not channeled to policymakers, and policy corrections are delayed or do not occur at all. Practical cases, including unilateral price cuts and the flow of funds through unaudited accounts, show how intermediaries can become a knowledge bottleneck as well as a source of information distortion, ultimately hindering the evolution of best practices at the implementation level (CELIOS, 2025;Qomarrullah et al., 2025; Sarwono et al., 2025).

Adequate interorganizational socialization requires formal and informal forums where actors exchange experiences, test SOPs, and build social capital for controlled policy experiments. However, secondary findings point to the lack of such forums during the MBG trial: coordination meetings are often ceremonial, technical training for kitchen partners has not been systematically organized, and mechanisms for civil society participation in monitoring are still weak. As a result, the existence of potential learning-by-doing is not recognized as institutional change because no mechanism closes the feedback loop between field evaluation and revision of technical guidelines (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; CISDI, 2025; Ludher & Nasution, 2024).

Revealing Barriers to MBG Implementation through Innovation Network Orchestration

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program faces a fundamental problem in the aspect of innovation appropriability that stretches from the level of perception to institutional practice, so that value creation efforts are not

followed by adequate mechanisms to capture and distribute them equitably. In this context, three indicators (trust, procedural justice, and shared asset ownership) were adapted as a collective incentive mechanism, mapping the causal pathways that explain why the potential benefits of MBG are challenging to realize on the ground (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006). The findings of the secondary study suggest that these issues are interrelated: weak trust fuels doubts about collaboration, procedural loopholes open opportunities for opportunistic practices, and the absence of a co-ownership mechanism undermines the long-term commitment of implementation actors, thereby reducing incentives to invest in quality and compliance with nutritional standards (CELIOS, 2024; Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives, 2025)

First, the trust indicators in the MBG network are weakened by a combination of less transparent intermediary practices and the real experience of partner providers/kitchens who feel disadvantaged. The case of the kitchen partner payment dispute in Kalibata, as reported in the media and investigative reports, illustrates how the failure of the funds flow and unsystematic administrative practices can damage the implementing partner's reputation and raise suspicions about the integrity of the procurement and distribution process. These experiences, documented in investigative reports and news coverage, not only account for individual financial losses but also produce an external effect in the form of a decrease in partners' willingness to participate in quality improvement proactively. This condition theoretically breaks the learning and collaboration loops essential for appropriability. In theoretical terms, when trust between actors is fragile, transaction costs increase and incentives to share knowledge or invest in quality decrease, making the value created difficult to maintain together (CELIOS, 2024; Tempo, 2025).

Second, procedural justice issues arise from the absence of a clear, consistent, and accessible procedural mechanism for all parties to assess,

claim, or improve administrative decisions related to payments, partner selection, and quality audits. Policy documentation and governance studies note variations in practices between regions and the involvement of intermediary actors with different operational schemes. This condition results in inconsistencies in the implementation of contracts, audit standards, and dispute resolution pathways. This procedural uncertainty has implications for the perception of unfairness: local providers who experience withholding or delayed payments often do not have formal appeals channels or independent audit evidence to enforce their rights. In the qualitative dimension, this phenomenon opens up the question of why formal governance schemes are not enforced or are unable to enforce consistency. Is it due to hasty policy design, limited supervisory capacity, or the deliberate inclusion of intermediaries? Secondary evidence from policy studies supports the claim that without fair and transparent procedures, appropriability will be fragile because actors will choose protective or opportunistic strategies over collaborative ones (CELIOS, 2024; Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives, 2025; Ludher & Nasution, 2024).

Third, the adaptation of the concept of joint asset ownership for the context of MBG, for example, in the form of a joint procurement platform, matching funds scheme, or a mechanism for asset ownership and shared responsibility between the government and philanthropy, has not been adequately developed. The policy literature assessing MBGs underscores that without a binding collective incentive structure (e.g., clear joint contracts, joint management accounts with open audits, or co-financing schemes that require contribution and transparency), each party is likely to manage risk individually or delegate it to other actors. The absence of such instruments not only weakens appropriability but also reduces the punishment/incentive mechanism that makes opportunistic behavior unprofitable. In practice, the recommendations from several studies emphasize the importance of designing collaborative financing models and procurement platforms that

increase accountability and clarify the allocation of benefits, because only then can the value generated (nutritional quality, health impact, economic opportunities for MSMEs) be internalized by stakeholders in a balanced manner (CELIOS, 2024; Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives, 2025; Institute for Development of Economics and Finance (INDEF), 2024)

These inter-indicator interactions explain the causal dynamics relevant to qualitative research: when non-transparent administrative practices erode trust, demands on fair procedures increase; If those demands are not met, actors seek alternative protection mechanisms that could be in the form of withdrawal of participation, litigation, or the establishment of parallel supply chains that, in turn, weaken the network and reduce potential appropriability. This phenomenon is repeated in the diverse range of secondary findings you collect, thus confirming that the root of the problem is not just technical (e.g. budget shortages or logistical issues), but structural and normative, about governance design, the role of intermediaries, and the architecture of unestablished collective incentives (Andreas et al., 2025; Center of Macroeconomics and Finance (INDEF), 2025; Institute for Development of Economics and Finance (INDEF), 2024; Tempo, 2025). More specifically, improving appropriability for MBG requires a governance reformulation that prioritizes transparency of fund flows, accessible claims and audit procedures, and binding collective incentive designs. Without these changes, efforts to increase the scope and funding of programs, even if fiscally ambitious, risk producing value that is unfairly dispersed or even lost due to the failure of the value capture mechanism.

Synthesis and Interpretation of Quantitative–Qualitative Findings in the MBG Programme

The results of the cost-benefit analysis (positive NPV of IDR 439.26 trillion and BCR 1.759) theoretically place the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program in the economically viable category within the horizon of one

government term with a discount of 6%, which shows the potential for considerable socio-economic benefits if the program is implemented according to its economic-normative design. These figures represent the expectation that the aggregate benefits, especially household spending savings and long-term human capital improvements, may outweigh the cost of the program. However, the quantitative findings also highlight a significant concern: the substantial contribution of waste and loss (±35% of costs; estimated Rp47.18 trillion/year) poses a considerable risk that ex-ante benefits will not be fully realized if leakages and governance inefficiencies are not addressed. Therefore, the final interpretation will trace the institutional mechanisms that link the theoretical possibilities of benefits to realisation on the ground.

Qualitative findings provide a map of the mechanism. First, the problem of knowledge mobility, identified as obsolete target data, information fragmentation between levels of government, and the role of intermediaries filtering field flows, explains most of the transaction costs and operational inefficiencies reflected in the waste & loss component of the CBA. When target data is inaccurate or late, suppliers oversupply or undersupply, allocated budgets are inappropriate, and stocks of both food and funds become vulnerable to waste or untargeted distribution. In other words, the gap between economic design (which assumes adequate information and operational coordination) and practice on the ground (which is filled with data disintegration and filtered communication channels) forms a direct causal pathway that erodes the value that can be captured by society and public systems. Secondary findings from the evaluative review reinforce this interpretation with documentary evidence of data disintegration and the lack of cross-actor learning forums.

Second, the innovation appropriability dimension explains how the problem of distribution of benefits and institutional risks contributes to the difference between theoretical NPV and realized NPV. Cases involving

payment cuts, fund flow failures, and non-transparent administrative practices lower the level of trust between actors and weaken procedural justice, conditions that encourage actors to adopt protective or opportunistic strategies. Economically, such behavior increases aggregate costs (e.g., through the costs of oversight, litigation, or the establishment of parallel supply chains) and decreases the effectiveness of the program, so that the estimated benefit component at the planning stage is in danger of being degraded. Thus, appropriability is not just an ethical or administrative issue; it is an economic determinant that moderates how much of the benefits of CBA can be materialized in practice. Secondary evidence exposing procedural inconsistencies and provider complaints supports this causal sequence.

At the policy level (Patton et al., 2016), the integration of results shows that enlarging the budget or scope of MBG without governance reform and knowledge sharing mechanisms risks financing inefficiencies that magnify socio-economic losses. Therefore, the policy recommendations that emerge from this synthesis should be multi-layered: technical improvements (integration of recipient databases, digitization of monitoring), institutional capacity building (operational and supervisory training at the regional level), and reformulation of incentive architecture (joint contracts, transparent management accounts, independent audits). These measures are designed to reduce the most material waste & loss components and strengthen appropriability so that NPV/BCR figures have a greater chance of being realized in the form of tangible benefits. These recommendations are supported by secondary findings that highlight the need for data integration and financing accountability.

Economic Potential and Governance Barriers in the MBG Programme

This discussion examines the quantitative results (cost-benefit analysis) and qualitative findings described previously to address the central question of the research: why is it challenging to realize the potentially significant economic benefits of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program at

the implementation level? In order to answer this question, the researcher reads empirical findings through the lens of orchestration theory in innovation networks, which emphasizes the role of central actors (orchestrators) in managing the flow of knowledge, appropriability, and network stability (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006). The integration results show that prospective economic figures, positive NPV, and BCR above 1 represent the potential for well-being. Still, this potential is theoretical and highly dependent on the quality of the network orchestration process: data integration and feedback mechanisms (knowledge mobility) and governance design to capture shared value (innovation appropriability). The empirical findings show how gaps in these dimensions (e.g., database disintegration, the role of intermediaries who filter information, cases of payment cut-offs, and the absence of a co-ownership mechanism) serve as a channel that diverts measurable benefits into material waste and losses, thereby eroding the realization of NPV on the ground.

To bridge the diagnosis with an implementable solution, it is necessary to discuss it with various previous studies and other relevant theories—Table 3. The following presents a matrix of contextualization of findings on the dimensions of innovation network orchestration theory. This matrix summarizes empirical issues related to theoretical indicators, relevant quantitative/qualitative evidence, previous research, and operational, implementable recommendations on who is responsible and the metrics that can be used to monitor change. Table 2 is a theoretical operationalization tool: it links the identified practical problems to orchestration actions that can reduce waste and loss and increase the chances of realizing projected economic benefits. This comparative framing not only strengthens the theoretical grounding of the study but also ensures that the recommendations are context-sensitive and actionable within Indonesia's policy environment. By linking observed governance gaps to established orchestration mechanisms, the matrix serves as both an academic contribution and a

practical roadmap for policymakers seeking to transform MBG's projected viability into realized social outcomes.

Table 3. Operationalising Innovation Network Orchestration for the MBG Programme: Contextualised Policy Recommendations

Issue	Finding	Insight	Recommendation
Data fragmentation	Beneficiary data remains outdated and unvalidated, causing persistent misallocation and waste (~Rp47.18T/year).	This reflects weak *knowledge absorption*, where fiscal allocations fail to match actual needs, inflating indirect costs.	Integrate MBG targeting into DTKS/SIKS-NG and connect to provincial dashboards for real-time verification and distribution monitoring.
Filtered reporting	Intermediaries monopolise logistics and reporting, filtering field data before it reaches decision-makers.	Such control disrupts *inter-organisational socialisation* and breaks learning loops essential for programme adaptation.	Require multi-actor reporting directly to dashboards with geo-tagged audits and sub-district verification to ensure transparency.
Opaque fund flows	Documented payment cuts, delays, and procedural inconsistencies undermine partner trust and increase disputes.	This erodes *trust* and *procedural justice*, encouraging opportunistic or defensive behaviours.	Adopt PKH-style escrow or scheduled transfers with contractual SLAs, linked to public audit trails for financial accountability.
No collective incentives	Absence of joint procurement or financing platforms leads actors to manage risks in isolation.	Weak *joint asset ownership*diminishes long-term collaboration and equitable value capture.	Implement matching-funds schemes and centralised e-procurement with published tenders and contract audit trails.
Weak capacity building	Coordination forums are largely ceremonial; training for partners and local actors is irregular.	This limits *network identification*and slows institutional learning-by-doing.	Institutionalise structured training and certification programmes, linked to verified provider databases and tracked on dashboards.

Source: processed by authors (2025)

Table 2 is an adaptation of solutions to existing platforms, accelerating operational phases and reducing the risk of build-from-scratch that often leads to fragmentation of new systems. The use of DTKS/SIKS-NG as a single source of truth overcomes the problem of targeting and verification, as experienced by the *Program Keluarga Harapan* (PKH), which has built standardized verification and transfer channels. In contrast**,** the use of provincial Dashboards/Command Centers (e.g., West Java Command Center / West Java Dashboard) allows real-time visibility of distribution realization and logistics issues that were previously hidden at the field level. The integration of these two approaches is complementary: DTKS/SIKS-NG closes the gap in targeting/assigning recipients, while the Command Center/Provincial Dashboard supplies operational monitoring channels and publication of audit trails, both of which are needed to improve both knowledge mobility and appropriability so that a positive NPV/BCR can be more strongly realized (Fardiah et al., 2023; Jabarprov, 2025).

The Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS) and SIKS-NG systems serve as the central reference point for determining the targets of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) programme. All prospective beneficiaries must undergo an administrative pre-verification process at the district or city level, involving the double-checking of household data and welfare status. This process generates unique recipient IDs, verification attributes, and historical metadata accessible to the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), the Ministry of Social Affairs, and related institutions. Any status changes are logged with user audit trails and timestamps to preserve data integrity. At the district level, sub-district officers conduct home visits for field verification, inputting proof into SIKS-NG via a digital form. This includes geo-tagged photographs, signed statements from household heads, and, if required, biometric data or supporting documents. Verification covers nutritional needs, the presence of school-aged children, and the household's capacity to receive assistance. Officers must follow a standard checklist and

submit their inputs within a set time frame, enabling the final recipient list to be compiled at the provincial level.

Following verification, the validated data is synchronised automatically with the provincial dashboard or command centre—such as the West Java Command Center—through a secure API. This platform acts as an operational monitoring hub, displaying maps of recipient distribution, delivery status, and flagged issues, while providing restricted view-only access for BGN, independent auditors, and technical partners. Synchronisation includes schema validation, encrypted data transmission, and rollback mechanisms for handling inconsistencies. Payments are processed using a PKH-style scheduled transfer mechanism, with funds held in a centralised escrow account. Disbursements are triggered upon dashboard-verified proof of delivery, including geo-tagged photos and recipient confirmations, and are transferred to partner providers' accounts via registered banking partners. Operational contracts must stipulate service-level agreements (SLAs) for payment timelines, penalties for unjustified delays or deductions, and clauses for regular audits, with all transactions leaving accessible audit trails.

The provincial dashboard offers real-time monitoring of quantitative indicators such as portions delivered, payments completed, and complaints resolved, alongside audit logs capturing each stage of data and fund flows. Limited public disclosure of aggregate summaries and contract or tender lists strengthens accountability. Regular audits include field verification, sampling, and cross-checks between geo-tagged photos, SIKS-NG records, and transfer evidence to identify anomalies or potential irregularities. Audit findings are summarised, published, and given priority in follow-up actions. Feedback loops to BGN and other relevant agencies are institutionalised, transforming monitoring data and audit outcomes into actionable measures such as recipient list adjustments, SOP revisions, and reimbursement schemes. All operational recommendations are time-stamped, tracked for

completion within fixed deadlines, and documented on the provincial dashboard. This process involves sub-district verifiers, independent auditors, kitchen partner representatives, and civil society organisations, ensuring that corrections are both administratively and practically validated.

Ultimately, this structured feedback mechanism functions as an institutional learning engine. Policy adjustments and their outcomes are recorded back into DTKS and SIKS-NG, enabling orchestrators to assess the effectiveness of corrective actions, whether revised targeting reduces allocation mismatches, whether updated SOPs minimise waste and loss, or whether reimbursement systems rebuild provider trust. Within the framework of post-populist orchestration, this approach harnesses political momentum to accelerate programme delivery while safeguarding technical procedures. In doing so, it channels public legitimacy into data-driven oversight and strengthened governance, increasing the likelihood that projected economic benefits will be realised tangibly and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates a clear but conditional answer to the central research question. Quantitatively, the ex-ante cost–benefit analysis indicates that the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) programme is economically viable within a five-year horizon (NPV ≈ Rp439.26 trillion; BCR ≈ 1.76), provided implementation follows planned parameters. Qualitative evidence, however, explains why this prospective viability is fragile in practice: systemic failures in knowledge mobility (fragmented beneficiary data, filtered field reporting through intermediaries, weak learning loops) and weaknesses in innovation appropriability (erosion of trust caused by opaque payment flows, lack of procedural justice, and absence of collective incentive structures) create direct causal pathways that translate ex-ante potential into waste & loss (estimated ≈ Rp47.18 trillion/year) and undermine realisation of projected benefits. In short, MBG's economic promise is real but contingent; its realisation depends

on restoring integrated data governance, accountable financial flows, and institutionalised multi-actor orchestration that together bridge populist political impetus with technocratic safeguards.

Policy recommendations derived from the integrated findings are intentionally operational and sequenced to maximise feasibility and impact. Short-term priorities are: (a) gate disbursement to validated beneficiary lists by leveraging existing national systems (DTKS / SIKS-NG) and provincial dashboards (e.g., Jabar Command Center) to serve as single sources of truth and real-time monitoring platforms; and (b) require PKH-like transfer protocols (escrow/centrally scheduled bank transfers + contractual SLAs) before funds are released. Medium-term actions should institutionalise a BGN-led multi-actor coordination forum with mandated dashboard access, operational rights to propose DTKS corrections, and formal escalation paths, alongside a certification and capacity-building programme for kitchen partners (technical partners). Longer-term reforms include establishing integrated e-procurement and matching-funds arrangements to create joint asset/benefit ownership and a public audit-trail for contracts and payments. Monitoring indicators to assess impact must be explicit and tracked quarterly: % beneficiaries verified via DTKS, % on-time payments, reduction in waste & loss (Rp and %), number of verified corrective actions closed within 30 days, and a periodic trust index among providers. These measures operationalise the post-populist orchestration strategy: harnessing political legitimacy for rapid scale-up while anchoring delivery in data-driven, contractual, and transparent institutions.

This study also acknowledges several important limitations that frame interpretation and future work. First, the analysis relies principally on secondary sources (administrative documents, policy briefs, investigative reports, and published literature), so findings are conditioned by the scope, quality, and potential biases of those sources; primary fieldwork (interviews, direct observation) would be required to validate actor motivations and to

triangulate contested claims. Second, the CBA is ex-ante and dependent on assumptions about behavioural responses, price paths, and loss estimates—sensitivity to those parameters may materially change NPV/BCR outcomes. Third, causal inferences about institutional mechanisms (e.g., that escrow payments will restore trust sufficiently to reduce waste by X%) remain hypothetical until tested in pilot or quasi-experimental settings. To strengthen policy relevance, future research should combine process-tracing case studies in sites with documented governance failures, controlled pilots of the orchestration package (data gating + PKH-style transfers + dashboard monitoring), and longitudinal impact evaluations that link governance reforms to realised economic benefits.

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