

Strengthening the Supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG): Mechanisms, Challenges, and Strategic Solutions

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meal Program is a strategic national policy initiated by the government of the Republic of Indonesia to improve children's nutritional status and support the development of high-quality human resources. As a large-scale public program with significant government funding and multiple stakeholders, effective supervision is essential to ensure accountability, food quality, proper distribution, and accurate beneficiary targeting. This study aims to analyze the supervisory mechanism of the MBG program, identify the challenges faced in its implementation, and propose solutions to strengthen supervisory effectiveness. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method, supported by observation and document analysis. A total of 11 informants were selected for this study through purposive sampling, including program implementers, school representatives, beneficiaries, and supervisory actors. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the MBG program's supervisory mechanism generally complies with the stages of management control theory, including establishing implementation standards, determining performance indicators, measuring program implementation, comparing results with established standards, and taking corrective actions. However, several challenges remain, including inconsistencies in the application of standards across regions, limited performance indicators that focus mainly on administrative aspects, weaknesses in monitoring and reporting systems, and insufficient coordination among supervising institutions. To improve the effectiveness of supervision, this study recommends strengthening operational standards, developing outcome-based performance indicators, implementing integrated digital monitoring systems, improving interagency coordination, and increasing community participation in oversight. Strengthening these aspects is expected to enhance program accountability and may help improve children's nutritional status and support sustainable human resource development in Indonesia, although this study did not directly measure nutritional or health outcomes.

Keywords: Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), Program Supervision, Public Program Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is one of the strategic programs of the government of the Republic of Indonesia, aimed at improving the quality of human resources from an early age by meeting students' nutritional needs (Qamarullah et al., 2025). This program is aimed not only at improving students' welfare but also at preventing and reducing stunting, so that students have a healthy physical condition and can optimize the learning process (Rozak et al., 2025). Despite this, nutritional issues among school-age children remain a strategic issue in Indonesia. Nutritional imbalances, whether in the form of deficiencies or excesses, directly impact health, cognitive development, and the quality of student learning outcomes. In this context, the successful implementation of the MBG program is determined not only by policy formulation but also by effective supervision that ensures the program is carried out in accordance with established standards, is well targeted, and remains sustainable. Therefore, supervision is crucial to ensuring the quality of MBG program implementation in the field (Rahmah et al., 2025).

In this context, the Free Nutritious Meal Program was designed as a government intervention to improve the nutritional status of school children and support the development of superior human resources (Kurniawan & Suryadi, 2021). However, the urgency of this program should not only be viewed from a policy perspective but also needs to be supported by empirical data describing the real conditions of children's nutrition and the challenges of program implementation in the field (Pangaribuan & Siregar, 2022). Data related to the nutritional status of school children and the implementation of the Nutritious Meals program can be seen in the following table 1.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the main issue lies not only in the need for the program itself, but also in the potential risks in its implementation, particularly if the supervision system does not function optimally. Weak supervision may result in poorly targeted programs, a decline in service quality, and accountability issues in their field implementation.

Table 1 illustrates empirical conditions that highlight both the urgency and the complexity of implementing the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Indonesia. Overall, the findings indicate that nutritional problems among school-aged children remain significant and require systematic intervention. First, the indicators showing low consumption of fruits and

vegetables (97.7%) and a high proportion of children who do not regularly consume a healthy breakfast (65%) suggest that children's dietary patterns remain far from balanced nutrition standards. This condition may hinder physical growth and cognitive development, underscoring the need for the MBG program as a direct intervention to improve daily nutritional intake. Second, the large target coverage of approximately 83 million beneficiaries demonstrates that MBG is a massive national-scale program. This reflects a high level of complexity in planning, distribution, and program management, requiring strong cross-sectoral coordination. Third, data on food preparation infrastructure 27,877 kitchens serving 63 million children indicates substantial operational capacity. However, this scale also presents challenges in maintaining consistent standards of quality, hygiene, and service delivery across regions. Fourth, the occurrence of 449 food poisoning outbreaks in the early stages of implementation is a critical indicator of implementation risks. This finding underscores that the issue lies not only in the program needs but also in supervision and quality control. Without an effective supervision system, there is a greater risk of mistargeting, declining food quality, and potential health hazards for beneficiaries. Overall, the table suggests that while the MBG program is essential for addressing child nutrition problems, its successful implementation largely depends on effective governance, particularly in terms of supervision, coordination, and quality assurance in the field.(Yuliani & Pratiwi, 2022).

Table 1. Empirical Indicators of Nutrition and Implementation Challenges in the MBG Program

Indicators	Key Findings	Source
Low consumption of fruits and vegetables among children (5-14 years)	97.7% of children consume insufficient fruits and vegetables	Kemenko PMK, 2024
Children not consuming healthy breakfast regularly	65% of school children skip healthy breakfast	Kemenko PMK, 2024
Target beneficiaries of the MBG program	Approximately 83 million individuals	BGN, 2025
Early implementation issues	449 cases of food poisoning outbreaks as of May 11, 2026	Ministry of Health, 2026
Food preparation infrastructure	27,877 kitchens serving 63 million children	BGN, 2026

Source : Compiled by the authors from Kemenko PMK, BGN and Ministry of Health reports (2026)

In its first year of implementation in Indonesia, the program has not yet fully achieved its expected outcomes, particularly in funding, food quality, distribution, and supervision mechanisms. As a national-scale program involving multiple stakeholders, supervision is crucial to ensuring sustainability and effectiveness. Supervision is needed to ensure the program is implemented in accordance with established standards, including food quality, accurate beneficiary targeting, distribution mechanisms, and budget utilization (Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2021). Weak supervision may lead to various irregularities, such as meals that do not meet nutritional standards, distribution delays, and inaccurate beneficiary targeting.

Furthermore, the complexity of the Free Nutritious Meal Program, which involves multiple actors ranging from the central government and local governments to educational institutions, food providers, and the community, creates additional challenges in the supervisory process. (Jomaa et al., 2021). Limited supervisory human resources, lack of coordination among institutions, and suboptimal reporting and evaluation systems may hinder the effectiveness of program oversight. Differences in social, economic, and geographical conditions across regions also influence the implementation of supervision and create variations in program quality at the local level (Bhutta et al., 2020).

Although previous studies have examined school feeding programs and public nutrition policies, most have focused primarily on program design, nutritional outcomes, or overall implementation effectiveness. There are still few studies that specifically analyze supervision mechanisms within large-scale nutrition programs such as MBG, particularly how oversight is structured, coordinated, and enforced across multiple actors and administrative levels. Moreover, existing studies rarely address the practical challenges of supervision in the field, including capacity constraints, coordination gaps, and food safety risks.

This study contributes to the literature by focusing explicitly on strengthening supervision in the MBG program through three key aspects: mechanisms, challenges, and strategic solutions. First, it provides a systematic analysis of existing supervision mechanisms and their operation within a complex, multi-actor governance structure. Second, it identifies and examines key challenges in supervision, including coordination, monitoring capacity, and standard enforcement, particularly regarding food safety. Third, this study proposes strategic solutions to enhance the effectiveness of supervision, including strengthening institutional coordination, improving monitoring systems, and reinforcing accountability frameworks.

The Financial and Development Supervisory Agency (*Badan Pengawasan Keuangan dan Pembangunan - BPKP*), as the Government Internal Supervisory Apparatus (APIP), plays an important role in ensuring that government programs are implemented honestly, transparently, and accountably. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct study into the supervisory mechanisms, challenges, and potential solutions to ensure the Free Nutritious Meal Program achieves its intended objectives. The results of this research are expected to provide both academic contributions and practical recommendations for stakeholders in improving the quality and sustainability of the Free Nutritious Meal Program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Good Governance

Governance, or more commonly known as government administration, is the use of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage state affairs at all levels (Dawud et al., 2020). Another definition states that governance is a mechanism for managing economic and social resources that involves the influence of the public, private, and community sectors in a collective effort. This definition assumes the involvement of many actors, with no dominant actor determining the actions of others (Maharani et al., 2023).

The World Bank defines good governance as the implementation of solid and responsible development management that aligns with the principles of democracy and efficient markets, avoids misallocation of investment funds, prevents corruption both politically and administratively, enforces budgetary discipline, and creates a legal and political framework for the growth of business activities (Widodo, 2001). Meanwhile, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), good governance is the use of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage state affairs at all levels. Good governance encompasses all mechanisms, processes, and organizations through which communities and/or community groups can express their aspirations and needs, exercise their legal rights, fulfill their obligations as citizens, and bridge any differences between them.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), good governance has several key characteristics, including:

1. Participation, which refers to the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes either directly or indirectly through representative institutions.

2. Rule of Law, which emphasizes the existence of a fair legal framework that is enforced impartially.
3. Transparency, which ensures freedom of access to information related to public interests.
4. Responsiveness, which reflects the ability of public institutions to respond promptly to stakeholders' needs.
5. Consensus Orientation, which focuses on mediating different interests to achieve broad agreement in society.
6. Equity, which ensures that all members of society have equal opportunities to achieve welfare and justice.
7. Efficiency and Effectiveness, which refers to the optimal management of public resources to achieve desired outcomes.
8. Accountability, which refers to the responsibility of public institutions to account for their actions to the public.

In interpreting the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), several key principles of good governance are particularly relevant, with accountability serving as the primary lens to assess the effectiveness of supervision mechanisms, especially in ensuring that implementers comply with food safety and service standards. This is closely supported by transparency, which enables public access to information on procurement, food quality, and monitoring outcomes, thereby strengthening oversight and trust. Responsiveness is also critical in addressing field-level challenges, such as food safety incidents, by ensuring timely corrective actions and adaptive management. Furthermore, efficiency and effectiveness are essential given the program's large-scale nature, which requires optimal resource use and consistent achievement of nutritional objectives. The principle of rule of law underpins the enforcement of regulations and sanctions against violations, ensuring that supervision has binding authority, while participation complements formal oversight by involving communities, schools, and beneficiaries in monitoring and feedback processes. Collectively, these principles provide an integrated governance framework for analyzing and strengthening supervision in the MBG program.

Supervision Theory

According to Mockler, management oversight is a systematic effort to establish implementation standards for planning purposes, design feedback information systems, and compare actual activities with predetermined standards (Mockler, 2003). Guntur defines oversight as the overall activity of comparing and measuring what is being or has been implemented against predetermined plans, using criteria, norms, and standards (Guntur, 2005). According to Halsey, supervision involves selecting the right person for each job, arousing each person's interest in their work and teaching them how to do it, measuring and evaluating their work results to ensure they have understood the lesson properly, making corrections when necessary and transferring people to more suitable jobs or dismissing those who are found to be unable to perform well, praising them when they deserve it and rewarding them for good work, and finally, aligning everyone into a close cooperative atmosphere with their coworkers (Halsey, 2003). All of this is done fairly, patiently, and with consideration, so that everyone will carry out their work skillfully, meticulously, intelligently, enthusiastically, and perfectly.

Supervision theory defines supervision as the process of ensuring that the implementation of activities complies with established plans, policies, standards, and regulations to achieve desired goals. According to Robbins, the function of supervision includes measuring performance (does the distributed food meet nutritional, quantity, and timing standards?), comparing performance with standards (comparing the reality on the ground with existing SOPs), and taking corrective action (if deviations are found) (Robbins, 2006).

According to Siagian, there are several types of supervision: First, internal supervision, conducted by the program implementing agency itself (for example, supervisors from the Health Office or Education Office at the regional level). Second, external supervision, conducted by parties outside the implementing agency, such as the Financial and Development Supervisory Agency (BPKP), the Inspectorate General/Regional Office, the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK), and community supervision (social auditing) (Siagian, 2003).

According to Handoko (2003), supervision is a systematic process that includes several interconnected stages designed to ensure that organizational performance aligns with

established standards. Handoko explains that the supervision process consists of the following stages:

1. Establishing Standards, The first step in supervision is determining clear standards that serve as benchmarks for evaluating performance.
2. Determining Performance Measurement, After standards are set, it is necessary to establish indicators or criteria that will be used to measure program implementation.
3. Measuring Implementation, This stage involves collecting data and information related to the implementation of activities in order to determine whether performance aligns with predetermined standards.
4. Comparing Performance with Standards, The measured results are then compared with established standards to identify any deviations.
5. Corrective Action, If discrepancies between performance and standards are found, corrective actions must be taken to ensure that the program can return to the intended path.

Through these stages, supervision serves as a control mechanism that helps ensure organizational activities remain aligned with planned objectives (Handoko, 2003).

While the classical management-control literature summarized above remains foundational, more recent studies confirm that its core concerns are still relevant to public-sector oversight. Andersen and Young (2023) show that public-sector risk management increasingly relies on interactive information processing that links local monitoring insights with central risk analysis, extending the standard-setting and measurement logic of classical supervision theory into more adaptive, risk-based forms of oversight. In the specific context of large-scale food and nutrition programs, Schultz et al. (2024) demonstrate that sustained supervisory capacity, including clear standards and community-based accountability mechanisms, is central to the effectiveness of oversight of school feeding programs in developing countries. Because MBG supervision spans national, provincial, and local institutions, the multi-level governance perspective is also relevant: Castelnovo and Sorrentino (2024) argue that the effectiveness of multi-level oversight depends heavily on the adaptive capacity of local implementers who must reconcile national standards with local conditions, a dynamic that closely parallels the standard-adaptation challenges identified in this study.

Finally, digital monitoring is increasingly recognized as a determinant of transparency and accountability in Indonesian public-sector programs; Pribadi et al. (2024) find that information and communication technology, together with institutional transparency and accountability practices, significantly strengthens the implementation of digital government services in Indonesia. These contemporary studies reinforce the continued relevance of Handoko's supervision stages while situating them within current debates on risk-based, multi-level, and digitally supported public oversight.

Taken together, the theoretical foundation of this study positions Handoko's (2003) supervision theory as the primary analytical framework, since the Results and Discussion section is structured around its five stages of standard setting, performance measurement, implementation measurement, comparison with standards, and corrective action. Good governance principles serve as a supporting normative perspective for interpreting the substantive meaning of these stages: the establishment of standards and performance measures relates to accountability and effectiveness; the measurement and comparison stages relate to transparency; and the involvement of communities and beneficiaries in oversight relates to participation. This framing clarifies the relationship between the two bodies of theory used in this study and the roles each plays in the analysis that follows.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program. The qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the supervisory mechanisms, implementation processes, and challenges encountered in the program (Moleong, 2017). Through this approach, the research seeks to capture real conditions in the field and interpret the perspectives of stakeholders involved in the implementation and supervision of the program (Sugiyono, 2013). This qualitative exploratory study examines selected stakeholders' perspectives on the supervision of the MBG program. The informants were drawn from national-level implementing and supervisory institutions, as well as program actors operating in the Bandung area, so that the findings reflect the perspectives of these selected national and local stakeholders rather than a nationally representative sample.

The research explores the experiences and perceptions of various actors involved in implementing the MBG program. A total of 11 informants were selected for this study through purposive sampling, which enabled the researcher to identify individuals with direct knowledge of and involvement in the program. These informants include program implementers, school representatives as field-level actors, students and parents as beneficiaries, and supervisory actors involved in monitoring program implementation. The supervisor on this study is The Financial and Development Supervisory Agency (BPKP)

Data in this study consist of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and direct observation, enabling the researchers to gather detailed information on the supervisory process and the program's implementation in practice. Secondary data were collected from relevant documents, including government regulations, official reports, policy documents, and academic publications related to the Free Nutritious Meal Program.

Several data collection techniques were applied to ensure the completeness and reliability of the information obtained. These techniques include observation to understand the real conditions of program implementation, in-depth interviews to obtain detailed explanations from informants, and documentation studies to review relevant written sources that support the analysis. To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, this study employed triangulation techniques, including data triangulation (comparing information from different sources), method triangulation (cross-checking findings from observations, interviews, and documentation), and member checking to confirm the accuracy of information provided by informants.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. These analytical processes were carried out continuously throughout the research to identify patterns, interpret findings, and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the supervision mechanism and the challenges encountered in implementing the Free Nutritious Meal Program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program

As explained in the literature review, this study uses T. Hani Handoko's (2003) supervision theory as its primary analytical framework, with the principles of good governance serving as a supporting normative lens rather than as an independent analytical structure. The five stages of Handoko's framework, namely establishing implementation standards, determining performance measures, measuring implementation, comparing implementation with standards, and taking corrective actions, are used here to organize the empirical findings, while good governance principles such as accountability, transparency, participation, and effectiveness are drawn upon to interpret what these findings mean for the quality of supervision. Rather than restating the theory in full, the following discussion focuses on the empirical findings for each stage and uses the theory primarily as an interpretive lens.

Unless otherwise indicated, the description of the formal supervisory stages below is based on document analysis of national policy guidelines, regulations, and program manuals, while statements concerning implementation practices, challenges, and field-level conditions are based on in-depth interviews and direct observation involving the 11 informants of this study. Where a specific finding draws primarily on one source of evidence, this is noted explicitly.

1. Establishment of Implementation Standards

The first stage of supervision in the Free Nutritious Meal Program is reflected in the establishment of implementation standards by the Indonesian government. These standards include policy guidelines, nutritional and food quality standards, beneficiary eligibility criteria, and financial management procedures. Relevant ministries and government institutions are responsible for formulating these standards as the foundation for program supervision.

The establishment of clear standards is essential to the supervision process because program implementation cannot be objectively evaluated without clearly defined benchmarks. In the MBG program, these standards serve both as operational guidelines and as control mechanisms for policy implementation. The formulation of menu standards, food sourcing, and distribution mechanisms also considers regional geographical conditions and socio-economic characteristics. For example, coastal areas may utilize marine resources such as fish, while agricultural regions may prioritize locally produced crops. For example, coastal

areas such as North Sulawesi or East Nusa Tenggara may utilize abundant marine resources such as fish, while agricultural regions such as Central Java or West Java may prioritize locally produced crops, vegetables, and rice. These contextual differences require supervisors to ensure that locally adapted menus still comply with national nutritional standards, while also monitoring the quality, safety, and sustainability of the food sources used.

In addition to nutritional and beneficiary standards, implementation standards also include governance and financial control mechanisms. Supervisory institutions have been involved from the early stages of program planning to ensure that management and budgeting standards are designed in a realistic, accountable, and auditable manner without disrupting program operations. This approach reflects the importance of establishing clear standards as the primary foundation of effective supervision.

2. Determination of Performance Measures

The second stage of supervision involves determining performance measures or indicators used to assess program implementation. In the MBG program, government institutions translate implementation standards into both quantitative and qualitative indicators to evaluate program outputs and implementation quality.

These performance indicators are designed to ensure consistent monitoring across regions and to enable objective evaluation of program performance. The indicators cover various aspects of program implementation, including the number of beneficiaries, the accuracy of beneficiary targeting, the quality and nutritional adequacy of meals, and the timeliness of food distribution.

Performance indicators also function as an early detection mechanism for identifying potential irregularities. For instance, discrepancies between the number of beneficiaries and budget realization in certain regions may indicate weaknesses in program planning or implementation. In this sense, performance indicators play an important role in strengthening the supervision system by enabling early identification of potential deviations.

From a public administration perspective, the supervision of the MBG program reflects the government's efforts to implement the principles of accountability and good governance. Effective supervision ensures that public resources are managed responsibly, program implementation remains transparent, and policy outcomes are delivered efficiently. Given the

large budget allocation and the program's direct impact on society, financial oversight is particularly important for minimizing the risks of inefficiency and irregularities.

3. Measurement of Program Implementation

The measurement of program implementation is carried out through administrative and financial reporting systems, field monitoring activities, and the collection of preliminary data related to program outcomes. These activities involve multiple levels of government, including central government institutions, local governments, and internal supervisory bodies.

Implementation measurement represents a stage of supervision that relies on empirical data to evaluate program performance. Through field monitoring and data collection, supervisory institutions can assess various aspects of program implementation, such as the quality of food ingredients, food preparation processes, and the distribution system for schools.

In addition to conventional monitoring methods, efforts to strengthen supervision have begun to incorporate digital-based monitoring approaches, although no single standardized national system has been fully established for this purpose. These initiatives generally involve digital reporting tools, such as spreadsheets, mobile applications, or internal information systems developed by implementing agencies, to support more timely data submission and improve reporting accuracy. Such approaches are particularly relevant in regions where manual reporting systems are still widely used. This is consistent with an interview with a program implementer, who noted, "We still record most of our data on paper before entering it into the spreadsheet later." However, the implementation of digital monitoring also faces several challenges, including limited human resource capacity in operating digital tools, uneven access to technological infrastructure, and resistance to changes in established reporting procedures. These constraints indicate that while digital moni

toring holds significant potential to enhance oversight, its effectiveness depends on institutional readiness, technical capacity, and user adaptability at the local level.

These findings indicate that the measurement stage of supervision not only generates performance data but also reveals the institutional capacity of program implementers at the local level.

4. Comparison with Standards and Analysis of Deviations

The next stage of supervision involves comparing the results of program implementation with the established standards. In the MBG program, this comparison is conducted through performance evaluations and audit processes to identify deviations in nutritional standards, beneficiary targeting, and budget allocation.

Deviation analysis is necessary to understand the underlying causes of implementation problems, which may be technical, administrative, or institutional in nature. Identifying the root causes of deviations enables policymakers to formulate appropriate corrective measures and improve the program's overall effectiveness.

Several implementation issues have been identified during monitoring, including delays in food distribution, variations in meal quality, and community concerns about food safety in certain regions. These issues indicate that deviations from established standards may arise not only from technical challenges but also from factors such as public trust, coordination between program implementers, and the level of understanding of operational procedures.

The supervision of the MBG program therefore requires the involvement of multiple actors with complementary roles. Government ministries and agencies are responsible for setting standards, defining indicators, and evaluating policy outcomes. Local governments are responsible for implementing and monitoring the program at the regional level. Internal supervisory bodies conduct reviews, evaluations, and audits, while external audit institutions ensure public accountability. The involvement of multiple supervisory actors strengthens the overall oversight system and reflects the principle of checks and balances in public sector governance.

5. Corrective Actions

The final stage of supervision involves taking corrective actions based on the results of monitoring and evaluation. In the MBG program, supervisory findings are used as the basis for improving operational procedures, strengthening coordination mechanisms, adjusting policies, and enhancing the capacity of program implementers.

Corrective actions demonstrate that supervision serves not only as a control mechanism but also as a learning process for improving public policy implementation. Improvements have been directed toward strengthening field operators' capacity through training programs, refining standard operating procedures, and improving coordination among food providers, schools, and local governments.

In addition to operational improvements, corrective actions aim to address systemic issues, including integrating program reporting into national supervisory systems and strengthening public communication strategies to address food safety concerns. These measures reflect the final stage of the supervision process, where the results of oversight activities are used to ensure that program implementation remains aligned with its intended objectives and policy goals.

In general, based on the available data, the formal supervision design of the Free Nutritious Meal Program can be mapped onto the stages outlined by T. Hani Handoko (2003), in the sense that standards, performance indicators, monitoring mechanisms, comparison procedures, and corrective actions have each been formally established. However, as the subsequent findings show, this formal structure does not by itself indicate that every stage has been implemented effectively; the discussion below distinguishes what has been formally designed from what has actually been achieved in practice. A summary of the supervision process can be presented in the table 2.

Table 2. Existing Supervision Practices in the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program

Supervisory Stage	Implementation in the MBG Program	Key Actors	Supervisory Instruments
Establishment of standards	Determination of national standards for nutritious menus, food safety, and beneficiary targeting	Central Government, Ministries, BPKP	National guidelines, regulatory frameworks, technical guidelines (SOPs), nutrition standards
Determination of performance indicators	Indicators include beneficiary coverage, food quality, portion adequacy, and distribution timeliness	Ministries (Kemenkes, Kemendikbudristek), supervisory Institution (BPKP)	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), monitoring frameworks, indicator matrices
Measurement of implementation	Monitoring through reporting systems, field inspections, and kitchen sampling	Local Governments, Inspectorates, BPKP	Monitoring reports, digital reporting tools, inspection checklists, sampling instruments
Comparison with standards	Evaluation of deviations in food quality, distribution processes, and budget utilization	Inspectorates, BPKP, Audit Institutions	Audit reports, evaluation reports, benchmarking tools, compliance checklists

Corrective actions	Improvement of SOPs, training for implementers, and strengthening monitoring mechanisms	Ministries, Local Governments, Inspectorates, BPKP	Training modules, revised SOPs, policy recommendations, follow-up audit reports
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Source: Processed by the authors (2026).

Challenges in the Supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program

One of the primary challenges in supervising the Free Nutritious Meal Program lies in the complexity of establishing clear implementation standards. According to T. Hani Handoko (2003), effective supervision must begin with the formulation of clear standards that serve as benchmarks for evaluating performance. In the context of the MBG program, these standards encompass not only quantitative aspects, such as the number of beneficiaries or the frequency of meal distribution, but also qualitative dimensions including nutritional adequacy, food safety, targeting accuracy, and the sustainability of food distribution.

Findings from field interviews indicate that translating national standards into local practice is not always straightforward. An informant from BPKP stated, "The standards are clear at the national level, but in the field, we have to adjust to local conditions, which sometimes creates confusion about what should be prioritized." Similarly, a program implementer in Bandung explained, "In urban areas like Bandung, we rely more on market supply and agricultural products from surrounding regions, but the guidelines do not always clearly regulate how to standardize menu composition based on fluctuating availability." Such empirical evidence suggests that inconsistencies in the application of standards are not merely technical issues, but also reflect broader institutional disparities. Consequently, these differences make it more difficult for supervisors to objectively assess program compliance and ensure uniform implementation across regions.

Another challenge relates to the determination and application of appropriate supervision indicators. Handoko (2003) emphasizes that performance indicators must be relevant and measurable to ensure objective supervision. In practice, supervision of the MBG program tends to rely more heavily on administrative indicators, such as budget absorption, reporting completeness, and distribution timeliness. These indicators are relatively easy to quantify and verify, making them more frequently used in routine monitoring processes. In contrast, substantive indicators such as nutritional adequacy, food hygiene standards, dietary

diversity, and the program's impact on children's health status are more complex to measure and often require technical assessment, field observation, and even longitudinal data collection.

As a result, these indicators are not yet systematically integrated into the supervision framework. This creates an imbalance in the evaluation process, where programs may be considered successful from an administrative perspective but may not necessarily deliver optimal nutritional and health outcomes for beneficiaries.

The measurement of program implementation also presents a significant challenge. Effective supervision requires continuous monitoring supported by accurate and reliable data. However, the implementation of the MBG program often faces structural constraints due to its geographical characteristics as an archipelagic country. The vast dispersion of islands, uneven infrastructure development, and limited connectivity in remote and outer regions complicate the establishment of an integrated and real-time monitoring system. In many areas, particularly in eastern Indonesia and remote islands, limited internet access and transportation barriers hinder timely data reporting and verification.

As a result, supervision often relies on manual data collection, which increases the risk of reporting errors, data delays, and potential manipulation. Geographic fragmentation also makes routine field supervision more difficult, as supervisors must cover wide and often hard-to-reach areas, requiring significant time and logistical resources. In addition, the limited number of supervisory personnel and restricted operational budgets further constrain the frequency and depth of monitoring activities. These conditions create disparities in supervision quality between regions with better accessibility and those that are geographically isolated. Consequently, supervision tends to become reactive rather than preventive, with problems frequently identified only after complaints arise or audit findings are reported. This indicates that beyond technical and administrative issues, the effectiveness of supervision in the MBG program is strongly influenced by Indonesia's geographic realities, which necessitate adaptive monitoring strategies that are sensitive to regional accessibility and infrastructure limitations..

Institutional coordination also represents a major challenge in supervising the MBG program. The program involves multiple stakeholders, including central government ministries, local governments, educational institutions, food providers, and community beneficiaries. However, findings from interviews and field observations indicate that

coordination problems are not merely general in nature but occur across several specific aspects, including the division of supervisory tasks, reporting flows, data standardization, and the follow-up of supervisory findings. An informant from BPKP noted that, "There are still overlaps in supervisory roles between central and local institutions, especially in determining who is responsible for verifying field data and ensuring compliance with standards." This indicates that the division of authority is not always clearly defined, leading to duplication of efforts in some areas and gaps in others.

Furthermore, challenges also arise in the follow-up of findings. As highlighted by a BRIN researcher, "From our observations, many supervision findings are well documented, but the follow-up process tends to be slow because coordination between institutions is not systematically managed." This suggests that even when evidence is available, the absence of a structured coordination mechanism can delay corrective actions.

Beyond institutional factors, social and cultural aspects also influence the effectiveness of program supervision. At the local implementation level, particularly in schools and community settings, strong social relationships and cultural norms may discourage individuals from openly reporting problems such as poor food quality or distribution delays. Effective supervision requires active participation from beneficiaries as part of a broader social control mechanism. However, the absence of accessible and secure complaint mechanisms may limit community involvement in monitoring the program.

Another crucial challenge concerns the implementation of corrective actions based on supervisory findings. Handoko (2003) argues that supervision becomes meaningful only when deviations are followed by timely and appropriate corrective measures. In the MBG program, although supervisory findings have been identified, follow-up actions are sometimes constrained by lengthy bureaucratic procedures, limited authority at the local supervisory level, and political considerations. As a result, similar issues may recur and reduce the overall effectiveness of the program. Weak sanction mechanisms and limited guidance systems may also reduce the deterrent effect of supervision.

Delays in implementing corrective actions can lead to several significant consequences. First, unresolved deviations such as poor food quality, inadequate hygiene practices, or mistargeting of beneficiaries may persist over time, directly affecting the nutritional intake and health outcomes of program recipients. Second, repeated findings without timely follow-up

may create a perception of weak accountability, thereby reducing compliance among implementers and diminishing the credibility of supervisory institutions. Third, inefficiencies in program implementation may increase, as resources continue to be used without addressing underlying problems. In the long term, these conditions may undermine public trust in the program and limit its overall impact, indicating that the effectiveness of supervision is highly dependent on the speed and consistency of corrective actions.

The supervision of the MBG program also faces challenges in ensuring financial accountability. As a program with a large budget allocation, MBG carries potential risks related to inefficiency and misuse of public funds. The Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia (BPK) has emphasized the importance of strong internal supervision mechanisms to prevent irregularities in public expenditure. However, in practice, internal supervision mechanisms are not always fully integrated with external oversight and community monitoring, resulting in a control system that is not yet fully comprehensive.

Several specific risk areas have been identified. First, in the procurement process, there is potential for price markups and lack of price standardization across regions, particularly in areas with limited supplier competition. Second, discrepancies between reported and actual numbers of beneficiaries may occur, leading to inefficiencies in budget allocation. Third, weaknesses in financial reporting systems may result in inconsistencies between budget realization reports and actual program implementation. In some cases, reports indicate full budget absorption, while field observations reveal gaps in service delivery, such as irregular meal distribution or reduced food portions. These conditions suggest that administrative compliance in financial reporting does not always reflect substantive program performance.

Furthermore, internal supervision mechanisms are not always fully integrated with external oversight and community monitoring, resulting in fragmented control processes. This lack of integration makes it more difficult to detect and respond to financial irregularities in a timely manner. Overall, these findings indicate that strengthening financial accountability in the MBG program requires not only improved reporting systems, but also better alignment between financial data, field verification, and multi-level supervision mechanisms.

Overall, the challenges faced in supervising the MBG program reflect the complexity of implementing large-scale public programs. These challenges include unclear implementation

standards, limited performance indicators, weaknesses in monitoring systems, insufficient institutional coordination, socio-cultural barriers, and weak follow-up actions.

From the perspective of Handoko's supervision theory, these issues indicate that each stage of the supervision process from standard setting to corrective action has not yet been implemented optimally. Therefore, strengthening the supervision of the MBG program requires a comprehensive approach, including improving standards and performance indicators, strengthening supervisory capacity, utilizing information technology, and increasing community participation. Through effective and accountable supervision, the MBG program may move closer to its strategic goal of improving nutritional quality and supporting sustainable human resource development in Indonesia, though this study did not directly measure these outcomes. A summary of these supervisory challenges is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Challenges in the Supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program

Supervision Aspect	Main Challenges	Impact
Implementation Standards	Nutritional and operational standards are not clearly understood in the field	Difficulty in assessing program compliance and success
Monitoring	Field supervision is not conducted regularly	Deviations are detected late
Data and Reporting	Implementation data are often inaccurate. For example : data discrepancies between reports and field conditions (interview findings)	Supervision results do not reflect actual conditions
Coordination	Supervision among institutions is not well integrated	Supervision becomes fragmented
Follow-up Actions	Supervisory findings are not immediately addressed	Problems tend to recur
Accountability	Supervision has not created a deterrent effect. For example : delayed follow-up actions (interview findings)	Risk of inefficiency and misuse of resources

Source: Processed by the authors (2026).

Table 3 illustrates that the challenges of the Free Nutritious Meal Program extend beyond the technical aspects of food distribution and encompass the entire supervision process, including standard setting, monitoring, and impact evaluation. These challenges are interconnected and collectively influence the effectiveness, accountability, and sustainability of the program. From the perspective of the supervision framework proposed by T. Hani Handoko, this condition indicates that the supervisory function has not yet operated optimally,

particularly in the stages of standard setting, performance measurement, and the implementation of corrective actions.

Strengthening Supervision in the Free Nutritious Meal Program

Strengthening supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program is essential, given that the program operates on a national scale, involves substantial public funding, and targets a strategic population group for human resource development. Effective supervision is intended not only to ensure compliance with regulations but also to serve as a managerial control mechanism that ensures the program achieves its intended objectives. According to the supervision framework proposed by T. Hani Handoko (2003), supervision is a systematic process that involves establishing standards, measuring implementation, comparing performance against predetermined standards, and taking corrective action. Therefore, efforts to strengthen supervision in the MBG program should focus on reinforcing each stage in an integrated, context-sensitive manner.

The first strategic step involves improving the standards governing program implementation. Standards related to nutritional quality, food safety, beneficiary targeting, and distribution mechanisms must be clearly formulated, measurable, and operational at the implementation level. Well-defined standards help ensure that program implementers share a common understanding of operational procedures while enabling supervisors to assess performance more objectively. Translating national policy standards into practical, easily understood technical guidelines at the local level is therefore crucial for reducing variation in program implementation across regions. This condition is also supported by field observations showing variations in food composition and distribution practices across implementation sites.

Another important measure is strengthening supervision indicators and monitoring systems. The supervision of the MBG program needs to move beyond a purely administrative approach toward a performance- and outcome-based monitoring framework. This approach requires developing indicators that measure not only program inputs and outputs but also broader outcomes, such as improvements in nutritional adequacy and beneficiaries' health conditions. By using more comprehensive indicators, supervision can provide a clearer assessment of the program's effectiveness rather than merely evaluating budget utilization or procedural compliance. This is further supported by field observations indicating that

supervision activities tend to prioritize document verification over direct assessment of food quality or beneficiary outcomes.

Improving monitoring and reporting systems also plays a significant role in strengthening program supervision. Continuous and systematic measurement of program implementation is necessary to detect potential deviations at an early stage. The use of integrated information technology can enhance the accuracy, transparency, and timeliness of reporting processes. Digital reporting platforms enable real-time data monitoring while minimizing the risk of reporting errors or manipulation. Reliable information systems are therefore essential to support evidence-based supervision and effective decision-making in program management.

Institutional coordination is another key factor in strengthening the supervision of the MBG program. Given that the program involves multiple stakeholders across different levels of government and sectors, a clear coordination mechanism is required to avoid overlapping responsibilities and fragmented oversight. Establishing coordination forums or designating a primary supervisory unit responsible for integrating supervision activities may help improve communication and information exchange among institutions. Effective coordination will ensure that supervision findings are followed up in a consistent and timely manner.

In addition to institutional mechanisms, strengthening internal supervision and community participation is also crucial. Supervision should not rely solely on government authorities but should also involve beneficiaries and the wider community as part of a social control mechanism. Accessible and responsive complaint channels can encourage community members to report problems related to program implementation. Increased public participation not only strengthens program transparency but also enhances the legitimacy of the supervision process.

Finally, effective supervision must be supported by firm and timely corrective actions. Supervisory findings should be followed by clear follow-up measures, including administrative improvements, capacity-building efforts, or the application of sanctions when necessary. Consistent corrective actions help strengthen program discipline and prevent the recurrence of similar irregularities. In this regard, supervision should be viewed not merely as a control mechanism but also as a learning process that promotes continuous improvement in program implementation.

Overall, strengthening the supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program requires a comprehensive approach that integrates improvements in standards, monitoring indicators, information systems, institutional coordination, community participation, and corrective action mechanisms. When these elements are implemented consistently in accordance with the supervision principles outlined by T. Hani Handoko, supervision can function not only as an accountability tool but also as a mechanism for continuous improvement, so that the MBG program may better contribute to improving nutritional quality and supporting sustainable human resource development in Indonesia, recognizing that such outcomes were not directly measured in this study. A summary of these proposed solutions is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Proposed Solutions for Strengthening the Supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program

Supervision Aspect	Supervision Solution	Objective	Expected Output
Implementation Standards	Develop clear and measurable nutritional and operational standards	Facilitate the assessment of compliance and implementation quality	Standardized implementation across regions and reduced variation in service delivery
Monitoring	Conduct routine and scheduled field supervision	Detect potential deviations at an early stage	Timely identification and correction of implementation problems
Data and Reporting	Develop a simple and integrated reporting system	Improve data accuracy and reliability	Consistent, validated, and real-time program data
Coordination	Clarify the division of supervisory roles among relevant institutions	Prevent overlapping authority and fragmented supervision	Integrated supervision system with clear roles and effective information sharing
Participation	Involve communities and program beneficiaries in monitoring activities	Strengthen social control and program transparency	Increased public oversight and early detection of field-level issues
Follow-up Actions	Establish clear follow-up mechanisms and enforce appropriate sanctions	Prevent the recurrence of irregularities	Stronger deterrent effect and sustained improvement in program compliance

Source: Processed by the authors (2026).

Table 4 indicates that strengthening the supervision of the Free Nutritious Meal Program should focus on improving the overall control system, including clearer implementation

standards, more effective monitoring mechanisms, and firm follow-up actions. These proposed measures are consistent with the supervision principles outlined by T. Hani Handoko, which emphasize the importance of clearly defined standards, objective performance measurement, and consistent corrective actions to ensure that program objectives are achieved effectively.

Building on the proposed solutions presented in Table 4, these measures can be integrated into a more comprehensive supervision model for the Free Nutritious Meal Program. Rather than treating standards, monitoring, reporting, coordination, participation, and follow-up actions as separate interventions, the proposed model positions them as interconnected elements within a continuous supervision process. As illustrated in the figure below, the process follows the principles of supervision outlined by T. Hani Handoko, beginning with the establishment of implementation standards and performance indicators, followed by monitoring, verification, corrective action, and continuous learning. This process is further supported by inter-agency coordination, information technology, internal oversight, and community participation. In this way, supervision is conceptualized not merely as a mechanism for identifying deviations, but as an integrated process for ensuring accountability, facilitating corrective action, and promoting continuous improvement in MBG implementation.

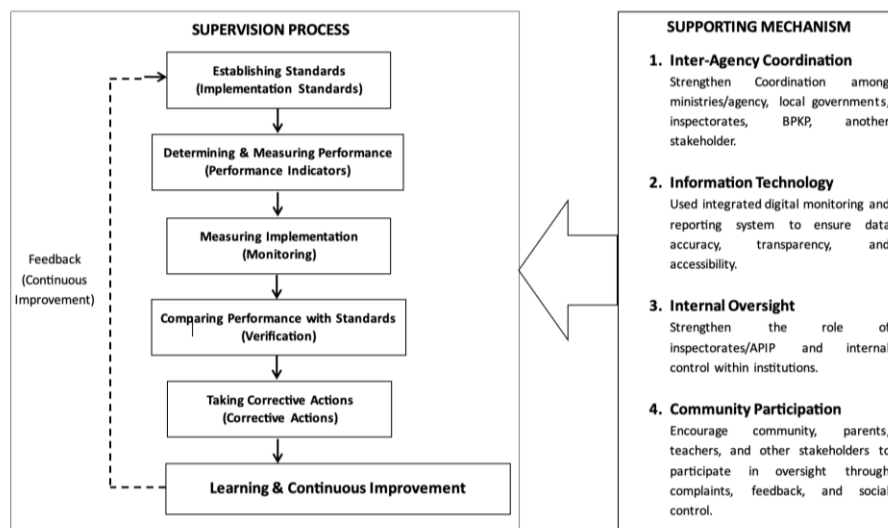


Figure 1. Supervision Model For The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG)

Source: Processed by the authors (2026).

Overall, the proposed supervision model demonstrates that strengthening MBG supervision requires a shift from fragmented and predominantly corrective oversight toward a continuous, integrated, and learning-oriented system. The interaction between the supervision process and its supporting mechanisms enables standards to be translated into measurable performance, implementation to be monitored and verified, deviations to be addressed through appropriate corrective actions, and lessons learned to inform subsequent improvements. Inter-agency coordination, digital information systems, internal oversight, and community participation further strengthen the capacity of the supervision system to respond to implementation challenges. Thus, the model provides a conceptual framework for strengthening the accountability and effectiveness of MBG supervision while supporting more consistent and sustainable program implementation.

CONCLUSION

The supervision mechanism of the Free Nutritious Meal Program comprises several key stages: establishing implementation standards, determining and measuring performance indicators, comparing implementation results against established standards, and implementing corrective actions. The supervision system involves various internal and external oversight actors, including government ministries and agencies, local governments, inspectorates, the Financial and Development Supervisory Agency (BPKP), and the Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia (BPK). Conceptually, this design reflects key principles of public governance, particularly accountability, transparency, and good governance in public program management.

Based on the selected informants and documents reviewed in this study, the formal supervision mechanism still faces several challenges in practice. These include variations in the interpretation and application of program standards across regions, performance indicators that are predominantly administrative and do not adequately capture program outcomes, weaknesses in monitoring and reporting systems, and suboptimal coordination among supervisory institutions. In addition, sociocultural factors, limited human resources, and the program's broad geographical coverage further affect the effectiveness of supervision. Within the scope of the informants and documents examined, these conditions indicate that each stage of the supervisory process from standard setting to corrective action has not yet been

implemented optimally; a broader claim about the program's national implementation as a whole would require a larger and more geographically representative sample.

Building on these findings, the authors recommend a comprehensive and sustainable strengthening of supervisory mechanisms. Key recommended measures include improving operational standards that are clear and easy to implement, strengthening outcome- and impact-based performance indicators, using information technology in monitoring and reporting systems, and enhancing coordination among supervisory institutions. The authors further recommend strengthening internal oversight, encouraging community participation as a form of social control, and implementing firm and consistent corrective actions, so that supervision may function not only as a control mechanism but also as a learning process that supports continuous improvement in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program. This study is limited by its qualitative, exploratory design and its focus on a purposively selected group of 11 informants drawn mainly from national-level institutions and the Bandung area; consequently, the findings and recommendations should be read as context-sensitive insights rather than as conclusions generalizable to every region in which the MBG program operates.

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