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Analysis Of The Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) From Pierre Bourdieu's Perspective: Policy Review And Capital Transformation

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Abstract

The Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) is a national strategic policy launched during the administration of President Prabowo Subianto, aimed at improving human resource quality and supporting Indonesia's Golden Vision 2045. This study analyzes the implementation of MBG from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, emphasizing the transformation of habitus, the distribution of economic capital, and the formation of power networks among actors. The analysis was conducted using a literature review approach based on Hannah Snyder (2019) and van der Waldt (2021), covering relevant scientific articles. The findings indicate that the MBG not only functions as a health intervention to reduce stunting prevalence but also as an instrument for transforming nutritional habitus. This is achieved through the internalization of healthy eating patterns, strengthening cultural capital, and reducing social stigma within school environments. The program also builds social capital through the Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi (SPPG), which connects government institutions, schools, MSMEs, and local farmers within region-based food-supply chains. In addition, the program generates economic spillover effects, such as increased income for local producers, job creation, and redistribution of economic capital to the agricultural sector. However, MBG implementation faces various structural and political challenges, including cultural resistance to menus, disparities in service quality, marginalization of school canteen vendors, and the risk of political patronage due to the program's large budget. Furthermore, geographical barriers, limited logistical infrastructure in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions, and disinformation in digital spaces may reduce policy legitimacy and hinder equitable capital distribution. In conclusion, the success of MBG depends heavily on transparent governance, locally based logistics decentralization, and strengthened quadruple helix collaboration to ensure that habitus transformation, capital distribution, and economic benefits occur inclusively and sustainably.

Keywords : Free Nutritious Meal (MBG), Habitus, Pierre Bourdieu, Public Policy, Social Capital.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of human resources (HR) is a key determinant of a nation's sustainable development. In its journey toward the vision of "Golden Indonesia 2045," Indonesia faces a fundamental challenge in the form of chronic nutritional problems that affect the cognitive capacity and productivity of its younger generation (Agustini, 2025; Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). Data indicate that the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia remained at 21.6% in 2023, while the national target is 14% by 2024 (Waluyo, 2025). This condition is further exacerbated by the fact that approximately 41% to 48% of students in Indonesia go to school on an empty stomach, which significantly reduces their concentration and academic performance (Dzakiyah et al., 2025; Kiftiyah et al., 2025). These nutritional problems not only affect individual health but also have direct implications for long-term economic productivity and the quality of human capital, as emphasized in the human development literature that positions nutrition as the foundation of cognitive ability and national competitiveness (Sen, 1999; Becker, 2009; World Bank, 2020).

As a strategic response, President Prabowo Subianto launched the Free Nutritious Meal Program (*Makan Bergizi Gratis*, MBG) (Aji, 2025; Waluyo, 2025). The program is designed to reach approximately 82.9 million beneficiaries, including students from early childhood education to senior high school, Islamic boarding school students, toddlers, and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers (Agustini, 2025; Waluyo, 2025). With a budget allocation of IDR 71 trillion in 2025, the MBG is positioned as a strategic investment in human capital. From a development economics perspective, large-scale national nutrition interventions like this have multiplier effects on education, health, and future labor productivity (World Bank, 2009; Alderman & Bundy, 2012). Therefore, MBG should not only be understood as a welfare policy, but also as an instrument of structural transformation with the potential to reduce social inequality and strengthen the capacity of younger generations to face the demographic dividend.

From a sociological perspective, the MBG policy can be analyzed using Pierre Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 2006) framework, particularly his concepts of social networks, capital, and habitus. Bourdieu argues that social networks are not naturally given but are the result of strategic social investments aimed at generating economically and symbolically beneficial relationships (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). In the context of the MBG, the program creates a new field in which various actors—such as the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), local governments, MSMEs, and schools—interact, compete, and distribute different forms of capital (Oktawila et al., 2025; Waluyo, 2025). Furthermore, the relationships among actors in this program reflect the distribution of economic, social, and symbolic capital that is not always balanced, thereby enabling state policies to potentially shape new power structures within local food governance (Bourdieu, 2011; Swartz, 2013).

This analysis is essential for moving beyond the technocratic aspects of food distribution. MBG has the potential to transform "habitus," or individuals' internalized structures, particularly in terms of nutritional consumption patterns. Simultaneously, the formation of local food distribution networks reflects the state's efforts to build new social capital. Within a social development framework, changes in consumption habitus through institutional interventions can generate long-term behavioral transformations that influence

patterns of food production, distribution, and consumption in society (Caraher & Coveney, 2004; Warde, 2016). Therefore, MBG functions not only as an assistance program but also as a mechanism for reconstructing social practices related to health and the local economy.

However, challenges such as the risk of corruption, logistical inefficiencies in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T; *tertinggal, terdepan, dan terluar*) regions, and resistance from school canteen vendors indicate the presence of complex capital contestations (Aprillia & Azzahra, 2025; Hermawati et al., 2025; Kiftiyah et al., 2025). Previous studies have tended to emphasize the effectiveness of school feeding programs primarily from health and educational perspectives, while analyses of power relations, capital distribution, and habitus formation in policy implementation remain limited (World Bank, 2009; Drake et al., 2016). Therefore, a research gap exists in examining the MBG program as a social arena involving negotiations of interests among actors and the formation of new social structures within local food systems.

This article explores how the MBG program operates as a tool of social transformation through a Bourdieusian perspective by integrating recent scientific studies. This study positions MBG not only as a nutrition policy but also as a political-economic instrument that shapes social networks, distributes capital, and constructs new habitus within society. Therefore, this study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of sociological analyses of public policy and practical contributions to the formulation of more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable food policies in Indonesia.

METHOD

This paper employs a descriptive qualitative approach using policy document analysis and literature review as the primary methodological strategy to understand the dynamics of the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) from a rural political economy perspective. This approach is chosen because public policy research, which is complex and multidimensional, is more appropriately analyzed through conceptual synthesis of various scientific sources and policy documents (Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 2014). This approach is grounded in two complementary methodological frameworks, namely, Hannah Snyder (Snyder, 2019) and van der Waldt (Waldt, 2021). According to Snyder (Snyder, 2019), literature reviews are highly relevant in contexts where knowledge production is rapid and interdisciplinary, making it difficult to track policy developments without a systematic synthesis. This study utilized a semi-systematic review model (narrative review approach), which is designed for topics that have been conceptualized differently by various groups of researchers (Snyder, 2019). This approach enables researchers to integrate findings from heterogeneous literature—including economic, political, and rural sociology studies—thereby allowing for a broader mapping of conceptual patterns and the evolution of policy discourse (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019). This method enables the identification of recurring key themes or concepts through meta-narrative synthesis, thereby providing a deeper understanding of complex policy areas such as the MBG Program (Snyder, 2019; Aziz et al., 2025).

In line with this, Waldt (Waldt, 2021) emphasizes the use of a “realist” literature review, an interpretative and theory-driven approach aimed at understanding heterogeneous

evidence related to complex interventions implemented in different contexts. This approach allows researchers to conduct critical analyses of previous studies to build a robust conceptual framework (Waldt, 2021). The research process was carried out through four main stages: (1) Identification: collecting selected scientific literatures related to MBG, including peer-reviewed journal articles using Google Scholar as the search engine; (2) Selection: screening literature that contributes to scholarly discussions on human resource transformation and socio-economic and political impacts; (3) Data Analysis: employing content analysis and thematic analysis techniques to categorize the content of each study, following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing based on the Miles and Huberman model; and (4) Theoretical Synthesis: integrating the findings with Pierre Bourdieu's social network theory to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of capital distribution within the MBG program. The integration of this theory is important because public policy analysis is not only concerned with technocratic aspects, but also with power relations and social structures that shape the distribution of program benefits (Bourdieu, 2011; Waldt, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation Of Habitus Through School-Based Nutrition Intervention

In Bourdieu's perspective, habitus is a system of durable dispositions that serves as the foundation for social practices. The MBG program aims to intervene in the nutritional habitus of Indonesian children, which has long been shaped by unhealthy eating patterns (affecting 52% of children) (Dzakiyah et al., 2025). Findings indicate that the regular provision of nutritious meals in schools compels the internalization of new health-related values (Azzahra et al., 2025; Widyasari et al., 2025). Students who were previously accustomed to consuming low-nutrient snacks begin shifting toward meals that meet the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) standards (Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Nissa et al., 2025). This process generates new forms of cultural capital, where access to balanced nutrition is no longer a privilege of the middle and upper classes, but a fundamental right guaranteed by the state (Azzahra et al., 2025; Oktawila et al., 2025). Empirical data show a 20–30% increase in children's daily energy intake, contributing to improvements in Body Mass Index (BMI) and a reduction in anemia prevalence (Agustini, 2025; Qomarrullah et al., 2025; Widyasari et al., 2025). However, challenges arise in the form of "cultural resistance" to certain menus and the presence of picky eaters, requiring more creative nutrition education approaches to ensure that new habitus formations become permanent.

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, habitus is a system of durable and transposable dispositions that functions as a scheme of perception and action internalized through prolonged social experience (Widyasari et al., 2025). The Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) essentially represents a state-led effort to intervene in the "nutritional habitus" of Indonesian children, which has been shaped within unequal social structures (Soma et al., 2024; Agustini, 2025).

The implementation of MBG seeks to restructure students' daily consumption patterns through the provision of meals that meet the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) standards (Ayuni, 2025; Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Nissa et al., 2025; Suardi & Purmadani, 2025).

Prior to this policy, data indicate that approximately 41% to 48% of students went to school hungry or without adequate breakfast (Agustini, 2025; Azzahra et al., 2025; Dzakiyah et al., 2025; Kiftiyah et al., 2025; Rahmah et al., 2025). The previous habitus of elementary school children was often characterized by the consumption of unhealthy snacks, high preservative intake, and dependence on instant noodles and processed foods (Soma et al., 2024). The presence of MBG in schools transforms this routine into a structured dietary pattern that includes carbohydrates, animal protein, fiber, and essential micronutrients (Azzahra et al., 2025; Saleh et al., 2025; Tambunan et al., 2025).

The transformation of habitus in the implementation of the MBG program is reflected in observable behavioral changes within school environments. First, the internalization of healthy lifestyles has emerged, as pilot implementations across various regions indicate that students have begun to consume vegetables and fruits that were previously often neglected in their daily diets, thereby fostering healthier and more balanced long-term consumption preferences (Azzahra et al., 2025; Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Rahmah et al., 2025). Second, communal eating activities function not only as nutritional interventions but also as platforms for character education, integrating values of discipline, hygiene through handwashing practices, and gratitude for food, which collectively contribute to the formation of new social habitus within schools (Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Dzakiyah et al., 2025; Oktawila et al., 2025). Third, shared meals with standardized menus help reduce social stigma, particularly for students from underprivileged families, as uniform food provision creates a sense of equality, minimizes visible economic differences previously reflected in packed meals, and ultimately strengthens social integration and collective cohesion among students in educational settings (Azzahra et al., 2025; Dzakiyah et al., 2025; Oktawila et al., 2025).

Efforts to transform habitus through MBG face complex structural and cultural challenges. Habitus is inherently “durable,” meaning that providing food alone—without comprehensive nutrition education—risks reducing the program to a consumptive social assistance initiative without long-term transformative impact. There is also a risk that students may perceive MBG merely as a “free lunch” rather than as part of broader health literacy (Aji, 2025).

Several critical issues identified in the literature indicate that the transformation of habitus through the MBG program is accompanied by complex cultural and structural challenges. First, cultural resistance and the phenomenon of “picky eaters” emerge in several regions because the provided menus are perceived as inconsistent with local tastes and deeply rooted traditional eating habits, leading students to partially or completely reject the meals offered. Second, disparities in implementation quality constitute a significant concern, as studies report inconsistencies in meeting the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) standards across schools, delays in food distribution, and even cases of food poisoning that may create trauma and reduce public trust in the program (Agustini, 2025; Ayuni, 2025; Nurmansyah & Fitriani, 2025; Riyanto & Sinaga, 2025). Furthermore, the lack of pedagogical infrastructure hinders the sustainability of behavioral change, as the MBG program has not yet been fully integrated into formal educational curricula. Without comprehensive approaches such as Shokuiku—culture-based nutrition education—the

transformation of habitus may remain temporary, with students potentially reverting to previous consumption patterns outside the school environment.

In conclusion, MBG is not merely a technical matter of distributing meals, but a contested arena for shaping a "new Indonesian human" endowed with strong physical and cognitive capital (Agustini, 2025; Azzahra et al., 2025; Nango et al., 2025; Widyasari et al., 2025). For this habitus transformation to succeed, MBG must go beyond the logic of "feeding" and move toward strengthening nutrition literacy through synergistic collaboration among schools, families, and local communities (Fatimah et al., 2024; Agustini, 2025; Qomarrullah et al., 2025; Rahmah et al., 2025).

Social Networks As A Modality Of Development (Social Capital)

Bourdieu emphasizes that social networks are resources that enable actors to gain advantages from membership within a group (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program through the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Units (SPPG) represents a manifestation of social network development at the grassroots level. This program involves multi-stakeholder collaboration encompassing government institutions, MSMEs, cooperatives, and local farmers (Aprillia & Azzahra, 2025; Khatmawati & Putri, 2026). In Sumbawa Regency and Southeast Aceh, MBG has been shown to stimulate the agricultural sector through the absorption of key commodities such as rice and local vegetables (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026; Khatmawati & Putri, 2026). This process generates economic capital for local producers, with potential income increases reaching 1.5–2.0 times the regional minimum wage (Andriyanty & Widyastutik, 2025; Beruh & Lusiana, 2026; Waluyo, 2025). From Bourdieu's perspective, active community involvement in program monitoring strengthens norms of trust, which are a prerequisite for economic development (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). However, the effectiveness of these networks is often constrained by weak inter-agency coordination and limited logistical infrastructure in 3T regions (Fatimah et al., 2024; Rahayu, 2025).

Within the framework of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2006), social capital is understood as the accumulation of resources (both actual and potential) possessed by individuals or groups through durable and institutionalized networks of relationships characterized by mutual recognition (Waluyo, 2025). The MBG program operates not merely as a food distribution mechanism but fundamentally constructs a new "field" that brings together cross-sectoral actors to generate social capital as a modality for national development (Agustini, 2025; Waluyo, 2025).

The implementation of MBG builds social networks through the establishment of SPPG units as key nodes at the grassroots level (Ayuni, 2025; Rahmah et al., 2025). Each SPPG unit is designed to serve approximately 3,000 beneficiaries, involving collaboration among the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), local governments, schools, and village administrations. This network facilitates economic integration by engaging MSMEs, cooperatives, and local farmers as suppliers for up to 95% of total food requirements (Agustini, 2025; Ayuni, 2025; Nango et al., 2025).

Sociologically, the program revitalizes the traditional mechanism of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) through the involvement of women's groups, PKK organizations, and

school committees in managing community kitchens, thereby strengthening trust and social cohesion at the village level (Pancani & Ningsih, 2025; Saleh et al., 2025; Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). In disadvantaged (3T) regions, this network expands further by involving the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI; *Tentara Nasional Indonesia*) as a key logistical actor to ensure food distribution to remote areas that are difficult for civilian institutions to reach (Thawley et al., 2024; Rahayu, 2025). Additionally, in the digital sphere, the MBG program has generated extensive conversational networks on social media platforms (such as X and YouTube), shaping public opinion and enabling citizen participation in monitoring policy implementation (Suaib & Pratiwi, 2025; Yuswira & Ginting, 2026).

Although descriptively the program has succeeded in building a broad network structure, critical analysis reveals distortions in capital distribution and risks of social exclusion. The formal networks established through SPPG tend to marginalize existing economic actors, particularly school canteen vendors, creating a displacement effect that results in income reductions of up to 70%, reflecting tensions between state interests and the economic modalities of small local actors who are not integrated into the new system (Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Hermawati et al., 2025). Furthermore, the rigidity of SPPG technical standards, which require large production capacity and industrial hygiene compliance, creates entry barriers for micro-level MSMEs with limited economic capital (Dwi K.S et al., 2025), potentially leading to the dominance of large vendors or centralized distributors and rendering the vision of local economic empowerment largely symbolic without meaningful participation from the smallest rural producers.

At the same time, the substantial budget managed at the service-unit level—reaching IDR 8–10 billion per year per SPPG—makes these networks vulnerable to local political patronage (Ayuni, 2025; Beruh & Lusiana, 2026), where vendor selection is often based not on technical competence but on social proximity within local power networks, increasing the risk of corruption and rent-seeking practices . Moreover, the centralization of information through one-way public communication by the Presidential Communication Office (PCO) is considered to hinder transparency (Dzakiyah et al., 2025), as media outlets frequently face difficulties accessing technical data from BGN, creating “dark spaces” in program accountability; this lack of openness, combined with food poisoning incidents reported in thousands of cases across provinces, may erode social capital in the form of public trust in state institutions .

In conclusion, social networks within the MBG program constitute a powerful modality of development when managed under principles of good governance (Oktawila et al., 2025; Rahim et al., 2025). However, without transparent participatory oversight mechanisms and fair inclusion of small-scale actors, these networks risk merely reproducing existing power inequalities under the label of a new welfare policy.

Capital Contestation: Bureaucratic Dominance And The Risk Of Patronage

The implementation of public policy often becomes an arena of power contestation. The literature highlights the risk of “political instrumentalization” at the local level (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). The massive budget of the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program (approximately IDR 800 billion per day nationwide) makes food procurement contracts

vulnerable to patronage practices by village elites (Thawley et al., 2024; Aji, 2025; Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). Such "project-sharing" practices can undermine healthy social capital structures and reduce service quality if vendor selection is driven by political proximity rather than technical competence (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026).

Moreover, rigid bureaucratic dominance may generate new inequalities. One of the most visible negative impacts is the marginalization of school canteen vendors (Hermawati et al., 2025). The decline in local traders' income due to students receiving free meals creates a conflict of interest between state objectives and the welfare of small-scale economic actors within schools (Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Hermawati et al., 2025). Without an appropriate inclusion strategy, MBG risks becoming a "centralistic" policy that benefits only certain groups.

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, every public policy creates a new field in which various actors compete over and distribute different forms of capital—economic, social, and symbolic (Agustini, 2025). The MBG program has become a highly dynamic arena of contestation, where bureaucratic power and political interests intersect in managing a vast public budget. Structurally, the program is administered by the National Nutrition Agency (BGN), which holds centralized authority over nutritional standards, procurement mechanisms, and distribution systems (Oktawila et al., 2025). Field implementation is carried out by the Nutritional Fulfillment Service Units (SPPG), which function as central kitchens serving thousands of students. Data indicate that the MBG budget allocation, ranging from IDR 71 trillion to IDR 121 trillion in 2025, makes it one of the largest instruments of economic capital redistribution in the history of Indonesia's social policy.

The state, through the Presidential Communication Office (PCO), manages symbolic capital by framing the program as an "investment in the future" and a "path toward Golden Indonesia 2045" to build strong public legitimacy (Dzakiyah et al., 2025). The political communication strategy employed tends to be centralized to maintain a positive government image and suppress negative sentiment in the digital sphere (Dzakiyah et al., 2025). At the regional level, coordination involves multiple ministries, local governments, and even security forces (TNI) to ensure smooth distribution in hard-to-reach areas.

Behind the formal structure of MBG implementation, critical analysis reveals inequalities in the distribution of power that lead to bureaucratic dominance and the erosion of local autonomy. The program reflects a centralized pattern in which strategic decisions regarding menus, vendors, and budget allocations are fully controlled by SPPG and BGN, thereby limiting the participation space of local actors. Schools and school committees are often positioned merely as passive beneficiaries without the authority to adapt the program to students' specific needs or local dietary cultures (Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Kiftiyah et al., 2025). The gap between policy designers at the central level and frontline implementers (street-level bureaucrats) also creates implementation inefficiencies that result in uneven service quality (Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Ritonga & Sazali, 2025). This situation is further complicated by the massive financial circulation of the program, reaching approximately IDR 800 billion per day, which opens opportunities for political patronage and rent-seeking practices by local elites (Thawley et al., 2024; Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). In several regions, the selection of food vendors and catering services has been reported as lacking transparency and prone to

“project-sharing” practices for electoral interests , while limited access to technical regulatory documents increases the potential for corruption within the procurement chain (Hermawati et al., 2025).

Furthermore, MBG implementation also generates capital conflicts with school-based economic actors and raises concerns about public accountability. The program directly affects school canteen vendors, with income reductions of up to 70%, reflecting the dispossession of small-scale economic capital through state intervention (Dwi K.S et al., 2025; Hermawati et al., 2025). Social tensions arise because rigid modern bureaucratic structures tend to overlook the interests of vendors who previously formed an organic part of the school economic ecosystem (Hermawati et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the government’s one-way communication pattern through the Presidential Communication Office (PCO) is considered a form of narrative hegemony that may obscure technical problems in the field, including the increasing reports of food poisoning incidents (Dzakiyah et al., 2025; Nurmansyah & Fitriani, 2025). This centralization of information limits media and civil society access to objective participatory oversight, thereby weakening program accountability (Dzakiyah et al., 2025; Oktawila et al., 2025). Without independent audit mechanisms and data transparency, MBG risks evolving into a legacy project that prioritizes political image-building over sustainable improvements in public nutrition outcomes (Aprillia & Azzahra, 2025).

In conclusion, the contestation of capital within the MBG program shows that it remains dominated by the logic of bureaucratic power, which sidelines meaningful participation from local actors. The program’s success in achieving social justice depends heavily on the government’s ability to transform a closed governance model into a system that is more transparent, accountable, and inclusive for all segments of society.

Spillover Effects And The Accumulation Of Economic Capital

The MBG policy generates a significant multiplier effect on the national economy. A budget allocation of IDR 71 trillion is estimated to boost GDP growth by 0.06% to 0.86% (Nissa et al., 2025; Oktawila et al., 2025). The program is also projected to create up to 1.5 million direct jobs, ranging from kitchen staff to distributors in rural areas (Thawley et al., 2024; Aji, 2025; Rahmah et al., 2025).

An increase in the Farmer Exchange Rate (NTP) by 1.84 points provides tangible evidence of how economic capital is redistributed back to the agricultural sector (Andriyanty & Widyastutik, 2025). Through the concept of home-grown school feeding, MBG integrates local producers into national supply chains, which not only enhances productivity but also strengthens regional food security (Khatmawati & Putri, 2026). However, fiscal concerns remain regarding rising public debt—already approaching 38% of GDP—and the risk of budget inefficiencies if not managed under strong good governance principles (Suardi & Purmadani, 2025; Waluyo, 2025).

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2006), public policy is not merely about distributing goods, but also serves as an instrument for the accumulation and conversion of various forms of capital. The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program creates a significant “policy spillover” phenomenon, where the impact of nutritional interventions

extends into macroeconomic sectors, food security, and household welfare through the redistribution of economic capital (Dwijayanti, 2024).

The MBG program is projected to produce a substantial economic multiplier effect in Indonesia. The 2025 budget allocation of IDR 71 trillion is expected to increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth by 0.06% to 0.86%, equivalent to a nominal rise of IDR 14.61 trillion at current prices. In terms of employment, MBG is predicted to absorb between 820,000 and 1.5 million direct workers involved in supply chains and village-level kitchen operations (Thawley et al., 2024).

The implementation of this policy is positively correlated with improvements in farmers' welfare, proxied by the Farmer Exchange Rate (NTP) (Andriyanty & Widyastutik, 2025). Data indicate that MBG implementation tends to increase NTP scores by 1.8492 points compared to the pre-policy period, particularly in food crops, horticulture, and smallholder plantation sub-sectors (Andriyanty & Widyastutik, 2025). Through the home-grown school feeding approach, MBG mandates up to 95% local sourcing of raw materials, providing market certainty for local producers and increasing their income by 1.5 to 2.0 times the regional minimum wage (Agustini, 2025; Andriyanty & Widyastutik, 2025; Ayuni, 2025; Khatimah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, MBG functions as an instrument for redistributing economic capital to low-income households. Given that food expenditure often accounts for up to 60% of total income among farming households, the provision of free school meals directly increases families' discretionary income (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026; Rahim et al., 2025). This allows parents to reallocate resources toward other essential needs, such as school transportation or savings, thereby strengthening purchasing power at the grassroots level (Nissa et al., 2025; Oktawila et al., 2025; Beruh & Lusiana, 2026).

Despite promising broad economic capital accumulation, the implementation of MBG faces systemic risks related to fiscal sustainability and development priorities. Full dependence on the state budget raises concerns regarding program efficiency and long-term viability, as funding requirements are projected to reach up to IDR 450 trillion by 2029 (Aji, 2025; Albaburrahim et al., 2025). This condition is further compounded by the risk of increasing national debt, which has approached nearly 38% of GDP, as well as the potential for fiscal deficits to exceed safe thresholds if not accompanied by careful budget planning and strong oversight mechanisms (Suardi & Purmadani, 2025; Waluyo, 2025). Moreover, MBG implementation may trigger a budget substitution effect, where massive funding for free nutritious meals could crowd out allocations for other productive sectors, such as improving teacher quality and maintaining educational infrastructure (Agustini, 2025; Ayuni, 2025). The reported reduction of higher education funding by up to 44% to support MBG is considered likely to hamper long-term economic growth by weakening investment in more complex forms of human capital oriented toward innovation (Aprillia & Azzahra, 2025; Ayuni, 2025; Nissa et al., 2025).

At the same time, the distribution of economic benefits faces structural challenges related to inclusivity and market stability. Strict technical standards for service provision often create barriers for small MSMEs, as the requirement for large capital investments to establish industrial-standard kitchens risks creating dependence on large vendors, thereby

limiting the absorption of economic benefits by small farmers and micro-enterprises surrounding schools (Andriyanty & Widyastutik, 2025; Dwi K.S et al., 2025). These challenges are more pronounced in 3T regions, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, where limited logistical infrastructure and inadequate cold storage facilities increase the risk of local food spoilage, ultimately leading to capital flight as schools rely on supplies from outside the region to maintain quality standards (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026; Fatimah et al., 2024). In addition, a simultaneous surge in aggregate demand for certain food commodities nationwide may trigger food price inflation at the consumer level, particularly for animal protein and vegetables. Without a concurrent increase in agricultural production capacity, this situation could worsen food security for populations not included among program beneficiaries, thereby creating new inequalities in the distribution of economic capital (Dwijayanti, 2024; Andriyanty & Widyastutik, 2025).

In conclusion, the spillover effects of MBG on the accumulation of national economic capital largely depend on the state's ability to decentralize management and ensure supply chain transparency. Without strict oversight to prevent "project-sharing" practices at the local level, the policy risks becoming merely a consumptive social assistance program rather than a driver of inclusive economic transformation toward Indonesia Emas 2045 (Aprillia & Azzahra, 2025; Beruh & Lusiana, 2026; Kiftiyah et al., 2025).

Structural Barriers: Geography, Logistics, And Disinformation

Indonesia, as an archipelagic country, faces complex physical barriers in building an equitable distribution network. In Eastern Indonesia (Papua, East Nusa Tenggara/NTT, and Maluku), limited road infrastructure and storage facilities (cold storage) lead to delays in distribution and deterioration in food quality (Fatimah et al., 2024; Agustini, 2025). This condition creates disparities in program outcomes across regions (Fatimah et al., 2024; Rahayu, 2025). Beyond physical challenges, the social network surrounding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is also threatened by disinformation in the digital space (Bhakti & Syarifuddin, 2025). Issues related to poor food quality, budget politicization, and negative narratives in conflict-prone regions such as Papua risk eroding policy legitimacy (Bhakti & Syarifuddin, 2025; Waluyo, 2025). Text Network Analysis results indicate that public perception remains divided: the majority is neutral (76%), while a portion remains skeptical about the program's sustainability (Aziz et al., 2025). Weak, top-down public communication from the government further reinforces public doubt (Bhakti & Syarifuddin, 2025; Dzakiyah et al., 2025).

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, the success of a public policy in distributing capital is strongly influenced by the structure of the field in which it operates. The MBG program faces dual structural barriers: physical challenges in the form of archipelagic geography that complicates logistics, and symbolic challenges in the form of disinformation flows that threaten policy legitimacy in the digital sphere (Bhakti & Syarifuddin, 2025; Fatimah et al., 2024). Indonesia, with more than 17,000 islands, presents highly complex logistical challenges for national food distribution (Thawley et al., 2024). In Eastern regions (Papua, NTT, and Maluku), where stunting and malnutrition rates remain high, the reach of the MBG program is constrained by limited transportation access and poor road conditions in

remote areas (Fatimah et al., 2024; Nango et al., 2025). Supporting infrastructure such as cold storage and cold chain systems is not evenly available at the village level, making fresh food items like vegetables and fish highly vulnerable to spoilage during transportation (Widyasari et al., 2025; Khatmawati & Putri, 2026).

On the other hand, the MBG program has become a site of contestation in the digital public sphere. Analyses of social media platforms such as X and YouTube reveal a polarization of public perception (Maulana et al., 2025; Suaib & Pratiwi, 2025; Yuswira & Ginting, 2026). Disinformation spreads rapidly in three main forms: narratives framing the program as a political image-building tool, concerns over the transparency of trillion-rupiah budgets, and the circulation of reports about unhygienic food quality (Bhakti & Syarifuddin, 2025; Nurmansyah & Fitriani, 2025). The government, through the Presidential Communication Office (PCO), has implemented a centralized communication strategy to control narratives and maintain a positive image. However, this approach is often criticized by the media for limiting access to technical data and field-level realities (Dzakiyah et al., 2025).

Critically, these structural constraints reveal a gap between centralized policy design and the heterogeneous realities of implementation across Indonesia. The focus of implementation, which tends to be more intensive in urban or relatively developed regions, risks creating geographical inequities in the distribution of capital, thereby marginalizing 3T areas in accessing program benefits (Aji, 2025; Azzahra et al., 2025; Kiftiyah et al., 2025). Without adequate logistical infrastructure interventions, the MBG program may widen disparities in human resource quality between regions, where children in Java receive significantly better nutritional standards than those in remote areas such as Papua (Fatimah et al., 2024; Kiftiyah et al., 2025). In addition, vulnerabilities in the food supply chain exacerbate implementation challenges. The absence of cold storage facilities is not merely a technical issue but also a threat to children's fundamental right to safe and quality food (Riyanto & Sinaga, 2025). The high number of food poisoning incidents, exceeding 10,000 cases by the end of 2025, indicates weak logistical risk management and inadequate quality control at the last-mile distribution stage (Aprillia & Azzahra, 2025; Nurmansyah & Fitriani, 2025; Rahayu, 2025). This condition reflects a bureaucratic orientation that prioritizes distribution quantity over the quality of field-level supervision.

Beyond logistical issues, structural barriers also emerge in the social and symbolic dimensions, particularly through the erosion of social capital due to disinformation and narrative contestation in public spaces. In Bourdieu's perspective, trust constitutes a key element of social capital; however, low digital literacy and top-down government communication patterns create opportunities for misinformation to spread, triggering collective distrust among parents toward the program (Bhakti & Syarifuddin, 2025; Pancani & Ningsih, 2025). Government efforts to control narratives through the Presidential Communication Office (PCO) to maintain a positive image are often perceived as information blackout, thereby weakening public accountability (Dzakiyah et al., 2025). At the same time, narrative contestation between legitimacy and criticism intensifies in digital spaces. Mainstream media tend to frame MBG as an economic welfare policy, while platforms such as YouTube function as arenas of resistance where criticism, satire, and negative narratives

regarding the program's budget are used to delegitimize government intentions (Maulana et al., 2025). This fragmentation of public perception indicates that the MBG program has not yet obtained a solid "social license" from all segments of society, leaving its legitimacy vulnerable to shifting public opinion.

In conclusion, geographical and logistical barriers highlight the need for decentralized, locally grounded logistics systems, while disinformation challenges demand a transformation toward more participatory and transparent public communication (Bhakti & Syarifuddin, 2025; Fatimah et al., 2024; Nango et al., 2025). Without fundamental improvements in these two structural dimensions, the MBG program risks remaining a fragile social policy vulnerable to long-term implementation failure. empowers teachers to move from confusion to competence, and from anxiety to confidence.

CONCLUSION

The Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG) is an instrument of social transformation aimed at accumulating human capital toward Indonesia Emas 2045. Through the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, MBG succeeds in creating a new arena for the redistribution of economic capital at the local level and in fostering the formation of a healthy nutritional habitus among the younger generation. The program's success is reflected in improvements in nutritional status (a decline in the prevalence of stunting and anemia) as well as increased school participation. However, the strength of the social networks built remains vulnerable to coordination fragmentation, logistical inefficiencies in 3T regions, and the potential for politicization at the local level. There is a clear disparity between the noble intentions of central policies and the realities of implementation on the ground, which are still marked by incidents of food poisoning, inadequate kitchen infrastructure, and threats to fiscal sustainability. The long-term success of MBG largely depends on the extent to which the state can integrate principles of good governance into its distribution networks. The policy implications of the MBG program call for the strengthening of a robust and integrated regulatory foundation. The government needs to promptly formulate legislation at the level of a Law to ensure legal certainty, establish binding national nutritional standards, and develop effective cross-sectoral oversight mechanisms. In addition, decentralization and local inclusion approaches are crucial so that program implementation is not uniform, but rather adaptive to the potential and comparative advantages of local food systems in each region. This strategy will not only reduce distribution costs but also strengthen local economies, particularly farmers and small enterprises. In this context, school canteen vendors and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) around educational institutions should be positioned as strategic partners within the program's supply chain, thereby fostering an inclusive and sustainable economic ecosystem rather than marginalizing local actors. On the other hand, the success of MBG is also highly dependent on the utilization of technology and the strengthening of multi-stakeholder collaboration. The digitalization of community-based monitoring systems is essential to ensure transparency in budget utilization, enable real-time tracking of food quality, and provide participatory feedback channels for beneficiaries. Furthermore, synergy within the quadruple helix framework—encompassing government, academia, the business sector, and civil society—must be reinforced to ensure continuous

and evidence-based program evaluation. Equally important, the program must be accompanied by efforts to enhance nutritional literacy among parents and students, as well as digital literacy to counter the spread of misinformation. Thus, MBG functions not merely as an intervention to meet basic needs, but as a broader instrument of social transformation that fosters awareness, self-reliance, and long-term societal resilience.

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