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ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUNTING POLICY IN IMPROVING NUTRITION: A CASE STUDY OF BANYUMAS REGENCY, INDONESIA

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Abstract. *This study aims to assess the impact of public policies on improving nutrition to reduce stunting in Banyumas Regency. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study examines the effectiveness of Banyumas Regent Regulation Number 25 of 2020 in reducing the prevalence of stunting through targeted and sensitive nutritional interventions. Quantitative data were collected through a survey of families (with toddlers) participating in the program, while qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews with stakeholders. The interim analysis reveals that, although there was a significant decrease in the prevalence of in 2022, the resurgence in 2023 highlights the program's sustainability challenges. Factors such as program implementation, cross-sector coordination, and public awareness determine the success of the policy. This research offers strategic recommendations to enhance interventions, bolster organizational capacity, and expand program reach, aiming to achieve the national target of reducing stunting to below 20%.*

Keywords: *policy, stunting, nutrition, impact evaluation, Banyumas Regency, Indonesia*

Raktiniai žodžiai: *viešoji politika, vystymosi sulėtėjimas, mityba, poveikio vertinimas, Banjumaso regionas, Indonezija.*

1. Introduction

Stunting is a global concern in various countries. One of the global nutrition targets for 2025 is to reduce the prevalence of stunting in toddlers by up to 40%. Currently, efforts to combat stunting are more focused on the period from pregnancy to toddlerhood. However, prevention during preconception is also important, with intervention targets including women of childbearing age, including adolescents, brides-to-be, and mothers who delay pregnancy (Lestari et al., 2023). The World Health Organization (WHO) describes stunting as a developmental problem in children caused by chronic malnutrition, recurrent infections, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation. Stunting occurs when a child's height falls below -2 standard deviations from the median growth standard set by WHO (WHO, 2015). According to the standard criteria of the Multicentre Growth Reference Study (WHO-MGRS), stunting is characterized by a height that is far below average (WHO, 2018). WHO reports that in 2018, 22% of toddlers worldwide were stunted. In Indonesia, the findings of the National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) and the 2019 Indonesian Child Nutrition Status Study (SSGBI) showed a stunting prevalence of 27.67%, exceeding the WHO global threshold of 22% (Riskesdas, 2018). Stunting is a growth disorder in children under five that is caused by chronic malnutrition, so children have a height that is not appropriate for their age. In Indonesia, around 30.8% of, or nearly 8 million, children are stunted (Riskesdas, 2018). Indonesia ranks fifth in the world for the highest prevalence of stunting. Children who experience stunting tend to have suboptimal intelligence levels, are more susceptible to diseases, and face the risk of decreased productivity in the future. The impact can be widespread, resulting in the hindering of economic growth, increased poverty rates, and exacerbated social inequality (Banyumas Regent Regulation Number 25 of 2020).

The Indonesian government addresses this through specific nutrition interventions and sensitive nutrition interventions. Specific nutrition interventions focus on the first 1,000 days of life (HPK) and contribute about 30% to stunting reduction. Implemented mainly in the health sector, they produce relatively quick results, such as providing supplementary food (PMT) for pregnant women to prevent deficiencies in energy, protein, iron, folic acid, and iodine, as well as malaria prevention and deworming (Sumarni, 2015). This intervention also promotes early initiation of breastfeeding (IMD), exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, and continued breastfeeding with complementary foods afterward. Other efforts include iron fortification, immunization, and diarrhea treatment. Sensitive nutrition interventions are reduced indirectly through long-term measures involving the government, private sectors, cross-sectoral programs, and community participation (Ridua & Djurubassa, 2020). According to Banyumas Regent Regulation Number 25 of 2020, the prevalence of stunting in toddlers in Banyumas Regency has reached 32%, whereas the national target is less than 20%. Therefore, immediate and sustainable solutions are needed through collaboration among the government, the private sector, and the community. As part of these efforts, the Regent Regulation on the Regional Action Plan (RAD) for the Prevention and Handling of Stunting in Banyumas was formulated to significantly

reduce the prevalence of stunting in the region. According to the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Alleviation (TNP2K, 2017), the Indonesian government pays great attention to the problem of stunting, especially in finding solutions to address and reduce its prevalence. The stunting intervention recommendations consist of five main pillars, namely: the commitment and vision of state leaders, national campaigns that focus on improving understanding and behavior change, political commitment and accountability, convergence and coordination of programs between the central government, regions, and communities, as well as policies related to food security and program evaluation (TNP2K, 2017). According to Nurcahyanti & Rahmansyah (2023), Banyumas Regency set a target to reduce stunting cases to 14% by 2024. Various efforts are made by local governments, one of which is by instructing all local government organizations (OPD) to carry out activities such as child nutrition interventions, improving home conditions, and increasing water availability. Table 1 details the achievements in handling stunting in Banyumas Regency from 2021 to 2023.

Table 1. Achievements of Stunting Handling in Banyumas Regency, 2021–2023

Year	Achievements	Information
2021	21.6%	Stunting incidence rate in Banyumas Regency
2022	16.6%	The stunting rate in Banyumas Regency was successfully reduced by 5%
2023	20.9%	The stunting rate in Banyumas Regency increased by 4.3% from the previous year

Source: Primary data

Stunting in Banyumas fell from 21.6% (2021) to 16.6% (2022) but rose to 20.9% (2023), revealing sustainability gaps and implementation weaknesses in nutrition programs. The government has targeted 15 high-burden villages and issued Regent Regulation Number 25 of 2020 to guide planning and coordination. This study evaluates the regulation's impact, the factors shaping outcomes, and lessons from Banyumas' stunting-reduction efforts. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How has Banyumas Regent Regulation Number 25 of 2020 been implemented across sectors involved in stunting reduction?
2. What impact has the policy produced at the individual, organizational, and system levels?
3. What factors explain the fluctuating stunting rates between 2021 and 2024?
4. What challenges impede the achievement of the national target of <14%?

Literature Review

Public Policy Evaluation

In the modern era, many governments prioritize public policies that promote social inclusion, aiming to reduce inequality and ensure justice. Through concrete measures, these policies foster an inclusive society where all citizens have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from development (Melati & Asmorowati, 2023). According to Permatasari (2020), policy evaluation is the final stage of the policy process, assessing implementation by identifying strengths, weaknesses, and impacts. It also serves as a key reference for formulating future policies. A careful assessment of the implementation and results of these policies is an important factor in determining whether the policy has achieved its stated objectives and in identifying ways to improve its effectiveness in the future. Winarno's (2012) public policy evaluation involves assessing implemented policies in terms of substance, implementation, and impact. Although usually the final stage of the policy cycle, it plays a crucial role and can also be applied to other policy activities. Thus, all consequences of the policy process can be evaluated without having to wait for the policy to be implemented (Abubakar, 2011).

According to Winarno (2008), policy evaluation serves to describe a policy's impact and assess its success against set criteria. It measures implementation, outcomes, and impacts to guide future steps. While often seen as the final stage of the policy cycle, some view it as followed by a further stage. Although aimed at solving problems, public policy often falls short of its targets. Evaluations are conducted to assess achievements and identify the causes of failure, with a primary focus on assessing policy benefits (Maulana, 2015). Evaluation is an assessment of the program that has been implemented. According to Judge (2015), policy evaluation measures how far public policies achieve their goals by comparing outcomes with targets. It examines not only results and impacts but also the policy's development and implementation processes. According to Rahman et al. (2015), evaluation functions as a monitoring tool to assess policy effectiveness and identify gaps between expectations and outcomes. It examines not only results or impacts but also how well policies are implemented. Overall, evaluation is an objective, systematic, and empirical process to measure the extent to which policy targets and objectives are achieved.

Impact Evaluation

According to Anderson (2010), impact evaluation examines outputs vs. outcomes, intended vs. unintended impacts, and direct vs. indirect effects. It measures changes caused by a policy by comparing conditions before and after, as well as between affected and unaffected groups. Key dimensions include timing, the gap between expected and actual impacts, the level of impact aggregation, and the types of impacts—economic, policy-making, public attitudes, and overall quality of life. Wibawa et al. (1994) state that policy impacts can be seen at four levels: individual (psychological, environmental, economic, social, and personal effects), organizational (direct or indirect effects on goals, morale, and

discipline), societal (capacity to serve its members), and relating to social institutions or systems (measured through factors such as resource sufficiency, coordination, legitimacy, and adaptability). In this study, the theory used is the Wibawa theory, which includes individual impacts, organizational impacts, and impacts on social institutions and systems. The theory was chosen because it was grounded in the specific situation, conditions, and characteristics of this research.

Factors Influencing the Implementation or Evaluation of Public Policies

Van Meter & Van Horn (1975) identify six key variables influencing policy implementation: policy standards and objectives, resources, communication, implementing agency characteristics, socio-economic and political environment, and implementers' disposition. According to Lipsky (1980), four factors affect the implementation or evaluation of public policies, namely: 1) executive discretion; 2) direct interaction with the public; 3) limited time and resources; and 4) bureaucratic work pressure. In his book *Public Policy Analysis: An Introduction*, William N. Dunn (1981) presents six policy evaluation criteria that can be used to assess the effectiveness and feasibility of a policy. These criteria are:

1. Effectiveness: This criterion measures the extent to which the policy achieves the goals it has set. The focus is on the tangible results produced by the policy. According to Ariyani et al. (2024), effectiveness refers to the level of success achieved by a person or organization through specific methods that align with the goals to be achieved. In other words, the more goals that are successfully realized, the more effective an activity will be. Effectiveness is a measure that shows the extent to which management has succeeded in achieving pre-set targets, both in terms of quantity, quality, and time (Ajefri, 2017). In addition, according to Julianto & Carnarez (2021), effectiveness is a broad concept influenced by internal and external factors. It reflects the success of individuals or organizations in achieving goals through appropriate methods, measured by target attainment in terms of quantity, quality, and time.

2. Efficiency: This assesses how the results achieved compare with the resources or costs used. Efficient policies deliver maximum results at minimal cost. Samsudin et al. (2024) state that achieving organizational goals requires aligning human resources with the company's vision, while efficiency means using resources optimally to minimize waste and maximize productivity. It also involves completing tasks with minimal input, on time, and appropriately. Additionally, this ability encompasses completing tasks in a timely and appropriate manner. In addition, according to Susanti & Pratiwi (2023), efficiency is the optimal and effective management of financial, human, and material resources to achieve organizational goals. It emphasizes using minimal input to maximize output while aligning resource use with the company's vision and productivity.

3. Adequacy: This measures whether the policy is sufficient to solve the problem or achieve the desired goal. That is, whether the policy is adequate in providing a comprehensive solution. According to Jasmine (2014), adequacy refers to the extent to which the level

of effectiveness can meet the needs, values, or opportunities that trigger the emergence of a problem. Meanwhile, according to Nuramalia & Rantau (2024), sufficiency is reached when achieved goals are deemed adequate, closely tied to effectiveness in meeting needs, values, or opportunities for problem-solving. In short, adequacy measures how well effectiveness addresses these aspects.

4. Equity: This assesses whether policies are fair and provide equal benefits to all groups of society, without discrimination. According to Vandito et al. (2023), equality refers to a situation in which every person or group has equal opportunities and access to the resources and rights that are available in society. Meanwhile, according to Heywood (2015), political equality aims to reduce economic, social, and other disparities by ensuring equal opportunities and access to resources and rights, thereby fostering a more just society.

5. Responsiveness: This evaluates the extent to which the policy can respond to the needs, demands, or aspirations of the targeted community. According to Ramadan (2021), responsiveness is an indicator of public service that reflects the ability of the state apparatus to respond to the needs of the community through regulations. Responsiveness is very important in public service because it shows the organization's ability to understand the needs of the community (Ramadan, 2021). Meanwhile, according to Lestari (2022), responsiveness in public services is the ability of the state to understand community needs, set priorities, and design programs that align with public expectations.

6. Feasibility: This measures whether policies are in accordance with the values, norms, and socio-cultural context of the affected communities. Feasibility can be interpreted as the effort made to provide financial and non-financial benefits to achieve the desired goals (Arnold et al., 2020). Feasibility means an in-depth analysis that will result in a decision as to whether the undertaking will provide greater benefits compared to the costs incurred (Sukmawati & Nasution, 2019). So, feasibility is an in-depth analysis to determine whether a venture provides greater benefits than the costs incurred, both financially and non-financially, in support of its desired purpose.

This study applies to William N. Dunn's theory of effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and feasibility. It fits the study's context and helps ensure policies are effective, fair, and relevant to community needs.

The Concept of Stunting

Stunting is a growth disorder in children caused by prolonged malnutrition, resulting in below-average height and delayed development (Hartati et al., 2024). According to Nurfadillah & Rahim (2024), defining stunting as a health problem is crucial, as it can impact the quality of human resources in the future. As the next generation of the nation, adolescents need to be aware of the importance of adequate and balanced nutritional intake, as well as maintaining health through good habits and avoiding the risk of early marriage. According to Aziz et al. (2024), stunting is a condition in which a child is malnourished, resulting in delayed growth and development. Meeting dietary needs is crucial

for ensuring children's nutritional intake, and steps need to be taken toward reducing and addressing stunting in the community. According to Yuliastri & Indawati (2024), stunting—caused by poor nutrition, infections, and inadequate parenting during the first 1,000 days—leads to disease, disability, reduced intelligence, lower productivity, and long-term impacts such as poverty, inequality, and slowed economic growth. Children are considered stunted when their height falls below age standards, reflecting growth failure during the first 1,000 days—a critical period for physical, cognitive, and future productivity (Dewi et al., 2023). In this regard, according to Jatmiko & Muzajjad (2024), stunting is a global problem due to its impact on reducing children's intellectual capacity, which in turn can reduce the competitiveness and quality of Indonesia's human resources in the future. Stunting, caused by chronic malnutrition during the first 1,000 days, is a serious health issue that harms children's growth, intelligence, and future competitiveness. Its impacts extend to poverty, inequality, and slowed economic growth, making proper nutrition, parenting, and public awareness crucial for prevention. International evidence shows that stunting reduction is strongly associated with multi-sectoral governance (Bhutta et al., 2020), stable funding (UNICEF, 2024), and frontline worker capacity (Victora et al., 2021). Studies in Bangladesh, Peru, and Rwanda demonstrate that long-term integrated interventions—such as providing clean water, sanitation, social protection, and maternal education—produce sustained improvements in child growth. In Indonesia, evaluations in Central Java, NTT, and West Sumatra highlight the importance of community-based delivery systems and convergent planning. Incorporating implementation-science frameworks such as CFIR or RE-AIM would further strengthen analysis of organizational readiness, context, and intervention fidelity.

Research Methods

Data were collected through a household survey of 114 beneficiary families in 15 priority villages and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The survey's 28-item questionnaire covered nutrition practices, service use, household conditions, and program perceptions, administered by trained enumerators during home visits. Interviews with government offices, village midwives, and community cadres examined implementation, coordination, challenges, and behavioral changes, and were recorded with consent. Although primarily qualitative, the study used descriptive analysis of quantitative data to support and triangulate findings. Simple cross-tabulations compared nutrition behaviors and service use across villages, without inferential statistics due to the absence of a control group and a non-causal focus. Future research should employ quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs for stronger causal inference. Qualitative data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's model, involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Transcripts were inductively coded, yielding 52 codes later grouped into themes such as coordination challenges, resource limitations, behavioral changes, and implementation

bottlenecks. Two researchers cross-checked and reconciled coding decisions to ensure inter-rater reliability. To enhance representativeness, the analysis included interviews with three village midwives, five community health cadres, and two TPPS village officials. Their input offered valuable insights into frontline implementation and community engagement. They also highlighted operational challenges not captured at the district level.

Analysis and Results

The results of in-depth interviews with representatives from the Banyumas Regency Health Office (Dinkes), Agency for Development Planning, Research, and Development (Bapedalitbang), Department of Social Affairs, Community and Village Empowerment (Dinsospermades), and Department of Population Control, Family Planning, Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DP2KBP3A) show that stunting policies have had a significant impact both directly and indirectly on individuals, organizations, and social systems.

Impact on Individuals and Organizations

Health Office respondents noted that the stunting policy provides psychological support to affected families and improves surveillance, anthropometric use, and SIGIZI-KESGA monitoring. Bappedalitbang emphasized its role in promoting behavior changes through nutrition education and supplementary feeding at health centers. It also contributed to shaping stunting-intervention planning for 2025.

Environmental, Economic, and Social Impacts

The policy improves sanitation and clean water access, provides economic support through PMT assistance and empowerment programs for mothers, and raises public awareness of nutrition and healthy parenting.

Policy Achievements and Impacts

Table 2. Fluctuations in the Achievement of Stunting Reduction

Year	Decline Achievement (%)
2022	16.6%
2023	20.9%
2024	Estimated at 19.6% (The Health Office has not yet issued an official SSGI)

Year	Decline Achievement (%)
2025	The interview results show that the data for 2025 has not been released yet

Source: Primary data

This indicates that although the achievement initially decreased, it has risen again, suggesting that there are challenges to the program's sustainability. Two speakers emphasized that the target of <14% in 2024 is still difficult to achieve due to the dynamics of the field.

Institutions and Social Systems

The Health Office noted overwork, uneven task distribution, and a shortage of nutritionists, while Bapedalitbang viewed task distribution as balanced under the TPPS decree. Both acknowledged suboptimal inter-agency coordination, with TPPS roles at sub-district and village levels seen as vital for strengthening policy implementation.

Evaluation Based on Dunn's Criteria

The stunting policy in Banyumas shows partial effectiveness, with improvements in TTD coverage, exclusive breastfeeding, and growth monitoring, though stunting rates remain inconsistent. Efficiency is seen in high budget absorption (98.95% in 2024), but the drastic drop in allocation from IDR 21.9 billion (2023) to IDR 180 million (2025) threatens sustainability. The reduction from IDR 21.9 billion to IDR 180 million requires clarification, as officials indicate it may partly reflect a reclassification of stunting-related spending into sectoral budgets. However, there are signs of a real decrease in dedicated funding, potentially affecting program sustainability. A detailed financial audit is needed to determine whether this change reflects reclassification, decentralization, or an actual budget cut. Human resources were limited until 2024, with improvements seen in 2025, though technical and reporting skills still need strengthening. The program remains fair and feasible, reaching remote areas, addressing complaints, and aligning with local values through food-based PMT and MSME support. Based on Dunn's framework, implementation can be evaluated across six dimensions and the factors shaping policy success.

Analysis Based on Dunn's Evaluation Criteria

The stunting policy in Banyumas shows limited effectiveness, with prevalence fluctuating from 16.6% in 2022 to 20.9% in 2023 and an estimated 19.6% in 2024, reflecting unresolved systemic factors such as food security, water quality, and parenting. Although there was a high budget realization in 2024 (98.95%), the drop from IDR 21.9 billion in 2023 to IDR 180 million in 2025 threatens progress toward the <14% target. The cut is misaligned with program complexity and fluctuating stunting rates, risking reduced coverage, service quality, workforce capacity, and coordination. It also endangers the sustainability of

sensitive interventions that provide clean water, sanitation, and economic support, which require stable long-term funding. At the same time, services and education are relatively adequate, but shortages of nutritionists, unclear OPD roles, and weak reporting integration limit sufficiency. Equity is well maintained through cadres, TPK, and local PMT reaching remote villages, ensuring fair access to food, health, and education. Responsiveness is demonstrated by the quick handling of complaints and integration of community input into planning, while feasibility is reflected in culturally grounded strategies such as local food-based PMT that also support MSMEs and align with Banyumas' social values.

Analysis Based on Dunn's Six Implementation Factors

The stunting policy targets <14% prevalence, but gaps between national goals and local capacity persist due to limited human resources, shrinking budgets, and weak data integration despite generally good OPD coordination. Implementation shows adaptive institutions and strong community acceptance, yet unclear task delegation, uneven structures, heavy workloads, and minimal training undermine consistency and accuracy. Overall, progress is positive but unstable, requiring stronger institutions, improved coordination, better staffing, and integrated cross-sector data for sustainable, inclusive results.

Quantitative Findings

Survey results show that 72% received nutrition education, 64% attended monthly growth monitoring, and 48% obtained supplementary food. Yet only 37% reported improved sanitation and 29% still faced clean-water difficulties, revealing gaps in sensitive interventions. Participation also varied by location, with the lowest coverage in remote hamlets. Frontline workers raised concerns about heavy workloads, with midwives noting that limited staff make timely data entry and follow-up difficult. Cadres similarly reported fatigue when activities accumulate at once. These issues reveal operational capacity gaps that may have contributed to the 2023 rise in stunting cases. The 2022 decline likely resulted from stronger breastfeeding promotion, intensified home visits, and expanded PMT distribution after pandemic recovery. The 2023 increase, however, may reflect rising food prices, reduced purchasing power, uneven WASH programs, and delays in SIGIZI-KESGA updates. These shifts stem not from the Regent Regulation alone but from interacting household, institutional, and environmental factors.

Conclusion

The implementation of Banyumas Regent Regulation Number 25 of 2020 has had multidimensional positive impacts, improving nutrition awareness, healthy behaviors, and access to services, especially for high-risk families. However, fluctuating stunting rates

(16.6% in 2022, 20.9% in 2023, and 19.6% in 2024) highlight sustainability challenges, driven by unequal workload distribution, limited resources, and weak cross-sector integration. While evaluations show effectiveness, responsiveness, and cultural feasibility, gaps remain in efficiency, adequacy, and institutional equity. Achieving the national target of <14% requires stronger human resources, clearer institutional roles, consistent funding, and enhanced community participation rooted in local data and wisdom. Overall, Banyumas' stunting policy is on the right track but needs a more integrated, adaptive, and sustainable approach for lasting results.

Data Availability Statement

The data used to support the findings of this research are available from the corresponding authors upon request.

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SUSTIPRINTO AUGIMO POLITIKOS VEIKSMINGUMO GERINANT MITYBĄ VERTINIMAS: BANYUMAS REGIONO, INDONEZIJOJE, ATVEJO ANALIZĖ

Santrauka. *Šiame tyrime nagrinėjamas viešosios politikos poveikis mitybos gerinimui siekiant sumažinti augimo sulėtėjimo paplitimą Banyumas Regione. Taikant mišrų metodų metodą, šiame tyrime nagrinėjamas 2020 m. Banyumas Regent reglamento Nr. 25 veiksmingumas mažinant augimo sulėtėjimo paplitimą taikant tikslines ir jautrias mitybos intervencijas. Kiekybiniai duomenys buvo surinkti apklausus programoje dalyvaujančias šeimas su mažamečiais vaikais, o kokybiniai duomenys gauti atliekant išsamius interviu su suinteresuotosiomis šalimis. Tarpinė analizė rodo, kad nors 2022 m. augimo sulėtėjimo paplitimas reikšmingai sumažėjo, jo atsigavimas 2023 m. pabrėžia programos tvarumo iššūkius. Tokie veiksniai kaip programos įgyvendinimas, tarpsektorinis koordinavimas ir visuomenės informuotumas lemia politikos sėkmę. Šiame tyrime pateikiamos strateginės rekomendacijos, kaip sustiprinti intervencijas, sustiprinti organizacinius pajėgumus ir išplėsti programos aprėptį, siekiant nacionalinio tikslo – sumažinti augimo sulėtėjimo paplitimą iki mažiau nei 20 procentų.*

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