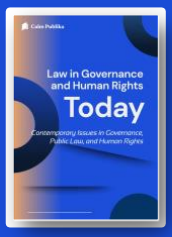
Cipta Aksara Literasi Media

Law in Governance and Human Rights Today

Vol. 1 No. 1 (2027)
pp. 1-11
ISSN: in process



MANUSCRIPT IN REVIEW – not yet published, not indexed, subject to change.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

Beyond Free Meals: Reformulating Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meals Programme through South Korea's Universal Free School Lunch from a Welfare-State Perspective

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Status: Manuscript in review

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's Free Nutritious Meals programme (Makan Bergizi Gratis, MBG) is presented as an investment in human capital for the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision, but it rests on a weak legal footing and meets large practical obstacles. This article analyses the programme from the standpoint of state responsibility in a welfare state and compares it with South Korea's free school meal programme, which has run under a dedicated statute, the School Meals Act, since 1981. It uses a qualitative, comparative socio-legal method based on documents: the constitution and legislation, official reports, statistics and the secondary literature. It finds that MBG rests only on Presidential Regulation No 83 of 2024 on the National Nutrition Agency, which leaves gaps in the division of powers among the Agency and the ministries of health, education and home affairs. It also finds heavy fiscal pressure, with a full-scale cost reported at up to Rp420 trillion a year, logistics costs that can reach 40 per cent of the price of a portion in remote regions, too few nutritionists and repeated food poisoning. South Korea shows what a statute can secure: a five-year plan, binding nutrition standards, trained nutrition teachers, cost sharing between central and local governments and purchasing from local farmers. It also warns that universal free meals can crowd out other school spending, including physical education. The article proposes a special statute on school and community nutrition, a tiered financing system, regional food cost standards, binding nutrition and food-safety rules, and nutrition education.

Keywords: free nutritious meals; welfare state; state responsibility; South Korea; school meals

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MANUSCRIPT IN REVIEW
This manuscript is under review. It is not yet published or indexed, it may change before publication, and it should not be cited.

1. Introduction

Indonesia describes itself as a welfare state. Its constitution, in the Pancasila and in Article 34(1) of the 1945 Constitution, makes the State responsible for the welfare of the people, and this makes the State the principal bearer of the duty to respect, protect and fulfil basic rights, among them the right to adequate food and nutrition.[1] Seen as state responsibility, running a country is more than keeping order; it is delivering public policy that reduces inequality and improves the quality of life.[2] The Free Nutritious Meals programme (*Makan Bergizi Gratis*, MBG) is one expression of this responsibility. It aims to improve children's nutrition, support concentration and learning, reduce stunting and stimulate the economy through local food supply chains.[3]

Despite its aims, MBG meets basic problems of legal certainty and sustainable governance. Its institutional basis is Presidential Regulation No 83 of 2024 on the National Nutrition Agency (*Badan Gizi Nasional*, BGN), and there is no statute that regulates the programme as a whole. That raises doubts about whether the regulatory framework can secure the programme over the long term, and it leaves open who decides what, how agencies coordinate, who supervises and whether policy continues from one administration to the next. On the ground, the programme meets large budget needs, high distribution costs in disadvantaged, frontier and outermost (3T) regions, a shortage of nutritionists and risks to food safety.[4]

The problems are sharper when set beside South Korea, whose free school meal programme (FSMP, the Eco-Friendly Free School Meal) runs under a special statute, the School Meals Act (*Hakgyo Geupsik Beop*), which fixes how meals are provided, the standards of safety and nutrition, and governance.[5] The Korean experience shows that nutrition depends on more than food: it needs legal certainty, a clear division of institutional duties, quality control and long-term planning. It also shows a warning. Where free meals are expanded without matching changes in the education budget, the cost of meals can crowd out other school spending, including physical education and the upkeep of sports facilities, which matter to children's fitness.[6]

Existing studies of MBG deal mostly with its nutritional benefits and economic effects. Fewer link state responsibility in a welfare state, the strength of the legal framework, fiscal sustainability and the protection of other educational services in one analysis. This article does so by using Korea's universal free, eco-friendly school lunch as a base for critical comparison. It has three aims: to analyse the State's responsibility for MBG from the welfare-state perspective; to identify the legal and practical problems of its implementation

[1]Syahnaz AY, 'Korelasi Antara Negara Kesejahteraan Dengan Demokratisasi Kehidupan Masyarakat Sebagai Wujud Negara Paripurna' (2021) 18(1) 1.
[2]Rahman A, Fikri M and Maysha HM, 'Reformasi Program Makan Bergizi Gratis Untuk Pemenuhan Hak Sosial Ekonomi' (2025) 9(1) 82.
[3]Maharani K and Bahar, 'Tanggung Jawab Negara Dalam Mewujudkan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Melalui Hukum Publik' (2025) 4 29.
[4]Nango M, Purwoko B and Hazim M, 'Makan Bergizi Gratis: Strategi Kebijakan Publik Menuju Generasi Emas Indonesia 2045' 25(2) 354.
[5]Fikri A, 'Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) Dalam Perspektif Konstitusionalisme' (2025) 10 428.
[6]Baek D, Cho Y and Lee H, 'Universal Welfare May Be Costly: Evidence from School Meal Programs and Student Fitness in South Korea' (2019) Sustainability 1.

in Indonesia; and to compare it with Korean school meal policy so as to propose a reformulation that strengthens its legal basis, secures its financing and keeps nutrition in step with the quality of education.

2. Method

The research is qualitative, descriptive and comparative, in the socio-legal tradition. It examines the relation between legal norms (law in the books) and their operation (law in action), drawing on the progressive legal thought of Satjipto Rahardjo and on Roscoe Pound's view of law as a means of social engineering. Three approaches are used: a statute approach, to examine the legal basis of MBG and overlaps of authority; a comparative approach, to compare school food policy in Indonesia and South Korea; and a policy-impact approach, to look at how the policies work in practice.

The data are secondary. The primary legal materials are the Constitution and legislation. The secondary materials are journal articles, policy documents, official reports and statistics. The authors report that the journal literature was selected with the PRISMA protocol and searched in the Sinta and Google Scholar databases; the selection steps are not reported here. Figures on the budget, on logistics costs in 3T regions, on food safety and on implementation were taken from reports and statistics, and several come from press and analyst reports and not from official statistical sources; they are marked as such where they are used. The data were analysed descriptively and qualitatively by classification, legal interpretation, deductive reasoning and comparison of the two countries' practice. No fieldwork or interviews were carried out, so the empirical side of the analysis rests on documents.

3. Framework: State Responsibility and the Welfare State

Indonesia rests on the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, and the welfare state is read as the State's effort, directly or through capable social groups, to secure the basic economic needs of all citizens. Mohammad Hatta's idea of the State as a caretaker (*negara pengurus*) puts the State's right of control (*hak menguasai negara*) over vital resources at the service of the people's prosperity, joining growth to social justice.[7] Welfare states are often identified with social policies such as education, employment and poverty relief; as Robert Goodin notes, a welfare state does not take a single form but varies in programmes and policies across the world.[8] Sukmana stresses the active management of resources through public-oriented regulation.[9]

When the concept is turned into legal instruments it becomes a doctrine of state responsibility that cannot be delegated. On the principle that the State remains responsible, it cannot discharge its duty by handing the work to a third party, and it has a positive duty to build the legal superstructure, the institutions and the supervision.[10] If welfare is reduced to a political gift, policy tends to chase short-term electoral rewards and citizens become passive beneficiaries instead of legal subjects who may demand their rights.[11] The rationality

[7]Hayati T, 'Hak Penguasaan Negara Terhadap Sumber Daya Alam Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Bentuk Penguasaan Pertambangan' (2019) 49(3), https://doi.org/10.21143/jhp.vol49.no3.2199.

[8]Pamungkas TJ and Hariri A, 'Tanggung Jawab Negara Dalam Pemenuhan Jaminan Sosial Perspektif Welfare State' (2022) 3(3) 270.

[9]Sukmana O, 'Konsep Dan Desain Negara Kesejahteraan (Welfare State)' (2016) 2(1) 103.

[10]The source cites Theja SRE, Lolong WRJ and Lasut MMW, 'Prinsip Tanggung Jawab Negara (State Responsibility) Dalam Hubungan Diplomatik Setelah Konflik Bersenjata Internasional' (2025) 7(2) 277, which concerns state responsibility in international law; the application to domestic welfare policy is the authors' own.

[11]Afrida NA and Luqman HH, 'Urgensi Pemenuhan Hak Warga Negara Menurut Perspektif Welfare State Di Indonesia' (2022) 4 11.

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of social policy is therefore measured by whether a legal and institutional framework guarantees secure access without discrimination.

3.1 MBG as a response to the Constitution

MBG carries out only part of the social welfare mandate of the Constitution. Article 34 has three layers of duty: paragraph (1) to care for the poor and neglected children; paragraph (2) to develop a social security system for all and empower the weak; and paragraph (3) to provide adequate health and public services. MBG answers a narrow part of paragraph (1) and part of paragraph (3), the basic nutrition of vulnerable groups (schoolchildren, toddlers, pregnant and breastfeeding women). It cannot be claimed to carry out paragraph (2), because comprehensive social security cuts across health, employment, education and old age, while MBG works at one point of intervention, daily access to nutritious food.[12]

A systematic review based on PRISMA finds MBG effective on proximal outcomes (daily intake, short-term attendance, concentration in class), while distal outcomes, such as long-term nutritional status, equal academic achievement across regions and the fall in stunting, vary widely.[13] MBG treats the surface, the daily hunger, but has not been shown to change the structure of nutritional inequality. Policy cannot be judged by good intentions; it needs complementary measures such as school nutrition standards, limits on the marketing of unhealthy food in schools and education in healthy eating, which are not fully built into the design of MBG.[14]

Politically, MBG is a progressive step by which the State is seen to be present for the public, and an expression of Articles 28H and 34 and an investment in human resources for 2045.[15] The Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs presents it as a way to strengthen purchasing power and move the real economy, from farmers to the small businesses that supply the nutrition service units (*Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi*, SPPG). That presence is a political legitimacy, which differs from legal and constitutional legitimacy; its symbolic value should not replace a substantive evaluation of the real effects, and political legitimacy and policy effectiveness should be judged separately.[16]

4. Results: Problems in Implementing MBG

4.1 Fiscal sustainability

Fiscal sustainability is the most basic problem. According to the figures the authors cite, state spending in the first two months of 2026 reached Rp493.8 trillion, up 41.9 per cent year on year, while revenue rose by only 12.8 per cent to Rp358 trillion, so that the State Budget (APBN) ran a deficit of Rp135.7 trillion, or 0.53 per cent of GDP, against 0.13 per cent a year earlier. An economist at CORE Indonesia estimated the need for MBG at about Rp19 trillion a month, which makes it the largest social spending item. Because it

[12]Sujud FA, 'Upaya Transformasi Kesejahteraan Dan Keadilan Sosial Melalui Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) Bagi Peserta Didik' 24.

[13]Saputri AA and Utari DM, 'Efektivitas Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) Terhadap Status Gizi, Kesiapan Belajar, Dan Luaran Pendidikan Peserta Didik: Tinjauan Sistematis' (2026) 14(1) 35.

[14]Sari NH and others, 'Free School Meals Policy as a Learning Framework for MBG in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review' (2025) 5(10) 12939.

[15]Nurafendi A and others, 'Analisis Yuridis Politis Kebijakan Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) Antara Mandat Konstitusi Welfare State Dan Tantangan' (2026) 6(2) 616.

[16]Zulaika N, Lestari D and Istiqomah H, 'Tantangan Implementasi Dan Akuntabilitas Anggaran Program Makanan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) Berdasarkan Instruksi Presiden Nomor 1 Tahun 2025' (2025) 1(3) 42.

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is populist and aimed directly at the public, its budget is rigid and hard to cut even when the fiscal position worsens.[17]

The long-term projection is more worrying. The full cost at maximum scale is reported at up to Rp420 trillion a year, about 90 per cent of the Ministry of Social Affairs' 2024 budget, and it could push the deficit past the 3 per cent of GDP limit in the State Finance Law. The initial budget of Rp71 trillion is said to have grown towards Rp400 trillion. The pressure shows in two rounds of reallocation and cuts, including a cut in village funds, and in a fall in the 2026 ceiling from Rp335 trillion to about Rp268 trillion. The programme is also exposed to shocks such as energy subsidies, and its annual budget equals about 37 per cent of the national social protection budget over five years, which holds back other welfare sectors. These figures come from press and analyst reports and should be checked against official budget documents.

4.2 Logistics and geography in the 3T regions

In the 3T regions the national cost standard of Rp10,000 per portion no longer holds, because of high logistics costs and local food prices; logistics can reach 40 per cent of the cost of a portion. There is also a shortage of nutritionists, with one nutritionist serving up to twelve SPPG, far from the ideal ratio of one to one. Table 1 gives the composition of the cost of a portion in urban and 3T areas.

Table 1. Composition of the cost of one MBG portion (per cent). Source: figures reported in the source manuscript, which presented them as a chart ("Grafik 1"); the original data source is not given.

Cost component	Urban areas	3T regions
Food ingredients	70	45
Logistics	15	40
Operations	15	15

The BGN has responded with fresh ready-to-eat meals five days a week in ordinary schools, and dry food (milk, fruit, bread) in 3T regions. This adaptive policy has not settled the problem: in the Riau Islands, some SPPG kitchens in 3T areas were finished but could not operate because central funds had not been released. An association of nutritionists (APGI) pointed to expensive logistics, shortage of staff, unstable supply chains and the sustainability of kitchen operations. Observers recommend replacing the uniform Rp10,000 benchmark with a logistics subsidy based on the Disadvantaged Regions Index.

4.3 Nutrition standards and food safety

Food safety is the most visible weak point. BBC News Indonesia reported that in thirty days in January 2026, cases of poisoning linked to MBG affected up to 1,929 people in six provinces, a repeated pattern that points to weak and non-uniform food-safety procedures. CISDI, a policy think tank, criticised the use of ultra-processed food on the menu, and the Indonesian Medical Association called for strict rules on formula milk for toddlers. Table 2 gives the causes of poisoning as reported in the source.[18]

[17]Aulia H and others, 'Polemik Alokasi Dana MBG Dalam APBN 2026: Tinjauan Konstitusionalitas Anggaran Pendidikan 20%' (2026) (4).

[18]Riyanto OS and Sinaga MRE, 'Penegakan Hak Anak Atas Makanan Aman Dan Sehat: Studi Kasus Keracunan Dalam Program Makan Bergizi Gratis Ditinjau Dari Tanggung Jawab Negara' (2025) (2) 1.

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Table 2. Causes of MBG food poisoning (per cent of cases). Source: figures reported in the source manuscript, which presented them as a diagram ("Diagram 1"); how the cases were classified is not stated.

Cause	Share
E. coli / Salmonella contamination	24
Packing food too early	23
Incomplete local-budget (APBD) provision	19
Temperature not monitored	18
Production over capacity	14
Storage procedure neglected	2

The risk of wrong targeting is also significant, because the recording of recipients still depends on manual reports from schools or local offices, in different formats and periods. A systematic review found that nutritional outcomes depend on how far the menu matches the recommended dietary allowance (*Angka Kecukupan Gizi*) and that consistency varies among SPPG. Differences in kitchen facilities may defeat the constitutional goal of the right to adequate nutrition, since students in poorly equipped areas face a higher risk of secondary malnutrition and food-borne disease.

4.4 Regulatory and institutional gaps

The BGN was created by Presidential Regulation No 83 of 2024 as a non-ministerial body that took over the food and nutrition insecurity function from a deputy of the National Food Agency (*Bapanas*), so there was a worry about overlap from the start. A normative study concludes that the regulation has no detailed technical rules and no firm division of authority with other ministries, and civil society has pointed to sectoral egos and the need to align with the national planning ministry (Bappenas) and the ministries of education, health, home affairs and villages.

The clearest overlaps are between the BGN and the Ministry of Health (nutrition standards and food-safety supervision) and the Ministry of Education (technical work in schools), and in the recording of the MBG budget within the 20 per cent education budget allocation, which has been criticised as harming the education sector. The Government and the BGN deny any overlap, citing regular coordination and a specific target group. Even so, the lack of an instrument at the level of a statute or a presidential regulation that explicitly sets out the roles of the ministries remains a structural gap, one that the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has identified as one of eight crucial gaps in governance. A larger cabinet increases the need for coordination and the cost of bureaucracy.[19]

[19]Weyana A and others, 'Rasionalisme Dalam Kebijakan Publik: Analisis Dampak Program Makan Bergizi Gratis Terhadap Kesejahteraan Pelajar' (2025) 3(4) 1969.

5. Discussion: What South Korea Offers

5.1 The Korean programme

Schools are a very good place for children's nutrition services, and South Korea is among the most active users of them, with major regulatory change in the last decade.[20] School meals are generally free or cheap, to address unstable access to food. In the United States, 72.1 per cent of participants in the National School Lunch Program and 85 per cent of those in the School Breakfast Program received assistance in 2015; in Sweden and Finland all pupils receive free meals without conditions; and South Korea widened the share of pupils receiving the eco-friendly free school meal from 46.8 per cent in 2011 to 67.6 per cent in 2016. School lunches began in Korea in 1953 with help from UNICEF, and the School Meals Act was passed in 1981 and improved several times.[21]

The share of schools providing lunch rose from 13.3 per cent in 1991 to almost 100 per cent in 2003; by 2010, 99.9 per cent of 11,396 schools provided lunch and 98.8 per cent of about 7,263,000 pupils ate it. Food-service companies were allowed to run the service after the statute was amended in 1996, and about 17 per cent of schools worked with them in 2004. After a mass poisoning in 2006 in schools using contractors, the law was amended and many schools returned to running their own kitchens, so that outside operators fell to about 5 per cent in 2010. In 2010 the average cost of a lunch was 1,900 won for primary schools and 2,700 won for middle and high schools.[22]

The "eco-friendly" element of the programme is a structured supply chain that gives priority to buying from farmers and farmer groups near the school, which cuts transport costs, keeps ingredients fresh and supports village economies. Ingredients must meet the food-safety standards of the Korean food and drug regulator, use of chemical fertiliser and pesticide is limited, and pupils learn where their food comes from, so that education, farming and the environment support one another.

5.2 Governance, staffing, standards and money

The nutrition teacher system has operated officially since 2006. A nutrition teacher teaches, counsels on nutrition and manages the meal operation, and must hold a dietitian certificate and a teaching licence. By 2010 there were 4,531 nutrition teachers, still under 60 per cent of the national need. The nutrition standards are set in an implementing regulation updated in January 2007: one third of the recommended dietary intake, energy within ±10 per cent, carbohydrate 55 to 70 per cent, protein 7 to 20 per cent, fat 15 to 30 per cent, and vitamins A, B1, B2, C, calcium and iron by age and sex.[23]

Funding has two channels: public funds (the central budget through the Ministry of Education, tax transfers and aid from local governments) and a school development fund from parents' contributions, managed by the school board under close supervision. The source reports that in 2014 the programme cost 28 trillion won, of which 17 trillion came from the central government and 11 trillion from local governments, a split of 60.7 and 39.3 per cent, and it attributes these figures to a paper published in 2012, which cannot be right; the year or the source needs to be checked. Table 3 sets Indonesia and South Korea side by side.

[20]Yoon J, Kwon S and Shim JE, 'Present Status and Issues of School Nutrition Programs in Korea' (2012) 21(1) Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition 128.
[21]Baek, Cho and Lee (2019).
[22]Yoon, Kwon and Shim (2012).
[23]Baek, Cho and Lee (2019).

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Table 3. MBG and the Korean school meal programme compared. Source: the authors' synthesis of the sources cited in this article.

Aspect	Indonesia (MBG)	South Korea (FSMP)
Legal basis	Presidential Regulation 83/2024 on the BGN; no statute on the programme	School Meals Act (1981, amended several times) with implementing regulations
Institutions	BGN, with unclear division of duties among the Ministries of Health, Education and Home Affairs and local governments	Education system: Ministry of Education, local education offices, school boards
Staff	One nutritionist may serve up to twelve SPPG; ideal ratio of one to one is not met	Nutrition teachers since 2006 (4,531 by 2010, under 60% of need)
Nutrition standard	Uniform cost benchmark of Rp10,000; menu fit with dietary allowance varies by SPPG	One third of recommended intake with set ranges for macronutrients and key micronutrients
Financing	Mostly central; rigid budget; reallocations and cuts	Shared by central and local governments (60.7 and 39.3% in 2014 as reported) plus parents' school fund
Supply and logistics	Central standard cost; logistics up to 40% of cost in 3T regions	Buying from local farmers and farmer groups; school-managed kitchens preferred after 2006
Response to failure	Press-reported poisonings; uneven SOPs	Law amended after the 2006 mass poisoning; outside operators fell from 17% to about 5%

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5.3 The cost of universal provision

The Korean case also carries a warning, which the source takes from the study by Baek, Cho and Lee. As the study's title puts it, universal welfare may be costly: expanding free meals to all pupils was associated with weaker student fitness in a setting where school budgets did not rise enough, and the authors of the source read this as a crowding-out effect, in which school money is moved from physical education and sports facilities to meal costs.[24] For Indonesia, where MBG is already charged to the education budget allocation, the warning is not abstract. Success cannot be measured by the number of recipients or portions alone, but also by the effect on other educational rights and on the quality of service.

[24]Baek, Cho and Lee (2019). The source gives no further detail of the findings; the exact result should be checked against the study.

6. Recommendations

The experience of South Korea suggests good practices that can be adapted, not copied exactly, by taking the principles that answer the structural problems of a similar policy.

A statute and a clear institutional framework. The legal basis of MBG, now only Presidential Regulation 83/2024, should be raised to a statute on the provision of community nutrition. It should set out a clear division of authority among the BGN, the Ministries of Health, Education and Home Affairs and local governments; guarantee a minimum budget allocation in law, so that it does not depend on momentary fiscal room; and set up structured evaluation and supervision that involve civil society and independent bodies. With such a basis MBG becomes an instance of state responsibility for the constitutional right to social welfare and not a seasonal programme.

Tiered and shared financing. Financing should be shared in proportion to local fiscal capacity, with more central help for regions with low own-source revenue; it should draw on local resources, such as part of the village fund and local revenue, with tight supervision so that other development is not disturbed; and it should avoid loading the whole budget on one spending item so that other important sectors keep their funds.

Local supply and regional logistics. Purchase from farmers near schools in Korea cuts cost, keeps food fresh, supports the local economy and makes the supervision of raw materials easier. For 3T regions, the source proposes food cost standards that fit each region in place of a uniform Rp10,000, with extra subsidy where logistics are costly; formal partnerships between SPPG and farmer groups, cooperatives and small food businesses; and two distribution models, ready-to-eat meals where access is easy and long-lasting nutrient-dense food in remote areas, with nutrition standards kept.

Binding nutrition and food-safety standards. South Korea requires each portion to give a third of the recommended intake and, after the 2006 poisoning, tightened supervision and preferred school-run kitchens. For MBG this means detailed binding national nutrition standards by age, sex and health condition, with regular monitoring; closer supervision of food handling, kitchen hygiene and raw-material quality; and more nutritionists, with a functional post of "nutrition teacher" combining kitchen management and education, so that the ratio of one nutritionist to each SPPG is met in stages.

Nutrition education and character building. South Korea shows that providing food is not enough; success also depends on changing eating behaviour through the nutrition teacher. MBG could include nutrition and healthy eating in the school curriculum, use meal time as direct learning (knowing ingredients, visiting local farms), and involve parents and the community in supervision and in drawing up menus.

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7. Conclusion

The State's duty to secure the welfare of the people comes from the Pancasila and Articles 28H and 34 of the 1945 Constitution, and MBG is one way the State makes itself present in meeting nutritional needs. But however progressive it is politically and symbolically, it has not yet dealt with nutrition problems in a structural and lasting way. The main obstacles are the sustainability of the budget, distribution and logistics costs in 3T regions, the lack of binding nutrition and food-safety standards, and unclear regulation and division of authority among agencies. South Korea shows that a school meal programme needs a strong legal basis, shared central and local financing, a local supply chain, strict nutrition standards and nutrition education, and it also shows that universal provision can crowd out other school spending if budgets do not keep pace.

The study has limits. It rests on documents, and several empirical figures (the Indonesian budget and poisoning data in particular) come from press and analyst reports that were not checked against official sources. It does not include interviews with officials, schools or recipients, and the findings on the Korean programme are taken from a small number of English-language studies, some of them over a decade old. Further work should test the proposals with official data, price out the proposed tiered financing, and examine how a special statute might fit with the existing laws on health, education and local government.

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