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Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) : An Instrument of Biopolitics and the Political Economy of Food

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) as a state instrument for governing population health and restructuring food-related economic relations. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study draws on literature review and document analysis of government regulations, technical guidelines, reports, policy documents, journal articles, and research papers published within the past five years. Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis and thematic coding, using Michel Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality, Nikolas Rose's ideas of responsabilization and the politics of life itself, and the political economy of food. The findings show that MBG operates beyond food provision. It establishes nutritional standards, regulates distribution, monitors health outcomes, and promotes state-legitimized understandings of healthy bodies and proper dietary practices. It also creates large-scale public demand that may connect state expenditure with farmers, fishers, livestock producers, cooperatives, village-owned enterprises, and MSMEs. However, the program contains ambivalence: while it may strengthen local food systems and a people-centered economy, procurement requirements concerning scale, standardization, logistics, and supply continuity may favor large suppliers. The article concludes that MBG's long-term contribution to Golden Indonesia 2045 depends on transparent governance, equitable benefit distribution, rigorous evaluation, and institutional protection for local small-scale producers.

Keyword:

Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG),
biopolitics, political economy
of food, human development

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's socio-economic policy landscape has undergone a significant transformation with the introduction of the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) as one of the government's national priority programs. In 2025, the government allocated an initial budget of IDR 71 trillion for the implementation of this program (NU Online, 2025), with an expansion scheme planned to increase funding allocations in subsequent years. The strategic priority assigned to the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) is clearly reflected in the substantial increase in budgetary commitments prepared by the central government. In 2025, through the State Budget (APBN), the government allocated approximately IDR 71 trillion for the initial implementation phase of MBG while simultaneously outlining a significant budget expansion plan for the following years. In a statement reported by various national media outlets, Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani Indrawati emphasized that in 2026, the MBG budget allocation was projected to "reach more than IDR 300 trillion" (Antara, 2025), in line with the expansion of beneficiaries to more than 80 million people. The magnitude of this budget requirement has been incorporated into the 2026 State Budget framework. This projected allocation exceeding IDR 300 trillion demonstrates that MBG is not merely a limited social assistance program, but rather a large-scale fiscal and socio-economic policy instrument that will influence state expenditure structures, the direction of human capital development, and the configuration of the national food economy over the medium and long term.

By May 2026, the government reported that the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) had reached approximately 62.45 million beneficiaries, including students, toddlers, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and educational personnel (Merdeka, 2026), supported by the involvement of 29,225 Nutrition Service Units (SPPG) operating across 38 provinces (Radar Bogor, 2026). The National Nutrition Agency (BGN) stated that this coverage had continued to expand since early 2025 (Tempo, 2026), increasing from hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries during the initial phase to tens of millions within a period of just over one year. The expansion of MBG has also generated more than 1.2 million new employment opportunities through MBG kitchens established across various regions of Indonesia. Therefore, the program does not only function as a nutritional intervention, but also plays an important role as a catalyst for local economic activities.

In its official narrative, the government and the BGN position MBG as a long-term investment aimed at reducing stunting, improving children's health outcomes, and strengthening the competitiveness of Indonesia's human resources. Various studies emphasize that MBG programs in schools can generate positive impacts on student attendance (Ering et al., 2026; Ramadhani et al., 2026; Wahyuningsih et al., 2025), learning concentration (Cahyani, 2026; Fatmawati, 2025; Nurani et al., 2026), and academic performance, while simultaneously reducing food expenditure burdens among low-income households (Agustina et al., 2026; Amanda et al., 2026; Arifah, 2026.; Umam et al., 2026).

By design, the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) adopts a home-grown school feeding model (Singh et al., 2026) namely a school-based food provision scheme that deliberately connects program food requirements with local production systems. Within this framework, farmers, livestock producers, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and community-based business units are encouraged to become integral components of the supply chain, ranging from the provision of raw materials to food processing and distribution. Consequently, the economic benefits of the program extend beyond fulfilling students' nutritional needs, reaching grassroots economic actors while simultaneously strengthening local food ecosystems.

From a theoretical perspective, this configuration can be examined through the lens of Foucault's concept of biopolitics and the political economy of food. In the context of Indonesia, the emergence of nutrition-based policy interventions reflects a broader form of state governance that extends beyond the provision of welfare assistance toward the regulation and optimization of population life. Drawing on Foucault's concept of biopolitics, modern states exercise power not only through legal and political institutions but also through interventions directed at managing life, bodies, health conditions, and population capacities (Foucault, 2007; Foucault & Carrette, 2013). In this sense, nutritional policies can be understood as instruments through which the state seeks to improve biological well-being, reduce health risks, and shape the future quality of its population.

Furthermore, Rose's concept of the "politics of life itself" provides an important analytical perspective for understanding how contemporary governance increasingly focuses on biological capacities as strategic resources for economic and social development (Rose, 2001). Within this framework, the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) can be interpreted not merely as a food assistance program, but as a biopolitical intervention aimed at producing healthier, more capable, and more productive future generations. Through the establishment of nutritional standards, menu regulations, distribution mechanisms, and monitoring systems, the state incorporates school-based eating practices into a broader regime of governing children's bodies and managing population vitality.

From the perspective of the political economy of food, MBG represents a large-scale mechanism for distributing public resources that affects the structure of economic opportunities within the food sector. Official narratives and academic studies indicate that the success of MBG is highly dependent on the effectiveness and sustainability of locally based food supply chains, the capacity of local producers, and the quality of procurement and distribution governance. In principle, the program creates opportunities for strengthening the people's economy if it is designed to consolidate the position of small-scale farmers, SMEs, and cooperatives. However, it also carries the risk of reinforcing the dominance of large-scale business actors if procurement mechanisms favor production capacities and administrative capabilities associated with larger enterprises.

Thus far, studies on MBG in Indonesia have predominantly focused on nutritional, health, and educational dimensions, including analyses of its implementation as a strategy for addressing stunting, evaluations of governance and fiscal risks, and assessments of its impacts on nutritional status and learning outcomes. Research that explicitly positions MBG as a biopolitical instrument and examines it within the framework of the political economy of food remains relatively limited, despite emerging discussions in policy debates and media discourse regarding these dimensions. This research gap provides an opportunity for a deeper examination of how MBG governs life through nutrition and contributes to the formation of new configurations in state-market-society relations within the food sector.

Based on this context, this article aims to: (1) analyze the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) as a state biopolitical instrument in governing life through nutritional policy; (2) examine the political economy of food within the MBG program, with particular attention to the configuration of involved actors, supply chain design, and patterns of economic benefit distribution; (3) analyze the implications of program implementation for the agenda of strengthening the people's economy; and (4) project the potential long-term benefits of MBG over approximately the next ten years.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, as outlined by Creswell, which emphasizes the researcher's effort to explore and understand the meanings of actions, processes, and social contexts from the perspectives of the actors involved (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using literature review and document analysis methods to examine the Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) as an instrument of biopolitics and the political economy of food. The research focuses on two main dimensions: how the state governs bodies and populations through nutritional policies, and how the design of MBG's supply chain and financing mechanisms shapes the dynamics of food political economy and the people's economy.

Data were collected through documentation and literature review. Primary data consist of regulations, technical guidelines, press releases, and official government publications related to MBG. Secondary data were obtained from journal articles, research reports, and policy papers discussing nutrition, education, the political economy of food, and the socio-economic impacts of the program within the last five years. The sources were selected based on their relevance to the themes of biopolitics, governmentality, food political economy, and the implementation of nutritious meal programs.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach. The analytical process began with an in-depth reading of all collected documents, followed by the identification of major themes and the categorization of data into several analytical dimensions, including nutritional governance, population regulation, food supply chains, the people's economy, and projections related to the achievement of the Golden Generation 2045 agenda. Subsequently, the findings were interpreted through the theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault's biopolitics and governmentality, as well as the political economy of food approach, to understand MBG's function as both an instrument for governing life and a mechanism for regulating food economies.

To enhance the validity of the findings, this study applies source triangulation by comparing information derived from official government documents, national media reports, and relevant academic articles and research reports. Through this approach, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of MBG as a policy instrument that connects nutritional governance, human resource development, and food economic governance in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the descriptive qualitative research design, the findings and analysis are presented in a structured Results and Discussion section consisting of four main sub-sections. This structure follows the dominant themes identified through the process of data coding and categorization while simultaneously reflecting the theoretical framework employed in this study, particularly Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality, Rose's notion of the politics of life itself, and the political economy of food approach.

First, MBG as Biopolitics: The State's Governance of Life through Nutrition presents findings on how the MBG policy constructs nutritional standards, healthy bodies, and targeted populations through specific mechanisms of intervention and regulation. Drawing on Foucault's concept of biopolitics, this section examines how the state exercises power through the administration of life by organizing nutritional knowledge, defining standards of health, and establishing institutional mechanisms for monitoring and regulating children's bodies and population well-being. Furthermore, through Rose's perspective of the politics of life itself, MBG is analyzed as a contemporary form of governance in which biological capacities, health conditions, and nutritional status become strategic concerns linked to

human capital development and the production of future productive citizens. This section also explores how MBG operates through techniques of biopower and governmentality in shaping individual practices and collective population outcomes.

Second, *The Political Economy of Food: Actors, Supply Chains, and the Distribution of Economic Benefits* examines the configuration of actors, supply chain design, and patterns of economic distribution generated through MBG implementation. This section emphasizes the relationship between the state, market actors, and local communities within the governance of food systems. From the perspective of the political economy of food, MBG is understood not merely as a nutritional intervention but also as a large-scale public resource allocation mechanism that restructures economic opportunities, production relations, and access to food markets. The analysis highlights how the program creates opportunities for strengthening local food systems while also identifying potential tensions related to market concentration, procurement mechanisms, and the involvement of large-scale economic actors.

Third, *Implications for the People's Economy* discusses the extent to which MBG strengthens or potentially challenges the broader agenda of Indonesia's people-oriented economic development. Particular attention is given to the position of small-scale producers, micro, small, and medium enterprises (SMEs), farmers, and community-based institutions within the program's economic ecosystem. This section analyzes whether MBG can function as an instrument for inclusive economic empowerment or whether its implementation risks reproducing existing inequalities if supply chain governance favors actors with greater capital, administrative capacity, and market access.

Fourth, *The Long-Term Projection of MBG Benefits Over the Next Decade* provides a forward-looking analysis of the potential implications of the program for public health, education, and local economic structures. Through the combined perspectives of biopolitics and political economy, this section examines how the sustainability of MBG depends not only on nutritional outcomes but also on governance capacity, institutional coordination, supply chain resilience, and long-term fiscal sustainability. The analysis considers MBG as a policy intervention whose impacts extend beyond immediate food provision toward the broader transformation of population quality, human development, and the national food economy.

MBG as Biopolitics: How the State Governs Life through Nutrition

From a Foucauldian perspective, MBG can be understood as a biopolitical instrument through which the state governs children's bodies and lives by standardizing and closely monitoring their nutritional intake. In this framework, the state is no longer present merely as a provider of food assistance. Rather, it assumes the position of an authority that defines what constitutes a healthy body, an appropriate meal, and a proper dietary pattern for millions of schoolchildren.

The establishment of nutritional standards, menu guidelines, and school meal schedules represents a disciplinary technique directed at the body. Children are instructed to eat at predetermined times, consume meals with specified nutritional compositions, and follow particular procedures. Consequently, eating routines become part of a broader process of shaping bodies that conform to the health norms established by the state. In this context, schools function as institutional spaces in which children's bodies are trained, supervised, and evaluated through everyday practices that may appear ordinary but are deeply embedded in relations of power.

At the same time, the collection of data and the production of indicators, charts, and performance reports transform children's bodies and lives into objects of calculation. Nutritional status, school attendance, and even academic achievement are represented

numerically, allowing the state to distinguish between populations categorized as “at risk” and those regarded as “ideal.” Through this process, MBG produces a ‘regime of truth’ concerning health: an officially authorized body of knowledge that defines the healthy body, the ideal meal, and appropriate nutritional practices. These norms are subsequently expected to be internalized by schools and families seeking recognition as responsible institutions and caregivers.

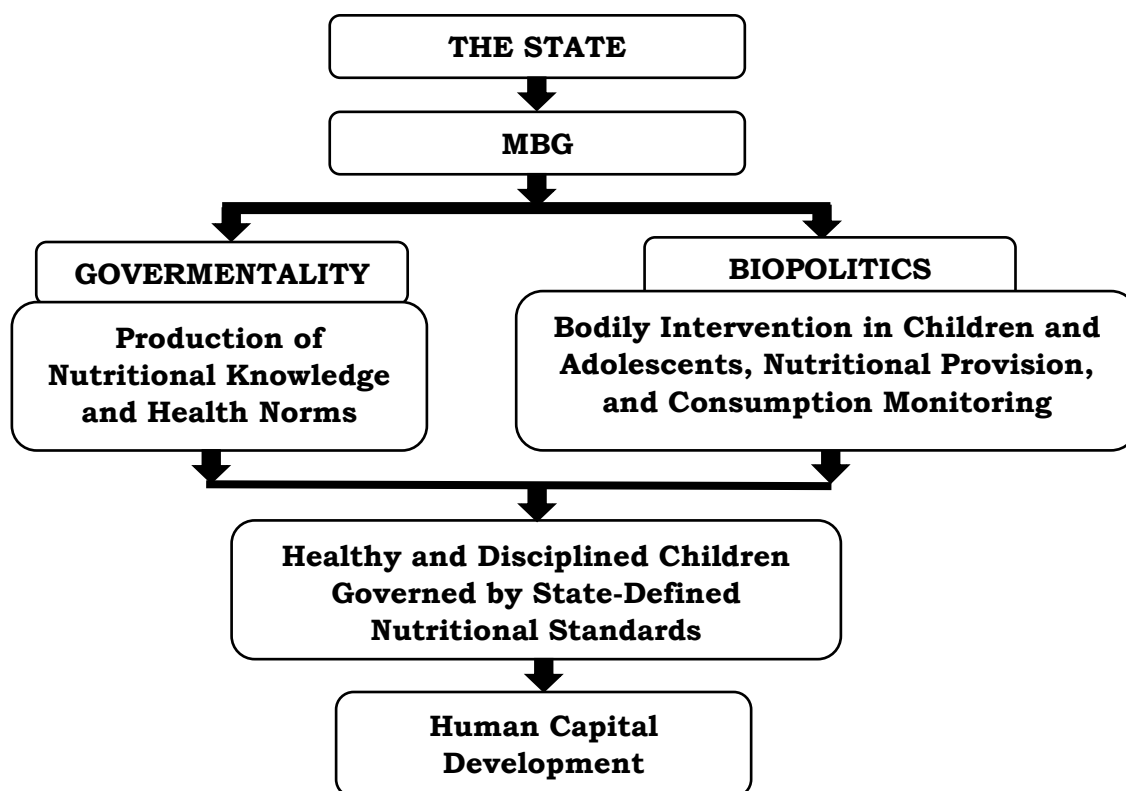
MBG therefore operates biopolitically at two interconnected levels. At the micro level, it disciplines individual bodies through school-based eating routines and nutritional protocols. At the macro level, it regulates the population through statistical measurements, stunting-reduction targets, and indicators of human-resource quality. These two levels converge within a common governing rationality in which children’s lives are treated as a form of biological investment or vital capital that must be managed, measured, and optimized through nutritional policies integrated into everyday practices.

This framework demonstrates how biopower operates through the combination of scientific knowledge in nutrition and education with administrative procedures that formally appear neutral and technical. Policy documents and implementation studies position MBG as a strategic state intervention intended to improve children’s nutritional status, reduce stunting, and cultivate a healthy and productive generation in support of the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045 (Kemenkes, 2025). President Prabowo has similarly described MBG as a long-term investment in the future of the nation and in the development of rural economies (Sekretariat Kabinet RI, 2026)

The implementation of MBG thus illustrates how nutritional policy can function as a practice of governmentality and biopolitics. Through the production and dissemination of knowledge concerning nutrition and health, the state establishes standards regarding dietary patterns considered appropriate, healthy, and worthy of adoption. This knowledge is subsequently translated into concrete interventions through the provision of nutritious meals for schoolchildren.

This sequence reveals that governmental rationality does not operate solely through formal regulations and institutional arrangements. It also works through the administration of bodies, dietary practices, and the biological life of citizens. The relationship between governmentality, biopolitics, and the regulation of bodies in the implementation of MBG is further illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram of the Relationship between Governmentality, Biopolitics, and Bodily Regulation Mechanisms Operating through the MBG Program



Within a Foucauldian theoretical framework, the MBG can be interpreted as both an articulation of and an intersection between governmentality and biopolitics. At the level of governmentality, the state does not merely provide food. It also produces, legitimizes, and disseminates nutritional knowledge through the establishment of menu standards, health education activities, nutritional guidelines, and various mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation.

This officially authorized knowledge subsequently serves as a reference through which society defines healthy food, appropriate dietary practices, and ideal patterns of consumption. The state therefore governs not only through direct intervention, but also by shaping the frameworks through which individuals understand and manage their own conduct. Nutritional norms validated by government institutions and health experts encourage schools, families, and children to regulate their everyday practices in accordance with officially recognized standards of health.

In this respect, MBG reflects what Foucault conceptualizes as governmentality: a form of power that operates by directing the conduct of individuals and populations rather than relying exclusively on coercion or legal prohibition. The program establishes a field of possible action in which particular dietary choices, eating habits, and understandings of health are presented as rational, responsible, and desirable. Governmental power thus functions by encouraging individuals to govern themselves according to norms that have already been defined and legitimized by authoritative institutions.

At the same time, MBG operates according to a biopolitical logic because it treats the biological life of the population as an object of policy intervention. Schoolchildren become the targets of nutritional programs designed to improve their health status, physical development, learning capacity, and future productivity. The child's body is therefore no longer understood solely as a private matter belonging to the family sphere. It is repositioned

as part of a broader population whose biological conditions must be administered in pursuit of national development objectives.

From this perspective, the provision of nutritious meals is connected to a wider political rationality concerned with the optimization of life. Children's growth, nutritional status, physical health, and cognitive capacities are rendered measurable, comparable, and governable. Through indicators such as nutritional adequacy, stunting prevalence, school attendance, and educational performance, the state transforms biological life into a field of calculation and intervention.

The relationship between governmentality and biopolitics becomes particularly visible when state-produced nutritional knowledge is translated into concrete practices of bodily regulation. Nutritional standards, menu formulation, meal schedules, portion sizes, and distribution mechanisms are not solely intended to satisfy biological needs. They also shape eating habits, consumer preferences, bodily routines, and socially accepted understandings of what constitutes a healthy body.

Through these mechanisms, the state does not primarily control children's bodies through repression. Instead, power is exercised through programs framed in the language of health, welfare, human development, and the improvement of human-resource quality. This is consistent with Foucault's argument that modern power is productive rather than merely prohibitive. It produces categories of healthy and unhealthy bodies, normal and risky populations, appropriate and inappropriate consumption, as well as responsible and irresponsible forms of conduct.

In this framework, MBG functions as a biopolitical instrument that directs the formation of children's bodies and eating practices according to state-legitimized nutritional knowledge. The rationality of governmentality ensures that intervention does not stop at the biological condition of citizens. It also shapes how individuals understand, monitor, and discipline their own bodies. Consequently, children and families are encouraged to internalize nutritional norms and reproduce them through everyday choices and routines.

Nikolas Rose's development of the concept of governmentality further strengthens this interpretation. Rose argues that contemporary forms of governing increasingly operate through the activation of individual responsibility, expertise, and self-management. Power is exercised by encouraging subjects to understand themselves as responsible for maintaining their health, managing risk, and improving their biological capacities. Applied to MBG, this perspective suggests that the program does not merely distribute nutritious meals. It also promotes a model of the responsible nutritional subject who is expected to recognize, adopt, and reproduce officially sanctioned health practices.

This process can be understood as a form of responsabilization. Schools are expected to implement nutritional standards, families are encouraged to reinforce healthy eating practices, and children are gradually taught to regulate their own consumption. Responsibility for nutritional health is therefore distributed across a network of actors, even though the state continues to define the principal standards, indicators, and objectives.

Rose's notion of the "politics of life itself" is also relevant because MBG places the biological capacities of children within a broader strategy of future-oriented investment. Nutrition is treated not only as a response to present deprivation, but as an intervention intended to shape future health, cognitive ability, labor productivity, and national competitiveness. Children's bodies are consequently understood as forms of vital or biological capital whose capacities can be improved through scientific knowledge, administrative management, and continuous policy intervention.

Ultimately, the regulation of bodies through MBG forms part of a wider strategy to produce a population that is healthy, productive, governable, and aligned with national development goals. Through this program, the state establishes a regime of truth concerning nutrition and health that is progressively internalized by schools, families, and children. Bodily regulation and patterns of consumption are therefore normalized through routine practices, institutional expectations, expert knowledge, and self-regulation rather than solely through direct coercion.

In this context, MBG should not be understood merely as a large-scale food assistance program. It can also be examined as a technology of power that combines the production of knowledge, the management of populations, the regulation of bodies, and the formation of healthy, responsible, and productive subjects within the horizon of national development.

The Political Economy of Food in the MBG Program

From a political economy perspective, MBG functions not merely as a social intervention addressing nutritional needs, but also as an institutional mechanism that governs commodity flows, distributes economic benefits, and restructures relations of power among the state, market actors, and local communities. Recent studies have positioned MBG as a policy that explicitly connects the agendas of food security and food sovereignty with efforts to strengthen local economies through a home-grown school feeding approach based on domestically produced food (BGN, 2025; DJPB Kemenkeu, 2025)

The government has designed MBG not only as a nutritional provision program but also as an instrument for stimulating local economic activity. By procuring food ingredients from local farmers, fishers, livestock producers, cooperatives, and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, the government seeks to ensure that public expenditure continues to circulate within the regions where the program is implemented. The use of the state budget to purchase rice from farmer cooperatives, eggs from village-based poultry producers, fish from local fishing communities, vegetables from farmer groups, and catering services from local enterprises may generate a multiplier effect within regional economies.

Within the political economy of food, this configuration demonstrates that food policy concerns more than the fulfillment of nutritional requirements. It also regulates the organization of production, commodity distribution, market access, and the allocation of economic value throughout local food chains. MBG therefore links the improvement of human-resource quality with the broader objective of strengthening community-based economic structures. The program transforms public nutritional expenditure into a potential source of demand for local agricultural and food production.

Research conducted by Mustafa Kamil Beruh indicates that MBG implementation can stimulate the agricultural sector and local food enterprises. In Southeast Aceh, for example, program implementers procured regional commodities, including locally produced rice and highland vegetables, to meet MBG food requirements (Beruh & Lusiana, 2026). Program implementation also created employment opportunities for rural communities, particularly in food preparation, processing, transportation, and distribution.

These findings suggest that MBG not only expands children's access to nutritious food but may also stimulate rural economies by increasing demand for locally produced commodities. Similarly, Andriyanty argue that MBG increases domestic demand for food commodities and contributes to the growth of agriculture, livestock production, and food-processing industries (Andriyanty et al, 2025). The expansion of demand for program inputs, particularly animal-protein products such as chicken meat and eggs, may encourage local

producers to increase their productive capacity and create new economic opportunities at the regional level.

MBG can therefore operate as a catalyst linking human development, local economic expansion, and national food security. However, such outcomes should not be treated as automatic consequences of large-scale public expenditure. Their realization depends on how procurement systems, financing mechanisms, institutional responsibilities, and supply-chain arrangements are designed and implemented. Increased food demand does not necessarily result in equitable benefits when producers possess unequal access to capital, certification, logistics, information, and government contracts.

The political-economic significance of MBG lies precisely in its capacity to determine who gains access to public demand and who captures the economic value generated by the program. State procurement does not operate in a socially neutral market. It takes place within an economic structure characterized by disparities in productive capacity, bargaining power, administrative competence, and logistical control. Consequently, the distributional effects of MBG depend on whether procurement arrangements enable small producers to participate directly or require them to operate through large suppliers, contractors, or commercial intermediaries.

Although MBG has the potential to strengthen local economies, this objective cannot be achieved without an appropriate procurement design and an accountable governance structure. Studies of the political economy of food indicate that the program's contribution to public welfare and food security is strongly influenced by its implementation mechanisms. Waluyo explains that MBG may improve household welfare and strengthen food security (Waluyo, 2025). However, the program may also concentrate its benefits among particular actors when financing structures and procurement arrangements are excessively centralized.

A centralized system may privilege businesses with stronger capital, greater administrative capacity, established distribution networks, and the ability to supply standardized food products in large quantities. These actors are generally better positioned to satisfy procurement requirements, manage payment delays, comply with certification standards, and absorb market risks. By contrast, small farmers, fishers, livestock producers, cooperatives, and local enterprises may face structural obstacles that prevent them from entering or remaining within the program's supply chain.

MBG is therefore situated at the intersection of two competing policy rationalities. On the one hand, the logic of food sovereignty, food security, and a people-centered economy encourages the government to construct supply chains from the village level by prioritizing products supplied by farmers, fishers, livestock producers, cooperatives, and local enterprises. Under this approach, MBG would function not only as a nutritional intervention but also as a mechanism for redistributing economic benefits, expanding market access for small-scale producers, strengthening grassroots economies, and reducing regional economic disparities.

On the other hand, the logic of bureaucratic efficiency, economies of scale, food-safety standardization, and supply stability requires the government to secure food in large quantities, maintain uniform quality, and guarantee timely and continuous distribution. These requirements tend to encourage cooperation with suppliers that already possess substantial capital, advanced logistical systems, administrative expertise, and extensive distribution networks. Large suppliers may be perceived as more capable of minimizing operational uncertainty and ensuring the continuity of service across numerous implementation sites.

The tension between these two rationalities reveals a central contradiction in MBG governance. The administrative pursuit of efficiency may undermine the distributive and empowering objectives of the program. A procurement system designed primarily to minimize transaction costs and ensure supply continuity may unintentionally exclude small producers whose scale of production, financial capacity, and administrative resources do not conform to standardized contractual requirements.

Without institutional arrangements that actively protect and prioritize small-scale producers, MBG may reinforce the concentration of economic benefits among larger businesses. Farmers, fishers, livestock producers, cooperatives, and local enterprises may consequently occupy peripheral positions within the food value chain. They may participate only as low-margin raw-material suppliers while actors controlling aggregation, processing, logistics, certification, and government contracts capture a larger proportion of the economic value generated by the program.

This condition also raises questions regarding the commodification of nutrition. Through MBG, children's nutritional needs are translated into measurable quantities of food, standardized menus, procurement packages, contractual obligations, and market transactions. Nutrition becomes connected to a large-scale commodity system in which public welfare objectives are implemented through the purchase and circulation of food products and services.

Commodification in this context does not necessarily mean that the program is inherently detrimental. Market transactions may be required to distribute nutritious meals on a national scale. The critical issue concerns how these transactions are organized, which actors control the supply chain, and how the resulting economic value is distributed. When procurement structures are dominated by a limited number of suppliers, a policy intended to improve public nutrition may simultaneously create new spaces for capital accumulation and market concentration.

The state therefore plays a dual role. It acts as a guarantor of nutritional welfare while also functioning as a major market-maker whose purchasing decisions reshape demand, production priorities, commodity prices, and business opportunities. Through budgetary allocation and procurement regulations, the state determines which commodities are prioritized, which quality standards must be fulfilled, which producers are eligible to participate, and which actors gain access to the program's economic resources. State intervention thus does not merely correct market failures; it actively constructs and reorganizes the food market surrounding MBG.

From this perspective, MBG constitutes a political arena in which state authority, market interests, and local community aspirations interact and negotiate the future direction of Indonesia's food system. The program provides an opportunity to decentralize economic benefits, strengthen local food systems, expand rural employment, and improve the bargaining position of small-scale producers. Nevertheless, it may also reproduce existing inequalities if program governance privileges actors who already control capital, logistics, technology, and access to public procurement.

The distributional effects of MBG consequently depend on the institutional architecture of its supply chain. Transparent procurement, accessible contractual requirements, timely payment systems, local sourcing targets, support for producer cooperatives, and public monitoring are necessary to prevent the exclusion of small producers. The program also requires mechanisms to ensure that local participation is substantive rather than symbolic. Merely including local producers in policy documents does

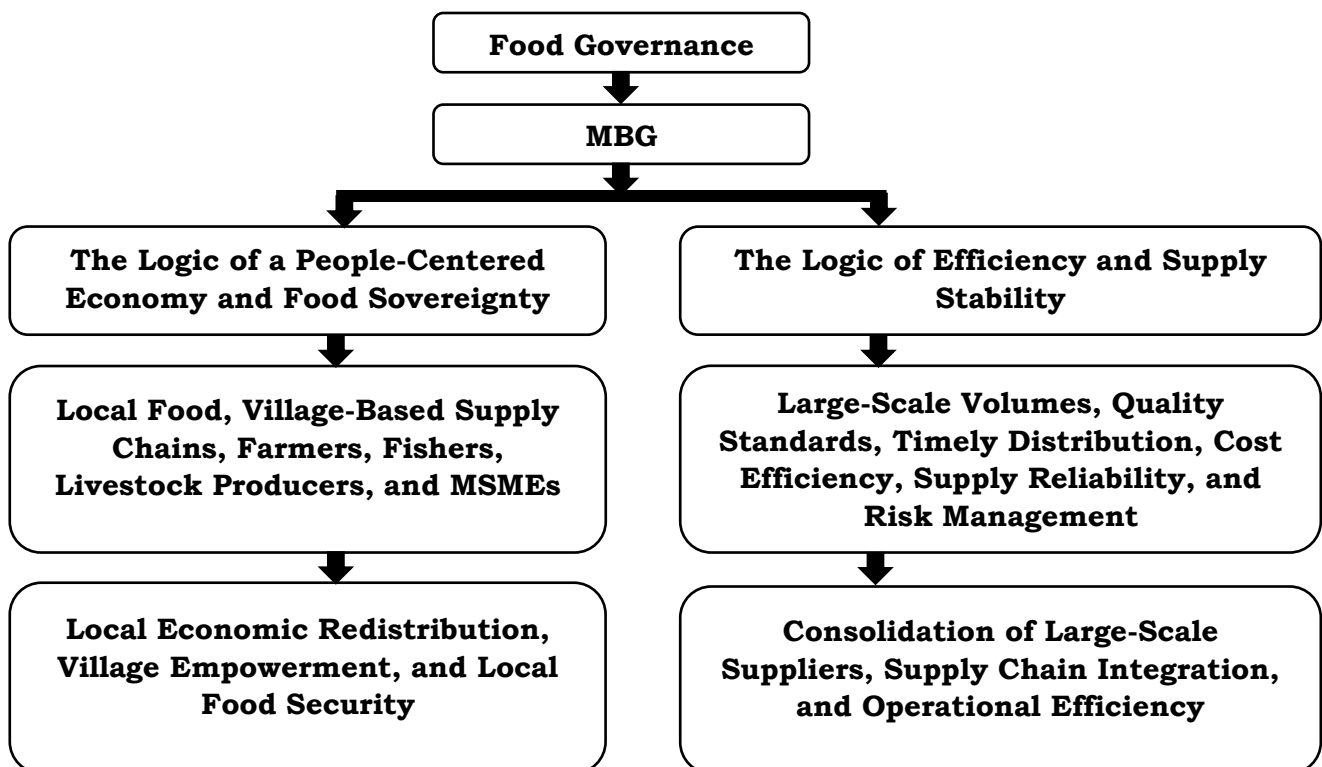
not guarantee that they will obtain stable contracts, fair prices, or meaningful control over the distribution of economic value.

In the absence of transparent procurement, explicit preferential arrangements for local producers, and accountable fiscal management, MBG may reproduce inequalities that have long characterized Indonesia's food system. Under such circumstances, the language of local economic empowerment could serve to legitimize the concentration of profits among a small number of actors controlling procurement, processing, and distribution networks.

Small-scale producers, who are expected to become the program's principal economic beneficiaries, may instead become increasingly marginalized. They may bear production risks and price volatility while economically stronger actors retain control over contracts, standards, logistics, and value accumulation. The fundamental political-economic question is therefore not merely whether MBG generates economic growth, but who controls that growth, who captures its benefits, and who bears the costs and risks of program implementation.

Accordingly, MBG should be assessed not only through nutritional outputs or the volume of meals distributed. Its success must also be evaluated through the structure of ownership and control within its food supply chain, the distribution of public expenditure, the participation of local producers, and the extent to which the program reduces or reproduces existing economic inequalities. In this sense, MBG represents both an opportunity for redistributive food governance and a potential mechanism through which established patterns of market concentration may be extended under the institutional legitimacy of a national nutrition program.

Figure 2. The Political Economy Framework of the MBG Program



The framework demonstrates that MBG does not operate within a politically neutral policy environment. Rather, it is situated at the intersection of two distinct governing rationalities. The first is rooted in the agenda of a people-centered economy and food sovereignty, which positions farmers, fishers, livestock producers, cooperatives, and micro,

small, and medium-sized enterprises as central actors within the program's supply chain. Under this logic, the state employs public expenditure as an instrument of economic redistribution to strengthen local food production, expand market access for small-scale producers, and enhance territorially based food security.

The second rationality, by contrast, derives from the state's administrative need to ensure the continuity and reliability of the program at the national level. Since MBG is required to provide millions of meal portions every day according to uniform quality standards, the state faces considerable pressure to select suppliers with large production capacities, sufficient capital, and established distribution networks. Such suppliers are often regarded as more efficient and better equipped to minimize the risk of supply disruptions.

The tension between these two rationalities explains why the economic outcomes of MBG are determined not only by the scale of the allocated budget, but also by the institutional design governing food procurement and distribution. If the government succeeds in establishing mechanisms that enable cooperatives, farmer groups, fishers, livestock producers, and MSMEs to participate directly, MBG may function as an instrument of economic redistribution that strengthens local economies. However, if program governance prioritizes efficiency by concentrating procurement among a limited number of large suppliers, the resulting economic benefits may become concentrated among particular groups, thereby reducing opportunities for the empowerment of small-scale producers.

MBG can therefore be understood as an arena of political economy in which three sets of interests intersect: the state's interest in ensuring the successful implementation of the program, market actors' interest in gaining access to food procurement contracts, and local communities' interest in securing economic benefits from public expenditure. Whether the program ultimately functions as an instrument of local economic empowerment or instead reinforces economic concentration depends largely on the governance arrangements that regulate the relationship among these three interests.

Implications for a People-Centered Economy

The implications of the Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) for a people-centered economy are reflected not only in the expansion of local economic activity, but also in the ways in which the state structures and directs the economic conduct of communities through organized policy mechanisms. The government does not merely allocate public funds for the provision of nutritious meals. It also creates a new economic ecosystem involving farmers, fishers, livestock producers, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, village-owned enterprises, cooperatives, food-processing workers, and local distribution networks.

Through procurement standards, nutritional specifications, contractual arrangements, and supply-chain governance, the state encourages local economic actors to adjust their patterns of production and business organization to the requirements of the program. From the perspective of governmentality, this process demonstrates how the state governs economic conduct through the organization of incentives, market opportunities, technical standards, and institutional expectations. Participation in the MBG ecosystem is consequently framed as both a rational economic choice and a potentially profitable opportunity for local producers and enterprises.

At the implementation level, various studies indicate that MBG may create a relatively stable market for local food commodities while generating new employment opportunities within communities. The continuous demand for food in large quantities stimulates production, processing, transportation, and distribution activities across different regions.

The establishment of community kitchens and Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units (SPPG) also creates new economic nodes connecting local producers with the program's beneficiaries.

This development demonstrates that the state intervenes not only in food consumption but also in the organization of local economic relations. By creating sustained public demand, MBG can influence production decisions, commodity flows, employment patterns, and the structure of local food markets. In this respect, the program may transform nutritional expenditure into a mechanism for local economic development.

From a biopolitical perspective, MBG is used to govern the quality of population life through interventions in nutrition and health. By providing nutritious meals on a regular basis, the government seeks to improve children's health, support their learning processes, and strengthen their future human capacities. At the same time, the program may reduce part of the household expenditure required to meet children's daily food needs, enabling families to allocate their limited economic resources to other necessities.

The governance of bodies through nutritional policy therefore cannot be separated from the broader objective of forming a healthy, productive, and economically capable population. MBG connects the biological development of children with future labor capacity, educational achievement, and national economic productivity. The program consequently represents a policy arrangement in which the management of biological life and the organization of economic relations operate simultaneously.

As an official policy associated with the strengthening of local economies, MBG has direct implications for the agenda of a people-centered economy. Government reports and cross-ministerial studies have stated that the program has generated employment, supported the development of community kitchens, and increased regional economic circulation through the procurement of food from local farmers, fishers, livestock producers, and MSMEs. Under an ideal implementation scenario, public expenditure allocated to MBG would remain within local economies rather than flowing outside the regions in which the program is implemented.

Such local circulation of public expenditure may generate a multiplier effect. Payments received by producers, workers, transport providers, cooperatives, and food-processing businesses can be spent again within local communities, thereby supporting household income, production activities, and rural markets. In this sense, MBG has the potential to convert a national nutrition program into an economic platform for strengthening grassroots production and community-based food systems.

However, the economic benefits generated by MBG are not necessarily distributed evenly. The scale of food demand, the pressure to maintain fiscal efficiency, and the obligation to guarantee the continuity of services may encourage program administrators to select suppliers with larger production and logistical capacities. Smaller enterprises and producers may consequently face difficulties in accessing procurement contracts directly and may participate only as supporting suppliers within a supply chain controlled by more established actors.

The requirement to maintain low procurement prices may also reduce the profit margins available to small-scale producers, whose production costs are often higher because of limited scale, weak infrastructure, and restricted access to capital. In addition, complex administrative requirements, certification standards, delayed payment risks, and logistical obligations may create structural barriers that prevent local producers from competing on equal terms with larger suppliers.

These conditions indicate that the economic impact of MBG is strongly shaped by the institutional arrangements governing access, participation, and the distribution of

opportunities. The existence of a large public budget does not in itself ensure economic democratization. What matters is whether small producers possess meaningful access to procurement, fair contractual terms, stable prices, timely payments, and sufficient bargaining power within the program's food supply chain.

A critical assessment of MBG therefore reveals an inherent ambivalence within its stated commitment to a people-centered economy. On the one hand, the program can create new markets for farmers, fishers, livestock producers, MSMEs, cooperatives, and village-owned enterprises through relatively stable and continuous food demand. It can also expand employment, reduce part of the economic burden borne by households, and strengthen local economic foundations by circulating public expenditure at the community level.

On the other hand, the same mechanisms can produce opposing consequences. The imperatives of fiscal efficiency, large-scale distribution, supply stability, and administrative standardization may privilege actors with stronger capital, broader logistical networks, and greater bureaucratic capacity. Access to the program's economic benefits may therefore remain unequal, while a disproportionate share of the resulting value may be captured by actors that already possess superior economic resources.

From the perspective of governmentality, this condition demonstrates that the state governs economic life not only through formal regulation, but also by constructing an economic arena that determines who is eligible to participate, who gains market access, and who is positioned to benefit from public expenditure. Procurement rules, technical standards, and contractual mechanisms function as technologies of governance that shape the conduct and opportunities of economic actors.

This process may encourage local producers to improve quality, expand production, form cooperatives, and develop administrative capacity. Nevertheless, it may also discipline them into adopting production models and business practices determined by the state's programmatic requirements. Their inclusion in the MBG ecosystem is therefore not politically neutral. It involves adjustment to standards, schedules, price structures, and performance expectations defined by public institutions and program administrators.

Nikolas Rose's notion of 'governing through freedom' is relevant to this process. Economic actors are not necessarily compelled to participate through direct coercion. Instead, they are encouraged to view participation in MBG as an opportunity for growth, market expansion, and economic improvement. Yet the range of choices available to them is structured by policy incentives, procurement requirements, and officially defined standards. Their apparent freedom to participate is therefore exercised within an institutional field constructed by the state.

The biopolitical dimension further demonstrates that the governance of nutrition and population health cannot be separated from the economic relations sustaining everyday life. MBG regulates children's dietary practices while simultaneously reorganizing the production, procurement, and distribution systems that make such dietary intervention possible. The governance of bodies and the governance of economic activity thus operate within the same policy regime.

For this reason, MBG may serve a dual function within the agenda of a people-centered economy. It may operate as an instrument of empowerment when designed according to principles of equity, participation, redistribution, and community control. Under such conditions, the program could expand market access, strengthen producer organizations, increase rural employment, and support the development of locally grounded food systems.

Conversely, MBG may become a new channel for the concentration of economic benefits when the logic of efficiency, scale, and capital accumulation dominates its

implementation. If governance arrangements do not explicitly guarantee the meaningful participation of local producers and community institutions, the language of empowerment may merely legitimize a supply-chain structure in which larger actors retain control over contracts, logistics, processing, and value accumulation.

The distinction between substantive and symbolic participation is therefore crucial. The formal inclusion of farmers, fishers, cooperatives, MSMEs, or village-owned enterprises in policy documents does not necessarily mean that these actors exercise meaningful control over economic resources. Their participation may remain marginal if they are confined to supplying low-value raw materials while more powerful intermediaries control aggregation, processing, certification, transportation, and procurement contracts.

Accordingly, the success of MBG as an instrument of a people-centered economy depends on the government's ability to prevent the concentration of benefits among a limited number of actors. This requires procurement arrangements that are accessible to small producers, affirmative local-sourcing policies, transparent supplier selection, timely payment mechanisms, fair pricing, support for cooperative organization, and public oversight of the distribution of economic benefits.

Institutional support is particularly important because small producers cannot be expected to compete with large suppliers under formally equal but substantively unequal conditions. Treating actors with radically different levels of capital, technology, administrative capacity, and market access as if they occupied equal positions would reproduce rather than reduce structural inequality. A genuinely redistributive policy therefore requires differentiated support and institutional protection for economically weaker actors.

The broader implication is that MBG should not be assessed solely according to the number of meals distributed, the amount of budget absorbed, or the volume of commodities procured. Its contribution to a people-centered economy must also be evaluated through the quality of local participation, the distribution of contracts, the structure of value capture, the bargaining position of small producers, and the degree to which public expenditure strengthens community-controlled economic institutions.

The implications of MBG for a people-centered economy are therefore inherently ambivalent. The program can become an instrument of economic redistribution that strengthens local producers, expands market access, supports community economic autonomy, and consolidates food sovereignty. At the same time, it may reproduce existing inequalities when institutional design, procurement mechanisms, and benefit distribution prioritize administrative efficiency over equity and participation.

The central question is thus no longer merely whether MBG can stimulate the people's economy. The more consequential question is who actually captures the greatest share of the resources and economic opportunities generated by the program. The answer determines whether MBG functions as an instrument of economic democratization and community-based food sovereignty, or instead becomes a new mechanism for reorganizing inequality within Indonesia's national food governance under the language of welfare, efficiency, and development.

Ten Year Projection of the MBG Program

The Indonesian government has positioned the Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) as a strategic instrument for preparing the so-called Golden Generation of 2045, a generation expected to be healthy, educated, productive, and capable of supporting Indonesia's transition into an advanced economy by the centenary of its independence. Children currently receiving MBG assistance will begin entering productive age between 2035 and

2045. Nutritional intervention in the present is therefore framed as an investment in future human capital, labor productivity, and national competitiveness.

Within this long-term developmental framework, MBG is not intended merely to respond to immediate nutritional deficiencies. It seeks to influence the biological, cognitive, and productive capacities of the generation that will shape Indonesia's economic and political trajectory over the coming decades. The program consequently connects present-day nutritional practices with a broader state project of population improvement and national modernization.

From a biopolitical perspective, MBG can be understood as a systematic attempt to optimize population life through the management of nutrition and health from an early age. The state seeks not only to reduce stunting, malnutrition, and nutritional inequality, but also to establish the biological foundations of a future population considered healthier, more productive, and more capable of contributing to national development.

This orientation reflects Foucault's conception of biopolitics as a form of power concerned with fostering life, managing populations, and optimizing their biological capacities. Through nutritional interventions targeting pregnant women, young children, and school-age populations, biological development becomes an object of continuous policy attention. Growth, nutritional status, cognitive development, and health outcomes are transformed into measurable indicators through which the state evaluates and governs the quality of the population.

The state's long-term projection therefore treats childhood nutrition as more than an individual or household concern. It becomes part of a national strategy in which children's bodies are constituted as future productive capacities. Within this framework, nutritional expenditure is justified as an investment whose anticipated returns include improved educational performance, reduced health burdens, increased labor productivity, and stronger national competitiveness.

Nikolas Rose's concept of the "politics of life itself" provides an additional analytical perspective. Rose argues that contemporary political rationalities increasingly seek to intervene in biological processes in order to shape future possibilities. Applied to MBG, this perspective shows that the program is not directed solely at addressing existing nutritional conditions. It is also oriented toward producing particular future outcomes by improving children's biological and cognitive capacities in the present.

Children are therefore positioned as bearers of future national value. Their health, growth, intelligence, and productivity are treated as capacities that can be enhanced through scientific knowledge, nutritional standards, administrative monitoring, and regular intervention. This future-oriented logic transforms nutrition into a technology for governing not only present life but also anticipated forms of social and economic productivity.

The rationality of governmentality becomes visible when nutritional improvement is integrated into a wider national development strategy. Through public policy, health education, school routines, and the dissemination of nutritional knowledge, the government encourages families, schools, and communities to adopt healthy living practices as part of everyday conduct. Knowledge concerning balanced diets, protein intake, stunting prevention, hygiene, and healthy consumption is circulated not merely as technical health information, but as a normative framework for responsible citizenship.

In this sense, MBG connects individual eating practices with the broader objectives of demographic management and national development. Families and schools are encouraged to understand children's nutrition as a shared responsibility and as a contribution to the future of the nation. Governmentality operates by aligning everyday conduct with long-term

state objectives, thereby encouraging individuals and institutions to regulate themselves according to officially authorized nutritional norms.

This process also reflects what Rose describes as ‘responsibilization’. Although the state establishes the principal standards and provides institutional support, responsibility for nutritional outcomes is distributed across schools, families, local governments, health workers, food providers, and communities. Each actor is expected to monitor, regulate, and improve its own conduct in accordance with the objectives of the program.

Over the next ten years, the effects of MBG will depend less on the scale of its political ambition than on the consistency and quality of its implementation. The program may contribute to improved nutritional status, learning capacity, school participation, and long-term human development if food quality is maintained, beneficiaries are accurately identified, monitoring systems function effectively, and implementation remains fiscally and institutionally sustainable.

However, these outcomes should not be presented as automatic consequences of meal provision. Nutritional improvement is influenced by multiple factors, including household food security, sanitation, access to health services, maternal education, disease exposure, local food availability, and the quality of program delivery. MBG can contribute to better outcomes, but it cannot independently resolve the structural determinants of malnutrition.

A credible ten-year projection must therefore distinguish between policy aspirations and empirically demonstrable effects. Reductions in stunting, improvements in educational performance, and increases in future productivity require longitudinal evaluation rather than reliance on short-term output indicators such as the number of meals distributed or the amount of budget absorbed. Without sustained evaluation, the program risks measuring administrative activity rather than substantive changes in population welfare.

The continuity of MBG will also depend on fiscal capacity. A program operating at a national scale requires substantial and recurring public expenditure. Its long-term sustainability will therefore be shaped by economic growth, budgetary priorities, administrative efficiency, and the government’s ability to prevent leakage, corruption, and excessive operational costs. If fiscal pressures increase, the program may face reductions in coverage, declining food quality, or greater dependence on standardized low-cost suppliers.

From the perspective of a people-centered economy, MBG also provides an opportunity to strengthen the foundations of the national economy from the local level. The use of locally produced food and the participation of farmers, fishers, livestock producers, MSMEs, cooperatives, and village-owned enterprises may create a more autonomous and resilient food ecosystem. Stable public demand can support local production, encourage investment, generate employment, and expand market access for small-scale economic actors.

Over a ten-year period, sustained local procurement could contribute to the development of stronger producer organizations, improved food-processing capacity, expanded rural logistics, and more integrated regional food markets. MBG could therefore function as a form of developmental procurement through which the state uses public purchasing power to shape production structures and support local economic transformation.

Nevertheless, this outcome depends on whether local participation is institutionally protected. If procurement becomes concentrated among large suppliers, the program may expand food markets without significantly strengthening small producers. Public expenditure

could increase overall economic activity while leaving existing structures of ownership, market control, and bargaining power largely unchanged.

The long-term implications of MBG for a people-centered economy must therefore be evaluated through the distribution of contracts, the location of value creation, the participation of producer organizations, and the proportion of public spending retained within local economies. Economic circulation alone is not sufficient evidence of empowerment. The key issue is whether local communities obtain meaningful control over production, distribution, and value accumulation.

The same tension applies to food security and food sovereignty. MBG may strengthen national food security by generating predictable demand and encouraging domestic production. However, food security based primarily on large-scale centralized suppliers may differ substantially from food sovereignty grounded in local control, diverse production systems, and the participation of small producers.

A program may secure adequate food volumes while simultaneously weakening local autonomy if production and distribution become concentrated in a limited number of corporate actors. For this reason, the ten-year trajectory of MBG will depend on whether the program develops decentralized and diversified food systems or instead reinforces centralized and commercially concentrated supply chains.

Three broad scenarios can be projected. Under an inclusive scenario, the program maintains food quality, expands local procurement, strengthens producer organizations, distributes contracts transparently, and integrates nutritional interventions with health, sanitation, and education policies. In this scenario, MBG could contribute simultaneously to improved human development, stronger local economies, and more resilient food systems.

Under an administrative-efficiency scenario, the program succeeds in distributing meals regularly and meeting basic nutritional standards but relies increasingly on large suppliers and centralized supply chains. Nutritional outcomes may improve, yet the economic benefits may remain concentrated and the contribution to food sovereignty and grassroots empowerment may be limited.

Under a critical scenario, fiscal pressure, weak oversight, inconsistent food quality, supply-chain concentration, and inadequate evaluation undermine the program's objectives. In this case, MBG may become an administratively expansive program whose political symbolism exceeds its measurable contribution to nutrition, economic redistribution, and long-term human development.

These scenarios demonstrate that the future of MBG is not predetermined. Its outcomes will be shaped by political choices concerning budget allocation, procurement governance, institutional accountability, local participation, food standards, and program evaluation. The program's long-term effects will therefore reflect not only its technical design but also the distribution of power among the state, market actors, experts, and local communities.

MBG can ultimately be understood as a strategic investment that connects human development, population governance, a people-centered economy, and food-system transformation within a single long-term policy framework. It represents an attempt by the state to shape Indonesia's future by intervening in the health, dietary practices, and productive capacities of children from an early age.

Yet its significance should not be assessed solely through the optimistic language of national development. The program must also be evaluated critically in terms of who defines its standards, who controls its supply chains, who captures its economic benefits, and how its biological and economic outcomes are measured. These questions determine whether

MBG becomes a genuinely transformative public policy or merely a large-scale administrative intervention supported by a powerful developmental narrative.

If implemented consistently, evaluated rigorously, and governed through principles of equity, transparency, and local participation, MBG may become an important component of Indonesia's path toward 2045. Its potential contribution lies not only in producing a healthier population, but also in building a more equitable, resilient, and socially grounded food economy. Conversely, without such institutional safeguards, the program may improve selected nutritional indicators while reproducing economic concentration, administrative dependency, and unequal participation within the national food system.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that the Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) constitutes more than a large-scale food assistance intervention. It represents a strategic policy instrument through which the Indonesian state seeks to improve population welfare by governing nutrition, health, and human development in a planned and continuous manner. Through the provision of meals for schoolchildren, young children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers, the state intervenes directly in the biological conditions of the population. At the same time, it establishes nutritional standards, regulates distribution mechanisms, monitors health-related outcomes, and produces an officially sanctioned understanding of healthy dietary practices.

From a Foucauldian perspective, these arrangements reveal the biopolitical character of MBG. The program renders nutrition, physical growth, health status, and future productive capacity into objects of governmental calculation and intervention. The state does not merely respond to hunger or nutritional deprivation. It seeks to optimize life by defining appropriate nutritional intake, identifying populations considered vulnerable, and integrating children's biological development into broader national development objectives. MBG therefore illustrates how contemporary state power operates through the administration of life rather than solely through legal commands or coercive measures.

The analysis also shows that MBG operates through the rationality of governmentality. The program does not depend exclusively on formal instructions, regulations, or administrative institutions. It also shapes how families, schools, communities, and economic actors understand nutrition, health, responsibility, and investment in children. By linking stunting reduction, educational quality, labor productivity, demographic opportunity, and the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045, the government constructs a development narrative that connects everyday dietary practices with long-term national objectives.

In this process, schools, families, and communities are encouraged to internalize and reproduce state-legitimized nutritional norms. Following Nikolas Rose, this mechanism can be understood as a form of 'responsibilization', in which responsibility for health and nutritional outcomes is distributed among individuals and institutions while the state retains the authority to define standards, targets, and indicators. MBG consequently governs not only through the direct provision of meals, but also through the formation of subjects expected to manage their bodies and conduct according to authorized knowledge concerning health and nutrition.

From the perspective of the political economy of food, MBG also has the potential to connect nutritional improvement with local economic development. Public expenditure allocated to the program may generate stable demand for food produced by farmers, fishers, livestock producers, cooperatives, village-owned enterprises, and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. Community kitchens and Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units may function

as new economic nodes linking food producers, processing workers, distribution networks, and program beneficiaries.

Nevertheless, the distributive effects of the program are not automatic. The economic benefits generated by MBG depend on the institutional design of procurement, financing, contracting, and supply-chain governance. Requirements concerning large supply volumes, standardized quality, logistical capacity, administrative compliance, and continuous distribution may privilege actors with greater capital, established networks, and stronger organizational capacity. Small-scale producers may therefore remain confined to peripheral or low-value positions unless the government adopts institutional arrangements that explicitly guarantee their substantive participation.

This tension indicates that MBG is situated between two competing policy rationalities. The first emphasizes food sovereignty, local production, economic redistribution, and the empowerment of grassroots actors. The second prioritizes administrative efficiency, economies of scale, supply stability, and operational risk management. The balance between these rationalities will determine whether MBG strengthens a people-centered economy or instead reproduces the concentration of contracts, market access, and economic value among a limited number of established suppliers.

Accordingly, MBG should not be evaluated solely through the number of meals distributed, the number of beneficiaries reached, or the amount of public funding absorbed. Such indicators primarily measure administrative outputs rather than substantive social transformation. A more comprehensive assessment must consider improvements in nutritional status, learning conditions, household welfare, local employment, small-producer participation, food-system resilience, and the distribution of economic value throughout the program's supply chain.

The ten-year potential of MBG should likewise be understood as conditional rather than predetermined. The program may contribute to improved health, cognitive development, educational participation, future labor productivity, and local food-system capacity. However, these outcomes depend on consistent implementation, adequate food quality, effective monitoring, fiscal sustainability, policy integration, and accountable institutional governance. MBG cannot independently address the structural causes of malnutrition, which are also shaped by poverty, sanitation, health-service access, household food security, and regional inequality.

Ultimately, MBG represents a policy arena in which the governance of biological life, the organization of food markets, and the distribution of public resources intersect. Its significance lies in its capacity to connect human development, nutrition, education, local economic empowerment, and food security within a single national policy framework. At the same time, this integration produces political and economic risks that require continuous scrutiny.

Whether MBG becomes a transformative instrument of human development and economic democratization will depend on who defines its standards, who controls its supply chains, who gains access to procurement opportunities, and who captures the economic value generated by public expenditure. Transparent procurement, meaningful local participation, fair pricing, timely payment, rigorous evaluation, and institutional protection for small-scale producers are therefore essential.

Under these conditions, MBG may contribute to the realization of Golden Indonesia 2045 by supporting a healthier, more capable, economically empowered, and socially equitable population. Without such safeguards, however, the program may improve selected

administrative and nutritional indicators while reproducing economic concentration and unequal participation under the language of welfare, efficiency, and national development.

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