

Local Government Policy on Handling Stunting in Mandailing Natal Regency

Irman Puansya^{1✉}, Darman Syah Pulungan², Rahmat Haris Saputra Harahap³, Anita Telaumbanua⁴

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan, Padang Sidempuan, Sumatera Utara

² Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan, Padang Sidempuan, Sumatera Utara

³ Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan, Padang Sidempuan, Sumatera Utara

⁴ Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan, Padang Sidempuan, Sumatera Utara

✉ email: Irman.puansah@um-tapsel.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Stunting is an issue that requires serious attention from the Central Government to the Regional Governments, particularly the Regional Government of Mandailing Natal Regency. This is because Mandailing Natal Regency is one of the regions in North Sumatra with a high stunting rate, reaching 47.7% in 2021, placing Mandailing Natal at the top rank in North Sumatra for stunting cases, according to the Indonesian Nutrition Status Study (SSGI). In 2022, Mandailing Natal dropped to third place with a stunting rate of 34.2%. However, this figure is still far from the national target set for Mandailing Natal, which is 14% by 2024. This study aims to analyze the policies of the Mandailing Natal Regional Government to reduce the stunting rate to 14% by 2024 and examine the various challenges faced. The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive analysis. Data collection techniques include interviews, observation, and documentation. The informants for this study included officials from the Mandailing Natal Health Office, Family Planning Office, village heads, and village assistants. The study found that the Mandailing Natal Government has implemented cross-sectoral policies, specific interventions, and the "Foster Father" program to reduce stunting. Success depends on policy continuity, program optimization, and increasing public awareness. The main challenges are limited funding, poor sanitation, and cultural barriers.

Keywords: *Policy; Stunting Management; Challenges; Mandailing Natal Regency*

INTRODUCTION

Stunting is one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is included in the second Sustainable Development Goal which aims to eliminate hunger and all forms of malnutrition and achieve food security by 2030 (Rehena, Hukubun, and Nendissa 2021) (Astuti, Adriani, and Handayani 2020). Stunting is a chronic nutritional problem characterized by stunted physical development in children due to inadequate nutritional intake, recurrent illnesses, and an unhealthy environment. Stunting is a condition in which a baby is considered too small for his or

her age. His or her height or height is below the WHO child growth and development standards (Choliq, Nasrullah, and Mundakir 2020) . Growth retardation (*dwarfism*) is a condition in which a baby has a short height or length compared to his or her age (Noviaming, Takaeb, and Ndun 2022) .

Knowledge about stunting is very important for mothers because lack of knowledge about stunting can increase the risk of stunting in their children (Ramdhani, Handayani, and Setiawan 2020) . Accurate information with the right media for mothers will be able to increase mothers' knowledge about stunting (Gustina 2021) (Wardana and Astuti 2020) .

Causes that contribute to the development of disease in children ultimately lead to the development of malnutrition (Puansah et al. 2023) . In general, the causes of stunting in children are divided into direct causes and indirect causes. The direct causes of stunting are the amount of nutrition in children, genetic factors, and infectious diseases. The nutrients needed by the body consist of macronutrients and micronutrients (Ernawati 2020) (Sulistyaningsih, Panunggal, and Murbawani 2018) . Many studies have stated that deficiencies in macronutrients, namely protein, and micronutrients, namely Fe, Zn, Ca, vitamin D, A, and C can cause stunting (Kusumawati, Rahardjo, and Sari 2015) . Another factor that correlates with stunting is hormones. Thyroid hormone is one of the hormones that plays a role in the child's growth process (Kartini 2016) . Stunting is also related to hereditary factors. Short parents can pass on short offspring (Amin and Julia 2016) .

Some of the impacts of stunting include: 1. Lowering intelligence or IQ. 2. Stunting children will experience a 7% decrease in optimal cognitive development, compared to non-stunted children (Anwar, Winarti, and Sunardi 2022) . Stunting in children can affect their growth and development. Suboptimal growth and developmental disorders occur early in life, resulting in low educational achievement in the future (Primasari and Keliat 2020) (Blake et al. 2016) . Stunting has an impact on cognitive development disorders, mental and motor development disorders, and makes children more susceptible to disease (Giyaningtyas, Hamid, and Daulima 2019).

Based on the 2019 Basic Health Survey (Riskdas) data, the stunting rate in Indonesia was 27.67%. According to WHO, stunting is considered a chronic public health problem if its prevalence exceeds 20%. WHO also ranked Indonesia as the third country with the highest stunting in Asia in 2017. So far, the government's interest in addressing the problem of stunting is very reasonable, as evidenced by the existence of various initiatives to address the problem. These policies include Health Law Number 36 of 2009, Presidential Decree Number 42 of 2013 concerning the National Movement for the Acceleration of Nutrition Improvement, and Decree Number 23 of 2014 concerning the Regulation of the Minister of Health concerning Stunting Mitigation and Handling (Puansah et al. 2023) .

According to the Asian Development Bank, the stunting rate in toddlers in Indonesia is estimated to be 31.8% in 2022. This figure places Indonesia in 10th place in the Southeast Asia region. Therefore, stunting is a problem that requires serious attention from the central and regional governments, especially the Mandarin-Natal Regency Government. Based on Indonesia's nutritional status, Mandarin-Natal Regency is one of the areas with the highest stunting rates in North Sumatra, with a stunting rate reaching 47.7% in 2021, making Mandarin-Natal Regency the highest in North Sumatra. becoming the first stunting case in Sumatra. Research: Sumatra Stand Report (SSGI). In 2022, Mandarin-Natal Regency fell to third place with a stunting rate of 34.2%. However, this figure is still far from the national target of Mandarin-

Natal Regency of 14% in 2024. Therefore, a series of policies are needed to achieve the national goal of reducing the stunting rate in Mandarin-Natal Regency to 14%, this needs to be done in a targeted, effective and efficient manner.

Basically, policies that affect society are called public policies. Public policies arise from the needs and problems faced by society. Policy makers are called stakeholders. Stakeholders in the formulation of public policies are governments that aim to meet the needs of society based on the principle of public interest. Public policy is the relationship between achieving goals and objectives based on the final results of activities carried out by the government. The shortcomings of a public policy can be recognized after the implementation of the policy, while the success of a public policy can be recognized from the impact achieved after the implementation of the policy (Sirajuddin 2016) (Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. Accounting Study Program. and Association of Accounting Study Programs of Muhammadiyah Universities. 2016) (Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. Accounting Study Program. and the Association of Accounting Study Programs of Muhammadiyah Universities. 2016) (19) (Desrinelti, Afifah, and Gistituati 2021) .

Previously, researchers have conducted a study entitled Village Government Policy on Stunting Prevention in Pagaran Gala-Gala Village, Panyabungan Selatan District. The results of the study indicate that the village government policy in preventing Stunting in Pagaran Gala-Gala Village is not optimal, this is due to the lack of systematic strategies and actions in preventing stunting. Furthermore, obstacles in preventing stunting in Pagaran Gala-Gala Village, Panyabungan Selatan District, include the Covid 19 Disaster that hit Indonesia, including Mandailing Natal, the lack of stunting prevention policies, and the lack of public awareness in maintaining cleanliness and a healthy lifestyle.

Based on this background, the researcher is interested in conducting research with the following problem formulation: Analysis of the Mandailing Natal Regency Government's policy to reduce the stunting rate to 14% in 2024 and analyze the various obstacles and opportunities faced to reduce the stunting rate.

METHOD

Descriptive qualitative research is used in this study. Through this study, it is expected to obtain a detailed description of the empirical conditions in the field regarding the policies of the Regional Government Regarding Handling and Reducing Stunting Rates. So that the information obtained is comprehensive, factual and accurate. The collection techniques used are interviews, observation, and documentation. Furthermore, the data analysis technique used is the interactive model data analysis from Miles & Huberman, through the process of data collection, data condensation, data presentation, then verification and drawing conclusions (Regita and Prathama 2023) . The informants in this study were the Mandailing Natal Regency Health Office, the Population and Family Planning Control Office, Village Heads and Village Facilitators.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Local Government Policy on Handling Stunting

The most popular public policy was put forward by Dye that " *public policy is whatever government chooses to do or not to do* " Friedrich also stated that public policy is an action or decision proposed by a person, group, or government institution to achieve the desired goals and objectives (Maulana, Sholihah, and Wike 2022) .

These two views offer complementary perspectives on public policy. While Dye focuses on government action or inaction as the end result of public policy, Friedrich emphasizes the process of proposing and formulating policies involving various parties to achieve certain goals. Therefore, public policy includes both the end result (government action) and the policy-making process involving various actors in government and society.

The government, both at the central and regional levels, has systematically implemented various intervention efforts to address stunting. The Ministry of Health, as the main institution handling stunting issues at the national level, has taken various steps, one of which is forming a team to verify data related to the stunting situation in 10 districts/cities and 100 villages that are stunting loci in Indonesia (Tampubolon 2010). In the sense that the efforts made by the government are not sporadic, but well-organized, covering various levels of administration from the center to the regions. This shows that there is coordination across levels of government to address stunting comprehensively. As the main agency, the Ministry of Health plays a central role in directing policies and implementation of stunting management in Indonesia. This includes making policies, developing programs, and ensuring effective implementation. One important step taken is to form a special team to verify stunting data. This verification aims to ensure the accuracy and validity of data related to the prevalence of stunting in various regions. Thus, interventions can be directed precisely.

The Mandailing Natal Regency Government has taken various measures to address the problem of stunting. Mandailing Natal Regent Regulation Number 31 of 2023 concerning Amendments to Regent Regulation Number 17 of 2020 concerning Convergence of Stunting Prevention and Management in Villages is a commitment of the regional government in strengthening the policy framework for handling stunting in Mandailing Natal Regency, with a focus on a cross-sectoral convergence approach, strengthening the role of villages, and increasing reporting and public education.

Mandailing Natal Regent Regulation Number 31 of 2023 concerning Convergence of Stunting Prevention and Management in Villages has an important role in efforts to handle stunting in the region. The following are the main roles identified from the regulation:

1. Strengthening Cross-Sector Convergence

This regulation emphasizes the importance of a convergence approach, involving various sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, and others. The aim of this approach is to address the problem of stunting holistically, so that all aspects that affect child health, including nutrition, sanitation, and education, can be well coordinated.

2. Active Role of Village Government

Village governments are given greater authority in implementing stunting management programs. They are responsible for managing village budgets that are directed towards stunting prevention and management activities. This allows the program to run more precisely because interventions can be adjusted to the local conditions of each village.

3. Improved Monitoring and Reporting

The regulation updates monitoring and reporting indicators to ensure accountability in policy implementation. More systematic data collection is expected to record developments more accurately, allowing the government to assess the effectiveness of programs and adjust strategies if necessary.

4. Public Education

This regulation also encourages community involvement in education related to nutrition and maternal-child health, including the importance of exclusive breastfeeding. By increasing public knowledge about health and nutrition, it is hoped that there will be behavioral changes that can help reduce stunting rates.

5. Resource Allocation and Budget Management

Through this regulation, the budget at the village level must be directed to support programs related to stunting prevention. More focused budget management is expected to accelerate the achievement of the target of reducing stunting rates in Mandailing Natal.

So this regulation has a key role in strengthening coordination between related sectors, giving a greater role to the village government, and increasing the effectiveness of stunting management programs through better reporting and public education. This regulation is an important foundation to ensure that all parties work together systematically to achieve the target of reducing stunting in Mandailing Natal Regency.

From the results of interviews conducted with informants, information can be obtained about Regional Government Policies in Mandailing Natal Regency, some of which are as follows:

1. Cross-Sector Coordination and Collaboration

The Mandailing Natal Regency Government has shown a high commitment to reducing stunting rates through strong cross-sector coordination. The collaboration of the Mandailing Natal Regency Stunting Task Force which has a Stunting Reduction Acceleration Team (TPPS) which was formed in 2023. This team consists of 17 Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) and is divided into four areas: specific and sensitive interventions, behavioral change, data, and monitoring and evaluation is running well. This synergy creates integration between the central government, regions, and the community, which is an important basis for the success of the stunting management program.

2. Specific and Sensitive Intervention Approach

Stunting management policies include specific interventions, such as providing additional food, iron tablets, and routine weighing of infants and toddlers to monitor nutritional development. On the other hand, sensitive interventions focus on improving sanitation, improving access to clean water, and health education that targets changes in clean and healthy living behavior. The government adapts these programs to local conditions, such as flexible weighing schedules for plantation workers, to ensure that communities can fully participate.

3. Social Innovation through the "Foster Father" Program and Local Innovation Program

The Mandailing Natal Regency Government is running the "Bapak Asuh" program as an innovative initiative to empower officials and capable communities to contribute directly to handling stunting. This program creates additional funding channels to support stunted children, demonstrating the community's social commitment in playing an active role in handling this problem. The funds collected are managed transparently by the Family Planning Service and distributed to those in need through various forms of assistance, including additional food. In addition, there are also local innovation programs in the form of "Eating Fish Simultaneously" and "Flying Doctors" (collaboration with the Health Service to provide pediatricians and in each sub-district) implemented to improve the nutrition and health of children and pregnant women.

4. Structured Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation and monitoring of the stunting program is carried out periodically through the TPPS achievement indicators, which include 64 criteria that must be achieved by the relevant OPD. The results of monitoring per semester are used as a reference to assess the progress and obstacles faced, which are then discussed in cross-sector coordination meetings, including through stunting discussions. The government also faces challenges in changing people's mindsets, especially in terms of nutritional awareness and healthy eating patterns.

5. Opportunities for Further Collaboration and Innovation

Mandailing Natal Regency continues to seek opportunities to strengthen efforts to reduce stunting, such as through CSR programs from local companies. Additional funding support from the central government is also expected to accelerate the implementation of programs in the field.

Overall, the stunting management policy in Mandailing Natal Regency reflects a structured and collaborative strategy, involving various government and community sectors. An approach centered on specific and sensitive interventions and social innovation is expected to accelerate the achievement of stunting reduction targets in Mandailing Natal Regency.

Obstacles and what is faced to reduce stunting figures

The obstacles faced in reducing stunting rates in Mandailing Natal Regency include:

1. **Obstacles in Sanitation and Culture**, The main challenges faced by local governments are the low quality of sanitation and the habit of people who still defecate in the open. Although there has been progress in several sub-districts such as Naga Juang and Sinunukan, many other areas still need to improve sanitation. In addition, local cultures that are difficult to change are a barrier to implementing better sanitation policies.
2. **Budget Constraints**, Although stunting management programs have been running, local governments face budget constraints, especially in terms of building adequate sanitation facilities. The available budget is not enough to support comprehensive sensitive interventions, such as building toilets and other infrastructure.
3. **Innovative programs**, such as "Foster Parents", need to be expanded and optimized to reach more children affected by stunting.

CONCLUSION

The Mandailing Natal Regency Government has taken various policy steps to address the problem of stunting, including through cross-sector coordination, specific interventions such as providing additional food, and innovative programs such as "Papak Asuh." However, various obstacles are still faced in efforts to reduce stunting rates to reach the target of 14% in 2024. Overall, efforts to address stunting in Mandailing Natal are on the right track, but full success will depend on the sustainability of policies, optimization of innovative programs, and increasing public awareness of the importance of good sanitation and nutrition. Key barriers include budget constraints, poor sanitation quality, and cultural challenges in changing community habits. However, policy measures such as Regent Regulation Number 31 of 2023 have strengthened the cross-sectoral convergence approach and village empowerment in handling stunting. Innovative programs, especially those involving

community participation, need to be expanded to increase the effectiveness of handling stunting in this area.

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