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## The Implementation of Integrated Policy in Addressing Stunting in North Gorontalo Regency

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### Abstract

*Stunting in toddlers remains a critical public health issue in developing countries, including Indonesia. This study focuses on evaluating the implementation of integrated policies aimed at reducing stunting rates in North Gorontalo Regency, highlighting the factors that influence policy success. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and analysis of relevant documents. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify barriers and enablers of policy implementation. The findings indicate that coordination among Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) is suboptimal, and the implementation of relevant regulations is incomplete. The study identified four key factors influencing policy success: communication, resource availability, disposition of implementing actors, and bureaucratic structure. These factors collectively contribute to the challenges in achieving effective policy implementation. To address stunting effectively, enhanced cross-sectoral coordination, improved human resource capacity, and full implementation of existing regulations are essential. These improvements could significantly impact the effectiveness of stunting interventions in North Gorontalo Regency. Not applicable. This study does not involve a healthcare intervention on human participants.*

**Keywords:** Integrated Policy, Stunting, North Gorontalo, Chronic Malnutrition, Regional Apparatus Organizations, Bureaucratic Structure, Human Resource Capacity.

### Introduction

The issue of stunting, which leads to impaired linear growth in toddlers and is prevalent in poor and developing countries, is a significant nutritional problem. Stunting is the result of prolonged nutritional deficiencies, spanning from pregnancy to 24 months of age, leading to disruptions in a child's physical growth (Littlejohn & Finlay, 2021). Malnutrition during this period can hinder both physical and mental development, increase the risk of diseases, and even lead to death. Children who experience stunting are at risk of reduced intellectual capacity and productivity, and they may also be more susceptible to chronic diseases in the future. (Satriawan, 2018)

Health and nutrition development in the community during the 2015-2019 period aimed to support the Healthy Indonesia Program by improving the health and nutritional status of the population through health efforts and community empowerment. One of the leading indicators of the 2015-2019 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RJPMN) was the improvement of the community's nutritional status, which included reducing the prevalence of stunting. The target for reducing the prevalence of stunting, which provides for children under two years of

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age, was set at 28%, according to the 2019 RJPMN. (Susanti et al., 2018)

In 2017, approximately 22.2%, or about 150.8 million toddlers worldwide, experienced stunting. There are more than half of the world's stunted toddlers are from Asia (55%), while a third live in Africa (39%). Out of the total 86.3 million stunted toddlers in Asia, the majority were from South Asia (58.7%), while Central Asia had the fewest (0.9%). There has been a decline in stunting rates compared to 2000; in 2017, the stunting rate was 22.2%, down from 32.6%. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that Indonesia is one of the three countries with the highest prevalence of stunting in Southeast and East Asia. The prevalence of stunting among toddlers in Indonesia between 2005 and 2017 was approximately 36.4%. (Kusumawati et al., 2013)

Stunting has a significant impact on the quality of human resources (HR). In the short term, stunting can lead to growth failure, cognitive and motor development disorders, and suboptimal body size and metabolism (Radjamuda et al., 2019). On the other hand, in the long term, stunting can lead to a decline in intellectual capacity due to permanent damage to nerve function and brain cells, which impedes learning ability in school and affects productivity in adulthood. Additionally, stunting increases the risk of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, and stroke. (Rahayu et al., 2018)

In 2000, the global stunting rate was 32.6%. However, by 2017, approximately 150.8 million toddlers, or 22.2% of the total, were experiencing stunting. As many as 55%, or around 83.6 million stunted toddlers, were from Asia. Meanwhile, more than a third, approximately 39%, were from Africa. (Priyono et al., 2015)

Globally, stunting management focuses on the First 1000 Days of Life (HPK) to the age of 24 months, with a target reduction of 3.9% per year to achieve a 40% reduction by 2025. Interventions involve health and non-health sectors, including government, the private sector, civil society organizations, and the United Nations (Oktarina et al., 2022). The 2017 National Action Plan for Stunting Management emphasizes convergence at all levels with Specific and Sensitive Nutrition Interventions. Specific Nutrition Interventions (30%) for pregnant women and children are carried out by the health sector, while Sensitive Nutrition Interventions (70%) in sectors other than the health sector target the general public during the HPK period until the age of 6 years. (Nugroho et al., 2021)

The Regent's Regulation of North Gorontalo Regency Number 14 of 2020 concerning the People's Healthy Lifestyle Movement (GERMAS) and the Regent Regulation of North Gorontalo Number 15 of 2020 regarding the Prevention of Stunting through the Community Movement for Stunting Prevention affirm that the Healthy Regency aims to increase awareness, willingness, and ability of the community to live in a clean, safe, comfortable, and healthy manner in order to achieve an optimal level of public health (Zaleha & Idris, 2022). This supports the implementation of various health programs and interventions for the development of economically and socially productive human resources. (Meri Agritubella & Delvira, 2020)

The prevention and management of stunting require a holistic approach and strong coordination between various sectors, as outlined in Presidential Regulation Number 42 of 2013 within the framework of Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN). The dissemination of information, advocacy, and cross-sector training are essential to improve understanding and participation in efforts to improve the nutritional status of the community (Elisaria et al., 2021). At the same time, strengthening the First 1000 Days of Life (HPK) and strategic nutrition and food policies are

vital focuses in addressing this challenge. Presidential Instruction Number 1 of 2017 on the People's Healthy Lifestyle Movement (Germas) reinforces efforts to raise awareness about the importance of a balanced diet and adequate nutrition and to accelerate the overall improvement of community nutritional conditions. (Hegantara et al., 2021)

The issue of stunting in toddlers has the potential to reduce the quality of human resources with significant impacts. In the short term, stunting can cause growth failure, hinder cognitive and motor development, and lead to suboptimal physical size and metabolic disorders. In the long term, stunting can result in decreased intellectual capacity and permanent damage to the structure and function of nerves and brain cells, affecting learning abilities during school years and productivity in adulthood (Wulandari et al., 2021). Additionally, malnutrition can lead to growth disorders such as being short or thin and increase the risk of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, coronary heart disease, and stroke. (Nuramalia et al., 2020)

In 2018, data on stunting in Gorontalo Province indicated that two regencies and one city were still in the red zone, with stunting prevalence rates above 30%. These figures are far from the World Health Organization (WHO) standard, which sets a 20% target for reducing stunting rates. According to the Head of Public Health, Population Control, and Family Planning of the Gorontalo Provincial Health Office, 2018 research showed that Gorontalo was one of the regions making significant efforts to reduce stunting rates, along with Bali Province. Despite these efforts, three areas, Gorontalo City, Boalemo, and North Gorontalo, still faced challenges with high stunting rates. (Purwanti et al., 2022)

Based on the mapping of regencies and cities, it is evident that Boalemo Regency has a stunting rate of 33.39%, North Gorontalo Regency has 30.16%, and Gorontalo City also falls into the red zone. Meanwhile, Gorontalo Regency and Bone Bolango Regency are in the yellow zone, with stunting rates below 30%. On the other hand, Pohuwato Regency is in the green zone with a stunting rate below 20%. This data is based on the 2018 Basic Health Research. Therefore, of the red, yellow, and green zones, the green zone, represented by Pohuwato Regency, is the safest. (Anggara Setya Saputra et al., 2022)

Data from the 2018 Basic Health Research shows that the stunting rate in North Gorontalo Regency reached 30.66% for children aged 0-24 months and around 33.35% for the 0-59 months age group. This indicates the need for specific and sensitive interventions and holistic, integrative, and quality technical support. Coordination between the Central Government, Provincial Government, Regency, and Village/Sub-district levels is necessary through cross-sectoral programs. In 2022, North Gorontalo Regency was designated as a locus for integrated stunting reduction interventions by the Ministry of National Development Planning of the Republic of Indonesia with Number KEP. 10/M.PPN/HK/02/2021. (Shauma & Purbaningrum, 2022)

In efforts to reduce stunting rates, two main intervention approaches are emphasized: specific and sensitive nutritional interventions. In addition to addressing both direct and underlying causes of stunting, this approach also considers supportive prerequisites such as political commitment, cross-sector participation, and adequate implementation capacity (B. A. Hidayat & Erlyn, 2021). These interventions are integrated comprehensively, aiming for the synchronization of jointly agreed sectoral programs, including utilizing village funds and empowering Human Development Cadres. (Dafiriadi, 2021)

The government has implemented various policies and regulations that support this integrated

approach in stunting prevention, leading to integration from planning stages to monitoring and evaluation. By aligning multiple available resources, stunting interventions are implemented effectively and efficiently, ensuring that the goals of reducing stunting can be achieved more optimally. (Aryastami & Tarigan, 2017)

Preventing stunting requires organized and comprehensive efforts involving cross-sectoral cooperation from the local government to the village level. Local governments are crucial in ensuring these measures are effectively implemented. However, challenges arise due to insufficient coordination among Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD), which hinders the effectiveness of stunting prevention programs at the local level. (Tampubolon, 2020)

## **Methods**

A qualitative descriptive method was used to explore the implementation of integrated policies in addressing stunting in North Gorontalo Regency and the challenges encountered in their application. This method was chosen to delve deeper into subjective experiences and phenomena. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, including department heads and community representatives, as well as participatory observations to observe the policy implementation process directly. This approach in data analysis allows for a detailed depiction of policy implementation and the factors influencing this process. (Agustianti et al., 2022)

The research design employed was a case study aiming to describe the implementation of a stunting prevention program by the Health Office of North Gorontalo Regency. The case study method was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the local context and the dynamics of policy implementation at the micro level. Thus, the author can collect detailed and contextual information about the policy implementation and explore the various challenges faced in the effort to countermeasures stunting. Hence, the case study design is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of policy implementation and the factors influencing it in the North Gorontalo Regency. (Hasibuan et al., 2022)

## **Results**

### **Implementation of Integrated Policies in Stunting Management in North Gorontalo Regency**

Stunting, a condition of impaired growth in toddlers due to chronic malnutrition and recurrent infections, demands serious attention as it directly impacts the quality of human resources. The local government has diligently undertaken efforts to combat stunting in North Gorontalo Regency. Although there has been a significant reduction from 30.66% in 2018 to 25.14% in 2020, the role of villages in implementing nutritional intervention programs has also been improved to ensure the sustainability of these efforts. The synergy of various stakeholders is crucial in maintaining the momentum of stunting reduction to ensure continuous progress. (Gaire et al., 2016).

In efforts to reduce stunting rates in North Gorontalo Regency, the local government has launched a series of programs. These include the provision of iron supplements and nutritional intake for adolescent girls and pregnant women, ensuring healthcare professionals attend childbirths, and providing nutrition to children until the age of 2 years (Erlyn et al., 2021). Additionally, the mothers are encouraged to initiate exclusive breastfeeding, practice early breastfeeding initiation, provide complementary feeding for children experiencing stunting,

ensure complete immunization, including Vitamin A, monitor child growth at integrated health service posts, and participate in the community movement for healthy living. Thus, to monitor these programs' implementation, this study focuses on three policy implementation indicators, using Soren C. Winter's Theory: 1) Organizational and inter-organizational behavior; 2) Lower-level bureaucratic behavior; 3) Target group behavior. (Gharpure et al., 2021)

### ***Organizational and Inter-Organizational Behavior***

Organizational and inter-organizational behavior refers to the attitudes and actions of the government in implementing stunting prevention programs in the North Gorontalo Regency, particularly within the North Gorontalo Health Office. The dimensions of inter-organizational relationships include commitment and coordination among organizations. (Qureshy et al., 2013)

#### **a) Organizational Commitment**

Commitment refers to the mutual agreement with relevant agencies to maintain the stability of the organization and the inter-organizational network involved in implementing the Infant and Young Child Feeding (PMBA) counseling program in North Gorontalo Regency. Maintaining the stability of the organizations is challenging due to the various interests held by each participating agency. Commitment is essential to achieve the objectives of the stunting prevention program at the North Gorontalo Health Office. The implementation of this program encounters challenges, as noted in an interview with the Coordinator of Stunting at the North Gorontalo Health Office, Mrs. MY, who stated:

*“This stunting reduction strategy must not solely be the responsibility of the health department; everyone must be directly involved. This is because it involves specific and sensitive interventions, and we cannot work alone without assistance. In recent months, there has been a commitment, but until now, only the health department has been actively working. Their efforts have primarily been limited to providing data to us and outlining how interventions should be carried out in the villages.” (Interview result, October 17, 2022)*

In their commitment to reducing stunting, as expressed by Mr. ZL from the North Gorontalo Regency Social Service Office:

*“Our commitment as the social services department, when implementing these programs, is to conduct monitoring and evaluation of the activities related to stunting. We focus on monitoring and evaluating whether the stunting-related activities have been properly executed. All activities mandated by the ministry require us to adhere to established standards. For instance, about the Family Hope Program (PKH) and the Family Capacity Building Program (P2K2), we are advised to raise awareness about stunting. The provision of non-cash food assistance aims to meet the nutritional needs of stunted children in the households we assist. We propose this to the Social Welfare Problems (PMKS) unit.” (Interview result, October 17, 2022)*

Based on the interviews conducted, it can be stated that they are committed to the community in their efforts to reduce the stunting rate in North Gorontalo Regency. This activity serves as a foundation for Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) interventions in implementing stunting reduction programs, with villages playing a pivotal role in collaboration with public health centers to collect data and address stunting cases (Bromell, 2022). Outreach initiatives are a critical component, carried out by stunting officers through public health centers, nutrition officers and Stunting Reduction Acceleration Team (TPPS). This is evident from the interview with the head of East Sumalata District, Mr. HY, who stated:

*“It is crucial to provide information about stunting in a tiered manner, and to engage community leaders, as well as cultural and religious figures. We convey this information at every community event and official meeting.” ( Interview result, October 18, 2022)*

Further, the Health Office continues to make visits to socialize or provide understanding to the community. Additionally, the Village Government communicates stunting issues to the public in public places and mosques. The commitment to socialize the stunting prevention program involves specific venues in this context. These venues include Community Health Centers (Puskesmas) and community event locations, which serve as platforms for both socialization and support in stunting prevention efforts (Oktarina et al., 2022). The Puskesmas used for these socialization efforts include the following in Table 1.

No	Name of Community Health Center (PUSKESMAS)	Address	District
1	Atinggola Community Health Center	Mongupa Village	Atinggola
2	Gentuma Community Health Center	Gentuma Village	Gentuma
3	Kwandang Community Health Center	Molou Village	Kwandang
4	Molingkapoto Community Health Center	Molingkapoto Village	Kwandang
5	Dambalo Community Health Center	Dambalo Village	Kwandang
6	Ponelo Community Health Center	Ponelo Village	Kwandang
7	Anggrek Community Health Center	Anggrek Village	Anggrek
8	Monano Community Health Center	Monano Village	Anggrek
9	Ilangata Community Health Center	Ilangata Village	Anggrek
10	Sumalata Community Health Center	East Bulontio Village	Sumalata
11	Dulukapa Community Health Center	Dulukapa Village	Sumalata
12	Buloila Community Health Center	Buloila Village	Sumalata
13	Tolinggula Community Health Center	Tolinggula Village	Tolinggula
14	Biawu Community Health Center	Biawu Village	Tolinggula
15	Limbato Community Health Centers	Limbato Village	Tolinggula

Table 1. List of Locations for Stunting Prevention Program Socialization in North Gorontalo Regency.

Furthermore, in an interview with the Head of the Public Housing and Settlement Office of North Gorontalo Regency, Mr. MS, he stated that:

*“Our commitment to addressing stunting is exemplified by the Pamsimas program, which has allocated 6 billion IDR this year, distributed across 15 villages. Additionally, the regional budget (APBD) will support 3 villages, specifically targeting those affected by stunting as instructed by the leadership. This initiative has already been discussed in the DPR (Regional Representatives Council). The program's primary goal is to ensure the provision of clean water, focusing on slum areas and regions impacted by stunting, with the main objective being to aid those communities most affected by stunting.” (Interview result, October 18, 2022)*

Based on the interview results, it is evident that the Public Housing and Settlement Office of North Gorontalo Regency, the Health Office, and other agencies are committed to reducing stunting rates through the Pansimas program, particularly by providing clean water to affected communities. This inter-agency collaboration demonstrates active engagement in stunting

prevention, with a target to reduce the stunting rate in North Gorontalo Regency from 14% to 9% by 2024. Effective communication and commitment from all parties are essential to achieve this shared goal, underscoring the pivotal role of North Gorontalo Regency in reducing stunting rates in Gorontalo Province.

In line with this, an interview with the Technical Team of TPPS in North Gorontalo Regency, Mr. SS, revealed that:

*“TPPS must function in both the reduction and prevention of stunting. The target of reducing the stunting rate to 9% by 2024 will be achievable if we can decrease it by 6% over the next two years. To this end, TPPS must not only work on prevention but also actively reduce the stunting rate, particularly through educating families at risk of stunting. This approach will ensure that stunting is not passed on to the next generation.” (Interview result, October 19, 2022)*

Based on the interview results, it is evident that TPPS has demonstrated a solid commitment to achieving a stunting-free North Gorontalo Regency by involving all relevant parties in the stunting prevention program. This aligns with (Nurprojo's (2014) view on policy implementation as the distribution of policy outputs by implementers to target groups to achieve policy goals. The interview with the Head of Social and Cultural Affairs, Regional Development Planning Agency, Mr. RD, also reinforced this commitment by emphasizing the role of all parties in executing and addressing the stunting prevention program in North Gorontalo Regency. (Bhutta et al., 2020)

## **b) Coordination**

Coordination is a process of synergizing and directing work activities between one party and another to achieve predetermined goals. Inter-organizational coordination becomes one of the benchmarks in policy implementation, thus requiring mutual coordination to achieve the desired objectives. Coordination is carried out both in decision-making, particularly in the provision of data and information, and in the implementation of activities. Based on an interview with the Stunting Coordinator of North Gorontalo Regency, Mrs. MY, she stated that:

*“The Ministry has transitioned to the new regulation, Perpres 72, which promotes integrated collaboration from the top levels of the Ministry down to local Puskesmas. The issue here, however, may lie at the provincial level, which has hindered our implementation efforts. The quickest coordination method is through the application system. We will implement this application at the district level and, if there are any issues, we will immediately contact the Ministry. In Gorontalo, there is one representative from the Ministry of Home Affairs, ensuring that problems will be resolved promptly.” (Interview, October 17, 2022)*

Based on the above interview, it can be stated that the Stunting Coordinator of North Gorontalo Regency has implemented effective coordination in the Stunting Prevention Program. The Health Office of North Gorontalo Regency consistently coordinates and consolidates with various parties such as the Regional Development Planning Agency, Community Empowerment, Women's Empowerment and Family Planning, Social Services, Housing and Settlements Office (Perkim), TPPS, Nutrition Officers, and related sub-districts regarding current activities and future actions. Further, in an interview with Mr. ZL, an employee of the Social Services Office, he mentioned that:

*“Regarding vertical coordination, it is necessary to submit reports related to stunting. The same applies to the BPNT (Non-Cash Food Assistance) program, which is recommended to provide*

<sup>4918</sup> *The Implementation of Integrated Policy in Addressing nutrition beyond just rice and eggs, such as offering fruit, vegetables, and fish. Special protection is extended to the central facility in Manado, including stunting-related efforts. For example, in the social services department, specifically within the PKH (Family Hope Program), we will further coordinate these efforts. Meetings with the P2K2 (Family Development Session) will include healthcare professionals.” (Interview, October 17, 2022)*

Based on the above interview, it can be concluded that the Social Services Office and the Health Office of North Gorontalo Regency maintain coordination in the Stunting Prevention Program by collaborating between Family Hope Program (PKH) officers and Nutrition Officers, as well as holding cross-sectoral meetings and socialization meetings with village officials. These meetings ensure that coordination is consistently effective.(MINTAWATI, 2022)

### ***Implementation Organization Management***

Management in this integrated policy implementation encompasses three aspects: clear signals of expectations, appropriate recruitment of personnel, and managing bureaucratic practices in the field (Masdar, Asmorowati, and Irianto 2009). It suggests that this management relates to a) providing clear signals or indications about the policy agency's goals, b) more frequent provision of information about the agency's policy goals, c) more systematic monitoring of staff, and d) applying recruitment criteria to ensure more substantial alignment with the agency's goals when recruiting frontline workers (Hughes, 2012). As evidenced by the interview with the Stunting Coordinator of North Gorontalo District, Ms. MY:

*“The objective of the related regional apparatus organizations (OPD) in the process of stunting prevalence in North Gorontalo is determined by the health department as the program controller, which then becomes the target and goal for all OPDs, including community health centers and other stunting officers. Our challenge arises when interventions are implemented, as targets do not maximize their potential, and targets relocate when re-evaluated. Regarding stunting information, currently, it is limited to socialization in coordination with the relevant OPDs and awareness campaigns with these OPDs, emphasizing the prevalence of stunting and identifying the villages that are stunting hotspots. This information is crucial for understanding data about stunting.” (Interview result, October 17, 2022)*

Strict and effective supervision is crucial in implementing the stunting program, as stated in the author's interview with Mr. HY, the District Head of East Sumalata.

*“There is indeed a working team formed for supervision, consisting of midwives, nutrition officers, village and sub-district PKK team leaders, village heads, family planning field officers (PLKB), and health officers, established by the sub-district head of East Sumala, who directly interact with stunting personnel. They have even formed a family assistance team. Additionally, the assistance team provides regular joint evaluations. They have also established the TPK (Family Assistance Team) to provide information to the local government.” (Interview, October 18, 2022)*

Based on the interview results above, providing clear signals relates to specific policy direction, provision of general information including informing about new laws and administrative rules, systematic monitoring of employee behavior, limiting agent discretion by setting procedural requirements to restrict agent authority, manipulating bureaucratic behavior by altering rewards and sanctions, or symbolizing external scrutiny on bureaucratic directors by involving interest groups.(Amarante et al., 2018)

### ***Street-level Bureaucrat Behavior***

One crucial aspect to understand in the implementation of the stunting prevention program in North Gorontalo District is the behavior of street-level bureaucrats, known as discretion. Discretion is the ability to make significant decisions beyond formal boundaries, often prioritizing community relations over official duties. Lower-level bureaucracy is a critical player in public policy execution, and its performance is assessed against existing program standards (Hondegheem & Vandenabeele, 2007). For instance, the capability of stunting officers at the North Gorontalo District Health Office to implement the stunting prevention program is pivotal. Collaboration among community health centers (Puskesmas), field officers, the PKH, and Sub-district Social Welfare Workers (TKSK) from the social affairs office is integral to the program's implementation and serves as an indicator of its success (Prayitno 2020). Insights from the interview with Mr. ZL, a Social Affairs Department employee, regarding the field officers' capabilities are as follows:

*“They are skilled because they are equipped with training. PKH facilitators and TKSK understand stunting because they have been provided with training via Zoom meetings related to stunting. Meanwhile, regarding the status of TKSK officers, they are permanent and have official decrees from the Ministry of Social Affairs. The criteria include having a Bachelor's degree, being willing to contribute to social conditions, being skilled, and educated with a Bachelor's degree, and undergoing training.” (Wawancara, 17 Oktober 2022)*

In line with the social service office, the Gorontalo district Stunting Coordinator Mrs. MY stated that:

*“The stunting officers are already skilled because, based on the visits we conducted to several community health centers (puskesmas), there were no discrepancies in the data they collected compared to our findings. Additionally, the data validation they performed was highly accurate due to their expertise in nutrition.” (Wawancara, 17 Oktober 2022)*

Based on the interview results above, it can be stated that community health centers and field officers, along with the PKH and TKSK as lower-level bureaucracies, exercise various forms of discretion. In this regard, they conduct door-to-door visits to households with valid data on stunted children to provide education, measurements, and weighings for those affected, aiming to address stunting cases and improve public service delivery, particularly those affected (Richards et al., 2020). As a fundamental operational unit in the stunting reduction effort, community health centers also prioritize fast service for pregnant women in emergencies or imminent childbirth, focusing on the safety of both the mother and baby and administrative matters. Furthermore, community health centers innovate through a program called Counseling on Infant and Child Feeding (PMBA), which gathers mothers and their children at the health center to receive education and herbal remedies based on local wisdom.(Melisa et al., 2022)

### ***Target Group Behavior***

One of the factors influencing the success of the stunting prevention program in North Gorontalo Regency is the dimension of target group behavior, which includes positive and negative responses. Target group behavior encompasses the positive or negative responses given by the community to the implementers regarding the government's performance. In this regard, the behavior of the target group or the community affected by stunting cases in North Gorontalo District regarding the prevention efforts conducted by the Health Office and related local government agencies. Based on the interview results conducted by the author with the

4920 *The Implementation of Integrated Policy in Addressing community in Hulawa Village, Mrs. YM stated that:*

*“We, the community, have experienced progress in reducing stunting rates. This program, implemented from 2020 to 2022, was well-known for targeting stunting and initially had a prevalence rate of 30.8%. The community has become more aware of the process of addressing stunting. Based on a 2021 publication, the rate decreased from 30.8% to 12.26%, surpassing the national target. In 2022, based on the weigh-in event and validated by the local government, it was confirmed that the Sumalata Timur subdistrict is now free from stunting loci. The stunting rate is currently at 10.6%.” (Interview, 21 October 2022)*

Based on the interview results above, it can be stated that the community responds positively to the stunting prevention program in North Gorontalo Regency. However, the change has not been maximized yet. In the implementation phase, this program is carried out regularly three times a month. Furthermore, in another interview with the community in Buladu Village, Mrs. YR stated that:

*“The stunting reduction officers provide excellent service, although sometimes we, the community, do not fully understand what they are conveying. Therefore, we, the community, request that they remain patient and continue to educate us about the efforts to address stunting in our village.” (Interview, 21 October, 2022)*

Based on the interview results above, it can be stated that the community has not encountered obstacles regarding the stunting prevention program conducted by Gorontalo Regency. One positive aspect noted is that changes have been observed in children affected by stunting. Education should be delivered through field visits and media channels. (Prendergast & Humphrey, 2014)

## **Factors Influencing the Implementation of Integrated Policies in Handling Stunting in North Gorontalo Regency**

### **Communication**

Implementation of policies will be effective when the measures and objectives of the policies are understood by the individuals responsible for achieving those objectives. Therefore, the clarity of policy measures and objectives must be communicated accurately to the implementers. Ensuring consistency in the fundamental measures and objectives is also crucial so that implementers precisely understand the policy measures and objectives. As stated in the interview with Mrs. MY, the Stunting Coordinator of North Gorontalo Regency:

*“Information about the goals and details of stunting is very important. By providing regular information and education, the process of handling stunting can proceed effectively.” (Interview on October 22, 2022)*

Based on the interview results, the information on stunting in the educational process for its prevention is crucial. The effort to prevent stunting in children is a shared responsibility of all layers of Indonesian society. Stunting is a condition of impaired growth and development in toddlers due to malnutrition during pregnancy and after birth. It has been a year since President Joko Widodo signed Presidential Regulation Number 72 of 2021 on the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction. Through this regulation, the government aims to reduce the prevalence of stunting from 24.4 percent to 14 percent by 2021. (Nuramalia et al., 2020)

In line with the data, Mrs. RN from the Stunting Reduction Acceleration Team (TPPS) stated

that:

*“Community-level outreach can provide education and enhance efforts for tiered stunting prevention.” (Interview on October 22, 2022)*

Socialization is the key to the effort to prevent stunting. This is a joint task across sectors involved in stunting prevention in North Gorontalo Regency. It has become a priority for the local government, supported by various OPDs, to improve stunting prevention efforts.

### **Resources**

The clarity and consistency of program implementation and the accuracy of the communication delivered are not consequences if the personnel responsible for executing the program lack the necessary resources to perform their duties. The resource component includes the number of staff, the expertise of the implementers, relevant and sufficient information to implement the policy, and the fulfillment of related resources in the program execution. Based on the interview with Mr. AT, the Head of the Food Security Agency of North Gorontalo District, it was revealed that:

*“The stunting officers are performing well, but there is a need for enhanced knowledge about stunting. I hope that in the future, there will be technical guidance provided to impart knowledge related to stunting management.” (Interview on October 24, 2022)*

Competent human resources in field activities have a significant impact on the success of a program. Therefore, having well-qualified resources is essential for promoting the prevention and management of stunting. The declaration of the movement for stunting prevention and management is merely the beginning of a formal commitment. Actions are required in order to save the children as the future leaders of the nation's development. (Risna Sari & Tanjung Pura, 2022)

Mrs. BM, as a field officer handling stunting, also emphasized:

*“Competent field officers must also master information technology, particularly regarding technical aspects in the field. Additionally, they should work to raise community awareness about reducing stunting rates.” (Interview on October 24, 2022)*

Based on this interview, it is evident that technology and technical proficiency in the field are crucial indicators of program success. Indonesia's new National Strategy to Accelerate Stunting Reduction will ensure that all "1000 HPK," those with pregnant women or children under two years old, can access comprehensive service packages essential for preventing stunting. Indonesia is part of the Human Capital Project, a network of 39 countries working on accelerated human capital development plans. The Investing in Nutrition and Early Years (INEY) program, supporting Indonesia's ambitious National Strategy implementation, embodies principles and guidelines used by these countries to transform human capital outcomes and improve future productivity. (Herawati & Sunjaya, 2022)

### **Implementers' Disposition/Attitude**

There are three forms of attitudes/responses of implementers towards policies: awareness of the implementers, guidance/directions for implementers to respond towards acceptance or rejection of the program, and the intensity of these responses. Implementers may understand the purpose and objectives of the program but often fail to implement it correctly because they reject its goals and, therefore, covertly divert and avoid program implementation. Skill or competence is one of

the benchmarks of program success. Further, the author found, according to the interview results with Mrs. MVT, an employee of the North Gorontalo Health Office, that:

*“The stunting officers have already been trained, as evidenced by our visits to several health centers. The data they have collected shows no discrepancies compared to the data we gathered. The data presented by the field officers aligns with the initial data collection conducted during the stunting deliberation at the district level.” (Interview on October 24, 2022)*

Based on the interview results, competent field officers will produce good data and performance. This allows for optimal coordination across sectors and lines. Commitment is also an indicator of the success of a task. Senior to lower officials must have a strong commitment to completing their work. This aligns with what Mr. ZL, a Social Services Officer, expressed:

*“Our commitment in the Social Services Department involves advocating for monitoring and evaluating the various stunting integration programs implemented. Therefore, we focus on monitoring and evaluating whether the stunting programs are being executed effectively.” (Interview on October 24, 2022)*

This commitment makes inter-line coordination focused on achieving each program, which is certainly focused on the policy of handling stunting in North Gorontalo Regency. However, integration or coordination has not yet reached maximum potential in the field. The handling of stunting is not fully integrated yet, but there has been progress at the local level, considering it is still the first year of implementation. Integration in addressing stunting has not yet been fully achieved, but progress in each OPD is already excellent (Nugroho et al., 2021). Improvement is needed in the coming years. In the following year, eight convergence actions will be implemented, and it is important to ensure continuous performance evaluation within these actions. (Wu et al., 2016)

Evaluation is crucial to reach the village level in terms of performance (Meri Agritubella & Delvira, 2020). There are indicators at the village and district levels, and there are categories for villages and districts that excel in reducing stunting rates. At the district level, assessments should be made regarding regional innovations, especially local wisdom innovations. Thus, it will positively impact handling stunting in North Gorontalo Regency. (Agustino & Eko, 2022)

### ***Bureaucratic Structure***

Despite sufficient resources and a clear understanding of necessary actions, implementation can still fail if the bureaucratic structure hinders essential coordination. Complex policies require collaboration from various parties, and resource wastage can affect implementation outcomes. Necessary changes will impact individuals and can influence the bureaucratic system overall. (Sunaryo et al., 2022)

The involvement of the local government of North Gorontalo Regency in the regulation of Stunting Reduction through the Community Movement for Stunting Reduction includes provisions on general regulations, principles, purposes and objectives, pillars of stunting prevention, scope, strategies and approaches, health and nutrition education, delegation of responsibilities, roles of village governments and community roles, recording and reporting, awards, funding, and closing provisions (Mandu & Mulyanti, 2023). This signifies both the manifestation and responsibility in the stunting management process. As expressed by the Head of Legal Affairs, Mr. YG:

*“The Regent will strive to enhance the "Gorut Pasti Bisa" application with the "SiCantik Gorut"*

*application, hoping it will integrate all stunting-related applications in the relevant regional government offices (OPDs). This integration will ensure data consistency and help the community understand and appreciate the local government's commitment to addressing and preventing stunting in North Gorontalo. Additionally, there is Regulation No. 15 of 2020, which is further refined with the "SiCantik Gorut" regulation, aimed at integrating efforts among OPDs to reduce stunting in North Gorontalo Regency." (Interview on October 25, 2022)*

The efforts undertaken by the government aim to maximize coordination and integration from the formulation process to field actions. This effort provides information from each OPD in executing activities in the field. This sentiment was stated by Mr. RD, Head of the Cultural Division of Development Planning Board (BAPPEDA), who stated:

*"Indeed, we have a special agenda, as per the instructions of the Regent of North Gorontalo, which must be implemented to accelerate stunting prevention efforts. This agenda includes cross-sectoral coordination meetings involving the Health Department, Family Planning Department, Social Services Department, and other relevant regional government offices (OPDs). Our target is 123 villages, in accordance with regulations. According to Presidential Regulation No. 72, the five target groups are prospective brides and grooms, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and mothers with children aged 0-6 months." (Interview on October 25, 2022).*

Providing understanding and education to the team, especially to colleagues in the OPD, regarding budget changes, special coordination meetings have been conducted to intervene in issues documented as metadata in each OPD or from the villages (Radjamuda et al., 2019). This includes analysis from archives and specific analysis of the issues and problems faced by the villages. (Sahroji et al., 2022)

Based on this data and analysis, synchronization is conducted concerning the planning or ongoing implementation for 2022, focusing on programs and sub-activities that can be intervened to address Village Fund issues. For 2023, North Gorontalo Regency is the only region that has periodically compiled data to be submitted to the Governor, with coordination with relevant agencies. The systematic approach aims to trigger the immediate reporting to the Governor and the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, several aspects need improvement in the report, including the innovations and strategies for accelerating the prevention and reduction of stunting in North Gorontalo. (Beal et al., 2018)

In the context of stunting prevention and reduction, coordination with OPD has been facilitated through the SISKEUDA application, which encompasses actions 1 through 8. This application provides various instruments, including indicators, activities, and programs, with reports uploaded totaling an allocation of 17 billion rupiahs for specific and sensitive OPD interventions. In 2022-2023, tagging has also been conducted through this application, with various instruments and program activities amounting to a budget of 27 billion rupiah, indicating a significant increase. It is important to note that the Regent has provided numerous directives and guidance, emphasizing the necessity of studying and analyzing every action to develop concepts that align with the targets, including reducing stunting in North Gorontalo. (Hermawati & Sastrawan, 2020)

## **Discussions**

The implementation of integrated policies for stunting management in North Gorontalo Regency demonstrates the critical role of coordinated efforts among various stakeholders in addressing this complex issue. Using Soren C. Winter's theory, which emphasizes organizational and inter-

organizational behavior, lower-level bureaucratic behavior, and target group behavior, the findings highlight both achievements and challenges in policy execution.(Dhami et al., 2019)

### **Organizational and Inter-Organizational Behavior**

The commitment of various organizations to reducing stunting is evident from the interviews conducted. The Health Office, Social Services, and Public Housing and Settlement Office have all undertaken significant initiatives. For instance, the allocation of IDR 6 billion for clean water provision under the Pamsimas program and the integration of stunting-related objectives into social programs like the Family Hope Program (PKH) highlight the prioritization of stunting prevention across sectors. However, as noted by Mrs. MY, the lack of active involvement from other agencies has been a challenge. This indicates a gap in the shared responsibility framework, which is crucial for the success of integrated policies.(Wididiati et al., 2022)

Further, the role of public health centers (Puskesmas) in disseminating information and providing direct interventions underscores the importance of grassroots-level engagement. Outreach through community events, religious gatherings, and local government initiatives ensures that stunting prevention messages reach target groups effectively. However, maintaining consistent communication across different organizational levels remains a challenge, as evidenced by the delayed implementation of regulations like Perpres 72.(KONAY et al., 2022)

### **Coordination Challenges and Opportunities**

Coordination among agencies has been a central pillar in stunting management efforts. The findings reveal that inter-agency coordination has facilitated data sharing, resource allocation, and implementation of targeted programs. The use of application systems to streamline communication and the involvement of ministry representatives at the provincial level reflect an effort to enhance vertical and horizontal coordination. However, delays in provincial-level processes and occasional misalignment between agencies, as highlighted by Mrs. MY and Mr. ZL, point to areas needing improvement.(Purwanti et al., 2022)

The inclusion of nutrition beyond basic staples in the BPNT (Non-Cash Food Assistance) program and the collaboration with healthcare professionals during P2K2 sessions are examples of cross-sectoral efforts that align with best practices for stunting reduction. These initiatives demonstrate a practical application of integrated approaches, emphasizing the need for sustained efforts to align organizational goals and community needs.(Casale, 2020)

### **Lower-Level Bureaucratic Behavior and Target Group Engagement**

The involvement of lower-level bureaucrats, such as village officials and nutrition officers, has been instrumental in executing stunting reduction strategies. Their role in monitoring child growth, providing direct nutritional interventions, and conducting community education ensures that policy outputs reach intended beneficiaries. However, as noted in the interviews, the reliance on a few committed agencies, particularly the Health Office, underscores the need for broader engagement from other stakeholders.(Miswan, 2022)

Target group behavior has also been addressed through community-level interventions such as exclusive breastfeeding promotion, early breastfeeding initiation, and complementary feeding programs. These initiatives align with evidence-based practices for reducing stunting. The emphasis on involving cultural and religious leaders further reinforces the need for culturally sensitive approaches that resonate with local communities.(Shauma & Purbaningrum, 2022)

## **Management and Organizational Coordination**

The implementation of the stunting prevention program in North Gorontalo Regency highlights several critical aspects of policy execution, including management, street-level bureaucrat behavior, and target group behavior. This integrated effort demonstrates both achievements and challenges in addressing stunting at the local level.(Dafiriadi, 2021)

Effective management in policy implementation involves clear communication of expectations, systematic supervision, and strategic recruitment of personnel aligned with policy goals. The insights from Ms. MY, the Stunting Coordinator, emphasize the central role of the Health Department in setting program objectives and coordinating efforts across multiple regional apparatus organizations (OPDs). However, challenges such as the mobility of target populations and limited dissemination of stunting-related information highlight gaps in maximizing intervention potential. Clear policy signals, as supported by Sukowati, Hadi, and Rengu (2004), are vital to aligning bureaucratic behavior with program objectives through structured monitoring and performance evaluation.(Aryastami & Tarigan, 2017)

## **Role of Street-Level Bureaucrats**

Street-level bureaucrats, such as stunting officers and health workers, play a crucial role in program implementation. The interviews with Mr. ZL and Mrs. MY reveal that frontline workers are well-equipped with skills and training, enabling them to perform essential tasks like household visits, data validation, and providing tailored education. This discretion, or the ability to make decisions beyond formal mandates, enables them to address stunting issues effectively while fostering community trust. Additionally, innovations like the PMBA program underscore the importance of integrating local wisdom and culturally relevant approaches into public health interventions. Nevertheless, maintaining consistency in service delivery and aligning efforts across diverse bureaucratic entities remain ongoing priorities.(Tampubolon, 2020)

## **Community Engagement and Target Group Behavior**

The success of the stunting prevention program is significantly influenced by the behavior and responses of the target group. Positive feedback from the community, as expressed by Mrs. YM in Hulawa Village, indicates growing awareness and tangible progress, with a reduction in stunting prevalence from 30.8% to 10.6%. This achievement surpasses national targets, reflecting the effectiveness of coordinated interventions. However, challenges persist, as highlighted by Mrs. YR in Buladu Village, where community members occasionally struggle to fully comprehend the program's objectives. This underscores the need for patient, persistent education through field visits and media channels to enhance community understanding and participation.(Direktur Bina Gizi, 2020)

## **Communication and Resource Allocation**

Effective communication lays the foundation for policy implementation. Regular dissemination of clear information, as emphasized by Mrs. MY and the Stunting Reduction Acceleration Team (TPPS), has significantly enhanced community awareness and engagement. However, tailored communication strategies are necessary to address varying levels of understanding within the community.(R. Hidayat, 2022)

Resource allocation complements communication by equipping implementers with the tools needed for effective execution. While field officers have received training, as highlighted by Mr. AT and Mrs. BM, there is a need for ongoing capacity-building initiatives. Advanced technical

skills, particularly in information technology, are essential for ensuring data accuracy and operational efficiency. The integration of comprehensive service packages under Indonesia's national strategy also underscores the importance of sustained investment in resources, including human capital and technological infrastructure. (Satriawan, 2018)

### **Implementers' Commitment and Coordination**

The attitudes and commitment of implementers play a vital role in translating policy objectives into tangible outcomes. Interviews with Mrs. MVT and Mr. ZL reveal a high level of competence and dedication among field officers, which has contributed to accurate data collection and effective program monitoring. However, achieving seamless coordination across sectors remains a challenge. Strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration and aligning efforts across departments are necessary to enhance the overall impact of stunting prevention initiatives. (Susanti et al., 2018)

### **Bureaucratic Structure and Integration**

The bureaucratic structure can act as both an enabler and a barrier to policy implementation. Efforts to integrate stunting-related data through applications like "SiCantik Gorut" reflect a commitment to improving coordination and efficiency. Cross-sectoral meetings, as mentioned by Mr. RD, demonstrate a structured approach to addressing stunting at the village level. However, overlapping responsibilities and procedural complexities can hinder execution. Simplifying processes and fostering inter-departmental collaboration are critical to addressing these challenges. (Kusumawati et al., 2013)

### **Progress and Future Directions**

Despite these challenges, North Gorontalo Regency has made significant strides in reducing stunting rates through innovative programs and strategic planning. Resource tagging and systematic data collection indicate a proactive approach to addressing gaps in implementation. Moving forward, the focus should be on refining communication strategies, investing in resource development, and streamlining bureaucratic structures. Enhancing local innovations and aligning efforts with national and regional policies will ensure sustained progress in reducing stunting and improving the health and development of children in the region. (Rahayu et al., 2018).

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study on the implementation of the stunting prevention program in North Gorontalo Regency, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. **Organizational and Inter-Organizational Behavior** : The dimensions of organizational and inter-organizational behavior include commitment and coordination between organizations. The commitment dimension of organizational and inter-organizational behavior has been functioning well. This collaboration is continually maintained to eradicate stunting in North Gorontalo Regency. The coordination dimension of organizational and inter-organizational behavior has also been practical. This is evident as the North Gorontalo Regency Health Office consistently coordinates and consolidates efforts with agencies such as BAPEDDA, the Social Affairs Department, Perkim, and the Food Security Department regarding current and future actions.
2. **Management of Implementing Organizations** : The implementation of a data

management system for stunting prevention and reduction interventions involves the structured management of data from the regency/city level to the village level. This system is designed to support the implementation and management of programs or activities to prevent and reduce stunting.

3. **Street-Level Bureaucrat Behavior** : The behavior of lower-level bureaucracy, particularly in terms of discretion, has been effectively implemented. This is evident from several activities that were initiated independently by the implementers. Discretion is exercised to ensure successful public service delivery for families with children under five years old, especially those affected by stunting. Additionally, discretion is utilized to address urgent issues in the field.

4. **Target Group Behavior** : The target group's behavior encompasses positive and negative responses from the community toward government implementers' performance. The target group's behavior has been generally positive. This is attributed to the continuous support and monitoring carried out by officials, conducted regularly three times a month. In addition to monitoring, officials also provide counseling, weigh children, and measure their growth, mainly focusing on those affected by stunting. These efforts aim to reduce the still high stunting rates in North Gorontalo Regency.

The findings of the study regarding the factors influencing the implementation of integrated policies for addressing stunting in North Gorontalo Regency are as follows:

- a) **Communication** : The socialization indicates an increase in public awareness regarding child nutrition. However, not all segments of society are readily receptive to receiving this information.
- b) **Resources** : A sufficient quantity of human resources ensures that services can be effectively delivered, achieving the policy objectives and successfully addressing stunting.
- c) **Disposition/Attitude of Implementers** : The commitment of regional apparatuses improves significantly by implementing integrated stunting interventions facilitated by effective coordination with all relevant OPDs.
- d) **Bureaucratic Structure**: The policy regulates all aspects of policy implementation, including the allocation of village fund budgets and the technical execution of stunting intervention measures

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