

TOWARDS A STUNTING-FREE GUNUNGSITOLI CITY: POLICY EVALUATION AND CHALLENGES OF THE ECONOMIC APPROACH

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to evaluate policies to accelerate stunting reduction and the challenges of economic approaches. Policy evaluation is an important basis for seeing and assessing a policy or program, namely the policy of accelerating stunting reduction in Gunungsitoli City. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data was collected through interviews, literature reviews, and observations. Interviews are conducted by informants, and then the data is processed, and qualitative data analysis is carried out. Based on the results of the research using evaluation indicators that believe in effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, leveling, responsiveness, and accuracy, the implementation has not been optimal or running well based on several criteria, namely the budget from the APBD for policies and programs to accelerate stunting reduction is still limited, access to stunting sufferers is still constrained considering the demographic conditions of the region spread across various regions, the existence of complex socialization So that the delivery of information is not effective and the implementation time of policies and programs is not too much so that the implementation of policies does not run well and the short implementation time makes programs and policies not optimal in terms of their implementation and economic challenges in handling stunting are met with poverty and limited access to nutrition, dependence on external resources, and economic impacts do not last long This stunting results in a decrease in productivity labor force, the burden of regional health increased, and poverty arose.

Keywords: Evaluation, Policy, Economic Approach, Acceleration of Stunting Reduction

INTRODUCTION

The research that will be presented by the author will discuss policies to accelerate stunting reduction and challenges in economic approaches. Where the focus of this study is stunting policy which focuses on accelerating stunting reduction from the side of local governments which are leading sectors and challenges from an economic point of view. Stunting is a growth and development disorder experienced by children due to malnutrition, recurrent infections, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation (WHO, 2015), the condition of the Covid-19 virus pandemic that hit Indonesia in early 2020 caused a significant increase in unemployment and poverty where according to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) the number of unemployed was recorded at 7.86 million as of August 2023 and the number of poor people in Indonesia was 25.90 million people as of March 2023. The existence of unemployment and poverty makes it difficult for people to obtain and meet their needs, including food. Food needs that are not met properly can cause various health problems, one of which is nutritional problems or stunting (Litahayu et al., 2022).

The condition of stunting is one of the conditions where the developmental stages in children experience growth and development where the stunting prevalence rate according to the Indonesia Satisfaction Survey (SKI, 2023), the stunting prevalence in Indonesia is 21.5% in 2023 and the decrease in stunting prevalence is not too significant compared to the previous year, namely according to the Indonesia SSGI Nutrition Status Survey at 21.6% where the stunting prevalence rate is still far from the RPJMN target 2020-2024 with a target of 14% in 2024 following WHO standards which target the stunting rate to be below 20%. Resistance to stunting conditions is one of the national agendas and President Jokowi issued Presidential Regulation Number 72 of 2021 concerning the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction regulating efforts to reduce stunting in a holistic, integrative, and quality manner. This is of course one of the bases for formulating, scheduling, and executing various programs to accelerate stunting reduction from the central to the regions.

The policy of accelerating stunting reduction is one of the breakthrough efforts in the form of policies formed by the government, this policy allows the existence of sensitive and specific nutrition interventions as a step in preventing stunting in the community where specific and stunting-sensitive nutrition intervention efforts were initially part of the National

Nutrition Awareness Movement in the context of the First 1000 Days of Life (HPK) have been carried out by the government (Wardani et al, 2020). The purpose of evaluating the policy to accelerate stunting reduction is to assess the extent of the success of the programs that have been implemented in reducing stunting rates. Through evaluation, we can identify factors that support or hinder the achievement of targets, measure the effectiveness of various interventions that have been carried out, and identify areas that need improvement. The existence of an evaluation of the policy to accelerate stunting reduction implemented by the government is important because it concerns Indonesia's human resources (HR) in the future. 5 densely populated areas in Indonesia are the areas with the highest stunting prevalence, namely West Java, East Java, Central Java, North Sumatra, and Banten (Sumartini et al., 2024).

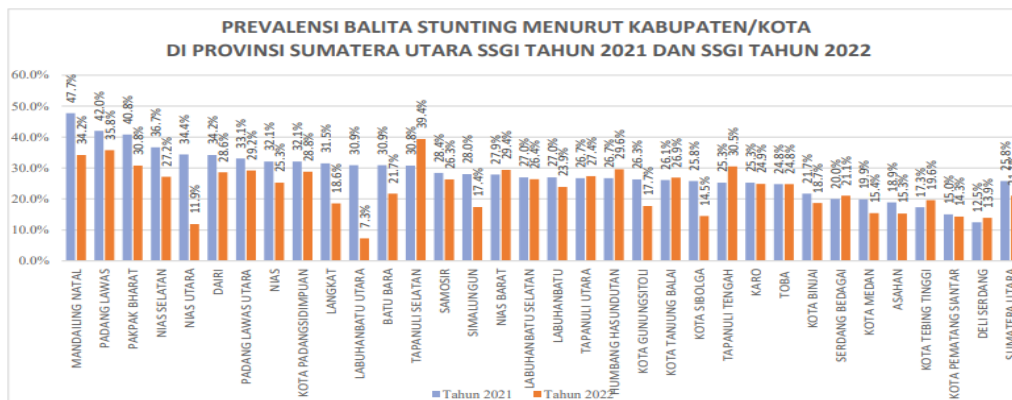


Figure. 1
Stunting Rate in North Sumatra Province in 2021-2022
 Source: SSGI Book, 2022

North Sumatra is one of the densely populated provinces with a fairly high stunting prevalence rate which according to SSGI 2021 was recorded at 25.8% and in 2022 according to SSGI it was recorded at 21.1%, this proves that there is a decrease in stunting but it is not too significant and far from the national target of 14%. So with the existence of a stunting policy, namely 8 convergent actions that are integrated from the center to the regions, it is hoped that the prevalence of stunting in the following years can be suppressed and the number of stunting-free toddlers is getting larger, another important thing to improve is the quality of human resources in the form of health workers. Limited human resources are one of the

factors inhibiting the success of reducing stunting prevalence, research by Fadare et al. (2019) shows that trained health workers play a key role in reducing the prevalence of stunting through effective nutrition interventions and counseling to the community.

Gunungsitoli City is one of the cities in North Sumatra Province, in 2021 the prevalence rate in Gunungsitoli City is 26.3% based on the results of the Indonesia Nutrition Status Survey released by the Ministry of Health. In this case, Gunungsitoli City implements specific and sensitive nutrition interventions, specific interventions related to improving nutrition and health while sensitive nutrition interventions aim to slow down the rate of stunting in the community. In this case, the policy to accelerate stunting in Gunungsitoli City uses a cross-sectoral approach, including the Central BKKBN, education offices, public works, fisheries, food security and agriculture, health institutions such as hospitals, health centers, and *posyandu*. This program is implemented in an action called 8 convergence actions consisting of situation analysis, activity planning, stunting prevention, development of actors and village/sub-district governments, stunting data management system, stunting measurement and publication, and annual performance review.

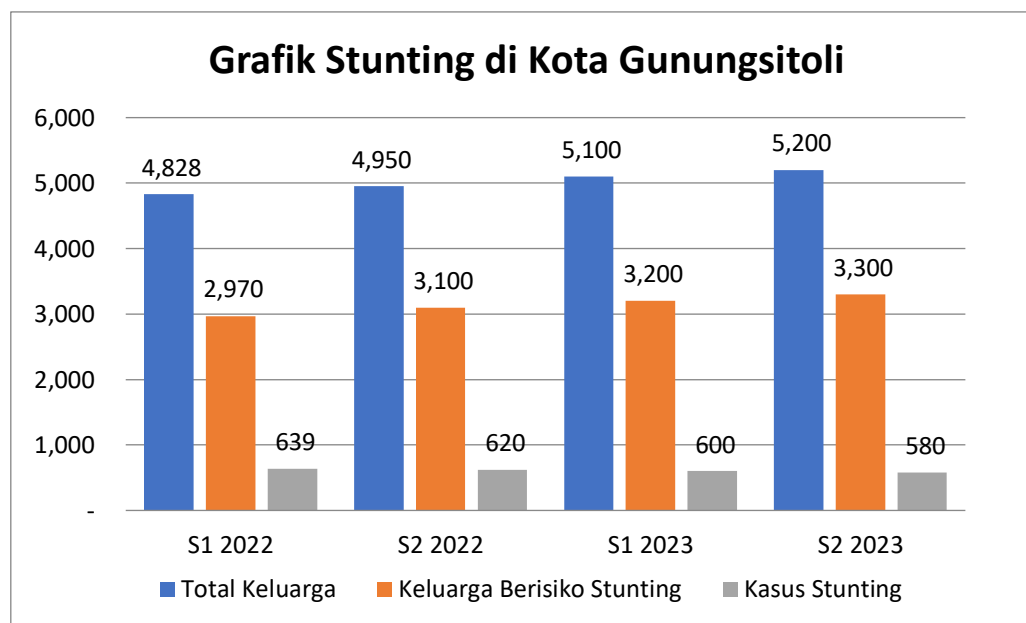


Figure 2
Graph of Stunting Conditions in Gunungsitoli City in 2022-2023
Source: Researcher Processing, 2024

Based on the graph above, in semester 1 of 2022, there are 4828 families in Gunungsitoli City where there are 2970 families at risk of stunting and there are 639 registered stunting cases. The programs and policies implemented have succeeded in reducing the number of stunting cases, which was 620 in the 2nd semester of 2022 with the total number of at-risk families increasing to 3100 from a total of 4950 families. Then in the 1st semester of 2023, there was a decrease in the number of stunting cases to 600 out of a total of 3200 families at risk among 5100 families. Furthermore, in semester 2 of 2023, the number of stunting cases decreased again to 580 out of 3300 families at risk from the total number of families, which is 5200 families.

Gunungsitoli City, as one of the areas that still has major challenges in health problems, especially stunting, has launched various intervention programs. However, to achieve optimal results, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies as well as the challenges that arise from economic approaches. The approach to health economics is closely related to the following aspects: The allocation of resources owned in an organization, the processes that take place in health services, the organization and financing of various health services, the efficiency and effectiveness of the allocation and use of various available resources, the impact of anticipating and overcoming health problems, efforts to handle and restore the health conditions of individuals and communities (Diwyarthi et al., 2022). Economic policies in stunting reduction focus on how governments and various stakeholders can efficiently and effectively allocate resources to address the factors that cause stunting. Economic factors, such as poverty, access to food, and the availability of health services, are closely related to the prevalence of stunting in an area. In Gunungsitoli, these economic challenges need to be overcome through proper budget planning, cross-sector collaboration, and inclusive development policies.

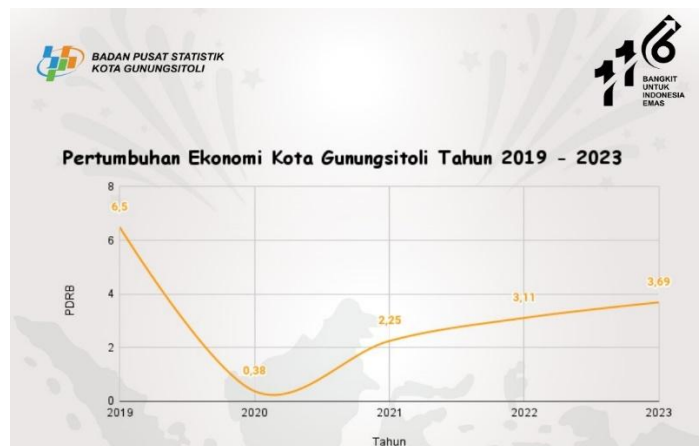


Figure 3
Economic Growth Graph in 2019-2023 Gunungsitoli City
Source: BPS Gunungsitoli City, 2023

Economic growth in Gunungsitoli City began in 2019 or before the pandemic at 6.5%, then in 2020 experienced a sharp decline, namely only 0.38% due to the covid 19 outbreak, then in 2021 it increased after the recovery from COVID-19 around 2.25% and increased in 2022 by 3.11% and in 2023 increased again to 3.69%. This is low when compared to the national economic growth of 5.05% and North Sumatra Province of 5.01%. The economic development of Gunungsitoli City during the 2019-2023 period is influenced by various dynamics, both from the local sector and external impacts such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The city's economic growth is largely supported by the agriculture, trade, and service sectors. However, challenges related to improving infrastructure, access to health services, and education remain the main obstacles to accelerating economic growth and community welfare, including efforts to reduce stunting.

The President of the Republic of Indonesia, Mr. Joko Widodo, on August 5, 2021, issued Presidential Regulation (PP) Number 72 of 2021 concerning the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction regulating efforts to reduce stunting in a holistic, integrative, and quality manner where this regulation is a replacement for Presidential Regulation Number 42 of 2013 concerning the National Movement for the Acceleration of Nutrition Improvement. The existence of a Presidential Regulation that is integrated with the regions in accordance with article 21 concerning the formation of a stunting reduction acceleration team (TPPS) at the district/city level, the City of Gunungsitoli issued Gunungsitoli Mayor Regulation Number

52 of 2022 concerning the acceleration of stunting reduction and the Decree of the Mayor of Gunungsitoli Number 476-39 of 2023 concerning the establishment of a stunting reduction acceleration team as an effort to implement the stunting program in question so that With this team, cross-sectoral communication between regional apparatus organizations (OPD) can be carried out so that with this coordination, it is hoped that progress in accelerating stunting reduction can be implemented immediately because basically coordination between government agencies is a strategic way to achieve the desired goals, considering that stunting events are caused by various aspects (Febrian & Yusran, 2021).

Although the policy of accelerating stunting reduction has been implemented in Gunungsitoli City, the reduction in stunting rates is still monitored low and not too significant where in semester 1 of 2022 there were 639 stunting cases which only decreased in semester 1 of 2023 as many as 580 stunting cases. Seeing that the policy of accelerating stunting reduction has not been effective, both from reducing the stunting rate and communication between cross-sectors, it is necessary to evaluate the success rate of the policy to accelerate stunting reduction, including the evaluation of the policy to reduce stunting in Gunungsitoli City from an economic perspective. This study aims to assess how existing policies have been implemented, challenges that arise, and solutions that can be taken to optimize stunting reduction programs. By analyzing existing policies from an economic perspective, this study also seeks to provide recommendations for more effective and sustainable policies in the future. Therefore, according to Anderson, evaluation, namely policy evaluation, can be said to be an activity that concerns the estimation or assessment of policies that include the substance, implementation, and impact of the implementation of the policy (Winarno, 2008). Meanwhile, according to Dunn, the evaluation is related to the production of information about the value or benefits of policy results (Handoyo, 2012), looking at these factors and conditions, the researcher wants to evaluate the policy of accelerating stunting reduction that has been carried out by the Gunungsitoli City government, whether it has been implemented properly which is associated with what are the economic challenges in handling this stunting case within the scope of Gunungsitoli City.

This study uses Dunn's policy evaluation theory (Handoyo, 2012) as part of the research instruments, namely: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Adequacy, Leveling,

Responsiveness, and Accuracy. The objectives of the evaluation according to Subarsono (2016) are (a) Determining the level of performance of a policy. Through evaluation, the degree of achievement of policy goals and objectives can be known. (b) Measure the efficiency of a policy. With evaluation, it can also be known how much the costs and benefits of a policy are. (c) Measuring the level of output (outcome) of a policy. One of the objectives of evaluation is to measure the amount and quality of expenditure or output of a policy. (d) Measuring the impact of a policy. At this stage, further evaluation is aimed at seeing positive and negative impacts. (e) To find out if there is any irregularity. The evaluation also aims to find out the deviations that may occur, by comparing the goals and the target achievement goals. (f) As input for future policies. The ultimate goal of the evaluation is to provide input for the future policy process so that better policies can be produced.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research will use qualitative method research which according to Sugiyono (2010) is a research method used to research the condition of natural objects with the researcher as a key instrument. Data analysis was carried out inductively/qualitatively with research that emphasized meaning rather than generalization, and data collection was carried out in a triangulation or combined manner. This type of research uses a case study approach, which means that the research focuses on a specific case that must be carefully observed and analyzed until completion. Case study research or field research is about intensively investigating the background of the problem, the circumstances, and the location of an ongoing event. The research topic can be individual, group, institution, or society. Case study research is an in-depth study of a particular social unit that provides a comprehensive and detailed picture of that social unit. The topics studied are relatively limited, but the variables and focus that will be used as research material will be broadly dimensional.

The location of the research was carried out in Gunungsitoli City. Data collection is the most strategic step in research because the main purpose of research is to obtain data. Data were obtained through literature review, observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique used is qualitative data analysis, where qualitative data analysis activities are carried out interactively and continuously until completion. When the data is

saturated, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing are carried out (Sugiyono, 2010). The validity test of data includes trust or credibility, dependability, and confirmability which are checked through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation (Sugiyono, 2010). carried out interactively and continuously until completion. When the data is saturated, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing are carried out (Sugiyono, 2010). The validity test of data includes trust or credibility, dependability, and confirmability which are checked through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation (Sugiyono, 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policies for the Stunting Reduction Acceleration Program

To overcome stunting cases in Gunungsitoli City, the Gunungsitoli City Government based on Regulation of the Mayor of Gunungsitoli Number 52 of 2022 concerning the acceleration of stunting reduction and Decree of the Mayor of Gunungsitoli Number 476-39 of 2023 concerning the establishment of a stunting reduction acceleration team forming the Stunting Reduction Acceleration Team (TPPS) which is a team chaired by the Mayor of Gunungsitoli and consists of several regional apparatus agencies or organizations (OPD) including the health office, P5A office, food security and agriculture, social service, marine service, education office, and health institutions such as health centers. This is based on the desire of the Gunungsitoli City Government to be free from stunting cases and reduce stunting rates following the President's directive which targets stunting prevalence by 2024 of 14%.

The main goal of the policy to accelerate stunting reduction coordinated by TPPS and assisted by several related agencies is to accelerate stunting alleviation and reduce the prevalence of stunting in Gunungsitoli City. Another purpose of the formation of the Stunting Reduction Acceleration Team (TPPS) in Gunungsitoli City is to increase the effectiveness of stunting reduction efforts in the region. TPPS serves as a cross-sectoral coordination forum to develop, implement, and evaluate programs related to improving nutrition, maternal and child health, sanitation, and public education on the importance of stunting prevention. With the TPPS, it is hoped that the synergy between various agencies and stakeholders can be strengthened, so that the interventions carried out are more targeted, more targeted, and

sustainable. In addition, TPPS also aims to periodically monitor the achievement of stunting reduction targets and identify obstacles faced in the field, so that policy adjustments can be made quickly and effectively.

The Gunungsitoli City Government has launched a stunting reduction acceleration program coordinated by the TPPS Team in 2023 as an effort to improve the quality of life of the community. However, if this program is not understood and implemented properly, there may be several negative impacts that hinder efforts to reduce stunting in Gunungsitoli City.

First, it is in the form of people's dependence on government assistance without accompanying consistent behavior change, which can ultimately hinder efforts to improve nutrition and health independently in the future. This dependence can occur if people rely solely on food assistance or nutritional supplies from government programs, without taking the initiative to adopt a healthy lifestyle or practice good nutritional behavior independently. This condition can make people passive and less proactive in maintaining the health and nutrition of their families so that after the program is over, they return to old habits that do not improve their nutritional and health status.

Second, the ineffectiveness of the program in achieving the stunting reduction target is caused by the uneven distribution of assistance. This distribution imbalance can occur if aid is only concentrated in certain areas or community groups, while other regions or groups are underserved. This can lead to inequalities in access to health and nutrition services, so the benefits of these programs are not felt in the same way by the entire population in need.

Third, one of the reasons why stunting reduction programs are not successful is the lack of public awareness about the importance of stunting prevention. As a result, the community becomes less active in health programs and does not implement preventive measures, so the problem of stunting remains.

The policy program to accelerate stunting reduction in Gunungsitoli City is a breakthrough where the policy in the form of this program aims to suppress and to work together with cross-sectoral organizations and regional apparatus organizations in the form of related agencies such as the health office, education, P5A, social, law, food security, and agriculture, as well as health institutions such as health centers and posyandu that are members of the TPPS team or the stunting reduction acceleration team in Gunungsitoli City.

The policy of the stunting reduction acceleration program that will begin to be implemented in 2023 will be a study of the evaluation of the policy to accelerate the stunting reduction in Gunungsitoli City seen from the aspects of input, process, and output or output, and finally the impact on community members.

Evaluation of Policies to Accelerate Stunting Reduction in Gunungsitoli City

Evaluation is seen from the activity of assessing an activity in the form of activities, programs, or policies that are still being formulated, are being implemented, or have been implemented. In this case, when conducting an assessment, it must be free from an intervention so that the results are more objective.

The research on the evaluation of policies to accelerate stunting reduction will use the Dunn algorithm (Handoyo, 2012) which has outlined several related indicators to measure the level of success of government policies. There are six main indicators in looking at the process of evaluating policies to accelerate the stunting reduction in Gunungsitoli City, namely effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, leveling, responsiveness, and accuracy (Handoyo, 2012).

Effectiveness

Effectiveness, according to Dunn, is related to whether the desired results have been achieved. In the sense that the measure of effectiveness is a standard that will be met regarding the goals and objectives to be achieved. The research conducted by this researcher shows that there is a decrease in the prevalence of stunting so the target of this policy has been successfully achieved based on the goal of accelerating the stunting reduction policy within the scope of Gunungsitoli City. Where based on data collected by researchers, there was a decrease in the number of stunting cases, wherein the first semester of 2022 there were 639 cases and there was a decrease in the second semester of 2022, namely 620 cases, then in 2023 in the first semester of stunting cases was at 600 cases and in the second semester of 2023 there were 580 stunting cases. Data on stunting cases in Gunungsitoli City in the period 2022-2023 has decreased, although slowly but it can be said to be quite good.

Another effectiveness can be seen from the implementation of specific and sensitive nutrition interventions, where specific nutritional interventions include supplemental feeding (PMT), and administration of blood supplement tablets for adolescents, women of

childbearing age (WUS), and pregnant women. Provision of nutrition management, monitoring and promotion of growth, counseling, and promotion of breastfeeding counseling. Meanwhile, sensitive nutrition interventions include water adequacy and sanitation adequacy, nutrition and health services, and access to food and nutrition.

The cross-sectoral action and regional apparatus organizations that carry out what is called stunting crumbs, stunting stunting crumbs is one of the meetings held to discuss and determine commitments in stunting prevention and handling. This stunting ban has come into effect at the city, sub-district, sub-district and village levels, which means that integration from upstream to downstream is carried out so that efforts to accelerate stunting reduction can be done together, cross-sectorally in the form of the Gunungsitoli City government, the health office of the P5A office, the social service, the marine service, the food security and agriculture service, the education office, the PUTR office, and health institutions in the form of health centers and posyandu that participate in cross-sectoral integration and seeks to suppress the prevalence of stunting in Gunungsitoli City

Efficiency

In terms of the implementation of the policy to accelerate stunting reduction, if you look at it again, the indicators of efficiency have not been optimally implemented in the form of the implementation of the policies that have been proclaimed. To achieve the success and sustainability of this policy to accelerate stunting reduction, the solution to problems must be carried out quickly and on time, both related to planning and technically in the field. There are still several problems, namely delays in the delivery of additional meals and assistance for families and toddlers affected by stunting on average from low-economic communities, which comes from the regional revenue and expenditure budget (APBD) and has been allocated to activities to accelerate stunting reduction as part of the commitment of the Gunungsitoli City government. However, APBD funds as one of the sources of funding in this policy program are not optimal to cover all programs and policies, due to the limitations of the APBD budget in executing policies and programs to accelerate stunting reduction as a whole.

Adequacy

The adequacy indicator in the Dunn evaluation model refers to the extent to which the implemented policies or programs have been able to provide adequate solutions to achieve the expected goals. In the context of evaluating policies to accelerate the stunting reduction in Gunungsitoli City, this adequacy indicator measures whether the programs implemented, such as the provision of nutritious food, increasing access to services and health workers, and nutrition education programs, are sufficient to significantly reduce the stunting rate.

The provision of nutritious food to stunted toddlers is still limited to those recorded and not comprehensive, whereas the provision of nutritious food and additional food is a program that can be said to be good so that in the future it will continue to be consistent and gradual considering that the available budget is also limited. To ensure that the policy has been implemented well, it is the responsibility of the policy implementer to carry out the supervisory function so that the program in the form of assistance provided can be on target and target people affected by stunting. In the report of the Gunungsitoli City Stunting Reduction Acceleration Team (TPPS) in the second semester (July – December 2023), which became an obstacle in the implementation of various policy programs to accelerate stunting reduction, namely, the budget that is still limited in the process of implementing activities, so that some programs from the policies that have been launched are not effective in their implementation.

Alignment

Equalization means the distribution of benefits to the targeted groups fairly and equitably, based on research, the results of the implementation of the policy to accelerate stunting reduction in Gunungsitoli City through TPPS or the stunting reduction acceleration team consisting of several agencies carrying out coaching and socialization to at-risk families and the wider community about stunting and its impacts, the provision of supplementary food (PMT), socialization of clean and healthy living, and the provision of compensation to families and toddlers who experience stunting. Another thing of concern is that there are still toddlers with stunting and their families who still do not have access to assistance to accelerate stunting treatment due to budget limitations and environmental or terrain

conditions to reach the youth and their families. Although the leveling in general has not yet been achieved, by prioritizing those who are more vulnerable or in need of handling, it is hoped that in the next period, it can be more evenly distributed and can reach all. In this case, there is a possibility of jealousy between the community and parents of children under five who are stunted in terms of receiving assistance due to limitations in terms of budget from the government.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness is one of the indicators according to Dunn, namely the extent to which a policy can meet the needs, preferences, or values of certain groups of people. This study shows that in the implementation of the policy to accelerate stunting reduction in Gunungsitoli City, there is support from the government and the community as a response to the success of the policy to accelerate stunting reduction which has an impact on the community in general. In the implementation of this policy, all parties who are members of TPPS include the health office, the education office, the social service, the marine service, the food security and agriculture service, the P5A office, and Bappelitbang or the regional development planning, research and development agency as well as basic health institutions for the community such as health centers to make responsive and massive efforts related to socialization of the dangers of stunting, accommodating aspirations, conducting data collection and surveys, as well as carrying out procedures in handling stunting cases by paying attention to guidelines and instructions.

The responsiveness carried out by the Gunungsitoli City government through the stunting reduction acceleration team shows that the government is present in the community, and implements policies in the form of programs for the community, especially for toddlers with stunting. The tendency of responses from the community varies, some are well received and it is not uncommon for there to be segments of society that tend to be indifferent or reject all information and socialization about stunting so that with this attitude, the complexity in understanding and responding to the community involved in this stunting reduction acceleration program. The role of the government is needed in providing education and socialization gradually and slowly so that the community is more aware and pays attention to the condition of the family and it is hoped that the level of public awareness can continue

to increase about the dangers of stunting. It is hoped that existing programs and policies will continue to be improved to adapt to the conditions of the pluralistic community.

Accuracy

According to Dunn's evaluation model, the right indicator in policy evaluation refers to the extent to which a policy or program has been designed and implemented following the stated objectives. In the context of evaluating the policy to accelerate the stunting reduction in Gunungsitoli City, the goal is to find out whether the intervention has been effective in targeting the right target groups, such as pregnant women, young children, and other high-risk families. This evaluation includes an analysis of the selection of the most appropriate intervention method, effective resource allocation, and program adaptation to the local needs and characteristics of the Gunungsitoli community.

Several factors that make the accuracy indicator still not achieve the desired results, namely programs that are not launched at strategic times or that do not take into account the situation and conditions of local communities can reduce their effectiveness where a short time with many actions related to accelerating stunting reduction makes programs and policies ineffective in their implementation. Another thing, namely the socialization and education methods used are sometimes inappropriate or ineffective, for example, the health messages conveyed are too complex or not in accordance with the daily experience of the local community, so the impact on people's behavior in terms of food, sanitation, and access to health services may not be optimal where most of these stunting cases depart from the middle to lower economic communities and are spread across various remote villages that are still thick with customs and customs.

Economic Challenges in Handling Stunting

Poverty and Limited Access to Nutrition

Poverty and limited access to nutrition are two main factors that affect the high stunting rate in Gunungsitoli City. Poor families tend to have low incomes, which limits their ability to buy nutritious foods such as animal protein, fruits, and vegetables. As a result, children's diets often consist of cheap carbohydrates and are poor in nutrients, leading to chronic malnutrition. In addition, poverty is usually accompanied by a low level of education, including knowledge of the importance of a balanced diet. Many parents in Gunungsitoli do

not fully understand the critical nutritional needs of children in the first thousand days of their lives.

Poverty also limits access to adequate health services, such as vaccinations, nutrition checks, and early treatment. Children from poor families often do not receive the health care necessary to prevent or treat health problems that can worsen stunting. In addition, the inability to access nutritious food is complicated by geographical issues. Many areas of Gunungsitoli are isolated and difficult to access, making the distribution of nutritious food uneven and food prices skyrocketing, especially for products with high nutritional value. This has led people to rely more on local food products, which are less varied, and often lack the protein and micronutrients that children need to grow. The combination of poverty, lack of nutrition education, and limited access to food exacerbates the risk of stunting in Gunungsitoli, creating a vicious circle that is difficult to break without appropriate and sustainable economic policy intervention.

Dependence on External Resources

Dependence on external resources is one of the main challenges in managing stunting in Gunungsitoli City. These external resources include funding allocation from the central government, assistance from international organizations, and support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on health and nutrition issues. While this assistance is important to support various stunting reduction programs, over-reliance poses several problems. First, funding from the central government is often unstable and depends on changing national policy priorities. When central government priorities change, budget allocations for regional stunting programs may decrease, disrupting the sustainability of existing programs. In addition, donor programs from international organizations often have a limited duration, so at the end of the assistance period, local governments often find it difficult to continue the program due to regional budget limitations.

In addition, this dependence also affects the way funds are allocated and the implementation of the program. Many programs designed by external donors do not always fit the local context of the city of Gunungsitoli. Therefore, these programs are less effective in addressing the root of the stunting problem in the region. For example, programs designed nationally or internationally often ignore local factors such as culture, eating habits, and

geographic accessibility. This makes the implementation of the program less than optimal. On the other hand, dependence on external funds also limits the ability of local governments to innovate and adapt to regional needs. They tend to be related to protocols and targets set by donors, rather than developing more contextual and sustainable solutions.

Long-Term Economic Impact of Stunting in Gunungsitoli

The long-term economic impact of stunting in Gunungsitoli creates a severe chain effect, affecting individuals, families, and the local economy as a whole. At the individual level, stunted children often face delays in physical and cognitive development, which affects their ability to learn in school. This results in low educational performance and inadequate skills when entering the labor market. Stunted people tend to have more limited opportunities to get quality, high-paying jobs, which reduces their earning potential in the future and increases the risk of long-term poverty. This limited productivity capacity not only has an impact on individuals but also contributes to a decrease in labor productivity throughout Gunungsitoli, which has a negative impact on regional economic growth.

From the perspective of the local economy, stunting causes a decline in the quality of the workforce, which hampers the potential for economic growth and industrial development of Gunungsitoli. Individuals with less than-optimal skills contribute to lower economic output, which can slow down the progress of regional economic development. This lack of investment in human capacity building means that the local economy cannot develop optimally, thus hindering Gunungsitoli's competitiveness in attracting investment and creating new jobs.

Stunting also adds to the burden on the regional health system. Stunted children often require more frequent and intensive medical care, resulting in high health costs. This burdens the regional health budget, reducing the allocation of funds for other health programs that can improve the quality of life of the community. Additional costs to treat chronic diseases associated with stunting in adulthood, such as diabetes and heart disease, increase the financial burden on families and the healthcare system and reduce the budget that could be used for infrastructure development and other community services.

In addition, stunting contributes to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Stunted children tend to grow up to be low-income adults, who then have children with the same risk

of stunting. This cycle hampers poverty eradication efforts in Gunungsitoli and slows down socio-economic progress. An increase in the number of economically disadvantaged people reduces the potential for economic growth and affects social stability in the region.

Overall, the long-term economic impact of stunting in Gunungsitoli shows that stunting control is not only a health problem but also an economic problem that requires a comprehensive response. Efforts to reduce stunting must involve strategies focused on improving education, access to health and infrastructure, and more effective fiscal planning, to break the cycle of poverty and promote more inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the region.

CONCLUSION

Stunting is a condition of developmental disorders in children caused by lack of nutrition or nutrition, poor maternal conditions during pregnancy, and hygiene factors such as poor sanitation and access to water. The condition of stunting cases in Gunungsitoli City, which is one of the regions in North Sumatra Province, based on the evaluation carried out is still not optimal and is running well. Based on the six Dunn evaluation indicators, namely effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, alignment, responsiveness, and accuracy. Where in the implementation of policies and programs there are still many things that make this condition not optimal, including the APBD budget shown for handling stunting reduction is still limited, access to reach several stunting cases spread across various regions is not optimal due to access and demographic factors, another thing is that the socialization carried out is still too complex for the community so that the delivery of information through socialization has not been effective. In addition, the short implementation time sometimes still cannot accommodate the implementation of the acceleration of stunting reduction, which is a long series so that the achievement of several programs is still not effectively implemented.

Economic challenges in handling stunting in the form of poverty and limited access to nutrition, dependence on external resources, and long-term economic impacts on stunting in Gunungsitoli City are some of the challenges that must be solved as soon as possible so that in accelerating the handling of stunting it is hoped that it can run well and the prevalence

of stunting can decrease so that Gunungsitoli City is free from stunting and produces the next generation a productive and competitive nation.

Improvement of intervention policies and strategies, more effective budget allocation, more intense integration between regional apparatus organizations or related agencies, and the community is more involved in socializing about the dangers of stunting. The above is an implication for this research so that in the future there will be meaningful changes, and the prevalence rate expected in 2024 by the government of 14% can be achieved.

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