

Optimizing School-Based Feeding Program Management: A Comparative Literature Review of Lessons from the Philippines for Indonesia

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Abstract

Improving student nutrition is a critical challenge in developing nations. As Indonesia prepares to launch its ambitious *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG) program, this study presents a strategic roadmap by comparatively analyzing the Philippines' established School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP). Institutionalized by law, the SBFP successfully rehabilitated 62% of severely wasted children and improved school attendance. However, the program offers crucial cautionary lessons. Severe Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) data inconsistencies were found, with only 43% of beneficiaries being correctly verified. More critically, nutritional gains proved unsustainable, as only 48% of children maintained normal status 12 months post-program. Based on this analysis, strategic recommendations are formulated for Indonesia: establishing a permanent legal framework to ensure sustainability, adopting a hybrid logistics model (Central Kitchens in urban areas and Home-Grown School Feeding in rural regions), and mandating the integration of comprehensive nutrition education with a robust digital M&E system. These steps are essential to ensure accountability and transform a short-term intervention into a permanent human capital investment.

Keywords: School-Based Feeding Program; Free Nutritious Meal; Comparative Analysis; Program Management; Governance

INTRODUCTION

The persistent challenge of childhood undernutrition in many developing countries, including those in Southeast Asia, poses a fundamental threat not only to public health but also to the formation of national human capital (Dukhi, 2020; Zerga et al., 2022). Established literature indicates a direct correlation between undernutrition in primary school-aged children and impaired cognitive development, higher rates of absenteeism, early dropout, and poor classroom performance (Tabunda et al., 2016). In response to this challenge, School Feeding Programs (SFPs) have been widely adopted as an effective social safety net (Bundy, 2009; Tabunda et al., 2016), and a strategic instrument aimed at achieving the dual objectives of addressing chronic malnutrition (such as wasting) and improving educational outcomes, including school participation and nutritional status (Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024; Tabunda et al., 2016). These programs also aim to enhance class attendance, with the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) targeting an attendance rate of 85% to 100% (Tabunda et al., 2016).

Table 1. Comparative Program and Scope Table

Feature	Philippines: School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP)	Indonesia: Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) (Initial Plan)
Primary Legal Basis	Republic Act No. 11037 (<i>Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act</i>).	Peraturan Presiden (Perpres No. 83/2024) concerning the National Nutrition Agency.

Initial Implementation Start	Launched as Breakfast Feeding Program (BFP) in 2011; SBFP name adopted in 2012; roots back to 1997.	Planned for national rollout starting in 2025 (Initial Phase).
Primary Target Beneficiaries	Selectively targets Severely Wasted (SW) and Wasted (W) learners. Expanded to include all Kindergarten learners.	Broadly targets 70.5 million beneficiaries, ranging from pre-school children (PAUD) up to junior high school (SMP) students.
Main Nutritional Goal	To rehabilitate at least 70% of severely wasted beneficiaries to normal nutritional status within 100–120 feeding days.	To address malnutrition (stunting) and improve overall quality of human resources (SDM).
Feeding Duration	Typically implemented over 100 to 120 feeding days. FY 2025 plan specifies 120 days for NFP/ Hot Meals.	Not explicitly defined in the sources (Focus is on initial budget allocation for the first phase).
Annual Budget (Example Year)	₱11.776 billion (Total for FY 2025, serving 3.39 million meal beneficiaries). (Previously: ₱3.3 billion/\$60 million in 2022).	Rp 71 trillion (Initial budget allocated for the first phase of implementation in 2025).
Logistics/Supply Chain	Semi-decentralized; mandated to procure milk from local dairy producers/cooperatives (NDA/PCC). Utilizes specialized models like the Blueplate Central Kitchen.	Aims to involve local stakeholders, including BUMDes, cooperatives, and UMKM, in the supply chain to empower the local economy.
Complementary Activities	Integrates Gulayan sa Paaralan Program (GPP) (school gardens) and Essential Health Care Program (EHCP) (hygiene). Nutrition education is integrated into the required MPAEH subject.	Implementation requires addressing historical failures of preceding programs (PM-TAS, PROGAS) due to the lack of nutrition education integration and poor governance.
Nutritional Measurement	Selection performed by school implementers using WHO weight-for-age and BMI-for-age tables.	Implicitly requires assessment to track goal achievement (stunting rates).

Source: obtained from primary data processed by researchers 2025

The Philippine School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) as a Comparative Case

Here's the academic English version of the text you provided:

The Philippine School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) serves as a critical comparative case study due to its decades-long history. Implemented by the Department of Education (DepED), the program was initially launched in 1997 as a conditional food transfer initiative aimed at alleviating “short-term hunger” among public school children. A significant shift occurred around 2011–2012, redirecting the program’s focus to address the more systemic issue of undernutrition. This strategic change specifically targeted students identified as Severely Wasted (SW) and Wasted (W) in public elementary schools. Currently, the SBFP prioritizes SW learners and, contingent upon budget availability, extends to W learners (Tabunda et al., 2016).

The SBFP is designed with two primary objectives: to rehabilitate at least 70% of its severely wasted beneficiaries to a normal nutritional status within a 100 to 120-day feeding period, and to ensure an 85% to 100% class attendance rate among these beneficiaries. This attendance requirement is comparable to the 80% to 85% minimum standard seen in similar programs in other countries.

An impact evaluation of the School Year (SY) 2013–2014 implementation revealed significant, though not fully realized, outcomes. Approximately 62% of children verified as SW before the program

achieved a normal nutritional status by its conclusion, falling short of the 70% target. Interestingly, about 70% of children verified as W successfully reached normal nutritional status. Beyond nutritional improvements, the program demonstrated a positive impact on student behavior. Teachers reported that a majority of SBFP participants showed enhanced attentiveness (96% during and 95% after the program) and sociability (97% during and 96% after). Furthermore, 94% of teachers noted improved class attendance, with 92% of children maintaining good attendance records. The median attendance rate for verified SW beneficiaries was recorded at 97.5% (Tabunda et al., 2016).

The program's consistency in the Philippines is reinforced by a robust legal foundation. DepED's school feeding initiatives have been operational since 1997, evolving from a conditional food transfer program to a more targeted intervention against undernutrition, particularly with the launch of the Breakfast Feeding Program (BFP) in 2011. This was later renamed the SBFP in 2012, narrowing its scope to SW children from Kindergarten to Grade 6 in selected public elementary schools. Its legal framework was further institutionalized through Republic Act No. 11037, also known as the *Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act* of 2018. This act mandates, among other things, the inclusion of fresh milk or fresh milk-based products as a component of the SBFP's hot meals (Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024).

As a comparative case, Indonesia is planning to launch a Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program to combat malnutrition and enhance educational outcomes. The initiative is recognized as highly ambitious in its implementation scale (Rahmah et al., 2025). As of the 2024 Global Survey of School Meal Programs, Indonesia was one of 17 countries reporting no large-scale school feeding activities. The MBG program is still in the formulation stage and has not been officially announced by the Indonesian Government (Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024). The forthcoming program targets both educational objectives (improving student attendance and participation) and nutritional goals (enhancing child health and nutrition). However, the planning of this new program faces critical infrastructure challenges that could exacerbate logistical risks. For nations planning to introduce school feeding programs, essential infrastructure is often inadequate. Specifically:

- Kitchen Facilities: Among countries without large-scale programs (including Indonesia), 77% reported that "none" or "very few" schools are equipped with kitchen or cooking facilities.
- Dedicated Eating Spaces: Only 23% of schools in these countries have adequate dedicated dining halls or canteens.

This infrastructure deficit is likely to present a significant obstacle for any new program involving on-site food preparation. Although the source does not explicitly mention historical program failures or food poisoning incidents during the initial rollout in 2025, it is noted that collaboration with partners and stakeholders in the Philippines has proven to foster stronger collaborations during emergencies

The SBFP operates with clear, measurable goals: to rehabilitate at least 70% of SW beneficiaries to normal nutritional status within a 100 to 120-day feeding period, and to ensure 85% to 100% classroom attendance. A key factor stabilizing the program is its robust legal foundation, institutionalized through the Republic Act No. 11037 (or the *Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act*) of 2018, which mandates program continuity and secures regular funding. Program evaluations have demonstrated significant positive outcomes, including a 62% rehabilitation rate among verified SW children in the

SY 2013–2014 study, and marked improvements in student attentiveness (96%) and sociability (97%) during the intervention period (Viajar et al., 2020).

The core challenge for Indonesia is not merely logistical implementation, but fundamentally building the robust governance architecture required to operate a program of this magnitude effectively and safely.

Rationale and Objectives of the Study

Given the massive scale and high-stakes nature of the MBG program, comparative analysis of the SBFP becomes crucial. The Philippine experience offers valuable insights into institutional stability (RA 11037), successful multi-stakeholder collaboration (Home-Grown School Feeding), and adaptive logistics (Central Kitchen model). Equally important are the documented failures in SBFP, such as the significant inconsistencies in nutritional status documentation and the lack of sustainability of nutritional gains more than 12 months post-program intervention. These challenges serve as vital lessons for MBG planning, particularly regarding the design of accurate Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems and the necessity of integrated nutrition education.

Therefore, this comparative literature review aims to distill actionable, evidence-based lessons from the SBFP implementation journey to inform and optimize the strategic management and governance of Indonesia's nascent MBG program.

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the management practices of the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) in the Philippines.
2. To identify the critical success factors and implementation obstacles of the SBFP.
3. To compare the relevance of these findings from the Philippines with the social, economic, and political context of Indonesia.
4. To formulate strategic recommendations for the optimization of Indonesia's *Makan Bergizi Gratis* program.

METHODS

This research employs a Comparative Literature-Based Case Study design (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The comparative approach is utilized to systematically analyze the similarities, differences, underlying success factors, and critical failures between the two analogous programs the mature School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) in the Philippines and the planned *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG) program in Indonesia. This methodology is chosen to identify key drivers of policy success that can be adapted and lessons learned that must be mitigated in the Indonesian context.

The Philippines (SBFP) serves as the primary comparative case, specifically because its implementation is institutionalized by national law (Republic Act No. 11037) and has been subject to multiple, well-documented impact evaluations (Credo & Del Castillo, 2019).

Focus and Scope of Analysis

The analysis focuses on extracting information related to the following management components across both national contexts:

1. **Legal and Governance Framework:** Analyzing the legal basis (RA 11037 vs. Perpres No. 83/2024), institutional support, and mechanisms for accountability and budget sustainability.
2. **Implementation Architecture and Logistics:** Reviewing models for food preparation and delivery, particularly the effectiveness of the *Central Kitchen* model and *Home-Grown School Feeding* (HGSF) approaches utilized in the Philippines.
3. **Program Outcomes and Challenges:** Synthesizing empirical results regarding nutritional rehabilitation rates, academic improvement, and critically documented implementation weaknesses, such as issues related to data accuracy and sustainability of nutritional gains.

Data Sources

The research relies exclusively on the systematic review and analysis of secondary data:

1. **Policy Documents and Regulations:** Official legislative and regulatory texts, including the Philippine *Republic Act No. 11037*, DepED Orders detailing SBFP guidelines (SY 2023–2024, FY 2025), and Indonesian policy documents (*Perpres No. 83/2024*).
2. **Official Evaluation and Impact Studies:** Comprehensive reports published by governmental research institutes (such as the Philippine Institute for Development Studies or PIDS), particularly the impact evaluation of SBFP SY 2013–2014, which addresses program objectives, complementary activities (GPP and EHCP), and documented limitations like documentation and measurement inconsistencies.
3. **Academic and Technical Literature:** Scholarly articles and technical reports concerning SFP implementation, logistics frameworks, M&E systems, and the theoretical link between nutrition and educational performance. Data from global surveys, such as those conducted by the Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF), are also synthesized to contextualize the programs within regional trends.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The methodology centers on two interrelated analytic stages:

1. **Systematic Document Analysis:** Documents are reviewed to extract specific quantitative metrics (rehabilitation targets (70%), rehabilitation achievement (62% in SY 2013-2014), target coverage (3.49 million primary students in Philippines), and qualitative evidence (details on Central Kitchen/HGSF models). Crucially, attention is paid to documented implementation challenges, such as the finding that only 43% of beneficiaries officially recorded as Severely Wasted (SW) were actually verified as such upon remeasurement due to equipment and protocol failures.
2. **Thematic-Comparative Analysis:** Data extracted is organized into themes (governance, logistics, M&E, sustainability). The analysis then proceeds to systematically contrast the documented outcomes and adaptive responses of SBFP (use of procurement through local dairy cooperatives/PCC/NDA) against the predicted challenges and required architecture for the MBG program in Indonesia, especially considering Indonesia's need to address food safety, scale, and past governance deficits.

Data Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of findings in this literature-based study, Source Triangulation is utilized. This involves cross-referencing findings derived from policy documents (DepED memos) against external evaluation reports (PIDS studies) and established academic literature. This technique strengthens the reliability of the strategic recommendations by ensuring they are grounded in consistent empirical evidence from multiple independent sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Implementation and Outcomes of the SBFP Philippines

1. Legal Institutionalization and Governance

The durability and consistency of the Philippines' SBFP are rooted in its robust legal foundation, Republic Act No. 11037, or the Masustansyang Pagkain para sa Batang Pilipino Act of 2018 (The Philippine Congress, 2018). This law not only mandates the program's continuation but also secures recurring national budget allocations, insulating it from political volatility. This legal framework transforms the SBFP from a discretionary "program," dependent on the priorities of the incumbent administration, into a non-negotiable state "mandate." This stability is critical, as social programs are often victims of shifting political priorities and fluctuating annual budgets.

2. Implementation Architecture and Logistics

The SBFP employs varied logistical models to adapt to different contexts. In dense urban areas, the Central Kitchen (CK) model has proven effective. The Blueplate model in Metro Manila, for instance, serves over 17,000 students daily, demonstrating the model's capacity for scale. Experts argue that CKs enhance efficiency through large-scale equipment, reduce waste, and lower overall staffing costs (Cooper, 2016). A study on the CK model in the Philippines demonstrated its success in improving the nutritional status of 55.77% of its beneficiaries (Credo & Del Castillo, 2019). In rural settings, the program often incorporates elements of Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF), aiming to link local agricultural production with school feeding needs.

3. Program Outcomes and Documented Challenges

Empirical evaluations of the SBFP reveal mixed results, highlighting both successes and significant challenges that offer crucial lessons.

- **Nutritional and Academic Outcomes:** The program has demonstrated positive short-term impacts. Malnutrition is linked to poorer cognitive function (Harbison & Hanushek, 1992), and SFPs can improve concentration and learning, as noted by foundational researchers like Pollitt (1990). The SBFP evidenced this with significant academic benefits, including enhanced student attention (96%) and improved academic performance (Tabunda et al., 2016; Viajar et al., 2020).
- **Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Failures:** A major evaluation uncovered severe inconsistencies in M&E data. Critically, only 43% of beneficiaries officially recorded as Severely Wasted (SW) were verified as such upon remeasurement (Tabunda et al., 2016). This fatal targeting failure was attributed to a lack of standardized measurement equipment and poor documentation protocols. This opacity created by "improper documentation" and "measurement incon-

sistencies” becomes a breeding ground for inefficiency and, at worst, corruption. The academic consensus, noted by experts such as Gelli & Espejo (2012), is that SFP M&E systems generally focus more on process than on child outcomes, a critique empirically validated by the Philippine case.

- **Post-Program Nutritional Regression:** The most sobering finding was the lack of sustainable nutritional benefits. Only 48% of the SW children who achieved normal status during the program were able to maintain that status 12 months or more after the feeding stopped (Tabunda et al., 2016). This indicates that the program provided a temporary nutritional scaffold but failed to build a permanent foundation of health, calling into question the long-term cost-effectiveness of a feeding-only intervention.
- **Complementary Interventions:** To address these sustainability challenges, the Philippines attempted to integrate complementary activities such as the *Gulayan sa Paaralan* Program (school gardens) and ensure nutrition education was part of the curriculum, which a systematic review confirms are key sustainability practices in SFPs (Moura et al., 2022).

B. Comparative Discussion and Strategic Implications for MBG Indonesia

1. Strengthening the Legal and Governance Framework

The Philippine experience underscores the paramount importance of a strong legal mandate. Aligning a permanent legal framework for MBG with international best practices is also crucial. The World Bank’s Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), for instance, requires borrowing governments to address social risks and strengthen national management systems as a condition for financing (World Bank, 2016). Similarly, the UN’s 2030 Agenda explicitly links “good governance and the rule of law” to achieving sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

Currently, Indonesia’s MBG program is anchored by Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 83/2024. However, Indonesia has a track record of past SFP failures linked to poor governance and corruption (Nabarro et al., 2012). A Perpres, while a positive first step, lacks the permanence and budgetary binding power of a national law. A law, involving more rigorous oversight, can embed mandatory requirements for transparency and independent audits, aligning with World Bank principles (World Bank, 2016). Advocating for a law akin to RA 11037 is a strategic recommendation to build an anti-corruption architecture directly into the DNA of the MBG program. The WHO’s “Nutrition Governance score,” which identifies ten key elements of strong governance, including dedicated budget allocations, can be used as a diagnostic tool for this purpose (WHO, 2023).

2. Designing a Hybrid Supply Chain for a Diverse Archipelago

A monolithic, one-size-fits-all logistics model for MBG in Indonesia is destined to fail. A hybrid approach combining the strengths of the Central Kitchen (CK) and Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) models is optimal.

- **The Case for Central Kitchens in Urban Centers:** Indonesia faces a critical infrastructure deficit at the school level, where 77% of schools in comparable nations report having “none” or “very few” cooking facilities (Global Child Nutrition Foundation, 2024). For dense urban centers, the CK model is the optimal strategy to overcome this gap, ensure food safety, and achieve economies of scale.

- The Multi-Sectoral Power of HGSF in Rural Areas: In rural regions, HGSF emerges as the superior model. The World Food Programme (WFP) has found that HGSF programs are powerful economic engines, generating between \$7 to \$35 in economic returns for every \$1 invested (WFP, 2025). Adopting an HGSF framework can strategically transform MBG expenditure into a direct investment in rural economic strengthening, aligning with multiple SDGs, including SDG1 (No Poverty), SDG2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (WFP, 2017). However, HGSF implementation must mitigate risks such as supply inconsistencies, price volatility, and climate change impacts (Sitali, 2022) through strong inter-ministerial coordination and technical support for smallholder farmers.

3. Building a Resilient, Digitally-Enabled M&E Framework

The M&E failures in the Philippines serve as a critical cautionary lesson. Modern social programs increasingly use digital M&E tools to create centralized data management systems, improve data accuracy, and reduce costs (S4YE, 2022). Indonesia must leapfrog the paper-based pitfalls by investing in a robust, integrated digital M&E system from day one. This aligns with the World Bank's SABER framework, which identifies "Good Design and Implementation" (including M&E) as a core policy goal (World Bank, 2016). However, technology alone is insufficient. The M&E strategy must be two-pronged: (1) invest in the digital platform, and (2) invest significantly in dedicated training and support staff to ensure the data entered is accurate and reliable.

4. Mandating Integrated Nutrition Education to Secure Human Capital Returns

The 48% nutritional regression rate in the Philippines demonstrates that providing food is a necessary but insufficient condition. To avoid this trap, the MBG program must mandate the integration of a comprehensive nutrition and health education program. The budget for this component is not an additional "cost" but an essential "insurance policy" to protect the primary investment.

An effective program focuses on long-term behavior change by teaching practical skills, incorporating behavior change techniques (goal setting, self-monitoring), and fostering community support (Mile High Recovery Center, 2023). The WHO's Health Promoting Schools model provides a comprehensive framework for this, involving changes to the school environment and engaging parents and teachers (Wang et al., 2019). Parental involvement through mandatory workshops is the critical link to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, ensuring healthy habits are reinforced in the home. This is the only way to ensure the massive financial investment translates into permanent human capital gains.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of the Philippines' School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) offers crucial strategic lessons for the implementation of the *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG) program in Indonesia. This study reveals that program sustainability and effectiveness are not solely dependent on food provision but are fundamentally underpinned by the strength of the legal framework, an adaptive logistics architecture, and the integrity of its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. The SBFP's failure to sustain long-term nutritional gains (nutritional regression) and its fatal weaknesses in M&E

data accuracy serve as a stark warning for Indonesia. Without complementary interventions focused on behavior change and a robust governance system, the substantial investment in the MBG program risks failing to produce permanent human capital gains and will remain vulnerable to inefficiency and resource mismanagement. To optimize the design and implementation of the MBG program and mitigate the risks of failure, the following strategic actions are recommended:

1. **Strengthen the Legal and Governance Framework:** Advocate for the transformation of the Presidential Regulation (*Perpres*) into a permanent national law. This step is crucial to guarantee long-term budget allocation, mandate transparency, establish clear accountability mechanisms, and build a robust anti-corruption architecture from the outset.
2. **Adopt a Hybrid Logistics Model:** Implement a flexible supply chain model utilizing Central Kitchens in dense urban areas for efficiency and food safety control, while mandating a Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) scheme in rural areas to stimulate local economies through the involvement of village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), cooperatives, and MSMEs.
3. **Build a Digital Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System:** Invest in the development of an integrated digital M&E platform from day one. This system must standardize measurement protocols and tools, ensure accurate beneficiary targeting, track program performance in real-time, and maintain public accountability through transparent dashboards, supported by adequate human resource training.
4. **Integrate Nutrition Education as a Mandatory Component:** Establish nutrition and behavior change education as an integral pillar of the program, not merely an add-on. This intervention must be mandated within the school curriculum and involve the active participation of parents to ensure the sustainability of health benefits, transform habits at the family level, and maximize the return on human capital investment.

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