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From Village Funds To Frontline Services: Challenges in Implementing the Stunting Policy In Tingkohubu Village

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Article Information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Accepted 24-05-2026 Fixed 26-05-2026 Approved 31-05-2026 Keywords: <i>Village Fund; Policy Implementation; Stunting Reduction; Policy-System Mismatch</i></p>	<p>Abstract: This study examines how Village Fund implementation shapes stunting reduction outcomes at the village level in Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach in Tingkohubu Village, the research explores four dimensions of policy implementation: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations and analyzed using a mechanism-based approach. The findings indicate that although the Village Fund supports key interventions such as Posyandu services, supplementary feeding, and health education, implementation remains uneven. Communication is largely administrative rather than transformative, resources are available but inadequately distributed, implementers are committed but motivated, and bureaucratic structures are formally established but inconsistently applied. These conditions create a policy-system mismatch, where policy design is not fully aligned with local implementation capacity. This study contributes by demonstrating that stunting reduction outcomes are shaped not only by resource availability but also by the configuration of implementation processes at the frontline service level.</p>

Introduction

Why do stunting reduction policies continue to produce inequitable results despite the failure of fiscal resources and multisectoral interventions to reach the village level? This question is a central conundrum in contemporary public administration, particularly in the context of developing country governance, where policy design appears strong, yet implementation outcomes remain inconsistent. In Indonesia, this paradox is particularly evident in the case of stunting reduction, where national progress is compounded by persistent regional disparities. Although national prevalence has declined in recent years, significant variations across provinces and districts suggest that aggregate-level improvements mask deeper implementation challenges at the local level.

The public policy literature has long recognized that policy effectiveness cannot be explained solely by design or resource allocation, but by how policies are translated into practice (Hill & Hupe, 2014). In the context of stunting, these challenges are exacerbated by the multidimensional nature of the problem, encompassing not only malnutrition but also sanitation, childcare practices, access to health services, and socioeconomic conditions (Nisa et al., 2021; Rahayuwati et al., 2022). As a result, stunting is often viewed as a governance issue rather than a purely health-related one, requiring coordinated interventions across multiple sectors and levels of government.

Indonesia's policy response reflects this shift. The introduction of the Village Fund as a decentralized fiscal instrument has positioned villages as key actors in translating national stunting policies into community-based interventions. Village governments are expected to allocate funds for Posyandu services, supplementary feeding, improved sanitation, and family-level interventions, thus acting as front-line policy implementers. Empirical studies have shown that the Village Fund can strengthen community-based services and support stunting reduction efforts (Phitra et al., 2024; Jannah et al., 2025). However, evidence also suggests that the impact of the Village Fund is highly uneven, with similar levels of funding producing different outcomes across local contexts (Indra & Id, 2022).

This variation raises an important question: why do similar policy instruments produce different outcomes under comparable institutional conditions? Existing studies have attempted to answer this question through the lens of policy implementation. Research highlights the importance of communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure as key determinants of implementation success (Marhaeni et al., 2022; Sumendap et al., 2025). These studies provide valuable insights into the operational dimensions of policies, but often remain descriptive and fragmented, focusing on individual factors without fully explaining how these factors interact to shape outcomes.

At the same time, another stream of literature emphasizes the role of service quality in determining stunting outcomes. Studies show that access to services, cadre competence, and continuity of care significantly influence health-seeking behavior and nutritional outcomes (Hanum et al., 2024; Hermawan et al., 2023). From this perspective, Posyandu (Integrated Health Post) serves as a crucial service delivery platform through which policies are transformed into concrete interventions. However, this body of work tends to treat service quality as an independent variable, without explicitly linking it to the policy design and implementation process.

The coexistence of these two dimensions—policy implementation and service delivery—reveals a significant analytical gap. Policy studies often focus on explaining how programs are implemented, while service studies focus on outcomes without exploring the policy's origins. As a result, the causal chain linking policy design, implementation processes, and service outcomes remains under-theorized. This gap is particularly problematic in the context of

decentralized governance, where policy effectiveness depends on alignment between national objectives and local implementation capacity.

These insights point to the need to shift from aggregate capacity to configuration analysis. Rather than focusing on individual variables, this approach examines how various dimensions of implementation interact and align within a given context. When these dimensions are misaligned, a policy-system mismatch can arise, where policy expectations exceed the operational capacity of the implementation system (Nani et al., 2024). This mismatch can lead to partial or ineffective implementation, even when resources and formal structures are in place.

The case of Tingkohubu Village provides an important empirical setting to explore this issue. Located in an area with a relatively high and fluctuating stunting prevalence, the village operates within the same national policy framework as other villages, including access to Village Funds and participation in stunting convergence programs. However, as the findings demonstrate, the implementation of these policies exhibits uneven patterns, shaped by variations in communication, resource distribution, implementer commitment, and bureaucratic coordination. Although the Village Fund has supported key activities such as Posyandu services, supplementary feeding, and sanitation interventions, challenges remain in ensuring program consistency, data accuracy, and community participation.

These observations suggest that the effectiveness of stunting policies cannot be fully understood without examining the mechanisms by which they translate into service delivery. Specifically, this raises questions about how the configuration of implementation dimensions influences the quality of frontline services and, ultimately, stunting outcomes.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explain how and why Village Fund implementation leads to variations in service quality and stunting management outcomes at the village level. Tingkohubu Village was selected as a critical case representing the dynamics of stunting policy implementation within a multi-level governance context. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Informants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the program and included village heads and officials, Posyandu cadres, Family Development Cadres (KPM), Puskesmas health workers, hamlet heads, community leaders, and target beneficiaries, particularly pregnant women and families with young children. Data collection continued until saturation was reached. Secondary data were obtained from village policy documents, Village Fund reports, Posyandu records, and stunting-related program documents.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview, observation, and documentary data were systematically organized and categorized into key themes before being presented in thematic narratives and analytical matrices to identify relationships among policy, implementation processes, and service quality. The validity and credibility of the findings were ensured through source and method triangulation, field observations, member checking, audit trails, and peer debriefing. These strategies

strengthened the consistency, reliability, and analytical rigor of the study in explaining the mechanisms underlying stunting policy implementation at the village level.

Results and Discussion

1. Communication, Program Accuracy, and Synchronization of Village Fund Implementation

The findings indicate that communication is a crucial element in ensuring the accuracy and synchronization of Village Fund implementation for stunting reduction in Tingkohubu Village. Formal communication has been operational through coordination meetings, village deliberations, Posyandu activities, and interactions between the village government, health cadres, community leaders, and technical actors. Village officials explained that policy information is first received from the district government and then communicated to village-level actors through an internal coordination forum involving village officials, the Village Consultative Body (BPD), health cadres, and community representatives (Interview-01). This indicates that communication has served as the primary mechanism for translating national and district-level stunting policies into village-level programs.

However, the findings also revealed that the existence of communication channels does not automatically result in a shared understanding among all actors. Although village officials and cadres generally understand that Village Funds can be used to support Posyandu, supplementary feeding, health education, and family risk data collection, community understanding remains uneven. Several informants indicated that some families still interpret stunting narrowly as a matter of body size or heredity, rather than as a multidimensional issue related to nutrition, sanitation, parenting patterns, health access, and household behavior (Interview-02; Interview-05). This suggests that communication is present administratively but has not yet been fully transformative at the community behavioral level.

Communication between the village government and health practitioners also supports synchronization, particularly in activities related to Posyandu schedules, weighing, height measurements, supplementary feeding, and data reporting. Cadres stated that coordination with village government and health workers allows for more regular activities, particularly when village-level meetings are held prior to Posyandu services (Interview-03). However, coordination tends to be event-based rather than system-based. Communication is intensive before activities, but less consistent in monitoring follow-up actions for at-risk families. This pattern indicates that communication has contributed to program implementation but still faces limitations in ensuring policy fidelity. The primary weakness lies not in the lack of communication, but in the depth, continuity, and consistency of messaging. When information is not fully understood by families, the program risks being reduced to a routine administrative activity rather than a behavior change intervention. Therefore, communication in Tingkohubu Village can be understood as a partially functioning mechanism: it supports coordination between implementers but does not fully ensure shared understanding and active participation among target households.

2. Resources and Sustainability of Stunting Interventions

The second finding relates to the role of resources in sustaining the Village Fund-based stunting program. The study found that resources are available but remain uneven in terms of quantity, quality, and operational adequacy. Village Funds have been used to support Posyandu (Integrated Health Post) activities, supplementary feeding, cadre incentives, health education, data collection on at-risk families, and limited support for sanitation and clean

water. This confirms that Village Funds have become a crucial fiscal instrument for strengthening frontline stunting services in villages.

From a human resources perspective, the number of village actors involved in the stunting program is considered sufficient for basic implementation. Village officials, cadres, PKK members, and community health actors have participated in program implementation. However, informants emphasized that the quality of human resources still needs improvement, particularly in technical reporting, data management, nutrition counseling, and anthropometric measurements (Interview 01; Interview 02). This finding suggests that the problem is not simply a shortage of personnel, but rather a gap between available human resources and the technical demands of stunting interventions.

The capacity gap is particularly evident among cadres. Cadres are the primary actors who interact directly with mothers, toddlers, pregnant women, and at-risk families. Their roles include weighing, measuring, recording, counseling, and encouraging attendance at Posyandu (Integrated Health Posts). However, several informants stated that cadres still need further training to improve service accuracy, particularly in data measurement and reporting procedures (Interview 04). This is crucial because inaccurate measurement and weak data management can impact the validity of stunting identification and intervention targeting. Financial resources also exhibit a mixed pattern. Village Fund allocations have enabled the implementation of some basic activities, but the available budget does not fully cover the needs of all intervention components. Informants noted that supplementary feeding, cadre incentives, equipment maintenance, and outreach activities require more stable and adequate funding (Interview 06). In this case, Village Funds support implementation, but their limited resources force the village government to prioritize certain activities over others.

Facilities and infrastructure also impact service sustainability. Findings indicate that Posyandu (Integrated Health Post) activities have been conducted routinely, but some supporting facilities, including measuring instruments and service equipment, remain inadequate (Interview 07). This affects not only the quality of technical services but also the implementers' confidence in producing reliable data. Thus, the sustainability of the stunting program depends on the interaction between fiscal support, cadre capacity, and service infrastructure.

Overall, resources in Tingkohubu Village serve as both a supporting and limiting factor. They enable the program to operate, but their uneven quality limits its ability to become fully sustainable. The findings show that Village Funds alone are not enough unless accompanied by stronger human resource capacity, better equipment, and more systematic operational support.

3. Implementer Attitude, Commitment, Motivation, and Responsibility

The third finding indicates that disposition is one of the strongest supporting factors in the implementation of the stunting program in Tingkohubu Village. Village officials, cadres, and health-related actors generally demonstrated a commitment to reducing stunting. Informants repeatedly emphasized that stunting is seen as a critical issue because it directly impacts children's futures and the quality of the village's human resources (Interview 08). This normative commitment provides an important motivational foundation for implementation. The cadres appear to play a central role in maintaining the program's daily activities. Their commitment is evident in their willingness to participate in Posyandu (Integrated Health Posts), conduct outreach, assist with data collection, and encourage mothers to bring their children for regular monitoring (Interview 09). This finding suggests that the success of stunting

interventions depends not only on formal policy design but also on the willingness of frontline actors to carry out tasks beyond routine administrative obligations.

However, this finding also reveals that motivation is not always stable. Some cadres face workload pressure, limited incentives, and technical challenges in managing families who do not consistently attend Posyandu (Integrated Health Post) or do not fully follow nutritional advice (Interview 10). This creates a tension between commitment and operational fatigue. In other words, implementers may be willing to support the program, but their capacity to maintain consistent performance depends on institutional support, incentives, and recognition.

The attitude of village leadership also influences program implementation. Informants indicated that when village leaders actively support the stunting program, coordination becomes easier, cadres feel more motivated, and program activities gain stronger legitimacy (Interview 11). Therefore, leadership attitudes serve as organizational signals: when the village government treats stunting as a priority, other actors are more likely to align their actions with that priority.

At the same time, responsibility is distributed unevenly among actors. Some activities still rely heavily on cadres and health actors, while community participation remains inconsistent. At-risk families are not always actively involved in counseling, attending Posyandu (Integrated Health Post), or implementing health advice in their daily practices (Interview 12). This means that disposition must be understood not only as the implementer's attitude, but also as the target group's readiness to participate in the intervention.

Thus, the findings indicate that attitudes in Tingkohubu Village are relatively supportive but remain fragile. Commitment exists, but its sustainability depends on incentives, leadership support, workload management, and community responsiveness. The program is more likely to succeed when moral commitment is reinforced by institutional support.

4. Bureaucratic Structure, Compliance with Regulations, and Procedural Accuracy

The fourth finding relates to the bureaucratic structure governing the implementation of the Village Fund-based stunting program. The study found that the village has established a basic implementation structure involving the village government, cadres, beneficiaries (KPM), Posyandu actors, and health workers. This structure enables the program to operate through task allocation, service schedules, reporting mechanisms, and coordination with technical health institutions.

Formally, the implementation team has recognized the division of roles. Village officials are responsible for budgeting and coordination, cadres manage Posyandu services and community outreach, and health workers provide technical guidance and validation support (Interview 13). This indicates that the bureaucratic structure has provided the institutional basis for program implementation.

However, findings also indicate that procedural compliance is not always consistent. Informants stated that although service procedures and reporting mechanisms are in place, implementation sometimes adapts to field conditions, including attendance rates, cadre availability, and technical constraints during Posyandu activities (Interview 14). This flexibility helps the program continue, but also creates variation in the quality of implementation.

Another issue concerns coordination and overlapping tasks. Several informants noted that certain responsibilities are not always clearly separated, particularly between cadres, village officials, and supporting actors during data collection and follow-up activities (Interview

15). This suggests that a bureaucratic structure exists but has not yet been fully consolidated into a clear operational system.

Data reporting is also a crucial component of the bureaucratic structure. Findings indicate that reporting is being implemented, but challenges remain regarding data accuracy, timeliness, and consistency (Interview 16). Because stunting interventions rely heavily on valid data, weak reporting mechanisms can impact targeting accuracy and villages' ability to identify families in need of further assistance.

Therefore, the bureaucratic structure plays a dual role. On the one hand, it supports implementation by providing role allocation and procedural guidance. On the other hand, weaknesses in coordination, reporting, and procedural consistency limit its ability to ensure program effectiveness. Findings indicate that the primary challenge is not the lack of structure, but the need to strengthen operational discipline.

5. Policy Communication and Accuracy

Research findings indicate that communication in the implementation of Village Funds in Tingkohubu Village has been structurally sound, but has not yet fully resulted in uniform understanding and program accuracy. This condition aligns with the policy implementation literature, which states that communication is a key prerequisite for successful implementation, particularly in ensuring that policy objectives can be consistently achieved by all actors (Marhaeni et al., 2022; Indra & Id, 2022). These studies indicate that policy failure is often determined by information distortion between the policy and implementation levels.

In the context of this empirical research, communication has transmitted policy information from the village government to cadres and the community, but has not yet fully translated understanding into consistent action. This reinforces the findings of Hanum et al. (2024) and Hermawan et al. (2023), which show that communication in health services functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as a process of shaping behavior. Thus, the communication weakness in Tingkohubu Village lies not in the lack of communication channels, but in the depth and effectiveness of messages in shaping public awareness.

However, this finding also opens up room for criticism of the literature, which tends to suggest that good communication automatically results in effective implementation. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of communication as a single variable without its connection with other factors such as cadre capacity and service structure (Sumendap et al., 2025; Parida, 2024). In this study, communication is shown not to stand alone but rather relies heavily on actors' abilities to interpret and operationalize policy messages.

Furthermore, research findings indicate that communication between actors remains intermittent and has not yet established a sustainable coordination system. This situation reinforces the arguments of Jannah et al. (2025) and Phitra et al. (2024), who emphasize that the effectiveness of stunting policies is highly dependent on continuous cross-sectoral coordination. When communication occurs only intermittently, program synchronization becomes weak and dependent on individual initiative.

From a more critical perspective, this condition indicates a shift from communication as transmission to the need for communication as transformation. Classical literature has not fully captured this dimension, focusing more on message clarity than on the process of internalization by actors and the community. This research finding suggests that communication success is measured not only by the frequency of information dissemination but also by the extent to which it is understood, accepted, and implemented in practice.

Thus, the synthesis of findings and literature indicates that communication in the implementation of Village Funds for stunting management in Tingkohubu Village is in a transitional phase: from administrative communication to transformative communication. This process's imperfections result in program inaccuracy and weak implementation synchronization. Therefore, communication must be understood as a mechanism that not only connects actors but also shapes meaning and action in service systems.

6. Capacity Limitations or Overall Service Distribution

Research findings indicate that resources are a critical factor in Village Fund implementation, but their availability does not fully guarantee program effectiveness. This aligns with the findings of Indra & Id (2022) and Phitra et al. (2024), which indicate that Village Funds have significant potential to support stunting programs, but their impact is highly dependent on the quality of resource management and distribution.

Empirically, Tingkohubu Village has allocated Village Funds for various activities, including Integrated Health Posts (Posyandu), PMT (Food and Nutritional Monitoring), and nutrition counseling. This finding supports research by Jannah et al. (2025), which states that Village Funds can strengthen community-based interventions. However, budget and facility limitations indicate that the available resources are not fully sufficient for program operational needs.

Furthermore, research findings indicate that the main challenge lies not only in the quantity of resources, but also in their quality and distribution. This reinforces the arguments of Sumendap et al. (2025) and Parida (2024), which show that implementation capacity at the village level is often uneven, resulting in variations in service quality.

However, the existing literature is still dominated by an aggregate capacity-based approach, which measures resources in total without considering their distribution and interactions. In this context, the research findings provide an important critique of this approach. Tingkohubu Village demonstrates that even when resources are available, cadre capacity, limited facilities, and suboptimal budget distribution can hamper programs.

These findings align with research by Nani et al. (2024), which emphasized that policy failure is often caused by inadequate capacity configuration, rather than a lack of resources alone. In other words, two villages with the same amount of resources can produce different outcomes due to differences in how those resources are used.

More broadly, these findings also relate to the literature on the determinants of stunting, which shows that effective interventions require the integration of various resources, including sanitation, clean water, and nutrition education (Nisa et al., 2021; Rahayuwati et al., 2022). When resources are solely focused on one aspect, such as PMT, without support from other interventions, program effectiveness is limited.

Thus, the synthesis of these findings and the literature suggests that resources in Village Fund implementation should be understood not merely as inputs, but as configurations that determine the program's objectives. The limitations in Tingkohubu Village are not simply a matter of quantity, but also of distribution, quality, and integration of resources within the service system.

7. High Commitment and Motivational Vulnerability

Research findings indicate that the disposition of implementers in Tingkohubu Village is relatively strong in terms of commitment, but still faces challenges in maintaining motivation and consistency. This aligns with the findings of Nugraheni & Malik (2023) and Nurlaili & Pertiwi

(2024), which emphasized that Posyandu cadres play a strategic role in the success of the stunting program.

Implementer commitment is evident in their awareness of the importance of stunting issues and active involvement in Posyandu activities. This finding supports the study by Hanum et al. (2024), which showed that implementer attitudes and concerns directly influence service quality. In this context, disposition serves as a key driver of implementation.

However, the research findings also indicate that implementer motivation is not always stable. Limited incentives, workload, and operational obstacles are factors that influence the regularity of performance. This aligns with research by Ana et al. (2025), which shows that program success is significantly influenced by social and institutional support.

From a critical perspective, this situation suggests that the implementation of the literature that positions disposition as an individual variable requires further study. Disposition is influenced not only by individual attitudes but also by the institutional context that shapes motivation and incentives. Thus, disposition must be understood as a relational phenomenon, not solely psychological.

Furthermore, the research findings indicate that village leadership plays a crucial role in shaping implementer disposition. This strengthens the argument that policy implementation depends not only on individuals but also on organizational dynamics and leadership (Marhaeni et al., 2022). A synthesis of the findings and literature indicates that the disposition of implementers in Tingkohubu Village is in a paradoxical state: high commitment but weak motivation. This situation creates instability in implementation, where programs may be successful but not always consistent over the long term.

8. Formal Availability and Operational Inconsistencies

Research findings indicate that the bureaucratic structure in Tingkohubu Village is formally in place, but has not been fully implemented consistently in practice. This aligns with literature showing that the existence of a structure does not always guarantee effective implementation (Sumendap et al., 2025; Parida, 2024). Task divisions, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and reporting mechanisms have been established, indicating an institutional foundation. These findings support the research of Jannah et al. (2025), which emphasizes the importance of structured governance in the implementation of stunting policies.

However, the research findings also indicate excessive errors in the implementation of SOPs, potentially leading to variations in service quality. This situation indicates that the bureaucratic structure is not yet fully capable of controlling the implementation process. Furthermore, coordination between actors still faces challenges, particularly in terms of role allocation and data accuracy. This aligns with research by Hermawan et al. (2023), which shows that service quality is highly dependent on effective coordination and reporting systems.

More broadly, this situation indicates a mismatch between formal structures and operational practices. Implementation literature typically assumes that bureaucratic structures can guide actor behavior, but this study's findings demonstrate that structures are only effective if accompanied by compliance and consistency in their implementation. Thus, the synthesis of the findings and literature indicates that the bureaucratic structure in Tingkohubu Village is in a state of "formal existence but operational inequity." This situation reinforces the argument for a policy-system mismatch, where institutional design is not fully aligned with operational capacity on the ground.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of Village Fund implementation in reducing stunting cannot be explained solely by the availability of financial resources or formal policy design. Rather, such effectiveness is shaped by the configuration of implementation dimensions, communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure that interact in practice at the village level. The findings indicate that while these dimensions are present in Tingkohubu Village, they operate unevenly and are not fully aligned. Communication is predominantly transmissive rather than transformative, resources are available but unevenly distributed, implementers' commitment is strong, but motivation is fragile, and bureaucratic structures are formally present but lack operational consistency.

These imbalances create a condition best understood as a policy-system mismatch, where policy expectations exceed the capacity and coherence of local implementation systems. Therefore, this study contributes by shifting the analytical focus from aggregate capacity to implementation configuration, and by linking fiscal instruments such as the Village Fund to frontline service delivery. This study highlights that effective stunting reduction depends not only on “how much” resources are provided, but also on “how” those resources are translated into coherent, sustainable, and context-sensitive service practices.

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