

Developing A Collaborative Governance Model for Stunting Reduction in Jeneponto Regency

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Abstract

Stunting represents a multidimensional human development challenge that requires cross-sectoral responses through sustained collaboration among diverse actors. Jeneponto Regency, as one of the regions with a relatively high prevalence of stunting, faces persistent difficulties in effectively integrating the roles of government institutions, communities, and non-governmental stakeholders. This study aims to develop a collaborative governance model for stunting reduction in Jeneponto Regency that strengthens coordination, policy integration, and program sustainability. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and policy document analysis involving local government officials, relevant sectoral agencies, village administrations, health professionals, community representatives, and development partners. Data were thematically analyzed using a collaborative governance framework that emphasizes initial conditions, institutional design, collaborative processes, and collaborative outcomes. The findings reveal that collaborative efforts in stunting reduction remain constrained by fragmented authority, uneven actor capacity, and underdeveloped mechanisms of communication and inter-organizational trust. Nevertheless, significant opportunities for strengthening collaboration exist through the facilitative role of local government, enhanced village-level engagement, and the utilization of integrated data systems to support evidence-based decision-making. This study proposes a collaborative governance model that prioritizes cross-sectoral role integration, institutional strengthening, and sustained community participation. The model is expected to contribute theoretically to the advancement of public administration scholarship and provide practical policy recommendations for local governments seeking to accelerate stunting reduction in an effective and sustainable manner.

Keywords: collaborative governance; stunting; public policy; local government, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Stunting is a condition of impaired growth in early childhood resulting from chronic undernutrition, manifested by a height-for-age that falls below internationally established standards. Beyond its clinical definition, stunting represents more than a public health concern; it reflects a systemic failure of development policies to ensure comprehensive child well-being. At the global level, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that hundreds of millions of children under five continue to experience stunting due to persistent nutritional deficiencies, recurrent infectious diseases, and inadequate psychosocial stimulation during the first 1,000 days of life. These conditions have profound and long-lasting consequences, including diminished cognitive development, reduced economic productivity, and weakened social resilience over the life course. Consequently, stunting has emerged as a critical development challenge in many low- and middle-income countries, necessitating integrated, cross-sectoral policy responses that engage multiple stakeholders beyond the health sector alone (World Health Organization, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, stunting reduction has been elevated to a national development priority, reflecting its strategic importance for human capital formation. According to the 2024 Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey (SSGI), the national prevalence of stunting declined to approximately 19.8 percent, indicating measurable progress over previous years. Nevertheless, this figure remains substantially above the national target of 14 percent set in the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). This gap underscores the persistent complexity of stunting as a public policy problem, particularly in regions facing compounded geographic, socioeconomic, and infrastructural constraints. Despite sustained policy commitment and programmatic interventions, the uneven pace of progress highlights the limitations of sector ally fragmented approaches and the need

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for more integrated governance mechanisms (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024). Jeneponto Regency in South Sulawesi Province exemplifies the localized manifestation of these national challenges. Local nutritional surveillance data updated in June 2023 indicate that 4,239 children out of approximately 24,943 measured were classified as stunted, corresponding to a prevalence rate of 16.99 percent. This figure signals a significant public health and development concern that warrants coordinated policy attention. Empirical studies conducted in Jeneponto further reveal that stunting is shaped by a constellation of environmental and behavioral determinants, including access to safe drinking water, handwashing practices, and household food preparation behaviors. While sanitation infrastructure such as latrine ownership does not consistently show a statistically significant association in all contexts, these findings collectively underscore the multifactorial nature of stunting in the region. As such, nutrition-specific interventions alone are insufficient without parallel integration of social, behavioral, and community empowerment strategies (Saleh et al., 2025).

Taken together, these conditions demonstrate that stunting in Jeneponto Regency is not merely a biomedical issue but a complex governance challenge that requires coordinated action across sectors and levels of government. Addressing stunting effectively therefore demands a governance approach capable of integrating policy domains, aligning institutional roles, and mobilizing community participation in a sustained and meaningful manner. This context provides a compelling rationale for examining stunting reduction through the lens of collaborative governance, particularly within the framework of local government-led policy coordination.

A series of national policy initiatives, most notably Presidential Regulation No. 72 of 2021, has institutionalized a convergence-based and collaborative approach to stunting reduction in Indonesia. This regulatory framework mandates cross-sectoral engagement encompassing health, education, community empowerment, and village governance. The convergence approach is explicitly designed to address the need for simultaneous and coordinated integration between nutrition-specific interventions, such as maternal and child health and nutritional supplementation, and nutrition-sensitive interventions, including sanitation improvement, education, and economic empowerment. By aligning these diverse policy domains within a single governance framework, the convergence strategy seeks to overcome sectoral silos and enhance the overall effectiveness of stunting reduction efforts (Pardosi et al., 2024).

Within the field of public administration and public policy, stunting is frequently conceptualized as a wicked problem, characterized by high levels of complexity, ambiguity, and resistance to single-sector or linear policy solutions. Wicked problems involve multiple interdependent causes, diverse stakeholders with differing objectives and capacities, and institutional arrangements shaped by distinct organizational cultures. As such, conventional hierarchical or sectorally fragmented governance models are often insufficient to address challenges of this nature. Stunting reduction therefore requires innovative governance mechanisms capable of integrating heterogeneous perspectives, coordinating dispersed resources, and facilitating sustained inter-organizational cooperation.

In response to these limitations, the concept of collaborative governance has emerged as a strategic approach for addressing complex public problems such as stunting. Collaborative governance refers to institutional arrangements in which public authorities engage non-state actors—including communities, private sector entities, and civil society organizations—in participatory processes of decision-making, policy implementation, and evaluation in pursuit of shared public objectives. Rather than relying solely on governmental authority, this approach emphasizes joint ownership of problems, collective problem-solving, and the co-production of policy outcomes, thereby addressing the capacity constraints and bureaucratic fragmentation inherent in single-actor governance models.

The conceptual framework of collaborative governance articulated by Ansell and Gash provides a robust analytical lens for examining such arrangements. Their framework highlights four core components: initial conditions that shape incentives and power relations among actors, facilitative leadership that enables trust-building and conflict mediation, inclusive institutional design that ensures balanced participation, and collaborative processes characterized by iterative dialogue, mutual learning, and consensus-oriented interaction. Applied to the context of stunting reduction, this framework underscores the importance of strengthening coordination among local government agencies,

expanding meaningful participation by communities and non-governmental organizations, and establishing continuous feedback mechanisms to support adaptive policy improvement. Through these mechanisms, collaborative governance offers the potential to transform stunting reduction from a fragmented set of sectoral programs into an integrated and sustainable public policy response (Supranoto, 2025).

Comparable findings emerge from research in Bekasi City, where the integration of regional policies through a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach contributed to a substantial decline in stunting prevalence over a five-year period, from 18.18 percent to 2.33 percent, far exceeding the national target. This success has been attributed to the presence of facilitative leadership, inclusive institutional design, and strong commitment across a broad range of stakeholders, including local government agencies, the private sector, academic institutions, and community groups. These findings reinforce the argument that collaborative governance arrangements, when effectively institutionalized, can generate transformative outcomes in complex public health challenges.

Further evidence from Bangka Regency highlights the limitations of formal convergence structures when not accompanied by substantive coordination mechanisms. Despite the existence of formal institutional frameworks, persistent gaps in actor roles, suboptimal coordination, and uneven program distribution across geographic areas continue to undermine the effectiveness of stunting reduction efforts. These studies collectively emphasize the necessity of integrated monitoring systems and strengthened institutional capacity to ensure that collaboration moves beyond formal compliance and achieves sustained policy impact over the long term (Supranoto, 2025).

Within the local context of Jeneponto Regency, a range of collaborative initiatives has been undertaken to address stunting. One notable example is the implementation of the Rembuk Stunting, a collaborative forum that brings together government actors, private sector representatives, community leaders, and civil society organizations to formulate systematic and measurable stunting reduction strategies. This initiative reflects the local government's commitment to facilitating cross-sectoral collaboration and positioning stunting as a strategic priority within the regional development agenda. Complementing these government-led efforts, community-based initiatives—such as premarital nutrition education and early childhood nutritional screening programs implemented by the University of Gadjah Mada's community service teams—illustrate the significant contribution of non-state actors in enhancing public awareness and promoting healthy household practices.

Nevertheless, cross-sectoral engagement in stunting reduction in Jeneponto remains uneven and insufficiently institutionalized. Key challenges include fragmented authority across local government agencies, disparities in human resource capacity across sub-districts, limited availability of integrated data to support evidence-based decision-making, and persistently low levels of active community participation in certain areas. These conditions indicate that achieving a significant and sustainable reduction in stunting requires a collaborative governance model that holistically integrates policy strategies, institutional coordination, and community empowerment. Such a model is essential to transforming fragmented initiatives into a coherent and resilient governance framework capable of addressing the multifaceted nature of stunting at the local level.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the advancement of public administration and public policy scholarship by developing a context-sensitive collaborative governance model for stunting reduction at the local level. The proposed model offers an integrated empirical and normative framework that supports cross sectoral collaboration, enhances the effectiveness of convergence-based programs, and strengthens the capacity of local actors to respond to complex socio-health challenges. By situating collaborative governance within the institutional and socio-political realities of local government, this study extends existing theoretical frameworks and provides empirical insights into how collaborative arrangements can be operationalized in decentralized governance settings. From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a strategic reference for policymakers in Jeneponto Regency and other comparable regions. The model provides guidance for designing adaptive policy strategies, strengthening coordination mechanisms, and developing more responsive approaches to measuring collaborative outcomes in line with local needs and capacities. In doing so, the study offers actionable insights to support the institutionalization of collaborative governance as a sustainable approach to addressing stunting.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the increasing prevalence of stunting and the associated institutional dynamics from the perspectives of the actors involved. A qualitative approach is particularly well suited to capturing meanings, interaction patterns, and collaborative processes that cannot be adequately examined through quantitative techniques. By emphasizing interpretive analysis, this approach enables a comprehensive exploration of how governance arrangements shape policy responses to complex and multifaceted public health challenges. The research is designed as a descriptive–exploratory study using a case study strategy. Jeneponto Regency was selected as a single case and examined holistically as the primary locus of stunting reduction efforts. The case study design allows for an intensive analysis of collaborative governance practices as they unfold within their real-world context, where institutional structures, actor interactions, and policy processes are closely intertwined.

The study is specifically intended to examine the practice of collaborative governance in stunting reduction in Jeneponto Regency and to develop a context-sensitive collaborative governance model. Given the study's focus on processes, inter-actor interactions, and institutional dynamics, a qualitative case study approach provides an appropriate methodological framework. This strategy facilitates a systematic and nuanced understanding of how collaboration is initiated, structured, and sustained across sectors and levels of government, thereby supporting theory development grounded in empirical evidence.

3. Results

The findings of this study indicate that stunting reduction efforts at the local government level, particularly in Jeneponto Regency, have adopted a cross-sectoral approach as mandated by national policies on the acceleration of stunting reduction. The local government has established a stunting reduction acceleration team and implemented various convergence programs involving sectoral agencies in health, education, social affairs, public works, and village administration. In addition, non-governmental actors such as posyandu cadres, community leaders, and community-based organizations have been engaged in program implementation at the community level.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence from the field reveals that the existing practice of collaborative governance remains largely administrative and coordinative in nature and has not yet evolved into substantive collaboration. Inter actor collaboration is predominantly manifested through coordination meetings, program reporting, and sectoral task allocation, without being accompanied by joint decision-making processes grounded in dialogue and consensus. This condition suggests that collaborative governance in stunting reduction is still at an early stage and has not been fully institutionalized within the local government governance system.

From a public policy perspective, the implementation of stunting reduction policies at the local level continues to face challenges related to institutional fragmentation. Each sectoral agency tends to implement programs in accordance with its respective mandates and functions, resulting in suboptimal integration of nutrition specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions. This fragmentation leads to overlapping activities in certain areas while creating gaps in intervention in others, particularly among the most vulnerable target groups.

The findings further indicate that the role of the local government as the central actor in collaborative governance has not yet been fully exercised in an optimal manner. The local government continues to function primarily as an administrative coordinator rather than as a facilitator of collaboration. Facilitative leadership that actively promotes cross-sectoral dialogue, builds inter-organizational trust, and mediates competing interests among actors has not been consistently evident. As a result, collaborative processes tend to rely heavily on individual commitment and initiative, rather than being supported by institutionalized and sustainable governance mechanisms.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the relevance of the wicked problems theory proposed by Rittel and Webber, which posits that public problems such as stunting are complex, multidimensional, and resistant to single policy solutions. Stunting encompasses interrelated health, social, economic,

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environmental, and cultural factors, thereby necessitating the involvement of multiple actors and sectors. Empirical evidence from the field demonstrates that public policy approaches that remain sectoral and bureaucratic in nature have been insufficient to effectively address this complexity.

From the perspective of the collaborative governance framework articulated by Ansell and Gash, the initial conditions of collaboration in stunting reduction at the local government level are characterized by uneven actor capacity and low levels of trust. Local governments possess formal authority and budgetary resources, while non-governmental actors maintain closer ties to communities but face limitations in policy planning capacity. This asymmetry contributes to unequal collaborative processes and has the potential to impede the achievement of shared objectives. These findings are consistent with recent studies published in *Public Administration Review* and *Policy Studies Journal*, which emphasize that capacity gaps and the dominance of governmental actors frequently constitute major barriers to effective collaborative governance in the public health sector.

With regard to institutional design, this study reveals that although formal collaborative structures have been established, these arrangements are not yet fully inclusive. The involvement of communities and non-governmental actors remains largely confined to the program implementation stage, whereas policy formulation and evaluation processes continue to be predominantly dominated by local government actors. This condition suggests that the existing practice of collaborative governance remains top-down in nature, contrary to the principles of participation and actor equality emphasized in collaborative governance theory. Recent literature in the *International Journal of Public Sector Management* further underscores that policy collaboration is unlikely to generate innovation and sustainability when institutional designs fail to provide equitable deliberative spaces for all stakeholders.

The collaborative processes in stunting reduction at the local level further reveal weaknesses in mechanisms for dialogue and joint learning. Cross-sectoral meetings tend to prioritize the fulfillment of administrative requirements and performance targets rather than collective reflection on underlying problems and the development of innovative solutions. Within the framework proposed by Emerson and Nabatchi, this condition reflects a low level of collaborative capacity, particularly with regard to the dimensions of shared understanding and joint commitment. In the absence of a common understanding and collective commitment, collaborative governance is likely to produce policy outputs that are short-term in nature and lack sustainability.

Community participation in stunting reduction likewise continues to exhibit characteristics of symbolic or tokenistic involvement. Communities are engaged primarily as beneficiaries and technical implementers, yet they are afforded limited opportunities to influence policy direction. This phenomenon reinforces Arnstein's critique of tokenism in public participation. Recent studies published in *BMC Public Health* and *Health Policy* demonstrate that the success of stunting reduction policies is highly dependent on the active involvement of families and communities in decision-making processes and behavioral change, rather than on their treatment merely as objects of intervention.

Based on this discussion, the study underscores that strengthening collaborative governance in stunting reduction at the local government level requires a transformation in the role of government from that of a policy implementer to a facilitator of collaboration. Local governments must enhance facilitative leadership, establish sustainable mechanisms for cross-sectoral dialogue, and develop institutional designs that are inclusive and adaptive. Furthermore, the integration of public policy and community empowerment must constitute an integral component of the collaborative governance model to ensure that stunting reduction efforts are both effective and sustainable. Taken together, the results and discussion demonstrate that collaborative governance represents a strategic approach to addressing stunting as a public policy issue at the local government level. This approach is not only theoretically relevant within the field of public administration but also carries significant practical implications for improving the governance of stunting reduction policies at the subnational level.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that stunting reduction in Jenepono Regency constitutes a complex and multidimensional public policy challenge. The findings demonstrate that collaborative governance practices in stunting reduction have begun to be implemented through the establishment of formal institutional structures and the execution of cross-sectoral convergence programs. However, the

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implementation of collaboration remains largely dominated by administrative coordination and has not yet evolved into substantive collaboration grounded in dialogue, consensus, and joint decision-making. Institutional fragmentation, uneven capacity among actors, and low levels of inter-organizational trust emerge as key factors constraining the effectiveness of cross-sectoral collaboration.

The study further reveals that the role of the local government in collaborative governance has not yet fully functioned as that of a collaboration facilitator. Local governments continue to assume the role of program coordinators, while facilitative leadership capable of fostering shared understanding, aligning diverse interests, and encouraging meaningful participation from non-governmental actors and communities remains insufficiently developed. As a consequence, community participation in stunting reduction remains limited and has not yet reached a level of sustainable empowerment.

Based on these findings, the study concludes that strengthening the collaborative governance model for stunting reduction in Jeneponto Regency requires a transformation in public policy governance. Such transformation entails reinforcing facilitative leadership at the local government level, developing inclusive and adaptive institutional designs, establishing sustainable cross-sectoral dialogue mechanisms, and enhancing the capacity and participation of communities as active subjects of development. The collaborative governance model developed in this study is expected not only to contribute to the reduction of stunting prevalence but also to strengthen local government governance and promote the creation of sustainable public value.

Recommendations

Local governments are recommended to strengthen their facilitative leadership role in stunting reduction by establishing cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms that are deliberative and sustainable, thereby ensuring that all actors have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. In addition, it is essential to enhance institutional capacity and human resources at the village government and community levels so that collaboration moves beyond administrative coordination and is able to generate effective program integration. Future research is encouraged to adopt mixed-methods approaches or conduct comparative studies across regions in order to test the effectiveness of the collaborative governance model in broader contexts and to further enrich the development of public administration theory and practice in the field of stunting reduction.

Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen integrated stunting data and information systems across sectoral agencies as a foundation for evidence based policy planning and evaluation. Local governments are also advised to promote meaningful community participation through sustainable empowerment and incentive schemes, enabling communities to function not merely as beneficiaries but as active partners in collaborative governance. In addition, subsequent studies should examine the dynamics of power relations and trust among actors within collaborative governance arrangements to better understand the non-technical factors that influence the success of stunting reduction efforts at the local level.

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