

Implementation of Convergence (Cross-Sectoral) Action for the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction in Palopo City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

Background: The global trend of stunting incidence has been declining from 2000 to 2022; however, the WHO still categorizes Indonesia as a country with a very high prevalence of stunting. A multisectoral and multi-stakeholder approach is one of the methods utilized in the National Action Plan for Accelerating Stunting Reduction. This study aims to analyze the implementation of convergence actions for accelerating stunting reduction in Palopo City. Methods: The study was conducted for 1 months in Palopo City. This study was a qualitative study with 14 informants from different regional government agencies (OPDs) involved in the Palopo City Stunting Reduction Task Force (TPPS). Data related to the implementation convergence action for Accelerating Stunting Reduction in Palopo City were obtained through in-depth interviews. Qualitative data were processed by searching for keywords and then content analysis was conducted. Qualitative data analysis uses an inductive thinking process. Results: The study reveals that at the initial stage, each OPD recognizes the importance of cross-sectoral participation. However, challenges persist in the utilization of human resources and budgeting. The collaboration process requires improvements as planning, governance structure, and actor roles are not yet optimal, with some OPDs still lacking clarity on their roles. Leadership in Palopo City involves regulation and communication, yet some OPDs lack specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and regulations, though inter-agency communication is fairly effective. The outputs of stunting interventions focus on health, education, infrastructure, and social welfare, with some programs being directly integrated while others provide indirect support. Conclusion: The implementation of convergence actions for accelerating stunting reduction in Palopo City is not yet optimal, with primary challenges in the utilization of human resources and budgeting. The collaboration process, leadership, and program outputs still require improvement, particularly in planning, governance structure, and inter-agency communication.

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a set of globally agreed development objectives aimed at enhancing human well-being comprehensively [1]. The SDGs encompass 17 interconnected and comprehensive goals, with the second goal focused on "Ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture" [2]. A major challenge in achieving SDG 2 is the issue of malnutrition, which poses a serious global problem with significant impacts on child [3]. Approximately half of all deaths among children under five years old are attributed to malnutrition, highlighting the need for increased attention to nutritional issues [4]. The elimination of malnutrition is estimated to reduce 32% of the global disease burden, underscoring the importance of addressing this issue [5]. Stunting, a chronic condition in early childhood, results in suboptimal growth and is characterized by height below WHO standards [6]. UNICEF defines stunting as a height-for-age measurement below minus two to minus three standard deviations from the WHO growth standards [7]. Prevalence of stunting serves as a key indicator for assessing population health, with negative impacts on both physical health and cognitive development, potentially affecting children's learning capabilities [8]. Globally, the prevalence of stunting in 2022 was approximately 22.3%, or about 148.1 million children, with a downward trend attributed to convergent multisectoral interventions [9]. This global decline in stunting prevalence is tangible evidence of governments' concrete actions to reduce stunting prevalence by 40% between 2010 and 2025 [10]. In 2022, over half of the stunted children were in Asia, with the highest prevalence in Southeast Asia, and Indonesia ranked second [10]. Despite a decreasing trend in stunting in Indonesia since 2013, the prevalence remains high, and Indonesia is categorized as having a very high stunting rate [10], [11]. The Indonesian government aims to reduce the prevalence of stunting to 14% by 2024 as part of a national commitment to address malnutrition [12]. Achieving this target requires strong commitment and cross-sectoral convergence at all levels, including national, regional, and non-governmental sectors [13]. Cross-sectoral collaboration serves as a tool for addressing multifactorial issues and planning within communities [14]. A holistic and coordinated cross-sectoral approach is deemed highly relevant for addressing stunting, given the

multifaceted factors involved [8], [15]. In Palopo City, the reduction in stunting cases from 421 in 2021 to 228 in 2023 demonstrates the impact of convergent actions, although the prevalence of stunting still falls short of the national target [11].

2. Method

Location and time of research

This research was conducted in Palopo City. Palopo City has an area of 247.52 km², encompassing 9 districts and 48 sub-districts. The government of Palopo City is led by a Mayor, supported by various regional apparatus organizations in addressing development challenges in Palopo City, not only in terms of physical infrastructure but also in human development. In the process of human development, the Palopo City government has demonstrated its commitment through the establishment of the Acceleration Team for Stunting Reduction, in line with the mandate of Presidential Regulation No. 72 of 2021.

Research design

This study employs a qualitative research method. Information is obtained through informants who serve as subjects in this study, where they can express their own answers and feelings to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of convergence actions for accelerating stunting reduction in Palopo City.

Informant

There were 14 informants in this study. The informant was the result of a recommendation from the Leadership of Regional Apparatus Organizations who were deemed to have a better understanding of the Convergence Action for the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction Program in Palopo City. The characteristics of the informants in this study can be explained in the following table.

Table 1. Informant Characteristics

No.	Name Initials	Age (Thn)	Gender	Education	Agency
1.	A	56	Male	Doctorate's Degree	Regional Secretariat
2.	B	50	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Regional Development Research Agency
3.	C	52	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Department of Housing and Residential Areas
4.	D	40	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Regional Development Planning Agency
5.	E	47	Female	Master's Degree	Public Health Office
6.	F	45	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Regional Service Of Agricultur, Livestock, and Platations
7.	G	43	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Secretariat of the Team for the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction
8.	H	53	Male	Master's Degree	Industry Departement
9.	I	42	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Food Security Departement
10.	J	46	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Fisheries Departement
11.	K	33	Female	Diplomat	Socia Services
12.	L	55	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Education Authorities
13.	M	36	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Department of Public Works and Spatial Planning
14.	N	41	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Labor Offices

Data collection

Secondary data in this study consists of a description of the research location and documents in the form of regulations that support the convergence actions for accelerating stunting reduction in Palopo City. The secondary data in this study was obtained through a review of documents from the Palopo City Government. The primary data in this study is related to the characteristics of the informants and the implementation of convergence actions for the stunting reduction acceleration program in Palopo City, gathered through in-depth interviews with informants. Interviews are among the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data [15]. This method can be more easily accommodated within a researcher's life because it is a flexible data collection method. The interview is specifically designed to explore what another person knows about a topic, to discover and document what they have experienced, what they think or feel about it, and the significance or meaning it might hold for them[16].Written informed consent was obtained from all informants individually before commencing data collection. Interviews were conducted at a time and place chosen by the informants,

specifically where the informants work. Field notes were taken during the interviews, and all interviews were audio-recorded.

Conducting research

The research began with field observations. Next, informants were selected for in-depth interviews.

Data processing and analysis

Data processing and analysis in qualitative research involve several key steps. First, data from interviews and document reviews are recorded descriptively and reflectively. Next, this data is reduced to focus on relevant and significant information. The data is then presented narratively to illustrate the findings. Finally, the researcher organizes, synthesizes, and identifies patterns to draw and communicate conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

1. Starting Condition

a) Understanding The Mission

The results show that a description of the initial conditions regarding the understanding regarding the mission of implementing convergence actions to accelerate stunting reduction, which is most widely understood and described by each Regional Government Agencies is, the implementation of convergence actions to accelerate stunting reduction or the involvement of all Regional Government Agencies because, the problem of stunting is a multi-sector problem that requires an integrated role and response from various sectors. However, they understand that this team can help reduce the prevalence of stunting. This is as stated by the following informant.

" Stunting is not merely a health issue but a problem affecting all sectors. If it is not addressed by all sectors, new cases of stunting will continue to emerge. This is why we need a multisectoral approach, extending even to the community"(D, 40 years old)

b) Human Resources

The results of interviews with informants showed Knowledge and understanding of the authority of Regional Government Agencies within the TPPS Team of Palopo City remain uneven, with some Regional Government Agencies only aware of their involvement without a deep understanding of their roles and powers. This is as stated by the following informant.

" If asked about our authority in the convergence actions, the Food Security Agency does not possess any. However, we can participate in stunting prevention efforts or develop programs related to stunting, even though it is not our primary focus"(I, 42 Years Old)

c) Budgeting

The results of interviews with informants showed The Palopo City Government does not allocate a specific budget for the TPPS team. Most of the OPDs involved in the TPPS team do not have dedicated funds for stunting programs and must integrate stunting activities into existing programs. Some OPDs, such as the Agriculture and Livestock Office, have allocated funds for stunting-related programs, but many others, including the Social Services Office and the Housing Office, do not have specific budget allocations and must support stunting mitigation efforts using available funds or personal contributions. This is as stated by the following informant.

"There is no specific budget has been allocated for the TPPS team's activities; however, the Palopo City Government has entrusted us with managing municipal funds for the PMT program"(G, 43 Years Old).

2. Collaboration Process

a) Planning

The results of interviews with informants showed that n Palopo City, the TPPS team prioritizes a convergence approach to address stunting, emphasizing cross-sector collaboration and specific action plans. While some sectors, like Bappeda and Dinas PUPR, have detailed strategies and interventions, others lack specific plans. The key challenge remains ensuring all OPDs develop and implement strategic actions to effectively support stunting reduction efforts. The results of the interviews can be described as follows:

"The TPPS team's strategy is to reduce stunting as quickly as possible by employing convergence. If we work

alone, the process will not be efficient. We must work together, each taking our respective roles. Even with good cooperation, it does not guarantee success” (G, 43 Years Old)

b) Structure and Governance

The results of interviews with informants showed The structure and governance of the TPPS team in Palopo City are characterized by a centralized decision-making process. The Regional Secretary, who serves as the Team Leader, has the primary role in making final decisions related to the convergence actions for reducing stunting. Although coordination meetings are the main forum for discussing and making decisions, some decisions are made without prior coordination with all relevant Regional Government Agencies. The results of the interviews can be described as follows:

“I believe the highest decision-making authority in the TPPS Team is the Secretary of the Region. He is the one who makes the decisions.”(E, 47 Years Old)

c) Role Of Actors

The results of interviews with informants showed some Regional Governemnt Agencies view their role as merely supportive, lacking a clear understanding of their specific responsibilities. This is highlighted by statements .

“The Palopo City Manpower Office does not have a specific program directly aimed at addressing stunting. However, the Manpower Office participates in general activities targeting the productive age group, which may include parents of children with stunting”(N, 41 Years Old)

3) Leadership

a) Regulation and Commitment

The results of interviews with informants showed Regulations are essential for the effective implementation of stunting reduction programs in Palopo City. They provide a structured framework and demonstrate commitment from various OPDs. While some Regional Governance Agencies have established specific regulations to support stunting reduction, others lack such regulations, indicating a need for greater consistency and comprehensive regulatory support across all Regional Governance Agencie. This is highlighted by statements from

“Regulations serve as guidelines for each sector to understand their responsibilities. We have regulations for forming the team, which clearly outline the team’s tasks” (A. 56 Years Old)

b) Communication

The results of interviews with informants showed Communication among organizations involved in the convergence action for stunting reduction in Palopo is generally effective and relies on two main methods: face-to-face meetings and WhatsApp groups. Meetings, organized by Bappeda, are used for routine coordination and information sharing, while WhatsApp groups provide a platform for ongoing communication. Despite this, communication primarily occurs during these scheduled meetings. Bappeda and the Health Office play central roles in facilitating this communication, with the Health Office frequently coordinating with other departments to share stunting-related data and updates. This is highlighted by statements from

“Communication is conducted through regular coordination meetings where each department shares field findings, current conditions, and follow-up plans. Additionally, communication is maintained via WhatsApp groups.”(H, 53 Years Old)

4) Output

The synchronization of programs for stunting mitigation in Palopo City has been effectively implemented by the majority of Regional Government Agencies in alignment with their primary duties and functions. Although some Regional Government Agencies do not yet have specific programs for stunting, they still participate in general stunting reduction efforts. Regional Government Agencies with specific programs demonstrate the integration of stunting-related initiatives into their main activities. This is highlighted by statements from

“Yes, it is synchronized because our role involves PK-21 data collection, which addresses families at risk of stunting. We have a program from BKKBN called PK-21. PK-21 involves field visits by family planning cadres

to directly assess conditions, collecting data on at-risk families, such as sanitation, clean water, mothers who have never visited a health center, and nutritious food intake. It aligns well with our work. The stunting activities are actually an addition since the core activity of the Family Planning Office is to encourage family planning among the community” (G, 43 Years Old)

4. Conclusion

The Starting Condition section highlights the importance of mission, resources, and budgeting in cross-sector collaboration. A clear mission is a crucial element that unites various organizations toward a common goal, such as "Prevention and Acceleration of Stunting Reduction in Palopo City." Although each government agency (OPD) may describe this mission differently, there is a shared understanding that cross-sector collaboration is necessary to achieve desired outcomes. Research indicates that a strong mission can sustain the program and enhance stakeholder commitment [17], [18], [19].

Additionally, human resources and budgeting play critical roles in supporting collaboration. Human resources are a primary asset, with regulations such as the Palopo Mayor's Decree No. 54/1/2022 facilitating the mobilization of available resources. However, lack of clarity regarding roles and positions within the collaboration can hinder its effectiveness [20], [21]. While the Palopo City Government has allocated funds for the stunting program, there remains a discrepancy between official budget allocations and practical needs for cross-sector collaboration. Some Regional Government Agencies have not fully supported the stunting program with adequate budget allocations, revealing challenges in policy implementation [22].

In Collaboration Process effective program implementation relies on meticulous planning. Planning involves determining future actions by selecting the best alternative from several options in an organized manner, considering all available resources to achieve objectives [23]. The handling of stunting has been incorporated into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2024. According to Presidential Regulation No. 72 of 2021 on Accelerating Stunting Reduction, all relevant government agencies (OPDs) are required to develop strategies and programs to meet national stunting reduction targets. The City Government of Palopo and the Palopo TPPS Secretariat have utilized convergence actions and introduced the Bapak-Bunda Asuh innovation program to accelerate stunting reduction. Strategic planning is essential for addressing obstacles in implementing stunting programs. Despite this, two OPDs, namely the Department of Labor and the Department of Industry, lack integrated cross-sector action plans [24]. This misalignment with Presidential Regulation No. 72 of 2021 and the Ministry of Home Affairs Circular No. 400.5/8476/SJ of November 27, 2022, reveals a gap where the Department of Industry, despite its role in stunting reduction, lacks a strategic plan [23].

Structure is crucial in collaboration, defining relationships and hierarchies among teams or sectors within an organization, which influences how they interact and collaborate. Structure involves both vertical and horizontal components that help differentiate and integrate organizational elements [25]. Effective collaboration requires a well-defined structure and governance to guide decision-making processes [24]. The City Government of Palopo employs two governance structures to enhance collaboration effectiveness: decision-making through routine meetings facilitated by Bappeda and a well-organized coordination forum. This supports effective collaboration, as noted in Safira et al. (2023), where repeated interactions strengthen cooperation [26]. However, there is no documented evidence of collaborative decision-making policies, contrasting with Prihatin & Dwimawanti's (2020) findings where collaborative decisions were formalized in joint decrees [27]. This lack of documentation has led to perceptions that decisions are made solely by the Secretary of Palopo City.

Local governments cannot rely solely on internal capacities to address issues like stunting. Cross-sector collaboration is essential for addressing complex nutritional problems. Each actor's role in this collaboration is vital for achieving common goals [28]. In Palopo, the TPPS or Convergence Action involves 15 OPDs, each with distinct roles and responsibilities as outlined in the Mayor's Decree No. 54/1/2022. Despite this, there is a lack of understanding among OPDs about their roles and responsibilities, which impedes effective collaboration [29]. This lack of clarity aligns with Faried's (2023) findings that insufficient understanding of roles and positions hampers collaborative processes [30].

Regulation and commitment play crucial roles in addressing stunting. Regulation, as a legal product, aims to establish order and certainty in policy implementation, involving various actors and processes [31]. Commitment, supported by regulation, is an essential element in collaboration [32]. The Palopo City Government demonstrates its seriousness in tackling stunting through the issuance of Mayor's Regulation No. 1

of 2023 and the SK Tim TPPS, which supports the integration of various OPDs in stunting management. However, only 7 out of 15 OPDs have specific regulations related to stunting, which may hinder program implementation if clear SOPs are not in place [33].

In terms of communication, effectiveness is critical for cross-sector coordination. Communication is conducted through face-to-face meetings and social media platforms such as WhatsApp, supporting coordination and collaboration [34], [35]. In the study shows that Bappeda and the Health Office act as the central hubs for communication and coordination. Although communication is effective, deficiencies in horizontal communication among OPDs can hinder collaboration. Communication tends to be vertical, involving interactions between superiors and subordinate units, while horizontal communication is less [36]. This indicates that effective communication, both vertical and horizontal, is crucial for the success of stunting management.

The synchronization of programs plays a pivotal role in the acceleration of stunting reduction efforts in Palopo City. As highlighted, Indonesia's success in development programs is underscored by its strategic approach to addressing stunting through integrated interventions [37]. These interventions include specific and sensitive nutrition strategies, and effective cross-sector collaboration is crucial. The TPPS (Team for Stunting Reduction Acceleration) in Palopo City integrates various OPDs (Regional Apparatus Organizations) to achieve stunting reduction goals. However, for effective implementation, clear SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) and synchronization of programs among these OPDs are essential [38].

According to the stakeholder analysis, the roles of various OPDs in Palopo City are categorized into four groups: Subjects, Key Players, Crowd, and Context Setters. Subjects such as the Population Control and Family Planning Office and the Research and Development Agency play a supportive role but have limited influence. Key Players, including the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), the Health Office, the Public Works and Spatial Planning Office, and the Housing Office, exhibit significant influence and active participation in stunting reduction initiatives. Context Setters, such as the Food Security Office and the Agriculture, Livestock, and Plantation Office, hold high influence but low interest in the stunting programs. The Crowd, including the Manpower and Industry Offices, show low interest and influence in stunting-related activities [26]. The findings suggest that while some OPDs are directly involved in stunting reduction, others contribute indirectly, which aligns with previous studies on stakeholder roles and effectiveness in similar contexts [39], [40], [41]

The implementation of convergence actions for accelerating stunting reduction in Palopo City is not yet optimal. Understanding the mission involving all Regional Government Agencies (OPDs) is crucial for addressing stunting issues through a multi-sectoral approach, although there is uneven understanding and support from each OPD. Centralized decision-making structures and the lack of specific action plans in some sectors can hinder the effectiveness of collaboration. Consistent regulations and commitment are essential to support program implementation, while effective communication and program synchronization among OPDs aid in accelerating stunting reduction efforts. Despite progress, there remain deficiencies in budgeting, role understanding, and strategic planning among some OPDs. The Palopo City Government needs to clarify OPD roles, decentralize decisions, enhance Bappeda's support, and ensure effective SOPs and coordination.

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