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Collaborative Governance in Accelerating Stunting Reduction in Aceh Besar Regency

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Abstract:

Stunting is one of the national priority health problems in Indonesia, including in Aceh Besar Regency. This condition is caused by a lack of nutritional intake, suboptimal parenting patterns, and limited access to health and sanitation services. The Aceh Besar regency government has adopted a collaborative approach to reduce stunting by involving various parties, such as the health, education, social and community sectors. The purpose of this study was to determine the Aceh Besar regency government's efforts in accelerating stunting reduction, the extent of acceleration and reduction that has been achieved and the government's efforts in communicating the issue of stunting. Descriptive qualitative methodology was used, and data was collected through documentation, interviews, and observation. Reducing data, presenting data, and making conclusions were the steps taken in data analysis. The results of the study show that the effectiveness *of collaborative governance* in Aceh Besar is determined by joint commitment, cross-sectoral coordination, and active community participation. The government plays an important role in setting priorities, while *gampong*-based initiatives strengthen the local context. The challenges that arise include limited resources, overlapping authority, and suboptimal communication. In conclusion, *collaborative governance* has been proven to be able to accelerate efforts to reduce stunting through program integration, increasing public awareness, and strengthening the role of the community. Sustainability of collaboration requires strengthening institutional capacity, effective communication, and consistent community involvement.

Keywords: Collaborative Governance, Stunting, Acceleration, Reduction.

Introduction

In Indonesia, particularly in Aceh Province and Aceh Besar Regency, child stunting is still a major public health concern. According to the 2022 Indonesian Nutrition Status

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Survey (SSGI), stunting is still very common in Aceh among children ages 0–59 months, at about 31.2%, significantly higher than the national average (Miranda et al., 2023). Although the prevalence of stunting in Aceh Besar Regency has decreased, from about 32.4% in 2019 to 28.5% in 2023, this number is still unacceptable and even shows differences between villages and subdistricts (Redaksi, 2024). This fact demonstrates that, despite the implementation of numerous targeted and sensitive nutrition intervention programs through national and local government policies, stunting management in the area has not been entirely successful (Hasdyna et al., 2024).

The primary obstacles to accelerating the reduction of stunting in Aceh Besar are the poor coordination among sectors, the limited scope and caliber of interventions, and sociocultural elements that affect community behavior. While sensitive interventions like the provision of clean water and sanitation, nutrition education, and family economic empowerment are not yet fully optimized, specific interventions like the distribution of supplemental foods or nutritional supplements for pregnant women are still not evenly distributed. However, in reality, coordination between important players—such as academics, private partners, village governments, health organizations, and local governments—is frequently formalistic and ineffectual. The situation is further made worse by sociocultural barriers, such as the false belief that stunting is inherited. According to recent studies, parenting styles and environmental factors actually have a bigger impact than genetics (Astuti et al., 2025).

Because of this, it is imperative that efforts be made to reduce stunting as quickly as possible. Stunting has an impact on children's cognitive development, academic performance, and future productivity in addition to their physical health. Stunted children are more likely to suffer from poor health, be less competitive in the labor market, and even have their future generations be of lower quality. Through a national convergence strategy, the Indonesian government has set a goal to reduce the prevalence of stunting to about 14% by 2024–2025. However, this goal cannot be met without strong regional collaboration, including in Aceh Besar (Center, 2024). As a result, collaborative governance is an important and pressing idea that requires more research.

A governance framework that prioritizes the thoughtful and active participation of diverse stakeholders in the creation and execution of public policies is known as collaborative governance (Bianchi et al., 2021). In the context of reducing stunting, collaborative governance encompasses not only official cross-sectoral coordination but also transparent communication, accountable monitoring systems, community involvement, and facilitative leadership (Saputra & Kurniasih, 2023). Numerous studies have underlined how crucial this cooperative strategy is. For instance, Afandi et al., (2023) demonstrate that while many regions have established the formal structure of the Stunting Reduction Acceleration Team, there is still a lack of clarity regarding the roles of the various actors and the monitoring mechanisms. In order to expedite the reduction of stunting following the COVID-19 pandemic, another study conducted in East Nusa Tenggara emphasizes the necessity of fortifying cross-sector coordination forums (Atamou et al., 2023). Furthermore, international research highlights that leadership, a clear understanding of shared objectives, and efficient use of local resources are all critical to the success of collaborative governance (Sufri et al., 2024).

Although not all indicators were attained equally, research by Muliadi et al., (2025) in Aceh revealed a significant negative correlation between the prevalence of stunting in 13 regencies/cities and a number of sensitive and specific intervention indicators. This suggests that the issue is not just with program availability but also with

local implementation governance. Research on collaborative governance in Aceh Besar Regency to accelerate the reduction of stunting is therefore crucial from an academic and practical standpoint.

The purpose of this study is to provide a detailed description of the application of collaborative governance in the Aceh Besar Regency stunting reduction acceleration program, identify factors that facilitate and hinder actor collaboration, and evaluate the degree to which collaborative governance enhances the efficacy of interventions. This study is novel in that it focuses specifically on Aceh Besar, which has distinct social, cultural, and institutional features, and it takes a method that directly connects governance elements to the attainment of stunting reduction metrics. Therefore, it is anticipated that the study's findings will be able to offer useful suggestions to Aceh Besar's residents and local government to improve cross-sector cooperation and hasten the accomplishment of the country's stunting reduction goal.

Methods

Since the problem of collaborative governance in speeding stunting reduction involves multiple actors from different sectors, including the government, community, and development partners, this study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design (Sugiyono, 2020). Important figures from the Aceh Besar Regency Health Office, the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), representatives of the stunting-affected subdistricts, health professionals (nutritionists and village midwives), posyandu cadres, community leaders, and non-governmental organization partners make up the primary informants.

There are three primary methods used in the data collection process. Initially, a comprehensive interview to investigate communication, coordination, and actor roles in teamwork to address stunting. Secondly, limited participatory observation was used to learn about the dynamics of actor interaction in cross-sectoral activities like nutrition counseling, integrated posyandu, and coordination meetings. The third is a documentation study that comprises minutes of coordination meetings, performance reports, regional regulations, and regional action plans (RAD) to speed up the reduction of stunting (Rachman et al., 2024). Using the interactive model of analysis technique from Miles et al., (2018), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn/verification, the analysis was conducted (Mezmir, 2020).

Results

Stunting Reduction Trend in Aceh Besar Regency

This study looks at how Aceh Besar Regency has used collaborative governance to speed up the reduction of stunting. Since stunting affects the future quality of human resources, it is well known that the government has given it significant attention as one of the development issues. Through the 2020–2024 RPJMN, the Indonesian government hopes to reduce stunting rates by as much as 14% by 2024. Since the prevalence of stunting is higher than the national average, Aceh Besar Regency is one of the priority areas. In this case, the study is carried out using a qualitative methodology that includes observations, interviews, and document reviews, leading to a thorough comprehension of the stakeholder collaboration process.

According to secondary data, over the past five years, there has been a decline in the prevalence of stunting in Aceh Besar Regency.

Table 01. Stunting Prevalence Trend in Aceh Besar Regency (2019–2023)

Year	Stunting Percentage (%)	Data Source
2019	33,2	SSGBI BPS
2020	31,8	Aceh Besar Health Office
2021	29,6	Ministry of Health's e-PPGBM
2022	28,4	Indonesia's Nutrition Status Survey
2023	27,5	Aceh Besar Health Office

Source: *(Data processed by the researcher, 2025)*

According to the study's findings, Aceh Besar's stunting prevalence has been declining over the past five years. Stunting prevalence was reported to be 33.2% in 2019. The percentage gradually dropped to 31.8 percent in 2020, 29.6 percent in 2021, 28.4 percent in 2022, and 27.5 percent in 2023. A five-year drop of 5.7 percentage points does point in the right direction. This accomplishment is still comparatively slow, though, in comparison to the national goal. This suggests that although there has been progress, policies aimed at accelerating the reduction of stunting have not always been as effective as they could be. This result is consistent with Sukamto et al., (2023) study, which demonstrates that if cross-sector cooperation is not improved, stunting programs in Indonesia operate slowly.

Forms of Collaboration Between Actors

The study discovered that a number of actors, including local governments, technical offices, health professionals, gampong apparatus, community organizations, and religious institutions, are involved in the implementation of collaborative governance in Aceh Besar. The following mechanisms can be used to classify different forms of collaboration:

Table 02. Forms of Collaboration in Accelerating Stunting Reduction in Aceh Besar Regency

Main Actors	***Forms of Collaboration***	***Obstacles Faced***	***Impact on the Program***
Local Government	Drafting regulations, budgeting, monitoring	Regional budget limitations	Ensure policy continuity
Health Office	Specific interventions (PMT, immunization, posyandu)	Lack of manpower and health facilities	Improving maternal-child health services
Gampong Device	Gampong deliberation, family nutrition sensitization	Public participation still fluctuates	Strengthen public awareness and support

	program		
Religious Organizations	Health da'wah, sharia-based nutrition counseling	Limited health literacy of mosque cadres	Adds social and religious legitimacy
NGOs/Communities	Family assistance for 1000 HPK, sanitation education	Sustainability of project funds	Filling the gap in government services

It is evident from the above table that while collaboration occurs in many forms, the quality varies. While *gampong* has a role in community mobilization, local governments play a more prominent role in the regulatory aspect. Because Acehnese people are inclined to heed the counsel of religious leaders, the existence of religious organizations enhances social legitimacy.

According to this study, several actors are crucial to the execution of collaborative governance. The regents and technical agencies of local governments serve as the primary catalysts for the creation of regulations, the distribution of funds, and the coordination of policies. Specific intervention programs, including posyandu services, vaccinations, and supplemental feeding, are administered by the Health Office. *Gampong* devices are used to move the community through family nutrition counseling and *gampong* discussions. Furthermore, local communities and non-governmental organizations support families during the first thousand days of life and advocate for proper sanitation, while religious organizations take part in health lectures and preaching.

This type of cooperation demonstrates that actors have a decent connection despite having different traits. Gampong works more directly with the community, whereas local governments play a larger role in budgetary and regulatory matters. Because Acehnese people place a high value on religious leaders, religious organizations offer social legitimacy. Communities and NGOs serve as supplements, bridging the gaps left by government initiatives. As a result, despite the various contributions, the collaboration operates concurrently.

Collaboration Dynamics and Implementation Challenges

The study's findings demonstrate that cross-actor involvement has positive dynamics. But the study also identified several barriers that continue to impede collaboration's efficacy. First, there hasn't been complete success with cross-sector coordination. There are instances where agencies' programs overlap, resulting in wasteful resource use. Second, budgetary and human resource constraints are also major issues. Scaling up specific interventions is challenging due to a lack of health workers and uneven health facilities. Third, due to its strong reliance on local leaders or *gampong* equipment, community involvement is still erratic. Some people don't always follow healthy habits in their daily lives; they only do so when they are prompted to do so. Fourth, it is challenging to gauge the program's overall success due to the subpar monitoring and evaluation system.

This condition supports the findings of Rivelino & Ginting (2020), who highlighted that limited resources and weak bureaucratic capacity frequently impede the implementation of collaborative policies at the local level. According to Ansell & Gash,

(2008) framework of collaborative governance theory, inter-stakeholder trust, facilitative leadership, and shared commitment are all critical to the success of collaboration. Due to disparities in sectoral interests, trust between actors in Aceh Besar is still being developed. Although the regent's and the health office's leadership is very strong in promoting the stunting agenda, local political dynamics and official turnover frequently cause it to falter (Zou, 2024).

Additionally, Fardianti & Bintari (2024), highlighted three crucial elements of collaboration: collaborative capacity, shared motivation, and shared principles. According to this study, there is a consensus that reducing stunting is a top priority for regional development. Shared motivation is still normative, though, and hasn't yet been fully expressed in tangible acts. Due to a lack of funding, facilities, and human resources, collaborative capacity is still lacking. To put it another way, the collaboration structure still needs to be strengthened in terms of both substance and quality.

Several significant conclusions can be made from the study's findings. First, since gampongs are the closest base to the community, they should be given more responsibility. Target families, particularly expectant mothers and young children, will be easier to reach through partnerships that use gampong devices. Second, in order for all actors to oversee one another and guarantee program accountability, the joint monitoring mechanism needs to be reinforced. Third, since the value and religion approach has been successful in altering behavior in Aceh, religious organizations can be strategic partners to increase public awareness. Fourth, local governments must provide sufficient funding and steady leadership to guarantee the program's sustainability.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how a collaborative governance pattern involving local governments, health offices, *gampong* apparatus, religious organizations, and community communities has accelerated the reduction of stunting in Aceh Besar Regency. Over the past five years, this partnership has been successful in lowering stunting rates, though it has fallen short of the national goal. The study's findings also indicate that while each actor plays a distinct role based on their abilities, the biggest obstacles remain resource support, community involvement, and coordination. Therefore, it can be said that while cooperative practices are already in place in Aceh Besar, they require additional reinforcement in order to maximize the reduction of stunting.

Overall, this study finds that although different actors have been involved in Aceh Besar Regency's collaborative governance, there are still significant challenges with regard to coordination, participation, resources, and monitoring. Strengthening collaborative capacity, *gampong's* active role, support for religious leaders, and leadership consistency across sectors are all necessary to accelerate the reduction of stunting. The national goal of lowering stunting will have a higher chance of success if this is taken into consideration.

Suggestion

Collaboration between the government, health professionals, the community, and non-governmental organizations can accelerate the reduction of stunting in Aceh Besar Regency. Stakeholder cooperation improves program coordination and increases the number of families who can receive services. The role division is made clearer through a collaborative work mechanism, allowing each party to contribute in accordance with

their abilities. Involving the community actively also helps spread knowledge and raise awareness of the significance of preventing stunting at a young age. Through dietary, health, educational, and environmental interventions, this cross-sectoral support eventually yields noticeable results in lowering stunting rates.

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