Free School Lunch Program: Empowering BUMDes

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The aim of President and Vice President-elect, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, through the free nutritious meal program is to enhance the quality of life for Indonesia's young generation. They are committed to ensuring that every child in Indonesia, particularly those from underprivileged families, has adequate access to proper nutrition. Prabowo and Gibran hope that this program will help improve children's academic achievements, reduce stunting rates, and foster a healthier, more productive generation for the future.

However, the free nutritious lunch program is vulnerable to risks such as corruption, collusion, and nepotism (CCN), and faces significant challenges in logistics, distribution, and management. Additionally, the program may suffer from investment inequalities and issues related to food quality and variety.

**Corruption:** Large-scale programs like this are susceptible to fund misuse if not closely monitored. Funds intended to provide nutritious food for children can be diverted by irresponsible parties.

**Collusion and Nepotism:** The appointment of suppliers or service providers may be influenced by personal or political relationships rather than by competence and service quality. This could diminish the program's effectiveness and disadvantage more competent micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

**Distribution:** Managing food distribution across all corners of Indonesia presents a significant challenge. Remote areas are often difficult to reach, leading to potential delays or even failures in food deliveries.

**Management:** Effective coordination between various parties, including local governments, schools, and food providers, demands a highly efficient management system. Without proper management, the program could result in logistical and administrative chaos. The most significant challenge lies in accurately determining who is entitled to receive and benefit from the free nutritious food.

**Investment Inequality:** If the program disproportionately focuses on certain regions or MSMEs, other areas in need of support and economic development may be neglected. This could widen the economic gap between regions that receive investment and those that do not. Unequal investment may also hinder local economic development in areas that should be key targets of this program.

**Quality:** Ensuring the quality of the food provided is a significant challenge. Without clear standards, the food children receive may fail to meet essential nutritional requirements.

**Variety:** A lack of variety in the food provided can lead to boredom among children, potentially increasing food waste. A monotonous menu is not only unappealing but may also fail to meet all of the children's nutritional needs.

The optimal solution to address these challenges and risks is to empower BUMDes (Village-Owned Enterprises) as suppliers or providers of free nutritious food. Empowering BUMDes aligns with the Indonesian government's strategy to foster economic growth at the village level. According to Law No. 3 of 2024, which amends Law No. 6 of 2014, BUMDes are business entities owned and managed by the village government in collaboration with the community to independently and sustainably harness the village's economic potential.

The direct appointment of BUMDes in each village as providers of free nutritious food can significantly reduce the collusion and nepotism that often arise in open selection processes. Appointing BUMDes also saves time and costs typically associated with open selection, allowing the program to be implemented immediately without delays caused by lengthy and complex procedures.

Although BUMDes are not immune to corruption, such as providing food below the established quality and quantity standards, they are directly accountable to the community and village government. This accountability provides BUMDes with a stronger monitoring mechanism compared to individual providers. BUMDes are required to regularly report their performance to the village community through village meetings, which can significantly reduce corruption. Even if corruption does occur, its impact is directly felt by the village population, encouraging greater transparency and accountability.

The appointment of one BUMDes per village as the provider of the free nutritious food program is a strategic step that can encourage equal distribution of investment to the most marginalized and poor villages. This step not only helps in a fairer distribution of resources, but also strengthens the local economy and reduces the gap between developed and disadvantaged villages. Thus, this program has the potential to make a significant contribution to alleviating poverty and increasing prosperity throughout Indonesia.

Appointing one BUMDes per village as the provider for the free nutritious food program is a strategic move that can promote equitable investment in the most marginalized and impoverished villages. This approach not only ensures a fairer distribution of resources but also strengthens the local economy and reduces the gap between developed and disadvantaged villages. Consequently, this program has the potential to make a significant contribution to poverty alleviation and increased prosperity across Indonesia.