

## Government Communication Strategy In Preventing And Reducing The Prevalence Of Stunting In Labuhanbatu Utara District

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| Article Info                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| <p>Received: 2022-08-12<br/>Revised: 2022-02-21<br/>Accepted: 2023-12-21</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/>Government<br/>Communication<br/>Strategy, Prevention and<br/>Decreased Prevalence of<br/>Stunting, North<br/>Labuhanbatu Regency.</p> | <p><i>This study aims to analyze and explain the government's communication strategy in the prevention and decline in the prevalence of stunting in North Labuhanbatu Regency. This research is a descriptive qualitative study used to observe the natural conditions of the prevalence of stunting in North Labuhanbatu. This research informant is determined through purposive techniques. This study collects data through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation. This research data refers to primary and secondary concepts, primary data sourced from interviews and observations, while secondary data sourced from relevant journal articles and books. This research data was analyzed through the Miles &amp; Huberman scheme which included reduction, presentation, and data conclusions. The validity of this research data is tested through the degree of trust (credibility), transfer (transferability), dependability, and confirmability. The results of this study indicate that the North Labuhanbatu government implemented a holistic and value-based communication strategy in stunting prevention efforts, by adopting the principles of Islamic communication such as Qaulan Sadidan, Qaulan Layyina, and Qaula Baligha to increase public awareness and participation. This strategy involves synergy between various parties, including local governments, health institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, with a focus on balanced nutrition education, health education, and successful narratives. Facing challenges such as lack of community understanding, coordination between weak agencies, low literacy, and the lack of participation of community leaders, this strategy emphasizes the importance of integration of stunting prevention programs with other development initiatives, optimization of communication methods, and community involvement in formulating solutions. This comprehensive and integrated approach aims to create a continuous positive impact in reducing the prevalence of stunting and building a healthier future for the people of North Labuhanbatu.</i></p> |

## **I. Introduction**

Data from the 2022 Indonesian Nutrition Status Survey (SSGI), North Labuhanbatu has a stunting prevalence rate of 7.3%, which shows a decrease of 23.6% from 2021, with a total of 382 toddlers affected by stunting. However, the readiness of Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) in related agencies to accelerate stunting reduction in the North Labuhanbatu Regency area is in fourth place nationally (Asnawi et al., 2024; Frisnoiry et al., 2024; Saragih & Damanik, 2022).

Stunting is a chronic malnutrition problem caused by insufficient nutritional intake over a long period of time, which results in growth disorders in children so that the child's height is lower or shorter than the age standard. Although a child's short stature is often considered a hereditary (genetic) factor from both parents, society should realize that genetics only has a small influence on the determinants of health compared to behavioral, environmental (social, economic, cultural, political), and service factors (health) (Martony, 2023; Tiyas & HasanBasri, 2023; Utami & Ainy, 2023).

Stunting is a condition of failure to thrive that occurs in children due to chronic malnutrition that lasts for a long period of time, especially during the first 1,000 days of life, from pregnancy to 2 years of age (Fitrauni et al., 2022; Priyono, 2020). The impact of stunting on children is very serious and can affect brain development, intelligence and overall health (Erlanda & Rahmadanik, 2023; Susanti & Mardhiah, 2022; Tendean et al., 2022).

Stunting is a major threat to the quality of Indonesia's people and the nation's competitiveness. This is caused by interference not only with the child's physical growth (short height/stunt), but also with their brain development, which has the potential to hamper their ability, (Naviu et al., 2024; Sianturi, 2023; Yunus et al., 2021) achievement at school, as well as productivity and creativity at productive ages (Azahra et al., 2023). Therefore, tackling stunting is a priority in efforts to ensure optimal growth and development of Indonesian children.

Through initial studies in the research area, it appears that the efforts of the North Labuhanbatu Regency government, as stated previously, have not reached the maximum level. Data from the 2021 Indonesian Nutrition Status Study (SSGI) shows that the condition of stunting in the North Sumatra region is very worrying. According to the Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), 13 of the 33 districts/cities in North Sumatra have a stunting prevalence above 30 percent. North Labuhanbatu Regency is included in this category, along with other districts/cities such as Mandailing Natal, Padang Lawas, Pakpak Bharat, South Nias, North Nias, Dairi, North Padang Lawas, Nias, Padangsidempuan City, Langkat, Batubara, and South Tapanuli (Pebri, 2022; Sartika et al., 2024; Sipahutar, 2020).

More serious efforts are needed to explore the other side of this problem, so that the root of the problem can be found which can then become the basis for developing further strategies (Alif et al., 2023; Mulyadi et al., 2022). Therefore, several major themes need to be proposed as study material, such as an analysis of the stunting situation in North Labuhanbatu Regency and the role of government communication in handling it. Literature study on government communication in overcoming stunting problems, qualitative research on perceptions of stunting and government efforts to overcome it through communication, as well as analysis of government policies in overcoming stunting and how communication strategies can influence the implementation of these policies (Bender, 2022).

In an effort to overcome the prevalence of stunting in North Labuhanbatu Regency, it is important to consider effective communication strategies. The first step is to set clear communication goals, whether to convey information, ask for support, or influence people's attitudes and behavior. Then, adapting the communication style to the target audience is also an important key, considering that everyone has different communication preferences. Using clear and easy to understand language and listening well are other important aspects in implementing a communication strategy.

Furthermore, the selection of effective media must also be considered in accordance with the communication objectives to be achieved. Formal situations require a different communication approach than informal situations, so it is important to consider the context in communicating. Apart from that, good conflict management is also needed when tensions arise in communication, by finding solutions that are mutually beneficial for all parties. Finally, receiving feedback from the audience is important for improving the quality of future communication strategies. By receiving input and constructive criticism, communication strategies can be improved to achieve greater effectiveness in overcoming the prevalence of stunting in North Labuhanbatu Regency.

## **2. Research Method**

This research is included in the type of field research (Field Research) with a qualitative approach. The approach taken in this research is a qualitative descriptive approach (Hasibuan et al., 2022; Hasibuan & Prastowo, 2019). The descriptive approach aims to systematically describe the facts or characteristics of a particular population or a particular field in a factual and accurate manner (Alhamid, 2019; Hasibuan & Rahmawati, 2019). The dimensions of the place in this research are the Regional Implementing Organization (OPD), the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) Jalan Aek Batu City, District and the Health Service Force No. 58 Aek Kanopan, Kualuh Hulu District, North Labuhanbatu Regency 21273. The perpetrators or subjects in this research were the leadership, BKKBN staff and the Health Service. The research location was focused on the Regional Implementing Organization (OPD), especially the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) and the Health Service operating in North Labuhanbatu Regency. The research time is planned for 3 months.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **Communities Affected by Stunting in North Labuhanbatu**

Communities affected by stunting in North Labuhanbatu Regency are those who have

toddlers or young children who experience delays in physical growth and development due to chronic malnutrition over a long period of time (Ariansyah & Mauliansyah, 2023; Indrayani et al., 2024). Factors that can cause stunting among the North Labuhanbatu community may include limited access to adequate nutrition, low knowledge about nutrition and healthy eating patterns, and unsupportive environmental conditions, such as poor sanitation and limited access to clean water (Anindri et al., 2024).

People affected by stunting usually experience negative impacts physically, cognitively and socially. Physically, children who are stunted tend to be shorter than their peers, which can affect their health and physical development. Cognitive impacts include reduced ability to learn and develop mentally, which can affect their academic performance and cognitive development. Socially, children who experience stunting may face stigmatization and difficulty in interacting socially with their peers (Asnawi et al., 2024; Nurfaidah et al., 2023).

Therefore, overcoming stunting in North Labuhanbatu Regency is very important, and the government and various related parties need to make efforts to increase public awareness regarding the importance of balanced nutrition, provide access to adequate nutrition, and increase access to health and sanitation services. quality. Communities affected by stunting in North Labuhanbatu are the focus of the local government's attention. Stunting, which is a chronic nutritional problem, has affected some of the population in the region.

The impact of stunting is not only limited to physical health problems, (Hadid et al., 2023) but can also impact overall development and quality of life (Nasution & Kusumawati, 2023; Vizianti, 2022). Therefore, overcoming stunting in North Labuhanbatu requires comprehensive efforts, involving various parties including the government, non-government organizations and the community itself. Steps such as increasing access to quality nutrition, nutrition education for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and strengthening the health and nutrition system at the local level are several strategies that can help overcome this stunting problem effectively in North Labuhanbatu.

## **Government Communication in Preventing and Reducing the Prevalence of Stunting**

The North Labuhanbatu government has taken various communication steps to prevent and reduce the prevalence of stunting in the area. One of the steps taken is to convey information to the public through various communication channels. They conducted direct outreach campaigns and used local mass media and social media to reach a wider audience. In addition, the local government is also involved in education and training programs for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers on proper nutrition. They conveyed the importance of a balanced diet for children's optimal growth. This effort aims to increase public understanding of the importance of adequate nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding (Ashikin et al., 2022; Sulistiyowati & Hermawan, 2022).

The North Labuhanbatu government also collaborates with health institutions and non-governmental organizations. They organize outreach and education activities about exclusive breastfeeding and providing healthy complementary foods. The aim is to increase awareness of the importance of proper nutrition for children's growth and development. Furthermore, the local government encouraged the establishment of posyandu in every village or sub-district. This posyandu is a place to provide maternal and child health services, including nutritional counseling and monitoring children's growth. This step is expected to provide easier access for the public to obtain information and health services related to stunting prevention (Arif et al., 2023; Sutraningsih et al., 2021).

The North Labuhanbatu government also involves the mass media in conveying health messages about stunting prevention. They use various media, such as television, radio and newspapers, to disseminate relevant information and help increase public awareness about the importance of good nutrition for children's growth (Pebri, 2022; Sulistyorini et al., 2024).

The North Labuhanbatu government's communication steps also include Islamic communication as an approach, the implementation of this communication includes Qaulan Sadidan (Gentle Words), Qaulan Layyina (Gentle Words), and Qaula Baligha (Continuous Words). In an effort to implement an Islamic communication approach, the Labuhanbatu government Utara adopts various important principles which are reflected

in the concept of Qaulan Al-Baligha, namely words that leave an impression on the soul. This principle emphasizes the importance of conveying strong and memorable messages to the community, so that information about the importance of good nutrition to prevent stunting can be well received and deeply understood by the community (Manggala et al., 2021; Pakaya et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the local government also applies the principle of Qaulan Al-Layyina, namely gentle words. In this context, they try to convey health messages in a way that does not offend or make people feel offended. This gentle approach aims to build a harmonious relationship between the government and society in addressing health problems, including the problem of stunting. Furthermore, the government is also committed to implementing the principles of Qaulan Sadidan, namely correct speech. They emphasized the importance of accuracy and truth in conveying information to the public regarding stunting prevention. This principle guarantees that the information conveyed by the government can be trusted and relied upon by the public (Ayu & Ariyanti, 2019; Saputri et al., 2022).

The informants emphasized that a regular monitoring and evaluation process is very necessary to determine the effectiveness of stunting prevention policies and programs, as well as to make adjustments if necessary. They also highlighted the importance of government transparency and accountability in implementing stunting prevention programs, as well as involving the community in the decision-making process to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the programs implemented (Amirah et al., 2024; Saleh et al., 2024).

Apart from that, the speakers also emphasized the importance of facilities such as posyandu and health clinics as strategic places to provide nutritional supplements and ensure their accessibility for the community (Sulistiyowati & Hermawan, 2022). They also highlighted the need for monitoring and evaluation of stunting prevention policies and programs to determine their level of success and make necessary adjustments to increase their effectiveness. Interview results show that intensive monitoring and evaluation, (Frisnoiry et al., 2024) government openness to input and active community participation, as well as the use of strategic facilities such as posyandu and health clinics are key factors

in efforts to prevent stunting in North Labuhanbatu (Purba, 2020).

### **Barriers to the Government's Communication Strategy in Preventing and Reducing the Prevalence of Stunting**

The North Labuhanbatu government has an important role in efforts to prevent and reduce the prevalence of stunting in its region. However, there are several obstacles to implementing effective communication strategies. One of the main obstacles is the lack of public understanding of the importance of nutrition and healthy eating patterns in children's growth. Many parents are still unaware of the negative impact of stunting on children's development (Laxmi Anggriani, 2019; Lutfiani et al., 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2022).

From a series of interviews, it appears that efforts to prevent and reduce the prevalence of stunting require a comprehensive approach and involve various parties. It is important for the North Labuhanbatu government to continue to collaborate with various stakeholders and strengthen effective communication strategies to increase public understanding and awareness about the importance of nutrition and healthy eating patterns in children's growth (Frisnoiry et al., 2024; Handonowati et al., 2023).

The unavailability of adequate resources is also a serious obstacle. The lack of budget for educational programs about balanced nutrition and good dietary practices makes it difficult for the government to provide the necessary materials and training for the community. This makes it difficult to reach a wide target population and disseminate the right information. It is important for the North Labuhanbatu government to find creative and sustainable solutions to overcome these obstacles and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of budget use for health and nutrition programs (Kesha et al., 2024; Sumanti, 2024).

The inability to coordinate between government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is also an obstacle in implementing communication strategies. Sometimes, there is a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of each party, resulting in overlapping efforts to prevent stunting. Good coordination is necessary to maximize program effectiveness (Nurva & Maharani, 2023; Zhara et al., 2024). Apart from that, the

lack of active involvement from community leaders and local leaders also hinders efforts to prevent stunting. People tend to be more accepting of information conveyed by figures they know and trust (Ayu & Ariyanti, 2019; Tammu et al., 2021). Therefore, involving local figures in stunting prevention campaigns can increase the effectiveness of the messages conveyed. A lack of understanding of the role of technology in improving access and dissemination of information is also a barrier. The use of social media and digital technology can be a very effective tool in conveying messages about nutrition and stunting prevention. However, awareness of this potential is still low among health workers and the public

Observation results show that high levels of migration and population mobility are obstacles in ensuring the continuity of stunting prevention programs. It is important for the North Labuhanbatu government to develop communication strategies and health services that can reach and influence this mobile population. A low level of understanding about the problem of stunting among health workers can also hinder prevention efforts. Lack of knowledge about the causes, symptoms and consequences of stunting can reduce the ability of health workers to provide education and support to the community. Lack of understanding about the importance of nutrition in the first 1000 days of life (MP-ASI) is also an obstacle in efforts to prevent stunting. Many parents do not realize that their child's diet since infancy can have a big impact on the child's growth and development later in life.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on the research results, the researchers concluded as follows: First, the communication steps taken by the North Labuhanbatu Government in preventing and reducing the prevalence of stunting combine various strategies based on relevant theories and concepts, including Islamic communication. Such as *Qaulan Al-Baligha*, *Qaulan Al-Layyina*, and *Qaulan Sadidan*, emphasizing strength, gentleness, and truth in conveying the message. This shows the government's commitment to paying attention to aspects of social welfare and family safety. With a focus on community understanding, acceptance and motivation, these steps aim to increase awareness of the importance of balanced

nutrition and children's health, with the hope of producing a significant positive impact in reducing the prevalence of stunting in North Labuhanbatu. Second, Policy Strategy The communication implemented by the North Labuhanbatu Government in preventing and reducing the prevalence of stunting includes an integrated approach and involves various related parties, such as local government, health institutions, non-government organizations and the general public. Third, in overcoming the stunting problem in North Labuhanbatu, the government has a number of obstacles that need to be overcome. The lack of public understanding about the importance of nutrition and healthy eating patterns for children's growth is a top priority, requiring an effective communication approach to increase awareness. In addition, limited resources, including an adequate budget, as well as a lack of coordination between government agencies and NGOs are also serious challenges.

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