

The village government's communication model: A promotion strategy for stunting prevention in Indonesia

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Abstract

Background: Stunting remains a significant social issue among the population in Indonesia. Inadequate treatment has led to numerous cases of suboptimal height in children aged 19 years.

Objective: This study aimed to explore the strategy of the village government in formulating communication messages, utilizing communication methods, and employing communication media for the stunting alleviation program.

Methods: A phenomenological approach was employed, with the research conducted in Pulau Harapan Village, Nine Island District, Sinjai Regency. Data were gathered from the government officials of Pulau Harapan Village through observations, interviews, and documentation. Subsequently, the collected data underwent analysis involving reduction, presentation, verification, and conclusions drawing, facilitated by Atlas TI 8 software.

Results: The village government's strategy in crafting stunting alleviation program messages, from socialization to implementation in Harapan Island Village, Nine Island District, Sinjai Regency, revolves around the Two-Step Flow Communication model. The communication methods used include information repetition, channelization, persuasion to alter the target mothers' perceptions, educational methods, and coercion (coerfindings). Media employed include print media, electronic media, and human resource mobilization within Harapan Island Village.

Conclusion: The findings of the study provide valuable insights to address the stunting issue in Indonesia.

Keywords: stunting; communication; method; media; Indonesia

Background

In recent developments concerning children who have reached the age of 19, it has been observed

that their height falls short by less than 13.6 centimeters in boys and girls, deviating from the normal height by less than 10.4 centimeters (Budd et al., 2019). The root cause of such incidents can

be traced back to the failure in the growth and development of children under the age of five (toddlers) (Arifuddin et al., 2023a). This failure in growth and development persists into subsequent ages, resulting in suboptimal height at the age of 19. Consequently, these individuals become adults with shorter stature, leading to limitations and suboptimal productivity (Arifuddin et al., 2023b). This issue is further elucidated by survey data from the South East Asian Nutrition Survey (SEANUTS) in 2010–2011, positioning Indonesia as one of the countries with the highest number of toddlers with short stature, surpassing neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. According to the 2010 data, the standard height for 5-year-old children is around 110 centimeters, while Indonesian boys and girls of the same age have average heights of less than 6.7 centimeters and 7.3 centimeters, respectively (Lalu Makripuddin, 2021).

This problem is one of the persisting issues in the nutrition of the Indonesian population, failing to meet compliance standards in Indonesian children (Walker et al., 2007). Consequently, cases of short stature, commonly referred to as stunting in Indonesia, continue to occur. Even in the Village Pocket Book on Stunting Handling, it is stated that data on the height of Indonesian toddlers according to their age, from the 2013 Basic Health Research, show that the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia has reached 37.2 percent (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2013). The Nutrition Status Monitoring in 2016 reported a rate of 27.5 percent, while the WHO allows a limit of less than 20 percent (Darvishi et al., 2013). This data implies that around 8.9 million children under five years of age in Indonesia experience suboptimal growth. In other words, one out of three children in Indonesia is stunted (World Health Organization, 2014). More than a third of Indonesian children under the age of five are experiencing below-average height (World Health Organization, 2018).

As a result, stunting is a widely discussed issue, involving not only the health sector but also all other sectors (Wahyuningsih et al., 2022). On the other hand, all sectors play a significant role in alleviating stunting cases. This is a focal point for the Pulau Harapan Village Government, Pulau Sembilan District, Sinjai Regency, Indonesia, which aims to prevent stunting in the area. This effort seeks to enable Indonesian children, especially those in

Pulau Harapan Village, to grow and develop optimally.

The community empowerment movement in the stunting prevention program, particularly in Pulau Harapan Village, is a challenging endeavor to implement. The village government must possess sufficient capacity to unite all elements of society and other sectors. Moreover, Pulau Harapan Village is distant from the mainland, the capital city of Sinjai Regency, and the existence of a Community Health Center (Puskesmas) on a different continent adds to the complexity. Despite these challenges, the stunting intervention program has been successfully implemented, earning appreciation from the Sinjai District Government.

Consequently, researchers are keen on examining the communication strategy of the Pulau Harapan Village Government to understand its ability to empower the community and involve all sectors in the stunting intervention program in their area. The study explores village government strategies in formulating communication messages, using communication methods, and utilizing communication media to support the implementation of the stunting alleviation program in Pulau Harapan Village, Pulau Sembilan District, Sinjai Regency. Through this research, it aims to provide a theoretical contribution to readers about the significance of understanding communication concepts. Additionally, for officeholders, implementing an effective communication strategy is crucial in facilitating the implementation of government programs to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

Methods

Study Design

The research design for this study is qualitative research, aiming to explore information about the status of existing symptoms. These symptoms will be described based on their relevance to a variable (Mack & Woodson, 2005). The focus of this study is to elucidate the communication strategy employed by the Village Government in the implementation of the stunting alleviation program in Pulau Harapan Village. The research approach utilizes a phenomenological approach, specifically examining phenomena or facts related to the communication strategy of the Harapan Island Village Government.

Samples/Participants

The data source for this study comprises officials from the Pulau Harapan Village Government, Pulau Sembilan District, Sinjai Regency, Indonesia, involved in the implementation of the stunting alleviation program.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with participants. The interviews aimed to gather comprehensive information regarding the participants' strategies for addressing stunting in their area, based on the local wisdom of the community.

Data Analysis

Data collection involved various methods, including observation, interviews, and documentation. Researchers utilized data reduction as the method for analyzing the information obtained from the field. Subsequently, data display was performed, followed by data verification through techniques such as comparing opinions, contrasting data, and drawing conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yudie et al., 2017). Atlas ti 8 software was employed for data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured the confidentiality of the respondents and explained that the provided information would be treated with confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained as approval for gathering information from the respondents. To ensure the accuracy of collected data the triangulation method was used.

Results

A concise overview of the study results is presented in **Figure 1**, outlining the strategies employed by the Government, in message composition, communication methods, and media utilization.

Communication Message Preparation Strategy

The government apparatus utilizes a two-step communication strategy in addressing stunting. This approach involves the transmission of messages from knowledgeable sources, specifically the Harapan Island Village Health Center, to officers or officials of the Harapan Island Village Government. These messages are then carefully crafted by the officers and subsequently disseminated to the families or mothers targeted by the stunting alleviation program.

Strategy for Using Communication Methods

Officials from Pulau Harapan Village, Pulau Sembilan District, Sinjai Regency, implement a dual-method approach in addressing stunting. The village officials employ audience analysis as the first step, followed by a persuasive method. Audience canalization is evident in the officials' ability to categorize the community into those who are receptive to and accepting of the stunting program and those who are somewhat resistant, perceiving the program as mediocre. Those hesitant to join the program receive intensive attention, gradually fostering a comprehensive and multi-aspect understanding. Subsequently, an educational method is employed, proving effective in providing information to the target mothers. When persuasive and educative efforts fail to change attitudes, coercive communication methods become the choice for the Harapan Island Village apparatus. This coercive communication method is a last resort, activated when the public disregards information presented through a persuasive approach. It is crucial to note that the application of coercive methods does not imply continuous force on individuals; rather, it is followed by an educative persuasive approach.

Strategy for Using Communication Media

The village head employs a media strategy including print and electronic media, along with the mobilization of human resources in Pulau Harapan Village. All potential avenues that can serve as media for conveying information about stunting alleviation programs are utilized. Additionally, individuals have diverse attitudes and perceptions in response to these programs. Some readily accept disseminated information through various channels such as WhatsApp, posters, advertisements, appeals, and the like. Conversely, there are individuals who are apathetic and can only be swayed to support and participate in the program if close acquaintances, community leaders, and religious figures are involved. Furthermore, there are individuals who need personal visits to recognize the stunting alleviation program as one they must actively engage in. Hence, the media mobilization strategy, both electronic and involving human resources, aims to encourage community participation in the stunting alleviation program in alignment with the targets set by the Pulau Harapan Village Government.

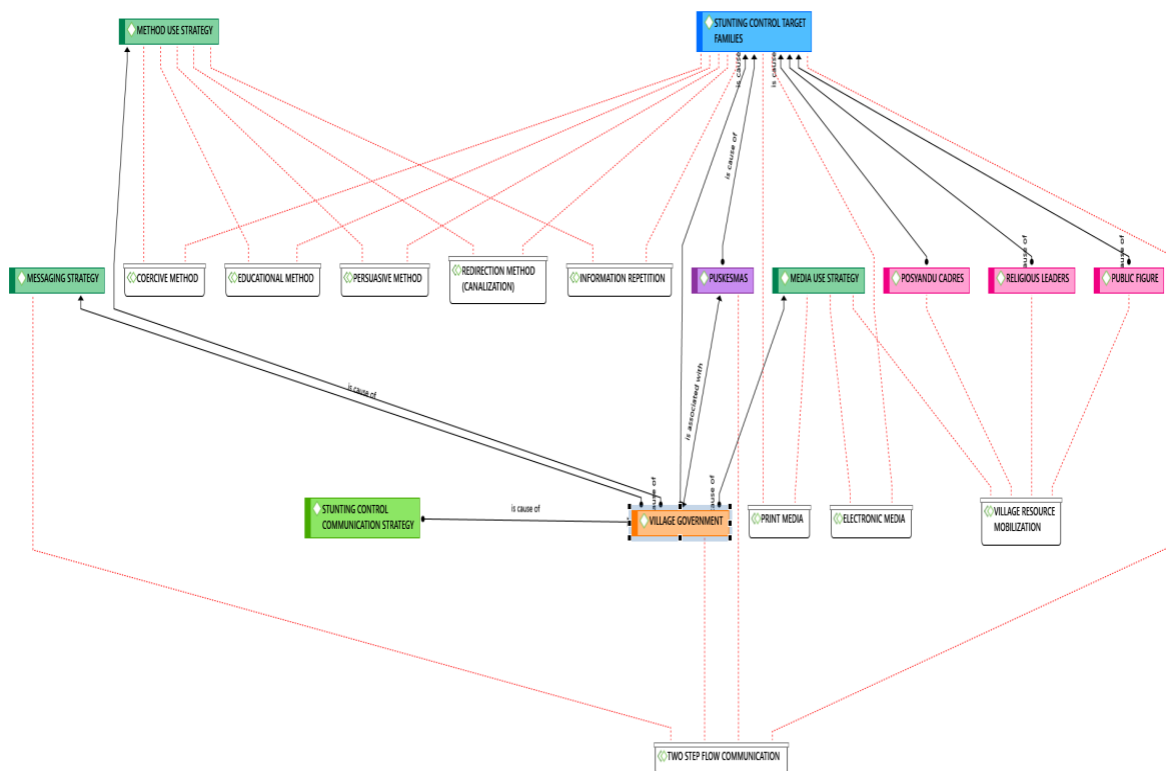


Figure 1 Communication strategy in tackling stunting

Discussion

The Village Government's Strategy in Developing Stunting Alleviation Program Messages

In communication, the message plays a crucial role as it represents the information conveyed by the communicator to the communicant (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The objective is to ensure that the communicator's intentions are comprehended by the communicant (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). To facilitate effective reception, the communicator must compose the message meticulously. The compiled messages must be logical and persuasive to engage the audience successfully (Campos, 2006; Matinheikki et al., 2019).

Recognizing the importance of messages in streamlining communication, the Pulau Harapan Village Government in Pulau Sembilan District, Sinjai Regency consistently packages messages for its residents, particularly when dealing with crucial program implementations. Over the past five years, the government has been vigorously implementing a national program, specifically the stunting alleviation program for pregnant women and children under five. This program significantly impacts the targeted families, as the term "stunting" carries a certain level of embarrassment for some individuals, labeled as

"kanretting stunting" in the local language. This situation is awkward due to the stigma directed at parents perceived as unable to care for their children.

Consequently, the Pulau Harapan Village Government places significant emphasis on effective communication with the community, especially the target families. The village government is resolute in eradicating stunting cases in their area while simultaneously instilling confidence in the community to actively participate in the success of the stunting alleviation program. To achieve this goal, the Pulau Harapan Village Government conducts intensive communication activities, including outreach, implementation, and program evaluation. In order to enhance program effectiveness, the government ensures that every message is well-packaged during directives to convincingly engage the residents. In this regard, a village official mentioned that, before conducting counseling sessions with the community, briefings are held to align perceptions. The outcomes of these briefings serve as the foundation for the counseling message. Additionally, given that the target community has diverse attitudes and understanding levels, some consciously accept the message, while others may be uninformed for various reasons (Figure 2).

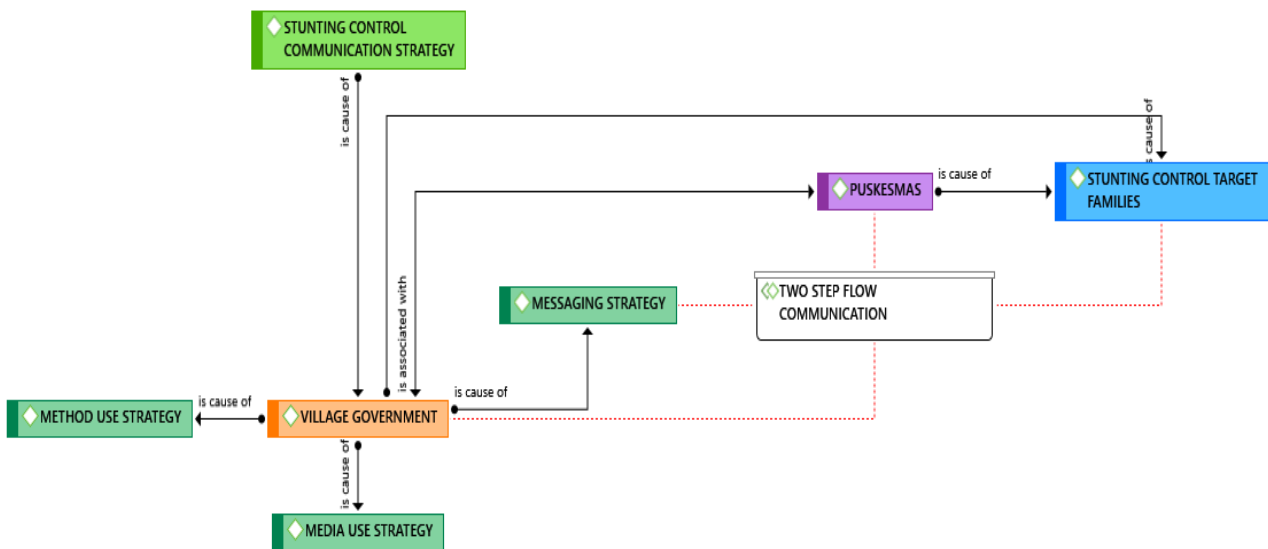


Figure 2 The village government's strategy in developing stunting alleviation program messages

This statement illustrates that the messages conveyed by the Pulau Harapan Village Government were compiled and agreed upon to avoid different perceptions that could potentially confuse the community. Additionally, the conveyed messages aim to convince the public of the importance of the promoted program, namely stunting eradication. The preparation of the message also aims to ensure that the conveyed messages are not ambiguous. Efforts to eliminate ambiguity in messages are deemed crucial because there are individuals who still perceive stunting as a non-issue, especially those who observe their children as healthy. A village official affirmed this by stating that during communication with the community, careful attention is given to the message being conveyed. This is because there are still people resistant to acknowledging the problem of stunting. Some believe that as long as they perceive their children as healthy, various treatments are unnecessary. The urgency of the message lies in its proper management to enhance understanding, comprehension, and encourage appropriate actions to collectively address stunting.

Thus, it is evident that the management of messages by village officials to persuade the community about the stunting program is highly disciplined. They organize messages in advance to ensure consistency across all officials. Moreover, in Pulau

Harapan Village, there are individuals with resistance to traditional understandings. This group requires convincing information to align with government programs. To deliver accountable messages, the village government consistently coordinates with the Pulau Harapan Village Health Center. Prior to officials and related agencies engaging with the community, they undergo coordination. During this coordination, a more competent party, the Community Health Center, enlightens several officials about the program's substance and the anticipated impact.

Village government strategy in using stunting alleviation program communication methods

One crucial aspect of communication is the method employed by the communicator (Ganguly, 2016; Kristoffersson et al., 2020). The chosen communication method is considered significant because, regardless of how well the message is packaged and organized, the effectiveness of communication is contingent on the delivery method (Cooper et al., 1993; Ganguly, 2016). An improper method not only leads to a lack of understanding on the part of the audience but also fosters a negative attitude toward the communicator (Maier et al., 2021). Hence, the method is a vital consideration for a communicator (Kristoffersson et al., 2020).

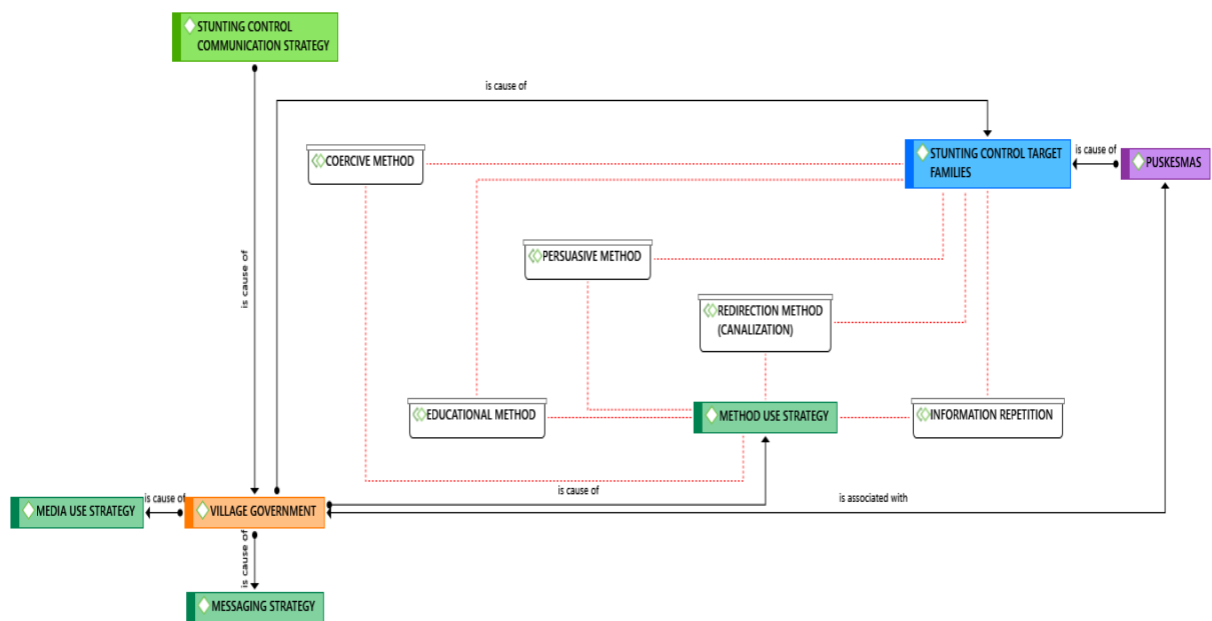


Figure 3 Village government strategy in using stunting alleviation program communication methods

Regarding the importance of method, one of the village officials said that in dealing with the community, we are very careful. This is because the community is very antipathy to the village government when we take the wrong way in dealing with them. People are reluctant to follow what we say, and even tend to withdraw for various reasons. Especially with regard to the problem of stunting which they consider normal because they see their child is healthy. They assume that the condition of thin and short children is common and may be a hereditary factor (Figure 3).

This statement illustrates that village government officials realize that communicating with the community must have the right method. The choice of method is adjusted to the material or message to be conveyed because if the choice of method is not appropriate, the public will not accept what is conveyed by the apparatus. Therefore, Pulau Harapan Village Government officials tried in various ways to approach the community so they would want to take part in the stunting alleviation program starting when they were still pregnant with their children until their children were born. This was stated by one of the village officials who stated that after we had received information and compiled a message that we would convey to the community, we would convey it to the community continuously. We always convey information about stunting, from its signs to the worst consequences it will cause. Every time there is a meeting with them, the information is

presented again. In other words, information about the stunting alleviation program is always intensified, so that people know and are used to this information. Even teachers in Pulau Harapan Village were also asked to provide information about stunting to all their students. The ustas were also asked to insert information about the stunting program to the public every time they enlightened the people. We want all the people and generations in Pulau Harapan Village to know and understand about stunting which is being promoted by the government. starting from the signs to the worst consequences that will be caused, we always convey.

Based on the statement made by the apparatus, it can be understood that communication was carried out very intensively. It even moved all the elements in Pulau Harapan Village. Information is constantly being intensified so that everyone, especially pregnant women and mothers with toddlers, is aware of the stunting program. The mobilization and repetition of information from all existing devices in the village is intended so that the thoughts and concerns of the program target community are attracted and embedded in their minds about the stunting program that they must follow for the sake of their own health and especially that of their children. If examined, the continuous repetition of information carried out by the Pulau Harapan Village Government apparatus is a manifestation of the redundant method or repetition method. The method of conveying information is carried out continuously

and repeatedly so that messages about stunting eradication can be embedded in the minds of not only the targeted mothers, but their husbands and their closest family. In this way, husbands and their immediate families can also understand the importance of stunting eradication, so that they can participate as much as possible to make the program a success. Moreover, the success of the stunting alleviation program in Pulau Harapan Village will have a positive impact on them as well. so that they can participate as much as possible to make the program successful.

Information aimed at the community, especially the community that is the target of the program, is also carried out by following the wishes and habits of the local community. That is, if there are people who are resistant even though they have been given information, but have still not shifted from their traditional understanding, then government officials or officials give whatever they want but are still given information. They are not just released to carry out habits that are contrary to the program but are changed little by little. This was stated by one of the Pulau Harapan Village officials who said that even though the numbers were not large, there were some in our community who were reluctant to take part in the stunting program. These people sometimes annoy us, but keep us informed. Cases of rejection like this mostly from those who are pregnant. There are many pemali-pemali in the local language that they are afraid of, so they are reluctant to do what we say. The way we deal with people like this is we exchange ideas with them about their understanding, so we know what their attitudes and stances are. What are their values that make it difficult for them to accept this stunting program. After knowing the main problem, then we try to provide new multi-aspect understanding and values related to stunting. Through this multi-aspect communication we try to enter the community little by little so that they can open up.

This statement illustrates the village governments efforts to map the objective conditions of the community based on their understanding of stunting. Their understanding, especially those who are resistant, accepts stunting as a normal thing, not as something to worry about for the sake of the health of future generations. The mapping is done to determine steps, such as giving answers to all their understandings so that they know, understand and

realize that what they understand is actually wrong. If the community has begun to understand and accept what is the substance of the stunting program, then proceed with the process of providing a comprehensive understanding. In providing this understanding, the community is slowly being directed to all stages of the stunting management program. The most important stage that the target women went through was inviting them to always attend the inspection activities carried out at the posyandu. In the researchers observations, the targeted mothers who were directed were mothers who had been given a touch of understanding and had accepted the stunting program even though they had not wholeheartedly. The women were picked up from their homes to be delivered to the Posyandu location. It can be seen that the targeted mothers were accompanied until the posyandu activities were completed. After they were finished, the assistants tried to accompany the target mother to her house while providing enlightenment about the importance of following these activities in order to prevent stunting cases.

After mapping the community, especially those who dont participate in the program for various reasons, assistance is provided so that the target population of the stunting program feels they are cared for. The assistance is not just mentoring but also given persuasive enlightenment by the staff who have been assigned. The persuasive approach was very intense, even when the schedule of program activities arrived, the assistants persuasively picked up and accompanied the target community until they returned to their respective homes. Persuasive efforts like this were quite successful in accordance with information from Pulau Harapan Village officials who said that the introduction, mapping, and classifying our people in this village really helps us to convey messages and especially in determining further steps or methods for us to do. The results of the mapping are used as a reference to approach them with a persuasive approach. We always communicate with them heart to heart. Moreover, they are mothers and we as mothers must have the same desire to see our children healthy in the future. This persuasive approach can touch the hearts and feelings of the target women little by little, so that they want to take part in the programs we have planned related to stunting reduction.

So, it can be understood that the Pulau Harapan Village apparatus applied the communication

method in launching the stunting alleviation program for the target mothers. The way they do this is to identify all aspects surrounding the programs objectives. Starting from their social background, their level of understanding to the values they hold which also influence their acceptance of this stunting program. The data is classified which is then mapped in such a way as to determine which targets need to be given high intensity attention and which targets need to be promoted, even used as examples to be followed by other program objectives. Those who are deemed to need to be given high attention are channelized to be directed little by little to understand. The process of directing the target women, Pulau Harapan Village officials also used persuasive communication methods to build reciprocal relationships from heart to heart. That is, through persuasive methods, the apparatus tries to touch the feelings of the mothers by comparing the apparatus themselves who are also mothers with the targeted mothers.

The village government's strategy in selecting and using communication media for stunting alleviation programs

In addition to messages and methods, one aspect that also needs to be considered in communication is the media used (Chen & Wei, 2020). Communication media is important because the effectiveness and efficiency of communication can be achieved if the media used is representative and conducive to supporting the achievement of messages to the public (Specht, 2019). Media that is not representative will interfere with the effectiveness of communication (Ganguly, 2016). Even the possibility of communication will fail because the purpose of communication is not met (Specht, 2019). But on the contrary, if the media used meets the standards and is very representative, then the message conveyed will be easily accepted by the audience in accordance with the wishes of the communicator (Ganguly, 2016). Therefore, the Pulau Harapan Village Government in implementing the stunting alleviation program uses the media by taking into account the conditions of its people. This was stated by one of the village officials who argued that in order to expedite the implementation of the stunting alleviation program, the village government made use of all the media that made it possible to achieve the goal. The researcher observed that there were print media posted, such as posters about the dangers of stunting and at the same time efforts that

could be made to prevent it and announcements about several activities that the target mothers could participate in as well as several other slogans which basically contained messages about the importance of stunting alleviation. Posters, advertisements or announcements and appeals are placed at several strategic points, such as busy street corners.

Apart from print media, in general the Pulau Harapan Village Government uses verbal communication media. The use of this media was emphasized by one of the Harapan Island village officials who stated that in general, to provide information to the community, especially information about government programs, the Pulau Harapan Village Government directly invited them to attend the village meeting hall. During the meeting, the village head of Pulau Harapan gave or explained all programs, including the stunting alleviation program. The village head took advantage of this moment, not only inviting the target women, efficient.

This statement illustrates the use of media in verbal form which is used by the Pulau Harapan Village Government to convey information about stunting alleviation programs in their area. Verbal communication media is a medium that is very commonly used because it directly involves the people involved. It can even present people who are influential and have competence related to the problem being informed. Influential people, such as the husbands of the target women, parents, community leaders, religious leaders, and the health sector have the competence to further sharpen the concept of stunting alleviation. Thus, everyone will be given a moral responsibility to be involved in the success of the program.

Other media that are often used by the Pulau Harapan Village Government are cellular electronic media, such as Whatsapp, SMS, and telephone (Figure 4). This was stated by one of the village government officials who stated that apart from using verbal media, we also use media that is on residents smartphones for those who have Android. Our target mothers are listed and included in the group to make it easier to provide information to them, what will be implemented. Groups are also used to provide information to each other and the condition of the target mothers. For those who are reluctant to disclose it in the group, we are open to being asked so that they can freely disclose their

current condition. To mothers who do not have their own HP, so we ask them to register the number that is always nearby. Through this number we can provide information related to the implementation of stunting alleviation programs. Through cell phones, we also often directly contact the target women by calling them. Especially if the person concerned is

not actively participating in the program being promoted by the village government. We called directly to ask about the circumstances, so we didn't take part in the activities being carried out. Even though we admit, there are still targeted mothers who often don't care, either by WA or by telephone.

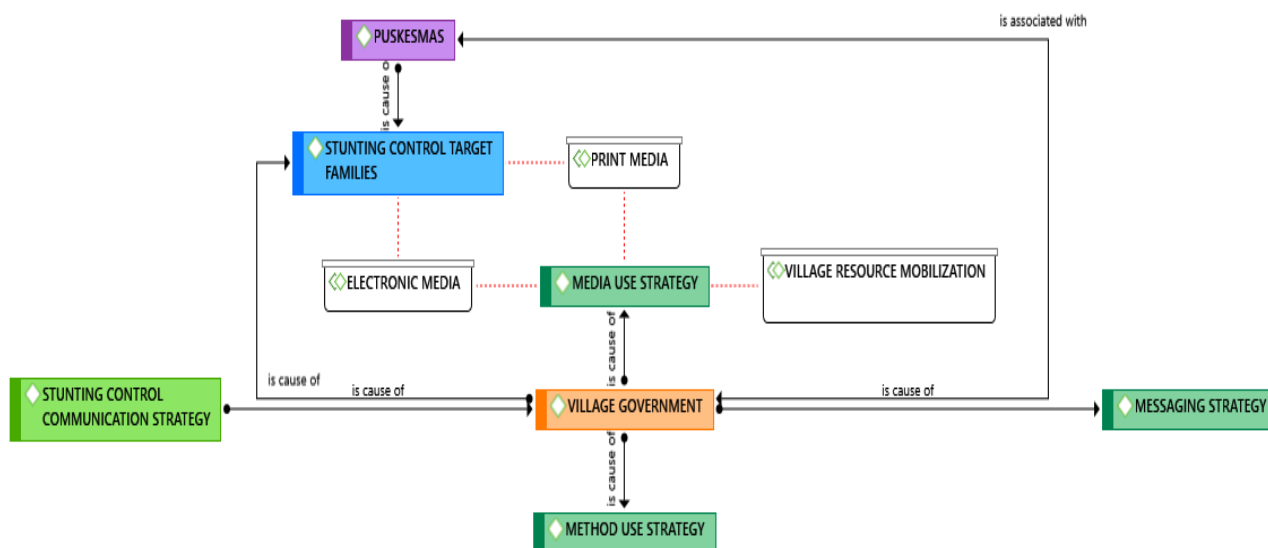


Figure 4 The village government's strategy in selecting and using communication media for stunting alleviation programs

This statement illustrates the use of communication media to launch a stunting alleviation program for target mothers. If you look closely, in general cellular media is used for targeted mothers who are in the caring and active classification to participate in the program. Interaction via WA media or via telephone is quite intense. Moreover, the apparatus is very open to receiving complaints, grievances, and whatever is problematic for the targeted women. Especially the problems related to the conditions of pregnancy and their children who are the target of stunting alleviation. However, it cannot be denied that there are targeted mothers who are apathetic towards stunting alleviation programs. They are indifferent to information sent via WA or by telephone. Pulau Harapan Village officials in responding to this condition of the community made efforts to utilize the people closest to them and several community leaders. This was stated by one of the village officials who said that the condition of our community was not all the same.

Conclusion

The village government's strategy in formulating messages for the stunting alleviation program,

spanning from outreach to program implementation in Pulau Harapan Village, Pulau Sembilan District, Sinjai Regency, employs Two-Step Flow communication. This method involves gathering information from knowledgeable sources, specifically the Health Center, which is then relayed to officials and village stunting management officers. Subsequently, the message undergoes management, systematization, and formulation to align perceptions from multiple perspectives before reaching the target mothers. Moreover, messages or information are tailored to suit the individual conditions of each target woman. The communication methods implemented by the Pulau Harapan Village Government include information repetition, channelization, persuasion, educational approaches, and even the use of coercive methods based on the program's objective conditions. Regarding communication media, the government utilizes print and electronic media, alongside mobilizing human resources within Pulau Harapan Village, such as posyandu cadres, religious figures, and community leaders.

The utilization of Two-Step Flow Communication in the village government's strategy for crafting

stunting alleviation program messages in Harapan Island Village, Nine Island District, Sinjai Regency, holds significant potential benefits for public health. Through repetition, channelization, persuasion, and diverse media usage including print and electronic platforms, the program aims to enhance awareness among target mothers regarding the significance of proper child nutrition and healthcare. It seeks to alter their perceptions and encourage positive behavioral changes. Mobilizing local resources further encourages community involvement, contributing to the program's success. Ultimately, this approach aims to reduce stunting rates, improve public health, and alleviate the burden on healthcare services.

Declaration Conflicting Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Author Contribution

AA, AFN, NR, RNF, RDW obtained and analyzed the data and developed the topics. S and MJN contributed to the study's conceptualization and design, field data collection. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript and took part in the discussion part. All authors read and approved the final manuscript to be published.

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