



## Parental Maintenance Responsibility in Fulfilling Children's Nutritional Needs: A Fiqh Analysis of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG)

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received 11 Mar, 2026

Revised 14 May, 2026

Accepted 25 May, 2026

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#### Keywords:

Child Maintenance;  
Parental Responsibility;  
Islamic Law; Public Policy;  
Free Nutritious Meal  
Program

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### ABSTRACT

The fulfillment of children's nutritional needs constitutes an essential component of parental maintenance obligations in Islamic law. Such obligations are not limited to providing food in a quantitative sense, but also encompass the quality of nutrition necessary to support children's physical growth, health, and overall development. In Indonesia, the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) has emerged as a public policy initiative aimed at addressing malnutrition, reducing stunting, and improving the quality of national human resources. The implementation of this program raises normative questions concerning the relationship between parental responsibilities and the role of the state in ensuring children's nutritional rights. This study examines the position of the MBG program within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence on child maintenance and analyzes its implications for parental obligations. The research employs a normative Islamic legal approach through library research, supported by fiqh analysis, maqasid al-shari'ah, and public policy perspectives. The findings indicate that parental maintenance obligations remain inherent and are not nullified by the existence of the MBG program. Rather, the program functions as a complementary form of state social support aimed at strengthening the fulfillment of children's nutritional rights. From the perspective of maqasid al-shari'ah, the MBG program aligns with the objectives of protecting life (hifz al-nafs), preserving intellect (hifz al-'aql), and safeguarding future generations (hifz al-nasl), provided that its implementation is conducted fairly, proportionally, and without generating new forms of harm.

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### INTRODUCTION

In the perspective of Islamic law, the fulfillment of child maintenance constitutes a fundamental obligation imposed upon parents, particularly the father as the primary provider within the family structure. This obligation is not limited merely to providing food in a general sense, but also includes the provision of proper, healthy, and nutritious meals to ensure the optimal growth and development of children. In Islamic jurisprudence, maintenance (nafkah) is understood as a form of sharia-based responsibility directly related to the protection of children's fundamental rights, including food, clothing, housing, education, healthcare, and adequate social protection. Therefore, the fulfillment of children's nutritional needs cannot be separated from the broader concept of maintenance within Islamic family law.

The normative foundation for this obligation is derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, and the opinions of classical and contemporary Islamic jurists. Furthermore, Indonesian national law, through the Marriage Law, the Compilation of Islamic Law, and child protection regulations, also emphasizes the responsibility of parents in ensuring children's welfare and basic needs. Consequently, neglecting children's nutritional fulfillment is not only regarded as social negligence but may also be categorized as a violation of children's rights that contradicts the principles of child protection in both Islamic law and positive law.

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On the other hand, Indonesia continues to face serious challenges related to children's nutritional quality, particularly the high prevalence of stunting and malnutrition in various regions. These conditions affect not only children's physical health but also cognitive development, educational achievement, and the productivity of future generations. As a result, child nutrition has become a strategic issue in the development of national human resources toward the vision of Indonesia Emas 2045. Therefore, the fulfillment of children's nutritional needs is no longer viewed solely as a private family matter, but also as part of the state's social responsibility and public policy agenda.

As a form of public policy intervention, the government introduced the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), targeting students and other vulnerable groups as an effort to improve public nutritional quality. This program is intended not only to reduce stunting and food insecurity, but also to enhance students' learning concentration, health conditions, and the sustainable development of human resources. From a social perspective, the MBG program is regarded as an instrument of social protection and distributive justice aimed at ensuring children's fundamental right to nutritious food.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the MBG program has generated normative discourse regarding the relationship between family responsibility and the role of the state in fulfilling children's nutritional needs. In Islamic law, maintenance obligations fundamentally remain the responsibility of parents as the primary caretakers of children. Meanwhile, the state is also obligated to ensure public welfare and protect vulnerable groups through various social policies. The issue arises when state intervention through free meal programs is potentially interpreted as a transfer of maintenance responsibility from the family to the state. If not understood proportionally, such conditions may create normative misunderstandings regarding the position of maintenance obligations in Islam.

Within the framework of maqasid al-shariah, the fulfillment of children's nutritional needs is closely related to the protection of life (hifz al-nafs), preservation of intellect (hifz al-'aql), and safeguarding future generations (hifz al-nasl). Therefore, public policies oriented toward improving nutritional quality may fundamentally be regarded as part of efforts to realize public welfare (maslahah 'ammah). However, such policies must still be positioned within a framework that does not eliminate the primary responsibility of parents toward their children.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the position of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence on child maintenance and to explain its implications for parental maintenance obligations in Islamic law. This research also seeks to elaborate the normative construction of the relationship between family responsibility and the role of the state in fulfilling children's nutritional needs in order to create a proportional, integrative understanding that aligns with the principles of maqasid al-shariah.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs normative legal research with a library research approach focusing on the analysis of Islamic legal norms related to parental maintenance obligations in fulfilling children's nutritional needs and the position of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as a public policy. The study applies conceptual, statute, and fiqh-maqasid al-shariah approaches to examine the relationship between parental responsibility and the role of the state in child nutrition fulfillment.

The data sources consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. Primary materials include the Qur'an, Hadith, fiqh literature, laws and regulations, and official government policy documents related to the MBG program. Secondary materials include books, scientific journals, academic articles, and relevant research literature, while tertiary materials consist of legal dictionaries, encyclopedias, and supporting references.

Data were collected through documentation studies and literature reviews from printed and digital sources. The analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically by examining legal provisions, fiqh concepts, scholarly opinions, and public policies related to the study. The maqasid al-shariah approach was also used to assess the extent to which the MBG program aligns with the objectives of protecting life (hifz al-nafs), preserving intellect (hifz al-'aql), and safeguarding future generations (hifz al-nasl) in Islamic law.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Position of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in the Fiqh of Child Maintenance

#### The Legal Status of State Food Assistance

In the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, child maintenance (nafkah) encompasses the fulfillment of essential needs, including food, clothing, housing, healthcare services, and educational needs that are appropriate and proportional to the parents' financial capability (bi qadr al-taqah). This obligation is considered a sharia-based duty grounded in the Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet, and the consensus of Islamic scholars, all of which consistently place parents, particularly fathers, as the primary parties responsible for fulfilling child maintenance obligations.

Islamic family jurisprudence, both in classical and contemporary literature, generally agrees that maintenance is an inherent right of the child that cannot be neglected. This right is closely connected to the fundamental objectives of Islamic law, particularly the protection of life, intellect, and the continuity of future generations, as formulated within the framework of maqasid al-shariah.

In the context of the modern state, various forms of social assistance have developed, including social security systems, subsidies, and free meal programs within educational institutions. Literature on social justice and public policy positions programs such as MBG as part of the national social protection system intended to safeguard vulnerable groups, particularly children, students, and pregnant women. Such policies function as a social safety net that strengthens the protection of citizens' fundamental rights rather than replacing the role of the family entirely.

Studies concerning the implementation of maqasid al-shariah in Islamic economic policy affirm that the state possesses sharia legitimacy to formulate and implement public policies oriented toward public welfare (masalah 'ammah). Such legitimacy remains valid as long as the formulated policies do not contradict Islamic legal principles and continue to preserve the five essential objectives of sharia: the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Within this framework, food assistance provided by the state, including MBG, may be categorized as a permissible act (mubah) that may even reach the level of sunnah or collective obligation (wajib kifayah) when it becomes an essential means of preventing hunger, stunting, and educational inequality.

The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), which targets school-aged children, students, and pregnant women as part of efforts to overcome malnutrition and improve the quality of human resources, is consistent with the view that the state is not only permitted but also encouraged to take proactive measures in protecting the fundamental rights of its citizens. As long as its implementation considers budget priorities, principles of distributive justice, and does not neglect other urgent public obligations, assistance programs such as MBG may be positioned within a strong framework of sharia permissibility based on the principle of public benefit (masalah 'ammah).

### **MBG as a Social Policy**

From a sociological perspective, the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) cannot merely be understood as a charitable practice in the form of food distribution, but rather as a long-term social policy. Studies on social justice related to the implementation of MBG indicate that the policy is directed toward reducing malnutrition and stunting among children, improving students' concentration and academic achievement, reducing social inequality within schools through equal distribution of nutritious meals without discrimination, and strengthening the principle of social justice as mandated in the fifth principle of Pancasila.

Various studies in nutrition and education from several countries demonstrate that the provision of healthy free meals in schools generates significant positive impacts, including reducing student absenteeism during meal hours, creating more equal social relations among students, fostering a more conducive classroom environment, and functioning as a medium for cultivating healthy eating habits from an early age.

These findings confirm that free meal programs are not solely related to fulfilling food needs, but also function as instruments of social policy with broad implications for health, education, and social equality. From the perspective of social fiqh, this function aligns with the principles of al-'inayah bi al-muhtajin (protection of vulnerable groups) and al-ta'awun 'ala al-birr wa al-taqwa (mutual cooperation in goodness and piety). Therefore, the state possesses legitimacy to implement distributive policies aimed at achieving greater social justice, provided that such policies are implemented proportionally and based on the principle of trustworthiness (amanah).

The MBG program also contains significant economic potential. When integrated with local farmers, food-sector micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and domestic supply chains, the policy may create sustainable markets, increase the income of low-income families, and encourage inclusive economic growth. Within the framework of maqasid al-shariah, such contributions align with the principle of protecting wealth (hifz al-mal) while simultaneously supporting the agenda of sustainable development as formulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, from the perspective of fiqh theory and maqasid al-shariah, MBG may be positioned as a legitimate and positive state social policy based on public welfare, as long as it is not politically misused and is managed transparently.

### **The Relationship Between Parental Maintenance Obligations and State Responsibility**

#### **The Principle of the Non-Extinction of Maintenance Obligations**

In principle, the fulfillment of family maintenance, including child maintenance, constitutes an individual obligation (fard 'ayn) imposed upon parents, particularly fathers toward their children, as well as husbands toward their wives. Islamic family jurisprudence emphasizes that maintenance is a normative right of wives and children that does not cease to exist, even when a wife possesses her own income or personal wealth, because such obligations are inherently attached to the family responsibility established by sharia. Likewise, child maintenance remains obligatory as long as the child is unable to independently fulfill his or her own needs, and this obligation must be fulfilled from the father's wealth according to his capability and the standards of the time.

Studies concerning maqasid within the family framework demonstrate that the family is a fundamental institution in safeguarding religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth at the micro level. Within this framework, Islam positions the family as the primary institution responsible for fulfilling the basic needs of its members before such responsibility extends to society and the state. Therefore, maintenance obligations do not cease merely because a wife or child possesses independent income, nor do they disappear due to assistance from third parties such as

relatives, social institutions, or the state. External assistance is instead regarded as complementary support, while the primary responsibility for maintenance remains with the parents.

Accordingly, the existence of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), which provides nutritious food for children within school environments, cannot be interpreted as the elimination or reduction of parental maintenance obligations within the household. A similar analogy may be found in other social assistance mechanisms, such as zakat, food subsidies, or the Family Hope Program (Program Keluarga Harapan), where families are allowed to receive assistance benefits while still remaining responsible for fulfilling their children's maintenance obligations.

### **The Complementary Function of the MBG Program**

From the perspective of Islamic social security, the state functions as the final safeguard when individuals and families are no longer capable of fulfilling their essential needs. Studies on maqasid al-shariah and social policy emphasize that social security systems should be structured hierarchically, beginning with personal responsibility, followed by the family and society, before the state ultimately assumes a role. Thus, state involvement is not intended to completely replace the role of the family, but rather to complement existing deficiencies and maintain social stability from collapsing due to poverty, inequality, and other vulnerable conditions.

In this context, the MBG program operates within this level of support by assisting poor and vulnerable families who face difficulties in providing nutritious meals daily for school children, reducing household consumption burdens so that family budgets may be allocated to other needs such as education, healthcare, and housing, and ensuring that children do not study in a state of hunger during school hours.

Research concerning the effects of free meal programs on household expenditures demonstrates reductions in household food spending and improvements in dietary quality, particularly among low-income families. This indicates that the role of the state through free meal programs is capable of strengthening family maintenance resilience rather than eliminating parental obligations.

Therefore, from the perspective of fiqh, the function of MBG may be firmly understood as complementary in nature, namely reducing disparities in maintenance fulfillment among families, serving as support when family maintenance capacity is weak, and contributing to the realization of maqasid at the broader societal level without altering the fundamental legal principle that child maintenance remains the obligation of parents.

### **Implications of the MBG Program on the Understanding of Maintenance Law Potential Normative Misunderstandings**

Every social policy implemented at the national level has the potential to create misconceptions among the public. Socio-political studies on the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) indicate that the flow of information circulating in the media and public sphere often shapes misleading perceptions, as if the state fully bears the responsibility for fulfilling children's nutritional needs while simultaneously taking over the role and responsibilities of the family.

On the other hand, the policy has also generated various criticisms related to budget efficiency, the possible reduction of allocations for other social programs, and debates concerning the use of School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds as well as the discourse on utilizing zakat funds to support the implementation of MBG.

From the perspective of fiqh on maintenance (nafkah), several normative misconceptions may arise. Among them is the assumption that the fulfillment of children's nutritional needs at school allows parents to reduce their attention to nutritional intake at home; the perception that the state has become the primary party responsible for providing food for school-age children; and the mistaken understanding that participation in the MBG program signifies the transfer of parental maintenance obligations to the state. In fact, family fiqh and maqasid al-shariah, which emphasize child protection, clearly place parents as the primary holders of responsibility for fulfilling children's physical, spiritual, and educational needs. Meanwhile, the role of the state is complementary in nature, namely strengthening the protection system through regulations, educational facilities, and basic social security.

Without proper education and public understanding, the MBG program has the potential to normalize dependency on the state and weaken the ethos of parental responsibility regarding child maintenance, even though no legal provision states that maintenance obligations are transferred from the family to the state.

### **The Educational Role of the State and Religious Leaders**

To minimize such potential misunderstandings, a clear and well-directed public communication strategy from the government is necessary regarding the objectives and position of the MBG program. Various studies on the socio-political dynamics of MBG emphasize the importance of strengthening public literacy and policy transparency so that the program is understood as an instrument of social justice and child protection, rather than merely a political tool or a transfer of family responsibilities to the state.

In this context, religious leaders occupy a highly strategic position. Through sermons, religious lectures, and Islamic study forums, they can explain that the fulfillment of children's maintenance remains the primary obligation of parents, while the MBG program should be understood as a manifestation of ta'awun and takaful ijtima'i, namely mutual assistance and social solidarity within society. Furthermore, religious leaders also play a role in reaffirming the principles of maqasid al-shariah, emphasizing that families, communities, and the state are required to work

synergistically in protecting religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth, rather than shifting or abandoning responsibilities.

Islamic educational institutions, pesantren, and madrasahs can also integrate the concepts of fiqh on maintenance and child protection into moral education and family fiqh curricula. They may use the implementation of MBG as a practical case study to teach concepts of maintenance, family responsibility, and the role of the state, while simultaneously promoting healthy eating habits as a collective social practice that connects the dimensions of health, worship, and social justice.

### **Maqasid al-Shariah Analysis of the MBG Program**

Maqasid al-shariah places all legal provisions and public policies within the framework of protecting five fundamental elements, namely religion (din), life (nafs), intellect ('aql), lineage (nasl), and wealth (mal). The maqasid approach in the formulation of economic, social, and environmental policies demonstrates that sharia is not limited merely to regulating ritual worship, but also functions as a normative guideline for public governance oriented toward justice, sustainability, and collective welfare.

In relation to the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), there is a strong connection with several primary objectives of maqasid al-shariah. The program is directly aimed at addressing malnutrition, stunting, and food insecurity still experienced by children and students. Various findings indicate that a significant percentage of children in Indonesia continue to suffer from stunting as a result of inadequate nutritional intake. Therefore, the state's effort to provide free nutritious meals constitutes a concrete manifestation of the protection of life (hifz al-nafs), since nutrition is closely related to survival, physical health, and body immunity.

Adequate nutrition is also closely associated with improved concentration, cognitive development, and academic achievement among students. Several studies on free school meal programs in Norway demonstrate that such policies contribute to creating a more positive learning environment, reducing student absenteeism during meal hours, and supporting a more conducive educational atmosphere. From the maqasid perspective, the protection of intellect (hifz al-'aql) is not only achieved through prohibitions against intoxicants and harmful substances, but also by ensuring that children study under proper physical conditions that support intellectual growth and educational development.

Furthermore, stunting and malnutrition among children have long-term consequences for the quality of future generations, including health, intellectual capacity, and socio-economic productivity. In Islamic perspective, the preservation of healthy and dignified generations constitutes part of the essential necessities (daruriyyat) that must be safeguarded. The MBG program, particularly because it targets children and pregnant women, contributes to the formation of stronger future generations and therefore aligns with the protection of lineage (hifz al-nasl).

From an economic perspective, if managed through accountable and sustainable governance, the MBG program also has the potential to generate positive impacts in terms of protecting wealth (hifz al-mal). The program can reduce food expenditure burdens for low-income households, lower long-term healthcare costs caused by malnutrition-related diseases, and stimulate local economic circulation through the involvement of local farmers and small food enterprises in the supply chain. This reflects the principle that public policy should support economic sustainability and avoid damaging the economic foundation of society in the long term.

Nevertheless, the maqasid al-shariah approach also requires efforts to prevent potential mafsadat (harm). In this context, budget allocation for the program must be carried out proportionally and carefully so as not to disrupt state financial stability or sacrifice other strategic programs equally important for realizing public welfare (maslahah 'ammah). Potential deviations such as misuse of funds, corruption, mistargeting, and politicization of the program must be anticipated through policy frameworks that uphold transparency and accountability.

If zakat or waqf funding sources are intended to support the program, their utilization must comply with fiqh provisions and the maqasid of Islamic philanthropy so that they remain consistent with the regulations of asnaf distribution and the objectives of sustainable development (Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs) that are compatible with the framework of maqasid al-shariah.

### **Fiqh Legitimacy toward Public Policy**

The relationship between maqasid al-shariah and usul al-fiqh demonstrates that legal determination is not solely based on literal textual interpretation, but also on understanding the divine objectives underlying the law itself. In the context of public policy, maqasid functions as a normative compass that evaluates whether a policy genuinely produces benefits (maslahah) recognized by sharia, whether its harmful consequences (mafsadat) outweigh its benefits, and whether the policy undermines any of the five fundamental protections of Islamic law.

Various studies on maqasid al-shariah and Islamic economic policy emphasize that development initiatives, social security schemes, and the utilization of philanthropic instruments such as zakat and waqf should be directed toward realizing the objectives of maqasid while remaining aligned with the framework of sustainable development.

Within this framework, the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) may obtain fiqh legitimacy as a public policy if it fulfills several normative requirements. The program must be oriented toward the protection of life, the development of intellect, and the preservation of future generations as integral components of maqasid al-shariah. It must also be implemented in ways that do not violate sharia principles, whether in public financing mechanisms

or in the utilization of religious funds. Furthermore, the distribution of the program should prioritize disadvantaged regions, frontier and underdeveloped areas (3T regions), and the most vulnerable groups in accordance with the principle of social justice.

In addition, the program must be managed accountably through governance mechanisms that prevent corruption, wastefulness, and abuse of authority. Equally important, the implementation of MBG should be synchronized with efforts to strengthen family functions so that the policy does not weaken parental responsibility, but instead supports the role of parents and communities in child care and education.

Through this approach, programs such as MBG are not only administratively and constitutionally valid, but also possess a strong sharia-based legitimacy as a form of public policy *ijtihad* oriented toward the realization of *maqasid al-shariah*.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the *fiqh* analysis, this study concludes that the obligation of child maintenance in Islam fundamentally remains attached to parents as an original sharia responsibility (*al-asl*), including the provision of nutritious food as emphasized in *fiqh munakahat* and Islamic family law. The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) has no legal basis to eliminate or transfer such obligations to the state. Instead, it should be understood as a complementary and subsidiary public policy designed to support the fulfillment of children's nutritional needs.

From the perspective of *maqasid al-shariah*, the MBG program is consistent with the objectives of protecting life (*hifz al-nafs*), preserving intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), and safeguarding future generations (*hifz al-nasl*), as long as its implementation does not create new forms of *mafsadat*, such as weakening family responsibility or placing disproportionate burdens on state finances. Therefore, MBG may be positioned as a policy that supports public welfare and child protection without removing the primary maintenance obligation of parents as the main holders of sharia responsibility.

## RECOMMENDATION

The implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) should continue to be strengthened while ensuring that it remains aligned with the principles of Islamic law and the objectives of *maqasid al-shariah*. Public understanding must be enhanced so that the program is viewed as a complementary form of state support rather than a transfer of parental maintenance obligations to the government. In this regard, parents should remain aware that the fulfillment of children's nutritional needs continues to be their primary responsibility within the framework of Islamic family law.

The government is encouraged to improve transparency, accountability, and fairness in the distribution of the program, particularly by prioritizing disadvantaged communities, underdeveloped regions, and vulnerable groups. In addition, stronger supervision mechanisms are necessary to prevent corruption, misuse of funds, and political exploitation that could undermine the objectives of the program.

Religious leaders, Islamic educational institutions, and community organizations should also play an active role in educating society about the relationship between parental responsibility, social solidarity, and the role of the state in child protection. Integrating discussions on *fiqh* of maintenance, child welfare, and *maqasid al-shariah* into religious and educational forums can help strengthen public understanding regarding the balanced relationship between family obligations and public policy.

Furthermore, future studies are recommended to examine the practical implementation of MBG from broader socio-economic and Islamic legal perspectives, including its impact on family resilience, child welfare, educational achievement, and social justice. Such studies will contribute to the development of policies that are not only effective from a public welfare perspective but also harmonious with Islamic legal and ethical values.

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