



# Food security policy in indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic: A sustainability governance perspective

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Food security is a multidimensional concept that encompasses availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability, and has become a central concern in global and national development agendas. The COVID-19 pandemic posed serious challenges to all subsystems of food security, particularly in Indonesia, where food vulnerability remains a persistent issue. **Methods:** This study aims to analyze the Indonesian government's food security policies during the COVID-19 pandemic by adopting a qualitative descriptive method through document analysis. Data were collected from various government regulations, official reports, and relevant scholarly literature issued between February 2020 and March 2021. Content and policy analysis techniques were used to examine how national-level policies addressed the four dimensions of food security under the stress of a public health crisis. **Findings:** The findings show that although Indonesia initially exhibited hesitation in implementing crisis response measures, it eventually issued key fiscal, health, and social protection policies that prioritized food access and distribution. Policies such as the reallocation of national budgets, logistics protocols for food distribution, and emergency cash assistance were instrumental in preventing widespread food insecurity. The study highlights that while food availability was relatively maintained, access and utilization remained fragile, especially among vulnerable populations. The integration of logistical sterilization procedures and protective equipment for food supply chain workers was also found to be an innovative measure during this period. **Conclusion:** The Indonesian government's policy response played a significant role in stabilizing food security during the pandemic, yet gaps in accessibility and sustainability persisted. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study lies in its comprehensive use of policy documents to trace the government's real-time adaptation to a non-natural disaster, offering valuable insights into food system resilience under compounded crises. This analysis contributes to the broader discourse on food security policy by emphasizing the importance of preparedness, coordination, and sustainability in future emergency responses.

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19 pandemic; food security; Indonesian government policy; policy analysis.

## 1. Introduction

Food is the foundation of human survival and development. Food security is generally defined as a condition in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security is not only related to the security of a nation but also to global peace and social stability. The United Nations' post-2015 sustainable development agenda has established the eradication of hunger as one of the key targets among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030 (Griggs et al., 2013).

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The latest Global Food Crisis Report 2020 released by the Global Food Crisis Network indicates that by the end of 2019, approximately 135 million people across 55 countries and territories were experiencing acute food insecurity (GFCN, 2020). Globally, nearly 750 million people were exposed to severe levels of food insecurity in 2019, and the number of food-insecure individuals has been gradually increasing since 2014 (FAO, 2020).

Several months before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global food system had already shown signs of contraction in the production of major cereals (wheat, rice, and coarse grains). The progressive decline in production due to COVID-19 was later confirmed by the FAO. The global food security situation was reported to have deteriorated further during the pandemic. Literature reviews and reports by international organizations support the notion of a slowdown in the global food system. Both United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have indicated that this shift has slowed the flow of global agricultural food trade (e.g., maritime, air, and land transportation of agricultural goods), a trend expected to deepen as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. This global food system slowdown scenario suggests that in the coming months, the world may face a widespread food insecurity crisis that affects all countries uniformly. The post-pandemic COVID-19 scenario will require coordinated global action (Lugo-Morin, 2020).

Food is essential for life, while the environment ensures sustainable development. Safeguarding food security and preserving environmental (ecological) sustainability are two interlinked goals that must be pursued together. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenge of achieving both simultaneously has become increasingly complex. If food prices become unaffordable, it may disrupt the balance between supply and demand, potentially triggering uncontrolled inflation and adversely affecting the economic sector (Darma et al., 2020).

Food security has recently become a widely discussed topic as a consequence of the escalating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. After grappling with public health concerns and declining purchasing power, food supply has emerged as another critical issue requiring urgent attention. Food must remain a top priority as it is the most fundamental need, alongside clothing and shelter. To what extent has the government anticipated the impacts of COVID-19 on food security in Indonesia? This paper seeks to address the question of how the government should anticipate and respond to the impacts of COVID-19 on food security in Indonesia.

## 2. Methods

The research method employed in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach using document analysis. This approach was chosen to provide an in-depth depiction of how the Indonesian government responded to food security challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to examine the impact of these policies on the sustainability of the national food system. The research data were sourced from various official government documents, such as Presidential Decrees, Presidential Instructions, Ministerial Regulations, and Circular Letters issued between February 2020 and March 2021. In addition, secondary data were obtained from reports published by international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Global Hunger Index, as well as from scholarly articles and policy studies relevant to the topic.

Data collection was carried out through a literature review and policy document analysis related to food security aspects, including fiscal policies, logistics distribution, social protection, and food commodity management during the crisis period. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and policy analysis techniques. The documents and data were analyzed based on the four dimensions of food security proposed by the FAO—availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. Furthermore, the study also considered the long-term sustainability dimension, which includes ecological, social, and economic factors as the basis for evaluating the implemented policies. To ensure the validity of the

data and the interpretation of the findings, source triangulation and validation through expert discussions in the fields of public policy and food security were conducted. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness and direction of Indonesia's food security policies in the context of a non-natural emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Food security

Food security is a flexible concept, as reflected in the numerous efforts to define it in both research and policy contexts. The concept of food security emerged approximately 50 years ago, during the global food crisis of the early 1970s. The most widely accepted definition today originates from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in its annual report *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001*, which defines food security as a situation in which all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2002). The most recent revision of this definition occurred at the World Summit on Food Security in 2009, which added a fourth dimension—stability—as a short-term temporal indicator of the food system's capacity to withstand shocks, whether natural or man-made (FAO, 2009).

According to the FAO (2008), food security comprises four key dimensions: availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. Food availability refers to the supply of food through domestic production and imports, ensuring that sufficient food is consistently available to the population. Accessibility pertains to the ability of individuals to obtain food, which depends on adequate transportation infrastructure as well as physical and economic access. This dimension also encompasses sociocultural aspects, ensuring that food is culturally acceptable and that social safety nets are in place for vulnerable groups.

The utilization dimension emphasizes that individuals must be able to consume food in both sufficient quantity and quality to maintain a healthy and productive life. This includes access to safe food and drinking water, adequate sanitation systems, and good physical health to properly digest and absorb the nutrients from the food consumed. Lastly, stability refers to the capacity of individuals, households, communities, or nations to withstand and recover from shocks to the food system. These shocks may arise from natural disasters—such as climate change and earthquakes—or from human-induced events, including armed conflicts and economic crises.

#### 3.2 Indonesia's food security policy during the COVID-19 pandemic

Food security has long been a priority in Indonesia's long-term policy agenda. Nevertheless, food insecurity and malnutrition remain persistent challenges, indicating that food security policies must be sustained and strengthened. The prevalence of chronic undernutrition among children has declined from a high of 50% in 1993; however, as of 2007, approximately 35% of children were still stunted. Across the general population, around 8% were undernourished, and the Global Hunger Index indicated that Indonesia's situation remained serious in 2016. Approximately one-third of Indonesian households were reported to be food insecure (Thow et al., 2019).

COVID-19 has disrupted all dimensions of the food system, from production and trade to food safety and nutrition subsystems. A food systems approach recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic is not the only crisis variable; rather, it operates within a broader context shaped by biophysical conditions, climate variability, and sociopolitical-economic factors that influence how individuals engage across producer, consumer, and nutrition subsystems. Alternatively stated, this approach views COVID-19 as functioning within a biophysical and socio-political-economic context that shapes behavior across these interconnected food system domains (Devereux et al., 2020; Lassa, 2012).

Since the onset of the pandemic, the Indonesian government has been reluctant to take decisive actions to mitigate its impacts, including maintaining a degree of ambiguity in protective measures. The government has faced a policy dilemma between safeguarding the economy and preventing poverty (even in non-crisis conditions) and protecting lives during the COVID-19 emergency. Although its crisis management responses were delayed and hesitant compared to many other middle-income countries in Asia, Indonesia eventually implemented several social protection measures aimed at anticipating food crises and hunger (Lassa, 2021). A broader picture of macro-level policies on food security from March 2020 to March 2021 is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Main Regulations Related to Food Security in Indonesia Feb 2020 – March 2021

No	Date	Publishing Institution Regulation	Title Regulation	Reference
1	February 28, 2020	National Disaster Management Agency	Declaration Situation Emergency Special Disaster COVID-19 Epidemic in Indonesia	Directions Head of BNPB 9A/2020
2	March 13, 2020	President of the Republic of Indonesia	Group Task Acceleration Handling COVID-19	Presidential Decree 9/2020
3	March 14, 2020	Ministry of Finance	Distribution Allocation Grant Special Infrastructure Health and Grants Sector Health Operations for Handling COVID-19	Ministry of Finance Decree 6/KM.7/2020
4	March 16, 2020	Ministry of Finance	Distribution and use grant for results, allocation fiscal, grant allocation general, grant allocation special and incentives area For response fiscal 2020 against COVID-19	Regulation Ministry of Finance : 19/PMK.07/2020
5	March 20, 2020	President of the Republic of Indonesia	Revision Presidential Decree about Group Task Acceleration Handling Covid-19	Presidential Decree 9/2020
6	March 20, 2020	President of the Republic of Indonesia	Focusing return activities, allocation fiscal, and procurement goods and services For acceleration handling of COVID-19.	Presidential Instruction 4/2020
7	March 21, 2020	Ministry of Finance	Incentive tax for Must Taxes imposed impact of COVID-19	Minister of Finance Regulation 23/PMK.03/2020
8	March 23, 2020	Ministry of Communication and Information	Acceleration socialization Prevention of COVID 19 at the level Province and Regency/City.	Circular Letter SE 2/2020
9	March 24, 2020	Minister of Villages , Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration	Responsive Village for COVID-19 and Cash For Working in the Village	Circular Letter SE 8/2020
10	March 31, 2020	President of the Republic of Indonesia	Policy National Budgeting and Stability System Budgeting For Disaster COVID-19	Regulation Government Replacement Law 1/2020

			pandemic and/or Handling Threat National Economy and/or System Budgeting Stability Declaration Situation Public Health Emergency for COVID- 19	Presidential Decree 11/2020
11	March 31, 2020	President of the Republic of Indonesia		
12	March 31, 2020	President of the Republic of Indonesia	Restrictions Social Scale Big For Acceleration Eradication of COVID-19	Regulation Government 21/2020
13	April 16, 2020	Ministry of Social Affairs	Implementation Help Food and Aid Cash For COVID-19 Pandemic	Ministry of Social Affairs Decree 54/HUK/2020
14	July 10, 2020	Ministry of Manpower	Adjustment time For benefit protection guarantee social For worker migrant pre-post during non-national disaster namely COVID- 19	Minister of Manpower Regulation 10/2020
15	July 8, 2020	Ministry of Social Affairs	Implementation Help Food and Aid Cash For COVID-19 Pandemic	Ministry of Social Affairs Decree 86/HUK/2020
16	August 11, 2020	Ministry of Social Affairs	2nd Amendment Implementation Help Food and Aid Cash For COVID-19 Pandemic Year 2020 Budget	Ministry of Social Affairs Decree 100/HUK/2020
17	August 14, 2020	Ministry of Manpower	Guidelines Help Government For Wages/Subsidies Wages for Worker/Laborer in Handling impact of COVID-19	Minister of Manpower Regulation 14/2020
18	December 30, 2020	Ministry of Social Affairs	Implementation Help Help Cash For COVID-19 Pandemic 2021	Ministry of Social Affairs Decree 161/HUK/2020
19	February 15, 2021	Ministry of Manpower	Implementation wages in industry congested work certain during COVID-19	Minister of Manpower Regulation 2/2021

(Djalante et al., 2020)

President Joko Widodo issued Presidential Instruction No. 4 of 2020, which specifically directed the public to refocus fiscal priorities, including the need for budget reallocation and procurement of goods and services to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring the reallocation of the food security budget, strengthening health responses and services, and reinforcing the national insurance scheme became four key agenda points of the directive (Djalante et al., 2020).

Crucial policies enacted by the Indonesian government were aimed at protecting the population by ensuring access to food and other basic rights. The central government, led by the Ministry of Finance, adjusted fiscal allocations accordingly. Two key decisions made by the Ministry of Finance in March 2020 included: first, the decision on “The distribution of special grant allocations for health infrastructure and operational grants for COVID-19 response”; and second, the decision on “The distribution and utilization of revenue-sharing grants, general allocation grants, special allocation grants, and regional incentives for the 2020 fiscal response to COVID-19.” The first decision aimed to control COVID-19 through

medical and public health measures, while the second was intended to create incentives that would ensure social protection and access to food and other basic needs (Lassa, 2021).

Globally, food prices remained relatively stable—at least until March 2020. According to data compiled by FAO (2020), global food prices—both nominal and real—had shown an upward trend from October 2019 to January 2020, with a slight decline in the following months (February and March 2020). A closer look at FAO's Rice Price Index reveals that major staple commodities such as rice began to rise, increasing by approximately 3% over the three-month period from January to March 2020. In light of this upward trend in global food prices, the government's incentive policies were particularly helpful in safeguarding food access and ensuring food availability.

Logistics and distribution channels became critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, as certain commodities—such as medical supplies and food—were deemed essential. While disaster logistics protocols typically serve as the initial reference point for distribution, the COVID-19 pandemic, as a non-natural disaster, demanded different procedures. Distribution routes assumed a highly strategic role in addressing the outbreak and meeting domestic consumption needs, especially with respect to food. The entry of food commodities via land, sea, and air transport required careful oversight prior to their distribution across Indonesia (Darma et al., 2020).

Primary commodities such as food, which had become central during the pandemic, required special handling and distinct procedures compared to other commodities. This special treatment involved following tailored logistics and distribution protocols to maintain both durability and sanitation. One key procedure in food logistics was the sterilization of commodities, logistics personnel, and equipment using disinfectants. Once items arrived at terminals, they also needed to undergo disinfection or sterilization processes before being distributed by courier operators to retailers or consumers. Standard personal protective equipment (PPE)—including masks, gloves, sterile uniforms, and hand sanitizers—was required not only for healthcare workers but also for logistics personnel.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Food security has long been a policy priority for the Indonesian government. However, food insecurity and malnutrition remain persistent issues, indicating the need for continued and strengthened food security policies. The COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to all dimensions of the food sub-systems, from production and trade to food safety and nutrition. Nevertheless, the Indonesian government was able to implement several social protection measures to anticipate food crises and hunger. Various policies were introduced to protect and ensure access to food for the population.

The policies enacted by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were primarily oriented toward providing incentives and food assistance to the public. These included cash transfers and food aid to guarantee food availability and maintain household food consumption. However, such policies functioned largely as short-term risk mitigation measures rather than long-term strategies. The food security policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic did not take into account the energy–water–food nexus, as the government's focus remained narrowly fixed on ensuring food availability and access. This situation highlights the urgent need for concrete actions to strengthen environmental support systems related to food security throughout the duration of the pandemic.

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