

WHEN SOCIAL INCLUSION MEETS OPERATIONAL DEMANDS: RECRUITMENT AND COMPETENCY CHALLENGES IN FOOD SECURITY POLICY IMPLEMENTATIONS

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of food security policies from a human resource management (HRM) perspective, emphasizing the link between HRM management practices and the effectiveness of policy implementation at the operational level. This study is motivated by the persistent gap between normative policy design and the reality of implementation on the ground, which is strongly suspected to be related to the quality and management of implementing human resources. The research focuses on recruitment practices, human capital investment through training and development, job fit, and their implications for the quality of policy implementation and public services. This study employed a qualitative approach, collecting data through in-depth interviews with various program implementing actors, including structural and operational staff. Data analysis was conducted using NVivo software, using open coding, thematic categorization, and visualization of inter-concept relationships in the form of project maps to systematically identify patterns of interrelationships between variables. The research results show that the implementation of food security policies still faces fundamental challenges in human resource management. These challenges include non-competency-based and informal recruitment practices, minimal investment in human capital, characterized by limited training and weak evaluation systems, and a high level of job fit mismatch between individual competencies and job demands. These conditions result in low adaptive capacity of human resources, increased workloads, and a decline in the quality of public services. Furthermore, research findings indicate that weaknesses in policy implementation are systemic and interconnected, with problems in recruitment, human resource development, and job placement forming a cycle that mutually reinforces and hinders the effectiveness of overall policy implementation. In this context, human resource management plays more than just an administrative function but also a determining factor in the success or failure of public policy implementation.

Keywords: food security, human capital, job fit, policy implementation, human resource management

INTRODUCTION

Food is a strategic instrument for ensuring public welfare, particularly in ensuring access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. In the context of sustainable development, food security is understood not only as food availability but also encompasses aspects of accessibility, quality, and sustainable food distribution across all levels of society (FAO, 2021). Therefore, the effectiveness of food security policy implementation is crucial, as its success is not solely determined at the formulation stage but also depends heavily on how the policy is implemented at the implementation level.

However, various studies show that the gap between policy design and the reality of implementation remains a major problem in public policy. Policy implementation often faces structural and operational obstacles that prevent policy objectives from being optimally achieved (Hupe & Hill, 2020). In this context, the capacity of implementing organizations is a key factor, particularly in the aspect of human resource (HR) management, which plays a direct role in translating policies into concrete actions on the ground. From a policy implementation perspective, George C. Edwards III emphasized that successful implementation is determined by four main variables: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Among these four variables, human resources play a very strategic role because they are directly related to the ability of implementing actors to understand, interpret, and implement policies. Limited HR capacity can hinder the flow of information, reduce compliance with procedures, and weaken coordination between implementing actors.

Numerous empirical studies confirm that problems with public policy implementation are often rooted in weak human resource management. (Kim & Lee, 2021) found that non-competency-based recruitment systems contribute to the low performance of public organizations. Meanwhile, (Rahman et al., 2023) showed that limited human resource training and development impacts organizations' low adaptive capacity in addressing policy dynamics. Similar findings were also presented by the OECD (2020), which emphasized that human resource quality is a key determinant of public sector effectiveness, particularly in the context of complex public services.

From a human capital perspective, Gary Becker emphasizes that human resources are a strategic organizational asset that requires continuous investment through education, training, and competency development. This investment not only increases individual productivity but also strengthens the organization's long-term capacity. A recent study by (Becker, 1993) shows that organizations that consistently invest in human capital development have higher levels of performance and innovation than those that do not. Furthermore, job fit theory provides additional perspective on the importance of the fit between individuals and jobs. Amy L. Kristof-Brown emphasizes that the match between individual characteristics (knowledge, skills, and abilities) and job demands is a key determinant of performance, job satisfaction, and service quality. Job misfit can lead to decreased performance, increased workload, and decreased service quality to the public (Kristof-Brown et al., 2021).

Thus, it can be seen that the implementation of food security policies cannot be separated from the quality of human resource management, which includes the recruitment process, capacity development, and appropriate placement of workers. However, research that specifically integrates the perspectives of policy implementation with human resource management, particularly in the context of food security policies, is still relatively limited. Most studies tend to discuss these two aspects separately, thus failing to provide a comprehensive picture of the relationship between the two. Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the implementation of food security policies from a human resource management perspective using a qualitative approach based on NVivo analysis. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in integrating the perspectives of policy implementation and human resource management, as well as practical contributions in formulating strategies for strengthening human resource capacity as a key factor in increasing the effectiveness of public policy implementation.

In the context of food security policy implementation, a social inclusion approach to recruitment is used as a strategy to expand community participation, increase local empowerment, and strengthen program legitimacy at the grassroots level. By involving individuals from diverse backgrounds, the policy serves not only as an instrument for distributing aid but also as a means of increasing economic access and employment opportunities for previously underserved groups. However, without being balanced with qualification standards and competency-based selection mechanisms, this approach has the potential to produce high levels of variation in work capacity, thus impacting the effectiveness of policy implementation. Therefore, a strategy is needed to

balance the principles of social inclusion and job qualifications through establishing minimum competency standards, needs-based training, and a more adaptive job placement system to ensure optimal achievement of policy objectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

2.1 Policy Implementation

According to George C. Edwards III, the success of policy implementation is influenced by four main variables: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. These four factors are interrelated and form a system that determines the extent to which policies can be implemented effectively in the field. Unclear or inconsistent communication can lead to misunderstandings in policy implementation, while limited resources—whether financial, facilities, or human—will limit the organization's capacity to implement programs optimally. Furthermore, the disposition or attitude of implementers, including their level of commitment and understanding of policy objectives, also influences the quality of implementation. An inflexible bureaucratic structure can also hinder coordination and slow down the decision-making process.

Of these four variables, human resources are the most crucial factor because they play the primary role in operationalizing policies in practice. Without human resources with adequate competence, understanding, and capacity, even well-designed policies have the potential to fail in implementation. In this context, human resources function not only as administrative implementers but also as interpretative agents, determining how policies are translated into concrete actions on the ground.

Recent empirical research further emphasizes the importance of human resources in public policy implementation. (Rahman et al., 2023) show that human resource capacity is a dominant factor influencing the success of policy implementation, particularly in public organizations facing complex tasks and limited resources. Human resources with low competency tend to struggle to understand policy instructions, adapt to change, and carry out their duties effectively. Conversely, human resources with high capacity can improve coordination, accelerate the implementation process, and produce more optimal policy outputs.

Furthermore, studies by (Hupe & Hill, 2020) emphasize that policy implementation failures are often not caused by weaknesses in policy design, but rather by the limited capacity of implementing actors at the operational level. This suggests that successful policy implementation depends heavily on an organization's readiness to manage and develop its human resources. Therefore, strengthening human resource capacity is a key prerequisite for ensuring effective policy implementation, particularly in complex programs such as food security policies.

2.2 Human Capital

Furthermore, studies by Howlett (2019) and (Hupe & Hill, 2020) emphasize that policy implementation failures are often not caused by weaknesses in policy design, but rather by the limited capacity of implementing actors at the operational level. This suggests that successful policy implementation depends heavily on an organization's readiness to manage and develop its human resources. Therefore, strengthening human resource capacity is a key prerequisite for ensuring effective policy implementation, particularly in complex programs such as food security policies.

(Nguyen & Tran, 2022) found that organizations with low levels of human resource investment tend to have weak operational performance, characterized by low work efficiency, limited adaptability, and suboptimal output quality. These findings suggest that investment in human capital is directly related to an organization's ability to respond to dynamic work demands, particularly in the context of a complex public sector that experiences frequent policy changes. Furthermore, investment in human capital not only impacts technical skills but also strengthens individuals' cognitive and adaptive capacities. Structured training enables individuals to understand

tasks more comprehensively, enhances problem-solving skills, and strengthens coordination between work units. In the context of policy implementation, this is crucial because policy implementers are required to be able to translate normative instructions into contextual practices in the field.

Conversely, when organizations fail to adequately invest in human resources, various consequences arise, such as increasing competency gaps, poor policy understanding, and a weakened ability to effectively carry out tasks. This situation also has the potential to create a reliance on work experience alone (learning by doing), which in the long term can reduce efficiency and increase the risk of operational errors. Furthermore, minimal investment in human resource development is often accompanied by a weak performance evaluation system. Without systematic evaluation, organizations lack a solid basis for identifying training needs or measuring the effectiveness of development programs. This reinforces the finding that low investment in human capital not only impacts individuals but also hinders the overall organizational learning process.

In the context of this research, findings related to the lack of human resource training and development indicate that organizations have not fully adopted human capital principles as a capacity-building strategy. Consequently, existing human resources are not yet able to function optimally in supporting policy implementation. Therefore, increasing investment in human capital is a strategic step that is oriented not only toward improving individual competencies but also toward strengthening organizational capacity to achieve policy objectives effectively and sustainably.

2.3 Job Fit

Job fit theory emphasizes the importance of matching individual characteristics—including knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal values—with the demands of the job. In human resource management literature, this concept is known as person–job fit, which refers to the extent to which an individual possesses competencies that align with job requirements. Amy L. Kristof-Brown asserts that this level of fit is a key determinant of individual performance, job satisfaction, and overall organizational effectiveness. Job misfit can have various negative consequences, both at the individual and organizational levels. (Kristof-Brown et al., 2021) showed that job misfit is correlated with decreased performance, increased work stress, and low quality output. In the context of public service organizations, this condition becomes even more crucial because it directly impacts the quality of services received by the public. Furthermore, job misfit often forces individuals to adapt through a learning-by-doing process, especially when not supported by adequate training. While in the short term, this may help individuals persist in their jobs, in the long term, it tends to decrease work efficiency and increase the potential for operational errors. A study by Chen et al. (2022) showed that competency mismatch in the public sector contributes significantly to declining service quality, especially in organizations with non-competency-based recruitment and placement systems.

Furthermore, job fit is closely related to motivation and job satisfaction. Individuals who feel a good fit for their jobs tend to have higher levels of engagement, enabling them to perform more optimally. Conversely, a mismatch can decrease motivation, increase job fatigue, and increase the likelihood of turnover intention. In the context of this research, findings related to the mismatch between educational background, skills, and job placement indicate a significant problem with job fit. This condition not only impacts the individual but also impacts the effectiveness of overall policy implementation. Therefore, ensuring a match between individual competencies and job demands is a crucial factor in improving service quality and the successful implementation of public policy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the implementation of food security policy from a human resource management (HRM) perspective. A qualitative design was chosen to enable an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and practices of policy implementers at the operational level, particularly in relation to recruitment practices, human capital development, and job fit. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with multiple categories of informants involved in the implementation of the program. These included managerial-level personnel (heads of units), technical staff (nutritionists and accountants), administrative staff, field assistants, and volunteers. This variation of informants was intended to capture diverse perspectives and provide a comprehensive understanding of how the policy is implemented across different organizational roles.

The selection of informants was conducted using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who are directly involved in the implementation process and possess relevant experience and knowledge. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was guided by a structured set of questions derived from three theoretical frameworks: policy implementation theory, human capital theory, and job fit theory.

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo software through a thematic coding process. The analysis involved several stages, including data familiarization, open coding, categorization, and theme development. Initially, interview transcripts were coded based on predefined categories aligned with the theoretical framework, such as communication, resources, training, recruitment, and job fit. These codes were then refined into broader themes to identify patterns and relationships among variables.

Furthermore, NVivo's visualization tools, particularly the project map feature, were utilized to illustrate the relationships between key themes and to identify systemic patterns in the data. This approach enabled the researcher to examine how different factors interact and contribute to the effectiveness or limitations of policy implementation. To ensure the validity of the findings, this study employed data triangulation by comparing responses across different informant groups. Additionally, consistency in coding was maintained through iterative review and refinement of categories during the analysis process.

Overall, this methodological approach allows for a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the role of human resource management in shaping the effectiveness of food security policy implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

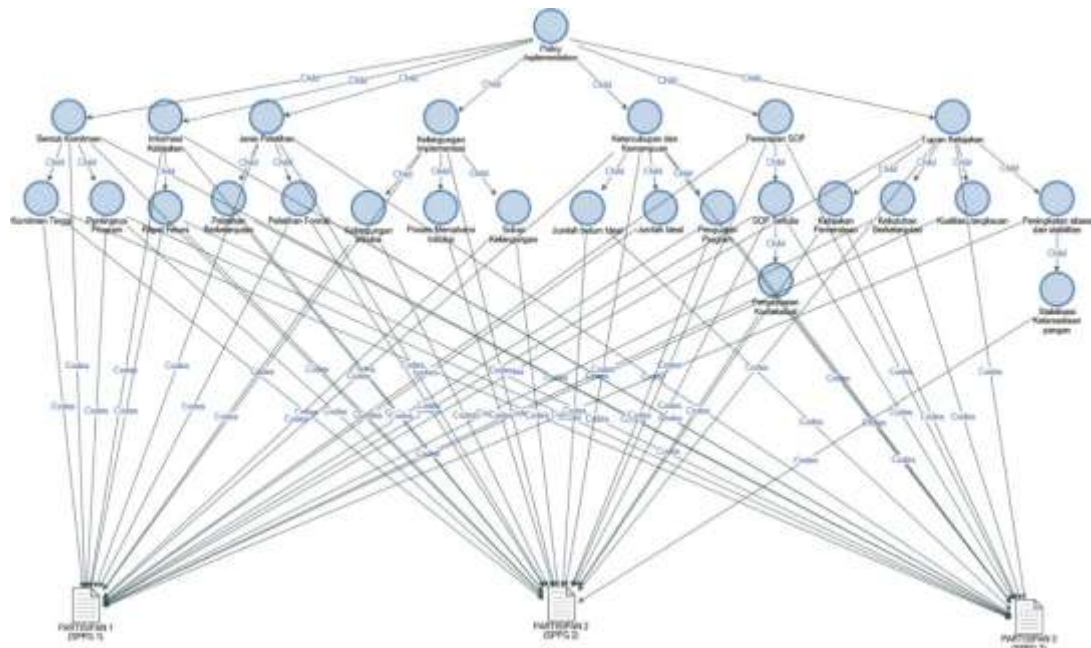


Figure 1. NVivo analysis results

1. Social Inclusion-Based Recruitment and the Degradation of Meritocracy

NVivo analysis results indicate that recruitment practices in food security programs tend not to be based on meritocratic principles. This is reflected in the dominance of categories such as "informal recruitment," "recommendation-based," and "unclear criteria" that consistently emerged across various informant groups, particularly at the operational level. This pattern indicates that the selection process has not been conducted systematically and standardized, thus failing to screen candidates based on competencies relevant to job requirements. This phenomenon indicates a tendency to use a social inclusion approach in recruitment, where access to participation is prioritized over ability-based selection. Normatively, this approach can be understood as an effort to expand community involvement in public programs. However, in the context of policy-implementing organizations, this approach has the potential to have serious consequences, namely the creation of high heterogeneity in human resource capacity. This imbalance ultimately impacts the effectiveness of teamwork, coordination between implementers, and the quality of program output.

From a human capital perspective, Gary Becker emphasizes that the quality of human resources is crucially determined from the initial selection stage. Non-competency-based recruitment reflects an organization's failure to identify and select individuals with the capacity to meet job demands. As a result, recruited individuals tend to have low levels of job readiness and require a longer adaptation process. This condition not only reduces work efficiency but also increases reliance on learning-by-doing, which in the long term can increase the risk of operational errors. Furthermore, non-standardized recruitment practices also have the potential to create adverse selection, where individuals selected are not the best candidates available. In public organizations, this condition can directly impact the quality of public services. (Kim & Lee, 2021) emphasized that a non-competency-based recruitment system has a negative correlation with public organization performance because it produces human resources with inadequate capacity to carry out tasks effectively. These findings also indicate that policy implementation problems do

not occur solely at the implementation stage but are rooted in the initial stage of human resource management, namely recruitment. In other words, weaknesses in the selection process become the starting point for various subsequent problems, such as low human resource capacity, mismatched job fit, and poor service quality. Therefore, improving the competency-based recruitment system is a fundamental step that needs to be taken to increase the effectiveness of overall policy implementation. Investment deficit Human Capital dan SDM capability.

NVivo analysis shows that investment in human capital in food security programs remains very limited. This is reflected in the dominance of categories such as "minimal training," "no evaluation," and "limited competency development," which consistently emerged across various informant groups. This pattern indicates that organizations have not yet prioritized human capital development as a strategic priority in supporting policy implementation. This limited investment impacts not only technical aspects but also individuals' adaptive abilities in facing the dynamics of work in the field. Human resources who do not receive adequate training tend to struggle to comprehensively understand tasks, adapt to policy changes, and effectively resolve operational issues. As a result, individual performance is suboptimal, directly impacting the quality of policy implementation. Within the framework of human capital theory, Gary Becker asserts that investment in human capital through education, training, and development is a key factor in increasing individual and organizational productivity. The low investment found in this study indicates that organizations do not yet view human resources as a strategic asset that requires continuous development. Instead, human resources are still positioned as static operational resources, thus not receiving adequate attention in the capacity-building process.

Furthermore, the lack of performance evaluation indicates weaknesses in the HR management cycle, particularly at the monitoring and feedback stage. Evaluation is a crucial tool for measuring performance effectiveness and identifying competency gaps that need to be addressed. Without systematic evaluation, organizations lack a solid foundation for designing targeted HR development programs. This situation hinders the optimal functioning of organizational learning processes, potentially leading to the repetition of the same mistakes. Furthermore, limited investment in human capital also creates a reliance on learning by doing, where individuals learn through experience without the support of structured training. While this approach may be helpful in the short term, in the long term it tends to decrease work efficiency and increase the risk of operational errors. This situation further exacerbates the gap between job demands and individual capacity.

(Nguyen & Tran, 2022) stated that low investment in human capital has a direct impact on declining organizational performance, particularly in terms of operational efficiency and output quality. This finding aligns with the findings of this study, which show that limited human resource training and development contribute to the low quality of policy implementation. Therefore, strengthening human capital investment is not only a technical necessity but also a fundamental strategy for improving organizational effectiveness. The implication of this finding is that organizations need to develop a more structured human resource management system, particularly in the areas of training, competency development, and performance evaluation. Without adequate investment in human capital, efforts to improve the quality of policy implementation will be difficult to achieve optimally and sustainably.

2. Job Misfit and Decreased Service Quality

Research findings indicate a significant mismatch between individual competencies and job demands in the implementation of food security programs. This is reflected in the emergence of categories such as "inappropriate background," "inappropriate skills," and "inappropriate placement," which consistently emerged across various informant groups. This pattern indicates that the workforce placement process does not fully consider the match between individual characteristics and job requirements. This mismatch forces individuals to adapt through a process

of learning by doing, that is, learning while performing tasks without adequate competency preparation. In the short term, this mechanism allows individuals to continue working, but in the long term, it actually has various negative consequences, such as decreased work efficiency, increased cognitive load, and a high potential for operational errors. This condition ultimately has a direct impact on the quality of services provided to the public.

From a job fit theory perspective, the fit between an individual and their job is a key determinant of organizational performance and effectiveness. Amy L. Kristof-Brown emphasizes that person-job fit reflects the extent to which an individual possesses the knowledge, skills, and abilities that align with the demands of the job. When this fit is not achieved, a condition known as job misfit occurs, which has negative implications for various aspects of performance. (Kristof-Brown et al., 2021) showed that job misfit is correlated with decreased productivity, low quality work output, and increased levels of stress and burnout. In the context of public service organizations, this condition becomes even more crucial because it not only affects internal performance but also directly impacts the quality of services received by the public. In other words, competency mismatch is not only an individual problem but also an organizational issue that impacts the effectiveness of overall policy implementation.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that job misfit does not exist in isolation but is a consequence of weaknesses in previous HR management processes, particularly during the recruitment and competency development stages. Non-competency-based recruitment and minimal training result in individuals being placed in positions that are inappropriate for their abilities. This creates a recurring cycle of problems, where competency mismatches continue to impact work quality and organizational performance. Furthermore, job misfit also impacts individuals' psychological well-being, such as decreased work motivation and job satisfaction. Individuals who feel unsuited to their jobs tend to have low levels of engagement, thus hindering their ability to perform optimally. This situation further worsens the quality of policy implementation, particularly in programs that require coordination and precise implementation in the field.

Thus, job fit mismatch in this study is a key factor explaining the poor quality of policy implementation. The implication of this finding is the need for improvements to integrated HR management systems, particularly in ensuring a match between individual competencies and job demands through more systematic, competency-based recruitment, training, and placement processes.

3. Weaknesses in Policy Implementation as a Systemic Impact

Overall, the analysis shows that policy implementation weaknesses in the food security program are not isolated but rather systemic and interconnected across variables. NVivo reveals a strong correlation between categories such as "limited human resources," "unclear communication," and "inconsistent SOPs," forming a mutually reinforcing pattern. This indicates that implementation issues do not exist in isolation but result from complex interactions across organizational aspects. Limited human resource capacity is a central factor influencing other variables. Human resources lacking adequate competency tend to have difficulty understanding policy instructions, hindering effective communication. As a result, the information conveyed is not uniformly interpreted, leading to confusion in task execution. This situation is exacerbated by a weak understanding of SOPs, leading implementers to make situational adjustments that do not always align with established standards.

Within George C. Edwards III's framework, successful policy implementation is largely determined by communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. This study's findings indicate that weaknesses in human resources directly impact other variables, particularly communication and procedural compliance. In other words, limited human resources are not only a limiting factor but also serve as a trigger that magnifies the impact of weaknesses in other aspects. Furthermore, the NVivo analysis indicates a mutually reinforcing structural relationship between

variables. This means that weaknesses in one aspect will amplify weaknesses in other aspects and create a recurring cycle of problems. For example, non-competency-based recruitment results in low-capacity human resources, which is then exacerbated by minimal training and development. This condition leads to job fit mismatches, which ultimately impacts low service quality and the effectiveness of policy implementation.

These findings align with (Rahman et al., 2023), who stated that the failure of public policy implementation is often caused by weak human resource capacity to effectively operationalize the policy. Furthermore, (Hupe & Hill, 2020) also emphasized that policy implementation is a complex process and is highly dependent on the capabilities of implementing actors at the field level. Without adequate human resource capacity, even well-designed policies have the potential to experience distortions in their implementation. Therefore, improving policy implementation cannot be achieved solely at the procedural level, such as refining standard operating procedures (SOPs) or improving coordination. These efforts need to be balanced with comprehensive reforms in human resource management, including improvements to competency-based recruitment systems, increased investment in human capital, and placement of workers according to individual capacities. This systemic approach is key to breaking the cycle of existing problems and increasing the effectiveness of policy implementation in a sustainable manner.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the implementation of food security policies still faces various fundamental problems rooted in human resource (HR) management. The analysis indicates that non-competency-based recruitment practices, minimal investment in human capital, and high levels of job fit mismatch simultaneously contribute to the low quality of policy implementation at the operational level. These three aspects are not isolated but interrelated, forming a systemic pattern of problems. Furthermore, the research findings demonstrate that weaknesses in HR management not only impact individual capacity but also impact the effectiveness of the organization as a whole, including aspects of communication, coordination, and compliance with procedures. In this context, policy implementation cannot be understood solely as an administrative process, but rather as an organizational process that is highly dependent on the quality and readiness of the implementing HR.

This research confirms that the success of policy implementation is determined not only by the quality of policy design, but also by the organization's ability to strategically manage and develop human resources. Without the support of competent human resources suited to job demands, well-designed policies have the potential to fail to achieve their intended goals. Therefore, a more comprehensive, competency-based reform of the human resource management system is needed. This reform includes improving the recruitment process to be more selective and standardized, increasing investment in human capital through continuous training and development, and placing workers according to their capacity and job requirements. This integrated approach is expected to improve organizational capacity while strengthening the effectiveness of policy implementation on an ongoing basis.

Furthermore, this study provides theoretical implications by emphasizing the importance of integrating policy implementation and human resource management perspectives in understanding the dynamics of public policy. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a basis for formulating strategies to strengthen human resource capacity as a key element in improving the quality of public services and the success of food security programs.

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