

Post-Colonial Food Paradigms and Nutrition Governance in Indonesia

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Abstract

The impact of colonial food paradigms on Indonesia's nutrition policies and explore strategies for decolonizing perceptions of healthy food in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua. Employing a comparative qualitative case study design, the research examines Indonesia alongside Vietnam and Peru, which have successfully integrated local foods into nutrition programs. Data collection involved secondary sources such as government reports, scientific articles, and policy documents, verified through data triangulation. The analysis utilized NVivo 12 Plus for thematic coding, focusing on actual conditions, challenges, and government responses related to food and nutrition governance. Results reveal that Indonesia's persistent reliance on imported and industrialized foods, coupled with a diminished appreciation for indigenous foods like tubers, forest products, and local fish, hampers efforts to address malnutrition. Colonial legacies continue to influence public perception, overshadowing traditional foods' nutritional value. Conversely, Vietnam and Peru have demonstrated that embracing local food systems can significantly reduce stunting prevalence. The study concludes that adopting a decolonized, culturally sensitive approach to nutrition policies, which reintegrates local foods, is essential for improving nutritional outcomes and fostering food sovereignty in Indonesia. Such strategies can help reshape perceptions and enhance the resilience of local food systems against malnutrition.

Keywords: Post-Colonial Food Paradigm, Malnutrition, Traditional Food Systems, Nutrition Policy, Government Strategy

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Article Highlights

- 1) Colonial perceptions of nutritious food in Indonesia marginalize local and traditional food systems, contributing to high rates of malnutrition.
- 2) This research underscores the need to reevaluate and transform traditional food into modern food, integrating local foods into public health strategies to improve nutritional outcomes and preserve cultural heritage.
- 3) The research calls for culturally sensitive policies and multisectoral collaboration to strengthen Indonesia's local food sovereignty and promote sustainable nutrition.

Introduction

The problem of malnutrition is not merely a health issue, but rather a multidimensional one influenced by social, cultural, economic, and public policy factors (Ali, 2021; del Carmen Casanovas et al., 2013; Seran & Sengkoen, 2024; Utumawishima et al., 2024). One aspect that remains overlooked is the paradigm of nutritious food. In Indonesia, this paradigm remains trapped in the post-colonial healthy food paradigm, where the understanding of healthy food is more influenced by colonial nutritional standards and modern/industrial food products, rather than rooted in the potential of locally available foods, which often leads to the marginalization of local and traditional food systems that are culturally embedded and nutritionally rich.

Consequently, regions with a high prevalence of malnutrition issues, such as East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) (35.3% in 2023) and Papua (34.6% in 2023) (Susenas 2023), have not fully utilized the wealth of local foods, such as tubers, nuts, local fish, and forest products, as sources of nutritional interventions (Fetriyuna et al., 2024; Harmayani et al., 2017; Noer et al., 2022). These indigenous food systems were not only nutritionally balanced but also closely linked to local ecological conditions and cultural practices, allowing communities to develop food security based on their immediate environments. However, over time, particularly since the New Order's national rice self-sufficiency program in the 1970s, there has been a gradual but persistent shift toward rice as the primary staple food across the archipelago. This shift has progressively overshadowed the role of indigenous foods, leading to a homogenization of diets and a decline in the consumption of nutrient-rich local foods that were once central to regional food sovereignty. The shift from local foods to rice in NTT and Papua is illustrated in the figure below (see figure 1).

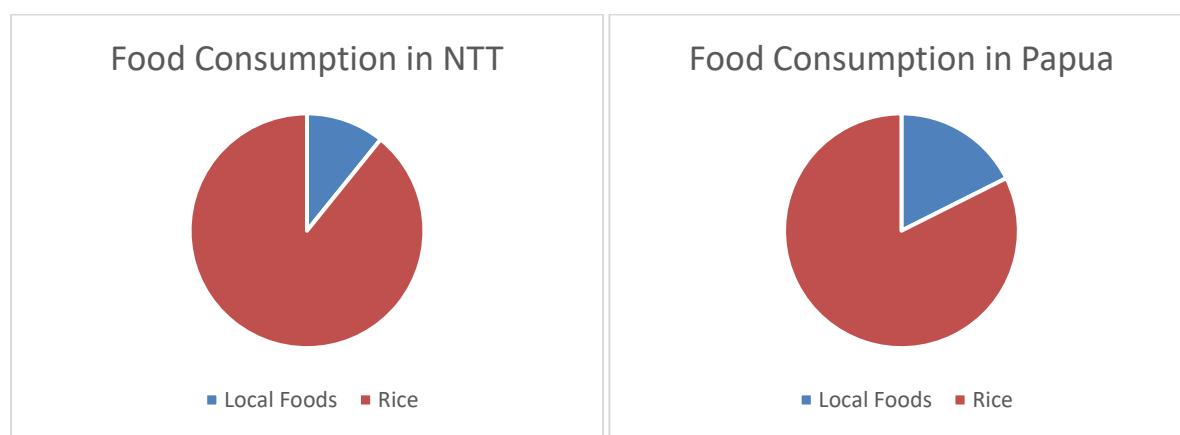


Figure 1. Comparison of Rice and Local Food Consumption in NTT and Papua in 2023. Source: National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas, 2023) as reported in the Food Consumption Bulletin I/2024

Based on Figure 1, rice dominated the dietary consumption patterns in both NTT and Papua, while the intake of traditional local foods remained significantly lower, reflecting a clear dietary shift away from indigenous staples. Instead of optimizing local foods to overcome malnutrition issues, government programs often rely on the distribution of supplementary foods based on biscuits or instant processed products (Mayangsari & Rasmianti, 2020; Oddo et al., 2022; Oddo, Roshita, et al., 2019; Sembiring et al., 2021) that do not always align with local cultural preferences, acceptability, or ecological contexts. Empirical studies have shown that (supplementary feeding program) PMT distribution in several provinces fails to significantly reduce malnutrition issues, partly because the foods are culturally unfamiliar and do not foster local food sovereignty (Dewi Satiawati & Januraga, 2018; Milwan & Sunarya, 2023; Purbaningsih & Ahmad Syafiq, 2023). This indicates that the persistence of a post-colonial paradigm in food governance undermines the potential of Indonesia's diverse local food systems to serve as sustainable nutritional interventions.

In addition to the minimal use of local food ingredients by the government, public awareness of the nutritional value of local food ingredients has also decreased (Gusti et al., 2024; Pawera et al., 2020; Rahayu et al., 2024), resulting in low use of local food ingredients as an effort to overcome the problem of malnutrition in Indonesia. Previous Study Nurhasan et al., (2022) shows that there is a phenomenon of dietary transition and a shift from local foods (sago, tubers, forest products) to rice, chicken, tofu, tempeh, as well as an increase in consumption of ultra-processed foods, which indicates a perception of modernity. Sidiq et al., (2021) also showed that household understanding, utilization, and preference for sago food were weakening and dependence on rice was increasing. On the other hand, the factor of reduced utilization of local food is also influenced by the perception of inferiority towards local food (Hardono, 2014; Sidiq et al., 2022; Utami, 2018). This phenomenon demonstrates the existence of a post-colonial food paradigm, where healthy food standards are more often measured by external criteria (rice or modern processed products), thus shifting the use of local foods that actually have great potential in supporting food security and reducing stunting.

There is an urgency to rethink nutrition policy directions in addressing the malnutrition issue in Indonesia. Lessons can be drawn from countries such as Peru and Vietnam, which have successfully integrated local food sources into their nutrition programs (Gie et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022). By promoting food system decolonization, shifting public perception to recognize the nutritional value of indigenous foods, both countries have demonstrated significant progress in reducing stunting rates. This success illustrates that the utilization of locally available and culturally accepted foods in supplementary feeding programs can be an effective strategy to improve child nutrition outcomes. The data below illustrate the declining pattern of malnutrition issues in Peru and Vietnam (see Table 1).

Table 1. Data on the Decline in Stunting Prevalence in Three Countries: Indonesia, Vietnam, and Peru

Year	Indonesia	Vietnam	Peru
2000	36%	34%	32%
2010	30%	22%	20%
2020	27%	15%	12%
2023	21.5%	12%	11%

Source : Global Nutrition Report, (2023), (2025)

Based on Table 1, Peru and Vietnam have succeeded in reducing malnutrition rates significantly over the past few decades through the transformation of the use and understanding of local food ingredients, while Indonesia still faces high malnutrition conditions (below the WHO standard of 14%). Although various nutrition intervention programs have been implemented, a

paradigm gap remains in understanding nutritious food. Therefore, a reframing of nutritious food policies, regardless of the context of colonialism and modernism, is needed to encourage local food production. Therefore, this study emphasizes the need for a new perspective in nutrition policy by integrating a postcolonial food paradigm approach that prioritizes decolonization of healthy eating patterns and empowerment of local food resources. This study aims to analyze how the local food paradigm can form the basis for formulating malnutrition management policy strategies in Indonesia, drawing on the experiences of Peru and Vietnam.

Research Objective

The malnutrition rate in Indonesia is still high and closely related to how Indonesians view and understand the concept of nutritious food, which is still entangled in the healthy food concepts of colonialism and globalization. A government strategy is needed to change the public's understanding of nutritious food. Therefore, this study will discuss: a) How do Indonesians perceive local healthy food, particularly in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua, in the context of colonial legacies? b) How have other countries applied decolonial principles to healthy food policies to address nutritional issues? c) What government strategies are recommended for decolonizing Indonesians' perceptions of healthy food, taking into account the local contexts in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua?

The first section will discuss the perspective of Indonesians in perceiving local healthy food in the context of colonial legacies. The second section of this article will analyze how other countries have developed strategies to understand nutritious food. Finally, this article will discuss lessons learned to develop strategies for the Indonesian government to transform its understanding of nutritious food, thereby contributing to reducing stunting rates.

Research Methods

Research Design and Data Collations

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative case study approach as outlined by (Creswell, 2007). This study adopts a comparative qualitative design that explores how various governments have addressed the paradigm shift in nutritious food from a colonial-influenced perspective to a locally rooted understanding. This design emphasizes cross-country comparisons, focusing on Indonesia, Vietnam, and Peru, to capture variations in conditions, challenges, and government responses. By positioning Indonesia, specifically the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua regions, as a primary case and comparing it with the experiences of Vietnam and Peru, this study aims to identification of patterns of policy innovation, cultural adaptation, and institutional strategies. This approach provides a structured basis for drawing lessons and formulating context-sensitive recommendations for Indonesia.

This study used a literature review and qualitative synthetic analysis to collect, assess, and synthesize qualitative data from various sources. This approach aimed to provide a comprehensive and methodical integration of qualitative findings related to food and nutrition governance, policy interventions, and paradigm shift strategies in dietary practices. Data were collected from books (1 book), scientific articles (10 online documents), government documents (7 online documents), and reports (2 online reports), among other sources (see Table 1). These materials provide insights into the actual conditions, challenges, and government responses in Indonesia, as well as comparative lessons from Vietnam and Peru. To ensure data validity, all study data were verified using data triangulation across methods, time, and place.

Table 2. Data Collection

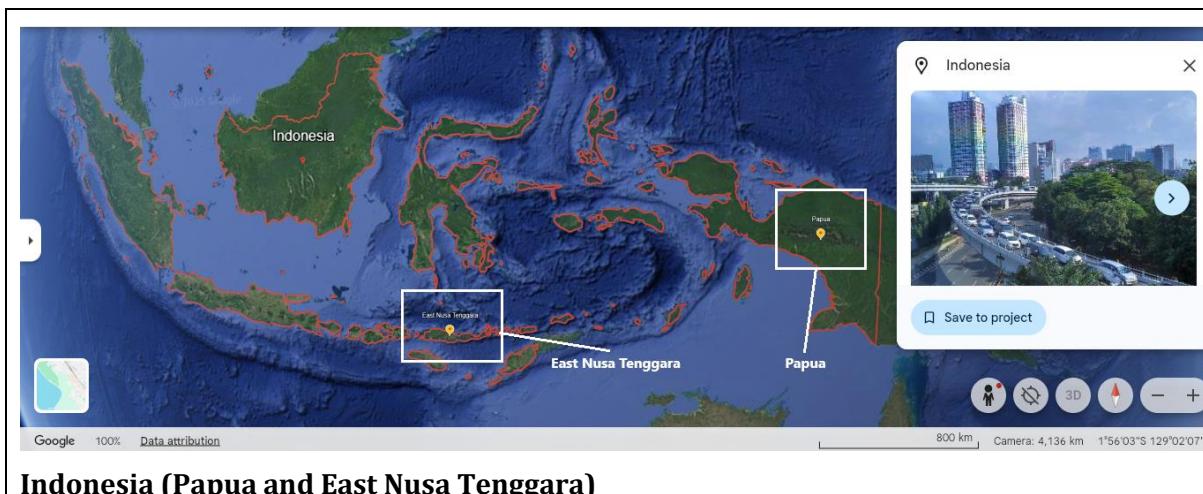
No.	Data Resources	References	A brief Relevance	Data Category
1.	Reports	National Socioeconomic Survey (2023).	Provides essential evidence on the dietary shift from local foods to rice in NTT and Papua, underscoring the relevance of rethinking Indonesia's nutrition policies within a post-colonial food paradigm	Official Statistics
		Global Nutrition Report, 2023.	Provides comparative evidence on malnutrition in Peru, Vietnam, and Indonesia, highlighting how successful integration of local food systems in Peru and Vietnam has contributed to faster reductions in malnutrition compared to Indonesia.	Global Monitoring Report.
2.	Books	Creswell, J. W. (2007).	Establishing contextual understanding by investigating and contrasting phenomena prior to developing policy suggestions.	Methodology
3.	Previous study	Aban, A. P. (2025), Calizaya, F., Gómez, L., Zegarra, J., Pozo, M., Mindani, C., Caira, C., & Calizaya, E. (2023). Harmayani, E., Lestari, L. A., Sari, P. M., & Gardjito, M. (2017). Karmakar, B., & Roy, S. (2024). Protschky, S. (2008). Wijaya, F. A., & Sanubari, T. P. E. (2024).	These studies have a strong correlation and present data that support this research regarding initial condition, government role, lessons learned to shifting healthy food paradigm in Peru, Vietnam and Indonesia.	Research Article

Source: Processed from various sources, 2025.

Based on Table 2, this study utilizes data collected from various official reports, scientific studies, and policy documents related to food and nutrition governance. Through a rigorous data reduction process, this research aims to identify gaps and draw lessons from Vietnam and Peru regarding the shift in public understanding of locally based nutritious food, in order to formulate context-sensitive recommendations for Indonesia. This study adopts a critical and exploratory approach to understand how government strategies contribute to the success of this paradigm shift in nutrition. The researchers used source triangulation by cross-checking data from various secondary sources, including previous scientific studies, official government reports, and program evaluation documents. This approach is intended to verify the consistency of information, detect recurring thematic patterns, and minimize the risk of interpretive bias toward a single source category.

Site Selection

This study focuses on three countries; Indonesia, Vietnam, and Peru to understand how government strategies are shifting public understanding of nutritious food from a colonial perspective to locally-based practices. Vietnam and Peru are examined as comparative cases due to their strong strategies in restoring local food systems and successfully reducing malnutrition, while Indonesia, specifically the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua regions, serves as a focal context where significant challenges remain. This comparative design provides valuable context for addressing existing gaps in Indonesia's food and nutrition governance and contributes to the development of strategies that emphasize cultural relevance, community participation, and food sovereignty. The geographic focus of this study is illustrated in Figure 2 (see Figure 2).



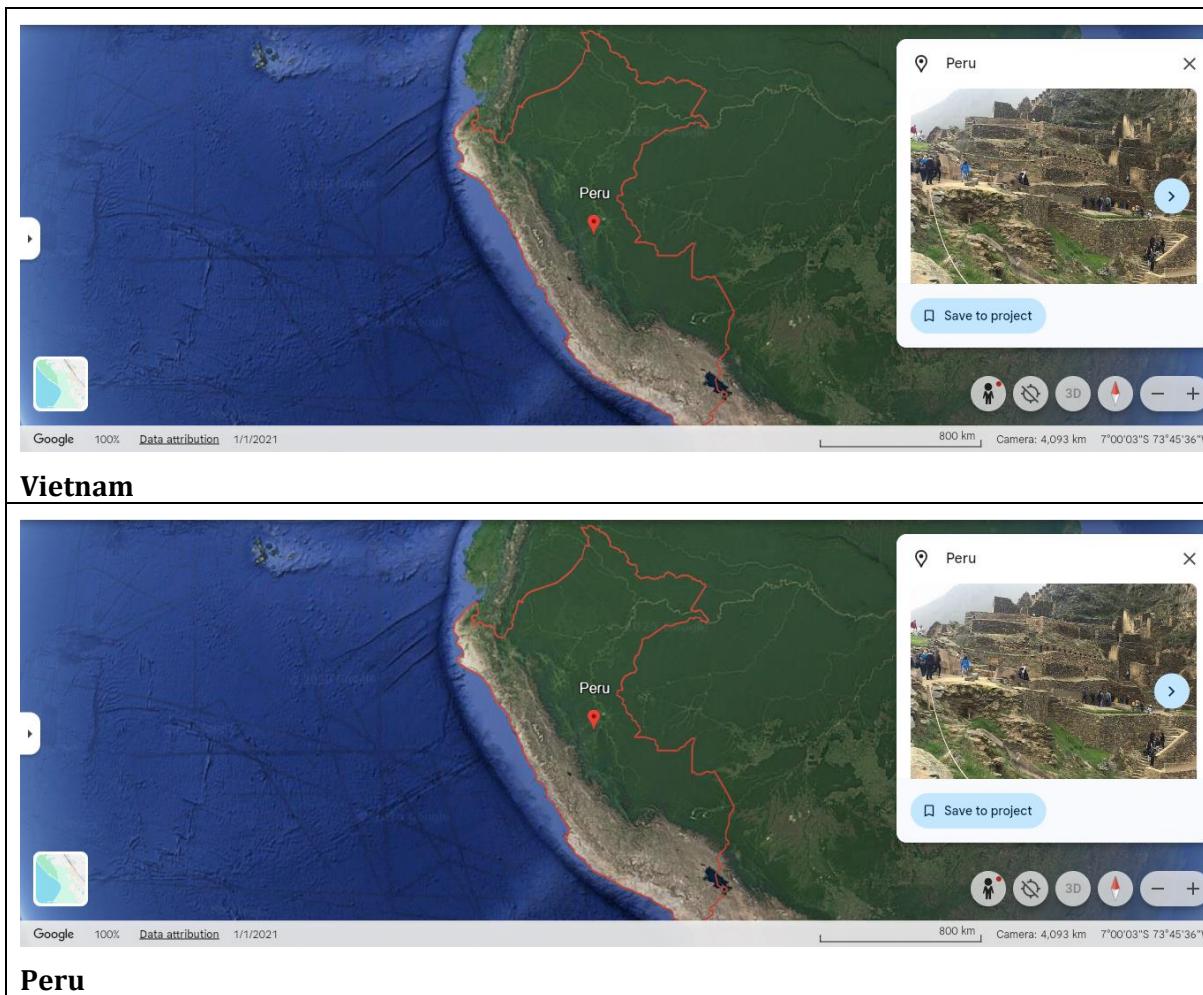


Figure 2. The location of this study, Indonesia, and the Countries with robust AI Regulatory Frameworks: Indonesia, Vietnam, and Peru. Source: Processed from Google Earth, 2025.

Data Analysis

This study used NVivo 12 Plus to analyze qualitative data through a series of structured steps. The process began with data collection, followed by importing and organizing the data within NVivo to ensure order and accuracy. Next, coding was performed, labeling relevant text segments according to key themes or concepts. Thematic coding encompassed three main categories: actual conditions, challenges, and government responses related to food and nutrition governance in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Peru. These themes emerged inductively from a review of secondary sources, including government reports, scientific articles, program evaluations, and policy documents. The cases analyzed reflect variation across the three countries, highlighting differences in cultural practices, local food utilization, and institutional strategies. NVivo's coding functionality, supported by its ability to create nodes and categories, simplified the organization of themes and patterns. NVivo's visualization tools, such as project maps, charts, and models, were used to illustrate findings and relationships, facilitating clear presentation, comprehensive reporting, and effective communication of results and methodology to stakeholders. Figure 3 below outlines these analytical steps (see Figure 3).

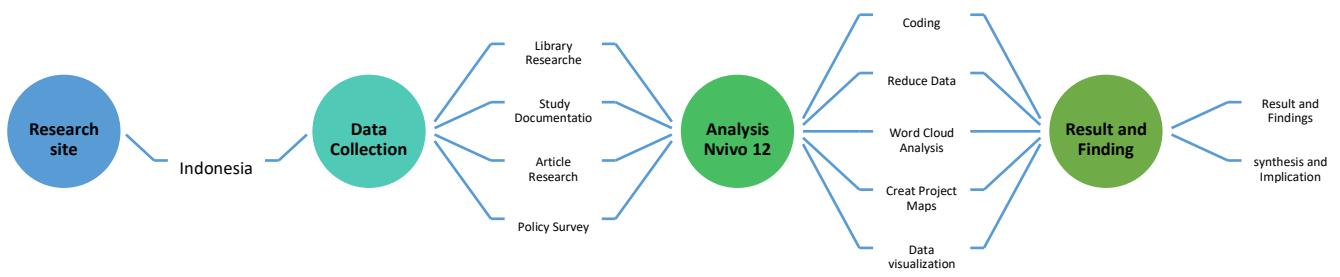


Figure 3. The stages of data analysis using NVivo Plus. Source: Processed by author, 2025

Results and Findings

Transformations in Local Diets: Challenges and Government Responses in East Nusa Tenggara and Papua

Research conducted by (McLennan & Ulijaszek, 2015) explains that social changes in the ownership of basic food ingredients have undergone a shift triggered by colonialism that influenced their eating habits, just as colonialism changed eating patterns in the Pacific Islands, creating consumption patterns that are more oriented towards social and market needs than tradition. This also occurs in Indonesia. Community understanding of nutritious food in the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua regions is significantly influenced by the legacy of colonial ideas and history impacts that changed the way people eat (Protschky, 2008). It is important to understand the initial conditions faced by communities in NTT and Papua, the challenges, government responses, and the final conditions to improve access to better nutrition in the local context. This analysis can be supported by the following table (see Table 3).

Table 3. Transformations in Local Diets in Papua and East Nusa Tenggara

Regions	Initial conditions	Challenges	Government response	Final condition
Papua	The community relied on sago as a staple food until the 1990s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problems with food distribution and pricing. A paradigm that views rice and packaged products as status symbols. A paradigm that views rice as a more modern product. 	Village food barn program, mobile health services and integrated health post outreach to conduct sago consumption campaigns / development of sago processing (local and pilot projects).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rice and packaged/instant products are becoming increasingly dominant in markets and daily consumption patterns, especially in population centers and areas with road access.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited nutrition education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote communities still use sago, but access to modern food is increasingly widespread • Local food prices are relatively volatile. • Sago revitalization efforts are ongoing but not evenly distributed. 	
East Nusa Tenggara	Corn, sweet potatoes, moringa and sea fish were still dominant until the 2000s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a perception that local food is considered "poor people's food" in some communities. • The lean season affects the availability of local food. • Market penetration and instant foods (instant noodles, biscuits) are cheap and convenient. • Nutritional literacy is low, and complementary feeding patterns are not always healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition education through integrated health posts (Posyandu), Family Welfare Movement (PKK), and food diversification programs campaign, local MPASI demonstration s). • Utilization of Village Funds and economic empowerment programs for local food processing. • Social assistance (PKH, social assistance) for food access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A marked shift to rice and instant foods is occurring in many communities. • Local foods are being used for food reserves. • Commercialized complementary foods (MPASI) and instant noodles are increasing in use. • There are local efforts at branding and local processing, but their scale is still limited compared to the penetration of industrialized foods.

Source : Processed by Authors, 2025.

According to Table 3, until the 1990s, Papuans still used sago as a staple food, but faced several challenges, such as distribution issues and rising food prices, which made access to sago quite difficult. Furthermore, the impact of modernization, urbanization, government food distribution, market access, media, and social perceptions influenced by the colonial legacy gave rise to a new paradigm in society that viewed rice and packaged products as status symbols, perceived as more modern than local foods (Patgiri, 2025; Tak et al., 2025). Limited nutrition education further reinforced this perception, resulting in a gradual shift in local food consumption. In response, the government launched several intervention programs, including the Village Food Barn Program, mobile health services, and counseling at Integrated Health Posts (Posyandu). These programs aimed to promote sago consumption and develop sago processing through local projects and pilot projects, ensuring that the nutritional value of local foods remained recognized and utilized by the community. However, recent developments have shown a significant shift: rice and packaged or instant products have become increasingly dominant in markets and daily consumption patterns, particularly in population centers and areas with good transportation access (Bairagi et al., 2021). In rural areas, a dual pattern remains evident, very remote communities continue to rely on sago, while access to modern food crops continues to increase. Local food prices are relatively volatile, and sago revitalization efforts are underway, but implementation is not yet uniform across the region.

Meanwhile, in East Nusa Tenggara, local foods such as corn, sweet potatoes, moringa, and sea fish were staple foods until the 2000s (Hamaisa et al., 2021; RIPTANTI et al., 2018). However, local foods face several challenges. In some communities, there is a perception that local foods are "poor people's food," which influences community preferences, especially in urban areas or population centers (Aban, 2025). Market penetration and the availability of cheap and convenient instant foods, such as instant noodles and biscuits, have begun to shift consumption patterns. Low nutritional literacy and unhealthy complementary feeding practices also reinforce this shift (Destiani et al., 2021; Fahmida et al., 2015; Litaay et al., 2024; Myers et al., 2014). This condition is driven by modernization, urbanization, government food distribution, market access, the media, and social perceptions influenced by a colonial legacy that views local foods as less nutritious and can determine social status (Colozza, 2024; Nurhasan et al., 2024; Venna & Romulo, 2024). The government has responded to this situation through various intervention programs, including nutrition education through Posyandu (Integrated Health Posts), the Family Welfare Program (PKK), and food diversification campaigns such as the "Isi Piringku" program and demonstrations of locally based complementary feeding (MPASI). In addition, the use of Village Funds and economic empowerment programs is directed at supporting local food processing, while social assistance programs, such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) and other social assistance programs, help communities improve food access. Despite these efforts, the current situation shows a significant shift: rice and instant food consumption is increasingly dominant in many communities, while local foods are now used more as food reserves. The use of commercially available complementary foods and instant noodles has increased significantly. Local efforts to brand and process traditional foods remain, but their scale remains limited compared to the penetration of industrialized foods and the influence of modern markets.

Vietnam and Peru in shifting the Healthy Food Paradigms and utilizing local sovereignty

In the context of changing the healthy food paradigm, Vietnam and Peru have successfully shifted public perceptions of "healthy food" by promoting local food sovereignty and revitalizing traditional dietary practices (Blare et al., 2019; Guillén-Sánchez, 2025; Li et al., 2024; S. C. O. Wertheim-Heck & Raneri, 2020). Both countries faced historical and socio-economic challenges that influenced community food choices, including the lingering effects of colonial food systems and the growing penetration of processed or imported foods (Guell et al., 2022; Trinh et al., 2020; Vuong et al., 2023). Through targeted government interventions, public campaigns, and community-based initiatives, Vietnam and Peru have fostered a stronger appreciation for local staples while integrating modern nutritional knowledge (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2022; Vu & Nguyen, 2017; S. Wertheim-Heck et al., 2019). By analyzing these cases, the study highlights strategies and mechanisms that can inform efforts in other contexts, such as Indonesia, to strengthen local food systems and shift paradigms toward culturally grounded, nutritious diets. This analysis can be supported by the following table (see Table 4).

Table 4. Vietnam and Peru are shifting the Healthy Food Paradigms and utilizing local sovereignty

Country	Initial conditions	Challenges	Shifting Paradigm Strategy	Result	Lesson Learned
Vietnam	High rates of child malnutrition (1990s). People rely more on white rice & imported products.	Urbanization & penetration of instant food (noodles, soft drinks) and urban-rural inequality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integration of local foods (leafy vegetables, freshwater fish) into school programs. The "Safe & Healthy Food" (An Toàn Thực Phẩm) campaign. Focus on community-based nutrition. 	Significant reduction in stunting (34% → 15% in 20 years).	There needs to be a shift from "rice & instant food" to nutritious local food through community education.
Peru	Chronic malnutrition is high in the Andes and Amazon. Local foods (quinoa, corn, potatoes) are considered traditional.	The dominance of imported and ultra-processed foods and the marginalization of indigenous communities and local food patterns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rebranding traditional foods (quinoa, maca, purple corn) as global superfoods. Collaborating with NGOs and the WHO to promote local 	Reduction in stunting (32% → 12% in 20 years). Local food is promoted to become a global commodity.	Rebranding local foods (sago, moringa, corn) as modern and prestigious foods.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complementary foods. • Elevating food culture as a source of national pride
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Source : Processed by Authors, 2025.

Based on Table 4, both Vietnam and Peru provide valuable lessons on shifting dietary paradigms toward healthy eating and supporting local food systems. In Vietnam, the early 1990s were marked by high rates of child malnutrition and a diet heavily reliant on white rice and imported food products (Kien et al., 2016). The community faced numerous challenges, including rapid urbanization, the widespread penetration of instant foods such as noodles and soft drinks, and significant urban-rural disparities that impacted access to nutritious food. In response, the Vietnamese government implemented a series of strategies to shift the dietary paradigm toward healthier, locally sourced foods (Nguyen-Minh et al., 2025). Key initiatives included the integration of local foods, such as leafy vegetables and freshwater fish, into school meal programs, the national "Safe & Healthy Food" (An Toàn Thực Phẩm) campaign, and a strong emphasis on community-based nutrition education.

These interventions yielded significant results: over a 20-year period, the prevalence of stunting in children dropped dramatically from 34% to 15% (Jalaludin et al., 2025). Vietnam's experience illustrates an important lesson: achieving sustainable nutritional improvements requires a deliberate shift from reliance on white rice and processed instant foods to diverse and nutritious local diets, facilitated through ongoing community education and engagement.

Similarly, Peru showed the same pattern in shifting the healthy food paradigm in their community. The high level of consumed ultra-processed foods and marginalized in the indigenous foods made their government implemented a range of strategies aimed at revitalizing local food system (including quinoa, corn, and potatoes). Key interventions included rebranding traditional foods as globally recognized superfoods, collaborating with NGOs and the WHO to promote locally sourced complementary foods, and elevating Peruvian food culture as a source of national pride (Karmakar & Roy, 2024). These efforts yielded significant results: over a 20-year period, the prevalence of stunting decreased from 32% to 12%. Moreover, traditional local foods were successfully promoted not only for domestic nutrition but also as commodities with global recognition (Calizaya et al., 2023). The Peruvian experience demonstrates that rebranding local foods as modern and prestigious products, such as sago, moringa, or corn, can effectively shift dietary perceptions and support both nutrition and cultural identity.

Overall, the experiences of Vietnam and Peru illustrate that shifting away from the post-colonial healthy food paradigm, where imported or "modern" foods are valued over traditional local staples, requires deliberate policy and community engagement. Both countries show that integrating local foods into daily diets, promoting culturally grounded nutrition education, and rebranding traditional foods as socially valued and prestigious are effective strategies for countering colonial-era influences on dietary preferences. These lessons underscore that sustainable improvements in nutrition occur when local food systems are strengthened, communities are actively involved, and the legacy of post-colonial food hierarchies is addressed through education and culturally sensitive interventions.

Discussions

Global perceptions of nutritious food have been shaped by colonialism, including in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua. The stigmatization of modern and local foods has led to changes in the

social and economic structures of communities. Local foods are considered inferior to foods introduced through colonialism, which are often associated with modernity and higher social status. Research by (Setiawan & Subaharianto, 2020) explains that in postcolonial societies like Indonesia, local foods have been marginalized by the dominant narrative that valorizes modern foods, typically associated with Western culture, which in turn influences consumption patterns and food preferences. This phenomenon creates a sense of "in-betweenness" within the communities of NTT and Papua.

Furthermore, communities in NTT and Papua often feel forced to adopt diets more similar to those offered by modern markets, even though this conflicts with local preferences and their potential biodiversity. This leads to the neglect of traditional agricultural practices and local food consumption, which have become an integral part of their cultural identity (Wijaya & Sanubari, 2024). This phenomenon negatively impacts malnutrition issues such as increased incidence of obesity and stunting (Oddo, Maehara, et al., 2019).

To address this issue, the government needs to develop strategies to reframe nutritious food, moving away from the concept of nutritious food promoted by colonialism through modernization and globalization. Lessons can be learned from Vietnam, which has undergone significant transformation in its food system through the integration of local foods into educational programs, particularly in school contexts, and the Safe & Healthy Food campaign, which has significantly impacted the reduction of stunting in children. This approach includes the introduction of local and traditional foods into daily diets, which not only supports children's nutrition but also strengthens cultural identity and raises awareness about good nutrition (Di Prima et al., 2022; Le et al., 2019). These programs also seek to reduce the community's reliance on processed foods, which are often unhealthy and potentially harmful (Nguyen-Tien et al., 2019; Nguyen-Viet et al., 2017). Therefore, a combination of educational campaigns, integration of local foods into daily consumption, and increasing public awareness of the importance of nutrition will be key to addressing stunting and malnutrition in Vietnam.

Similar to Vietnam, Peru has also successfully promoted the dominance of local foods as staple foods for its population. Peru's strategy involves rebranding local foods by promoting key commodities such as quinoa and maca as global "superfoods." This initiative, involving collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and various international institutions, seeks to address the alarming problem of stunting, particularly among children (Barreau et al., 2019; Karsak, 2025). By promoting local products as superfoods, Peru not only opens new markets but also provides communities with the tools to adapt and survive in the face of food security challenges (Alvarez-Vasquez et al., 2025; Lazíková et al., 2022). Through these programs, local foods function as global commodities that not only improve public health but also maintain economic sustainability. Therefore, introducing local foods that have been innovated into superfoods is not just a marketing trend, but rather a strategic effort to address malnutrition and increase access to local foods in the community. The success of this initiative depends heavily on collaboration between the government, civil society organizations, and international institutions to create an ecosystem that supports food sovereignty and strengthens public health in Peru.

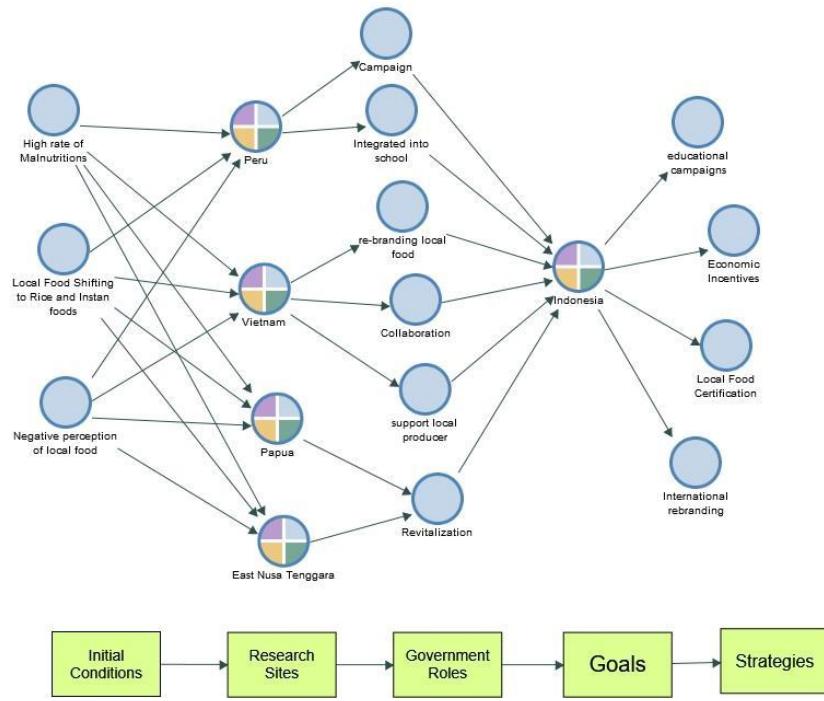


Figure 4. Nvivo Analysis in Strategies Post-Colonial Healthy Food Paradigm in Indonesia. Source: Processed by Authors, 2025.

Based on Figure 5, Indonesia can learn valuable lessons from the strategies implemented by Vietnam and Peru to increase dietary diversity and raise awareness of the importance of local foods. Vietnam's strategy of integrating local foods into the school curriculum, along with its "Safe & Healthy Food" campaign, has shown positive impacts in reducing stunting rates through improved nutrition in children (Kodish et al., 2015). Through this approach, Indonesia can focus its efforts on encouraging schools, particularly in areas with high stunting rates, to incorporate local foods into children's menus and educate children about the importance of nutritious food within a cultural context.

Furthermore, Peru has successfully created "superfoods" from local ingredients such as quinoa and introduced these products to the global market through collaborations with NGOs and the WHO (Huicho et al., 2016). In this context, Indonesia has great potential to rebrand traditional foods such as tempeh and sago into "superfoods" to increase their marketability in the global market and support better nutritional value for the community (Anwar et al., 2023). By creating synergy between local food rebranding, educational programs, and cross-sector collaboration, Indonesia can adapt lessons from Vietnam and Peru into a long-term strategy that will not only strengthen cultural identity and improve nutrition but also open up new economic opportunities in a global context (Agyemang et al., 2022; PROESTOS, 2018).

By adapting Vietnamese and Peruvian practices of promoting local food as a symbol of health and cultural identity, Indonesia can implement a post-colonial shift in the health paradigm. This strategy includes: educational campaigns to challenge colonial nutritional standards, strengthening local food including regulations, certification, and global rebranding, economic incentives for local producers, and integrating local food-based nutrition education into schools and integrated health posts (posyandu). This multi-layered approach not only improves community nutritional status but also builds food sovereignty and strengthens cultural identity in a global context.

Implications

This study on the integration of local food into nutrition strategies highlights the importance of changing perceptions influenced by colonial legacies. It emphasizes the need to reconsider external standards of healthy food and prioritize culturally based approaches that strengthen community identity and food sovereignty. By recognizing the sociocultural dynamics underlying dietary choices, this research broadens understanding of effective policies tailored to local contexts. At the institutional level, these findings suggest that governments and relevant organizations should strengthen regulations that support the local food industry and certification. Enhancing collaboration between policymakers, local producers, and educational institutions is crucial for incorporating local food into school curricula and health campaigns. Developing capacity for innovative branding of local food as "superfoods" and providing economic incentives can further empower local producers and promote sustainable food systems. Practically, efforts should focus on culturally sensitive educational programs that raise awareness of the nutritional and cultural benefits of local food. Schools and community health centers can serve as important platforms for rebranding traditional foods such as tempeh and sago, making them more appealing and acceptable. Collaboration with NGOs and international partners can facilitate market access and export opportunities, supporting local economies while improving nutritional outcomes and preserving cultural heritage.

Conclusion & Limitations

Indonesia's continued reliance on colonial-influenced concepts of nutritious food, centered on rice and modern processed foods, has marginalized local and traditional food systems that are both nutrient-rich and culturally significant. Despite high malnutrition rates in regions such as East Nusa Tenggara and Papua, the continued dominance of rice and industrialized foods, coupled with inadequate policy support for local foods, hinders efforts to improve nutritional outcomes. A deeply entrenched postcolonial food paradigm perpetuates perceptions of modernity associated with Western and industrialized foods, which undermines local food sovereignty and reduces community engagement with their traditional diets.

To address this, this paper advocates a paradigm shift that re-values local foods through education, culturally sensitive interventions, and policy reforms inspired by successful models from Vietnam and Peru. By decolonizing food systems and integrating nutrient-dense local foods into government programs and public awareness campaigns, Indonesia can leverage its rich biodiversity and cultural heritage to more effectively combat malnutrition and stunting. Such strategies are important not only for improving nutritional outcomes but also for fostering community resilience, preserving cultural identity, and promoting sustainable food sovereignty rooted in ecological viability and local knowledge.

The limitations include a dependence on secondary data sources, which may carry inherent biases and lack detailed contextual nuance specific to Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural landscape. Furthermore, while lessons are drawn from Vietnam and Peru, the applicability of these strategies to Indonesia's distinct regional conditions remains uncertain and would benefit from localized empirical validation. The analysis primarily focuses on policy frameworks and community interventions but does not incorporate extensive fieldwork or direct stakeholder perspectives, potentially overlooking practical challenges and community perceptions. Additionally, the data utilized are predominantly cross-sectional, limiting insight into the dynamic and evolving nature of dietary habits and nutritional outcomes over time, thus underscoring the need for more longitudinal and participatory research approaches.

Declaration of Competing Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. We confirm that our article has never been published anywhere and is not being considered for publication in any journal. Thank You.

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