

## Socialization on the Urgency of Establishing the Keujruen Blang Customary Institution Towards an Inclusive Farmer Community

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**Abstract:** The people of Blang Geunang often face challenges in their profession as rice farmers. In Gampong Blang Geunang, the community experiences problems with crop failure caused by pests and diseases, limited knowledge, and conflicts with wildlife. Community service activities provide theoretical and practical knowledge to the people of Blang Geunang in the establishment of Keujruen Blang customary institutions. The method for implementing research-based community service activities is through a SMART approach that shows explicitly what will be achieved and how to achieve it. This activity is a Focus Group Discussion, which goes through the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. This activity was held on October 4, 2023, in the Gampong Blang Geunang meeting hall. Participants who attended consisted of government elements (gampong, sub-district, and district), the Aceh Traditional Council, farmer groups, and the general public. This activity discovered that the Blang Geunang gampong does not yet have a Keujruen Blang traditional institution due to a lack of understanding of the laws and regulations and the Qanun as its derivative. This activity resulted in public awareness of the positive impact of the formation of traditional institutions on the profession of farming communities. The positive impacts obtained include clear regulations regarding rice field activities, the availability of solutions if conflicts occur, legal protection, and the management of rice fields based on local wisdom. Due to the magnitude of the impact felt, the community agreed to form the Keujruen Blang traditional institution. The presence of this traditional institution makes the community inclusive in the management of rice fields in Gampong Blang Geunang.

**Keywords:** farmer; inclusive; keujruen blang; traditional institutions

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### INTRODUCTION

Farming communities play a strategic role in the country's economy, especially in agrarian countries like Indonesia. Farmers are crucial in providing food for

the community (Wulandari & Pasaru, 2022). agricultural activities must be free from natural and non-natural threats to achieve food sovereignty (Konyep, 2021). Farmers face increasing

challenges, including crop quantity, product quality, and a declining interest in agriculture (Lindawati et al., 2022).

Aceh Barat is a regency with a vast land area of 103 hectares in 2021, making it suitable for cultivating crops, especially rice. One area in Aceh Barat where the majority of the population are farmers is Gampong Blang Geunang, located in the Kaway XVI Subdistrict. The significant role of rice farming in Gampong Blang Geunang has led farmers to consider this profession as one that needs protection from various threats. In reality, crop failures often occur in this area, resulting in unmet harvest targets for the community. Various factors contribute to the decline in the quality and quantity of agriculture in Gampong Blang Geunang, including land damage, poor regional management, and internal community issues.

Crop failures due to natural damage are influenced by the entry of protected wild animals into the residents' agricultural areas. Elephants, in particular, traverse the land, causing damage to the community's farmland. The disruption of the elephant ecosystem in the forest due to land clearing by companies is a contributing factor to wild elephants entering the agricultural areas of Gampong Blang Geunang.

Poor management of agricultural land contributes to suboptimal conditions in Gampong Blang Geunang. The lack of planned and organized development has adverse effects on farmers, resulting in unsynchronized and conflicting policies that hinder the agricultural sector. The unorganized management also limits farmers' access to knowledge about land management, as well as access to limited cutting-edge technology. Consequently, the unorganized management leads to low productivity and poor quality of

agricultural products in Gampong Blang Geunang.

Internal factors contributing to the decline in the quality and quantity of agriculture in Gampong Blang Geunang include the very low interest of the community in sustainable farming. Counseling practices are not comprehensive, leading to soil health deterioration, imbalance in the ecosystem, and farmers not adhering to guidelines and standards for sustainable agriculture. Another internal factor is that the community in Gampong Blang Geunang is economically disadvantaged, limiting farmers' understanding of agricultural activities due to skill limitations, neglected farmer protection, and limited capital. Further observation reveals a decline in the community's awareness and solidarity regarding social and environmental conditions. This results in environmental sustainability decline, loss of financial support, and a lack of effective cooperation within the farming community.

Gampong Blang Geunang, one of the villages in Aceh Barat, does not yet have a customary institution related to rice farming. In Aceh, regulations exist concerning the recognition of customary institutions. Customary institutions serve as platforms for community participation in solving social issues (Wahid, 2019).

In farming communities, a customary institution is called Keujruen Blang (Ikhsan et al., 2018). Keujruen Blang is recognized in Aceh Qanun No. 10 of 2008 concerning customary institutions. The qanun states that Keujruen Blang is an institution dealing with rice or rice field conditions. Keujruen Blang serves as a place for the community to exchange ideas regarding agricultural problem-solving, strategies, and increased participation. The presence of Keujruen Blang can lead to effective regulation of farming activities,

fostering inclusivity that ultimately contributes to community well-being (Ikhsan et al., 2018).

The importance of the existence of Keujruen Blang is supported by regulations related to the village's obligation to achieve food security equivalent to 20% of the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBG). Food security involves the availability of quality and quantity of food consumed by the community (Aisyah, 2020). Food security is significant in achieving community welfare (Chaireni et al., 2020; Kerans and Ngongo, 2022) emphasizing sustainability principles (Saputro & Fidayani, 2020).

Keuchik Gampong Blang Geunang revealed that the village is still isolated and lacks communication networks, agriculture is managed traditionally, and despite extensive farmland, the quantity and quality of harvests remain very low. The conditions mentioned regarding the decline in the quality and quantity of agriculture in Gampong Blang Geunang will impact community welfare. Community welfare is the goal of a family, the smallest system in society. The realization of welfare means the ability to meet a decent life, physical and mental health, and high utility and performance (Mulia & Saputra, 2020).

Given the conditions of Gampong Blang Geunang described above, socialization is necessary to form the Keujruen Blang customary institution. Socialization to the village authorities aims for the sustained development of the village, increased effectiveness and efficiency in resource management, and enhanced inclusivity of the village community in expressing demands and support for village policies. The targeted outcome of this program is to align perceptions so that the community is aware of the Keujruen Blang customary institution and is committed to its establishment.

## METHOD

The method of implementing community service activities utilized the SMART approach, which outlines what will be achieved and how it will be accomplished. The meaning of what is to be achieved should be specific, relevant, contributing to the overall advocacy goals, and time-bound, indicating the set time frame for achievement (Shabrinawati & Yuliastuti, 2020).

The execution of this activity emphasized the significance of establishing the Keujruen Blang customary institution through the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method. The realization of FGD involves several stages. Stage 1 was an exploration conducted over a month, precisely on August 26, 2023, as seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Initial coordination with the government of Gampong Blang Geunang

In this stage, the team conducted initial coordination with the Keuchik (Village Chief) as a partner to discuss the issues related to agriculture in the village, including land conditions, farmers, and other environmental aspects. This step was necessary as the first move in the community service activity in Gampong Blang Geunang.

Stage 2 involved preparation, addressing the location, time, speakers, participants, refreshments, and the material to be presented. The preparation stage was a collaborative effort between the team and the village authorities to meet the requirements of all involved parties.

Stage 3 consisted of conducting the FGD at the Aula Office of Keuchik Keujruen Blang. The activity occurred on Wednesday, October 4, 2023, from 08:00 to 13:30 WIB. There were 43 participants present, including government representatives, customary institution representatives, agricultural extension officers, village leaders, community members, and academic representatives, including lecturers and students.

This activity covered issues mapping in Gampong Blang Geunang, the importance of forming the customary institution, and the steps to establish the Keujruen Blang customary institution.

Stage 4 involved evaluation, conducted after the FGD. This stage aimed to assess the success of the conducted activity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service activity in Gampong Blang Geunang proceeded smoothly and provided the community with understanding and openness regarding their area. Here are some outcomes from the conducted community service:

### **Conflict with Wild Animals**

Wildlife entering farmlands includes the Sumatran Elephant, categorized as a critically endangered species and protected by law (Mustafa et al, 2018). Farmers expressed confusion and challenges dealing with elephants, as one farmer stated:

*"Elephants often enter this area. We don't know what to do; on one hand, elephants damage our fields, but on the other hand, we are not allowed to kill them because they are protected."*  
(Farmer from Gampong Blang Geunang)

The community is aware that the Sumatran Elephant should be protected. The presence of Sumatran Elephants is a

consequence of the damaged elephant ecosystem due to coal mining. The opening of land, which serves as the elephant habitat, disrupts their travel routes and damages the food chain, leading elephants to enter agricultural areas.

Elephants are animals that do not understand administration like humans. The damage to the Sumatran Elephant ecosystem or mining areas is not within the Gampong Blang Geunang region. Although the damage to the ecosystem is not in Gampong Blang Geunang, the preserved condition of the environment in Blang Geunang remains a new food source for these elephants.

The damage to rice fields has become a problem that the community cannot address directly. The presence of the Keujruen Blang customary institution is deemed necessary to advocate for wildlife conflict issues with the community. In this situation, Keujruen Blang cannot work alone; the customary institution of Pawang Uteun also needs to address this issue. Pawang Uteun, or the "pawang glee," is a customary institution focused on the sustainability and management of forests (Yulia, Sastro et al., 2021). The collaboration between Pawang Uteun and Keujruen Blang will positively impact rice farmers in Gampong Blang Geunang.

### **Poverty in the Community**

Most of the community in Gampong Blang Geunang are impoverished farmers. The poverty stems from the frequent inability of rice harvests to create prosperity in terms of quality and quantity. This poverty also acts as a barrier for farmers to access new technologies and knowledge regarding the governance and production of rice.

Agricultural extension officers from West Aceh Kabupaten were present during the socialization event. In their presentation, they mentioned the availability of assistance if a proposal is

submitted through the village government. This information was previously unknown to both the community and the village government, providing an opportunity for the village and its residents to seek assistance from the kabupaten government through the Department of Agriculture.

In Figure 2, the FGD and counseling activity on establishing a customary village based on Pancasila to enhance agricultural productivity through customary institutions are depicted.



Figure 2 Material from the agricultural counsellor of West Aceh District

### Low Interest in Sustainable Farming

Farmers in Gampong Blang Geunang have a low interest in agriculture. This is evident from irregular planting times due to the habit of planting only after depleting the previous harvest stock. In other words, the community begins planting when they run out of the stock from the previous harvest. The maximum number of times rice farmers in Blang Geunang go to the fields to plant is twice a year. The involvement of various stakeholder elements in the FGD activity is depicted in Figure 3.



Figure 3 FGD Participants

The urgency of the presence of Keujruen Blang in this context is necessary. In its role as a regulator of field procedures, it is believed to make farmers more productive, effective, and efficient in rice cultivation.

### Management of Rice Fields

The management of rice fields in Blang Geunang is still inadequate. The inadequacy of rice field management is due to three factors: lack of planning, coordination, and ineffective management. Firstly, the lack of planning regarding planting seasons results in an imbalance between rice demand and available supply, leading to uneven harvests. In addition, untimely planting also leads to a decrease in the quality and quantity of the harvest. Moreover, unclear planting times pose risks related to weather disturbances, making crops vulnerable to pests or diseases.

The second factor contributing to inadequate field management is the lack of coordination among the farming community. This lack of coordination leads to conflicts among farmers, such as disputes over irrigation water, disrupting cooperation among farmers. Poor coordination also hinders the transfer of agricultural knowledge and innovation.

The third factor is ineffective management, which wastes resources such as water, energy, and additional materials. Ineffectual management also contributes to financial issues, as the capital used does not align with the harvest results. The establishment of the Keujruen Blang customary institution is deemed essential to expedite its formation. This institution has the ability to serve as a platform for farmers to collaborate, coordinate, and nurture rice farmers.

The role of the Keujruen Blang customary institution is crucial, and its formation needs to be expedited. This



institution has the capability to serve as a platform for farmers to collaborate, coordinate, and nurture rice farmers (Budi & Wardah, 2021).

### **Allocation of 20% of Village Funds for Food**

Villages play a significant role in fulfilling society's most basic food needs. The presence of Keujruen Blang is supported by regulations related to village fund allocation. According to PMK No. 201/PMK.07/2022 on Village Fund Management, 20% of the village funds are allocated for food resilience.

Targets and objectives of the village government policy in realizing food resilience are also discussed in the FGD, as shown in Figure 4. This is because the establishment of the Keujruen Blang customary institution is crucial to assisting the government in managing rice fields in line with the policies of Qanun Number 10 of 2008 concerning customary institutions within the Aceh government.

The presentation of village fund allocation material is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Presentation of village fund allocation material

The amount of the village fund allocation related to food security has great potential to improve the quality of food in Gampong Blang Geunang. This village fund can be used for agricultural capital, such as seeds and fertilizers, improving equipment and technology, plant maintenance, and efforts to prevent crop failure. The utilization of the village fund also plays a role in improving the quality of farmers

through training, such as land management, water management, the use of renewable tools, and training in pest and disease prevention.

The Keujruen Blang customary institution can manage and supervise this village fund. Keujruen Blang can become a partner for the government in improving agricultural quality and ultimately enhancing the welfare of the people.

### **Establishment of the Keujruen Blang Customary Institution**

Forming and strengthening customary institutions are among the solutions to resolving social conflicts within indigenous communities (Samsul, 2014). The Keujruen Blang customary institution is a specific social organization for the Aceh government, granted autonomy to realize socio-economic development (Aziz, 2018).

Several aspects of the selection of who becomes Keujruen Blang need to be considered. First, Keujruen Blang should have good social capital. This is to ensure that the community can follow all policies issued by Keujruen Blang. The second aspect to consider is that Keujruen Blang should have good experience in the field of paddy cultivation. This is necessary for Keujruen Blang to gain knowledge, skills, and problem-solving abilities if issues arise.

The selection of Keujruen Blang is done democratically, allowing all community members to participate in the selection, ensuring the representation of minority voices, and promoting stable leadership. Other institutions that need to be present in the formation of Keujruen Blang include Babinsa, Kamtibmas, Tuhapeut, and Keuchik.

The establishment of the customary institution is warmly welcomed by the customary institutions at the district/city level to foster solidarity and recognition in government organizations for the

sustainability of sustainable, Pancasila-based agriculture, as presented in Figure 5.

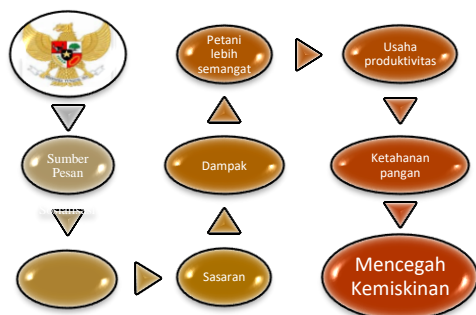


Figure 5 Pancasila-based farmer customary village

From the community service that has been carried out, positive feedback has been received from the Blang Geunang community. The community and the village government agree to promptly establish a customary institution in line with the government's specific policy based on Pancasila values. The community feels the positive impact if Keujruen Blang is formed, such as clear regulations regarding rice field activities, the availability of solutions in case of conflicts, legal protection, and rice field management based on local wisdom.

The evaluation stages involved gradual monitoring, from seed and planting plans to production control. However, this dynamic cannot comprehensively achieve its goals. In addition, regional government control misses the target because the Keujruen Blang customary institution cannot communicate effectively with government extension officers at the village level to farmer groups. Therefore, evaluating the success of the extension activities conducted by the regional government to farmer groups will establish a periodic control system that is intensively managed by the Blang Geunang village government and the district government. They agree to formulate a specific policy regarding the

guidelines for the Keujruen Blang customary institution. The formation will require advocacy processes with the government at the Aceh Barat district level. Therefore, the urgency for the Blang Geunang village to realize sustainable rice farming has led to the issuance of a decree by the Geucik (Village Head) regarding the process of intensifying the supervision of agricultural extension officers to farmer groups. This aims to enhance the productivity of rice farming.

The results of the evaluation, following the socialization activity with the government and the community of Gampong Blang Geunang, are presented in Figure 6.

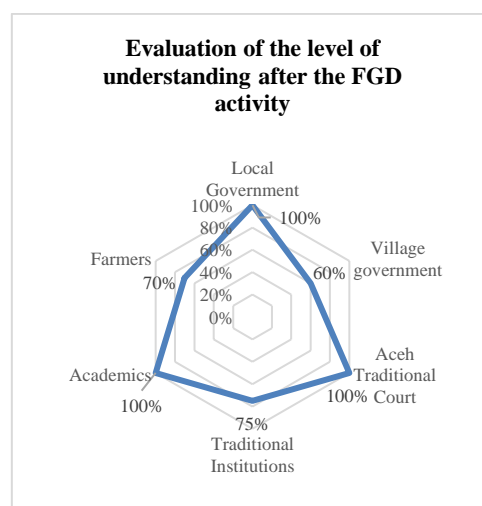


Figure 6 Evaluation results

It is seen in Figure 6 that the evaluation results for FGD participants indicate that they comprehended the socialization regarding the formation of the customary institution for rice field management, which is crucial for the farming community. Local government and academia participants understood the content very well, making this activity a sustainable priority for the West Aceh agricultural office. The village government representatives also grasped the information well, showing enthusiasm and expressing hope that the

existence of the Keujruen Blang customary institution would become a primary concern. Similarly, customary institutions and farmer groups understood the material well, suggesting that educational socialization programs of this nature could enhance an inclusive farming community in the management of rice fields, ultimately achieving increased rice productivity in the future.

### CONCLUSION

The community service based on research that has been carried out provides theoretical and practical knowledge regarding the importance of the presence of the Keujruen Blang Customary Institution. Theoretically, the community knows that Aceh is a province where customs and local wisdom are acknowledged, especially Keujruen Blang, a customary institution in paddy cultivation or rice fields. The community gained knowledge from the service about conflicts with wild animals. The presence of wild animals is a consequence of the damaged ecosystem due to land clearing for mining. The service also provided insights to the community regarding the need for sustainable planting patterns. Sustainable planting patterns help farmers produce better rice and maintain family food supplies.

The service also provided insight to the community about the 20% budget for food from the APBG. This fund can be utilized to improve rice field governance. Rice field management will be more effective if handled by a specific institution like Keujruen Blang. The Blang Geunang community feels the positive impact of the establishment of an intensive communication forum between extension officers and farmer groups, and the Keujruen Blang customary institution, which upholds the noble values of Pancasila. The Keujruen Blang customary institution is understood and felt to be a key element

capable of improving the quality and quantity of rice production, leading to the welfare of farmers.

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