

Story of Change

PRGs Helps Aceh Residents Become Legal Identity Document-Aware

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The relentless outreach efforts of the Gampong Registration Officers (PRGs) in Bireuen, Aceh has come to fruition. Thanks to the collaboration between KOMPAK, Centre on Child Protection Universitas Indonesia (PUSKAPA UI), and Centre for Education and Community Studies (PKPM), Bireuen residents now recognise the importance of legal identity documents. They can also benefit from government programs such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) and Direct Cash Assistance (BLT). Besides, comprehensive legal identity data is needed to draft better targeted village-level budgets.

"Sorry, no one is home," was the response to a knock on the door that Uswatun Khairat received time and again while canvassing the residents of Gampong Blang Kuta Dua Meunasah, Simpang Mamplam, Bireuen, as a *Gampong* Registration Officer (PRG). Even though Uswatun's sole intention was to help the residents to obtain their legal identity documents.

Back then, residents were not aware of the benefits of having legal identity documents. "Villagers would use their Family Registers (known as *Kartu Keluarga*, KK) document to wrap fried food because they thought it was unimportant," said Uswatun. Furthermore, the data recorded at KK were not always accurate. "Sometimes, the names of the family members at KK differed from the actual ones," said Uswatun, who became a PRG since 2017.

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Nonetheless, legal identity documents such as ID Cards (KTP), KK, and birth certificates are the main base for legal identity identification. They source the data for the Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS), which, in turn, become a reference in compiling lists of eligible recipients of the Central Government's assistance programs, such as the Family Hope Program (PKH) and Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT) Program.

As a result, the assistance distribution has often been off target. "If anyone asks about the PKH distribution process, the only explanation given was that the Central Government ruled everything," explained Uswatun.

That is why, Uswatun felt so glad when she heard that Gampong Blang Kuta Dua Meunasah was chosen as one of the six *gampong* (village) in Simpang Mamplam Sub-district selected as a pilot for the Village-Authority-Based Civil Administration Service (LABKD) program in 2017. The program employs the village civil registration (*Adminduk*) facilitators, better known as PRGs in Aceh. PRG existence is the outcome of a collaboration among PUSKAPA UI, PKPM and KOMPAK, the Australia-Indonesia Government Partnership program.

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PRGs are tasked to assist the needs of residents in completing their legal identity documents. PRGs collect the required supporting data, pick up and, if necessary, deliver the documents to people's homes. With completed legal identity documents, residents will be able to access basic public services and other government programs, which may reinforce poverty eradication efforts.

Fakhrizal, the *keuchik* (village head) of Gampong Blang Kuta Muesanah, selected Uswatun as a PRG after witnessing first-hand her tenacity and commitment in assisting with the village programs. Initially, Uswatun and her parents were on the fence because, at that time, Uswatun was completing her early childhood education (PAUD) training. However, after realising the adverse effects of ignorance on the importance of legal identity documents, Uswatun eventually said yes to support.

Immediately, Uswatun went door-to-door, asking the residents to show their legal identity documents to verify the data's consistency, and helping them obtain complete legal identity documents.

Every morning and evening, Uswatun tours around the *gampong* and neighbouring villages in the Simpang Mamplam Sub-district for two and a half hours. Each home requires at least three visits, and each visit one hour, to explain the necessity of the legal identity documents and how to acquire them. This is on top of Uswatun's activities as a teacher at the local kindergarten every afternoon at 2 pm and a local Islamic boarding school (known as *Pesantren*) nightly.

"I have often been turned away because some underprivileged residents had been cheated by unscrupulous brokers who pretended to help. So, they were hesitant to provide us with the documents. Sometimes, they were willing to show us their documents but only if I offered them cash," said Uswatun.

During one outreach visit, Uswatun found that the family's child's name on his birth certificate differed from his KK and elementary school graduation certificate. When she pointed this out, the mother shouted at her, "I have been living here forever, and no one has said a word about my data being inaccurate. Now you come out of the blue and have the nerve to say that I am wrong!" said Uswatun, imitating the person's expression.

The reprimand didn't dampen Uswatun's enthusiasm by a single morsel from providing the service. "The more they shouted at me, the softer I became. I persist in persuading them on how crucial it is to ensure their data's consistency," said Uswatun, explaining some tips and tricks in carrying out her duties.

She also explained that a faulty birth certificate would need to be amended as it may cause future complications when the child enters junior high school or needs government assistance. "Instead, the mother then asked me for assistance before amending the certificate," she said. Uswatun again explained to the mother that the assistance did not come from her but from the government, and so the government could only provide it based on the recorded civil registration data.

Even though she had been rejected, Uswatun persisted in offering her help by giving the mother her contact number and informing her that she could see her at the *keuchik* office every Friday and Sunday.

"At midnight on that very same day, she came to my house and knocked on my door. She asked if I could help her amend her son's birth certificate," said Uswatun, laughing. Apparently, after Uswatun's visit, the mother, a relative of Uswatun, discovered that the registration process for junior high school required that the elementary school diploma and birth certificate list the same name.

Gradually, people began accepting the PRGs' presence. "Thank God, after one full year, they now understand," said Uswatun, who was expecting her first child. The community has also begun to experience the benefits of having completed documents, such as accessing PKH. "If your data had been synced, then you are eligible for assistance," Uswatun explained the matter to the residents.

The Village Fund Cash Assistance (*BLT-Dana Desa*) Program in 2020 has further encouraged the residents to ensure the completeness of their documents. "Even more exciting! If in 2017 some residents refused to have their KK taken care of, now they are asking for our help in obtaining a new KK," exclaimed Uswatun.

Now, all residents of Blang Kuta Dua Meusanah understand the importance of legal identity documents.

"People realise that if you have reached the age of 17 years, you must have an ID card. They voluntarily visit the village offices and access the files with the help of PRGs," said Kasmiyati Amirin, a resident of Gampong Blang Kuta Dua Meunasah. Her three children, who are of high school age, have already obtained their ID cards.

The process of obtaining the documents has also become more streamlined. "In the past, people had to go back and forth to the subdistrict or district offices to ask about the prerequisite documents, complete all the requirements, and amend inaccurate documents," said Fakhrizal.

"Travelling between the villages and district offices takes about one hour, and the process might take a week or even longer," he added.

As a result, many residents opted for brokerage services. "Some brokers would ask for names or fill in forms for the residents without bothering to verify the data. Because of such a sub-par process, many legal identity data, such as names and places of birth, were inaccurate. The brokers were merely interested in getting their job done and over with," said Fakhrizal.

Now, the residents only need to fill in the required forms provided by the PRGs and fulfil the prerequisite documents. "It is the PRGs who bring the application documents to the District Population and Civil Registration (*Dukcapil*) Office, usually twice a week," explained Fakhrizal. When the documents are ready, the PRGs will deliver the documents to the residents or contact the residents for collection at the village offices.

"Documents are issued faster without costing a single Rupiah," Kasmiyati compared the process she went through in applying for an ID card through PRGs and brokers. They were usually people from outside of the villages offering document-processing services. "Sometimes, we require certain

documents to be ready and submitted to schools within one week. The PRGs are always good and ready," said the 48-year-old woman. Now, Kasmiyati has no use for brokers.

Accurate population data are also crucial in drafting the Village Budget (*APB Desa*). "The budget for empowerment and social programs targeted at, for instance, toddlers, monthly clinics for children and pregnant women (*Posyandu*), and expecting mothers is allocated based on the data collected at the village level. Such a process ensures that the programs will be on target and effective," said Fakhrizal.

So far, 609 *gampong* in 8 sub-districts in Bireuen have already adapted the presence of PRG. The District Regulation Number 14 Year 2018 (*Perbup 14/2018*) also guarantees the program's sustainability by providing a legal regulation for the PRG involvement and securing its funding.

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With the support from the village funds, Mursyidi, the Head of Simpang Mamplam District, noted that the number of legal identity document ownership in the region had increased. The increase, in turn, has contributed to more expansive coverage of birth certificate ownership in the Bireuen District. "Birth certificate ownership coverage in the Bireuen District has increased from 45% in 2017 to 89% in 2021 which is higher than the national target," explained Mursyidi.

Uswatun also hoped that the PRG program will continue to grow and expand in scope as it helps address the Acehnese people's difficulties in processing the *Adminduk*. "Hopefully, more extraordinary PRGs will be born. They will stop at nothing until all of Aceh becomes aware of the importance of legal identity documents," concluded Uswatun.