

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Strengthening community capacity in the *Keujruen Blang* customary institution on farmer empowerment in Nagan Raya district

Muntaha Mardhatillah¹, Mutia Kahanna², Ikhwan Rahmatika Latif¹ and Agus Pratama¹

¹Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia

²Department of Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Performing Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Padangpanjang, Padang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Strengthening community capacity in the *Keujruen Blang* customary institution is a strategic step in supporting farmer empowerment in Nagan Raya District. This customary institution has an important role in regulating the governance of agricultural resources, resolving conflicts, and maintaining local wisdom that has become part of the community's tradition. However, institutional capacity challenges are still an obstacle in optimizing the role of *Keujruen Blang* for farmer empowerment. This community service program aims to increase the capacity of the *Keujruen Blang* customary institution through a series of human resource development training activities in a group. A participatory approach is used to ensure the active involvement of the community in every stage of the activities. Expected outcomes include improved managerial and technical capabilities of adat institution members thereby increasing the productivity of farmers themselves. The program also contributes to the preservation of traditional values that are relevant to modern challenges in the agricultural sector. By strengthening the capacity of *Keujruen Blang*, it is hoped that a culturally-based and sustainable model of farmer empowerment will be created, which can serve as an inspiration for other areas.

KEYWORDS

Community capacity, customary institution, farmer empowerment

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 26 December 2024

Accepted: 3 January 2025

Published: 14 February 2025

HOW TO CITE

Mardhatillah, M., Kahanna, K., Latif, I. R. and Pratama, A. (2025). Strengthening community capacity in the *Keujruen Blang* customary institution on farmer empowerment in Nagan Raya district, 7(2), 94-100.
<https://doi.org/10.62941/irce.v1i2.76>

1. Introduction

The empowerment of farmers plays a critical role in achieving sustainable agricultural development, particularly in regions with strong ties to traditional practices. In Kabupaten Nagan Raya, the role of traditional institutions such as *Keujruen Blang* has been pivotal in managing agricultural resources, mediating conflicts, and preserving cultural heritage. However, the capacity of these institutions in supporting farmer empowerment remains underexplored. This study investigates the capacity-building

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR Muntaha Mardhatillah ✉ muntahamardhatillah@utu.ac.id 📧 Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia
© 2024 The Author(s). *International Review of Community Engagement* published by Pelita International Publishing.



This is an open access article distributed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (CC BY 4.0).

efforts for the *Keujruen Blang* institution and their impact on farmer empowerment within the socio-cultural framework of Kabupaten Nagan Raya.

Recent studies have highlighted the significance of traditional institutions in local governance and rural development. For example, (Rahim, 2023) found that traditional leadership structures could enhance community participation in agricultural planning. Similarly, (Mansur, 2023) emphasized that empowering traditional leaders strengthens local governance and resource management. Despite these findings, the integration of such institutions into formal agricultural empowerment strategies remains inconsistent, as noted by (Sugito et al., 2022). Furthermore, research by (Putri et al., 2022) highlighted gaps in institutional capacity as a barrier to achieving sustainable agricultural practices in rural areas. While these studies underscore the potential of traditional institutions, they often fail to address their specific operational challenges and the nuanced interplay between tradition and modernization in agricultural empowerment.

Existing methods for farmer empowerment typically rely on state-led initiatives, including training programs, subsidies, and modern technology adoption. While these approaches have yielded measurable outcomes, they frequently overlook the socio-cultural dynamics that influence farmers' decision-making processes. Traditional institutions such as *Keujruen Blang*, which are deeply embedded in the community, offer a unique avenue to bridge this gap. However, the literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of how strengthening such institutions can enhance farmer empowerment, particularly in regions like Kabupaten Nagan Raya.

This service aims to fill the gap by focusing on the specific role of *Keujruen Blang* in empowering farmers. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on operationalizing traditional practices to address contemporary agricultural challenges, thus offering a model for synergizing tradition and innovation. In particular, it explores how strengthening the institutional capacity of *Keujruen Blang* can foster more inclusive and sustainable agricultural empowerment.

2. Methods

The community service method used in this activity is a community-based participatory approach. This approach is designed to ensure that each activity is carried out by involving local communities, especially members of the *Keujruen Blang* customary institution, so that they have a sense of ownership of the results of the activity. This service activity was carried out through three main stages as follows:

Identification and Needs Analysis Stage, this stage begins with a survey and focus group discussions (FGDs) with local communities and stakeholders, including *Keujruen*

Blang members and farmers. The aim was to identify the main needs, potentials, and challenges faced by customary institutions and farmers in agricultural empowerment.

Material Delivery Stage, at this stage, training and knowledge transfer were conducted to *Keujruen Blang* members and farmers. The materials delivered included local wisdom-based resource management, technical skills improvement, and conflict management strategies. The material was delivered through presentation sessions, demonstrations, and relevant application examples.

Discussion and Evaluation Stage, after the material was delivered, an interactive discussion session was held to discuss the understanding and application of the material. This discussion involves all participants to identify challenges that may be faced in implementation and find solutions together. Evaluation was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the activities and provide feedback that will be used to develop the next steps.

3. Results and Discussion

Farmers in Nagan Raya District generally still do not understand the role and function of *Keujruen Blang* customary institutions in agricultural management and problem solving. This has led to low utilization of customary institutions as a source of solutions and support for collective management of agricultural resources. In addition, the lack of understanding of local wisdom values in traditional land and irrigation management further exacerbates the situation, resulting in individualized and uncoordinated farmer empowerment.



Figure 1. Discussions with the community

The process of implementing community service activities is carried out through three main stages. *First stage:* Identification of Needs, the first stage is the identification of needs through surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs). The survey was conducted

by visiting several villages that became the main location of the activity, to collect data related to the condition of farmers, the agricultural system used, and their understanding of the role of *Keujruen Blang*. This approach is done directly so that the data obtained is more accurate and reflects the reality in the field. Focus group discussions involved farmers, *Keujruen Blang* members, and other community leaders. The aim was to explore in-depth information about the problems faced, both related to land management, irrigation water distribution, and conflict resolution between farmers. In this discussion, participants were invited to share their experiences, challenges faced, and their expectations of the role of the *Keujruen Blang* customary institution (Mardhatillah et al., 2021). The identification results show that most farmers need technical training related to land management and irrigation, as well as an increased understanding of the function of customary institutions in supporting collective farming. In addition, it was also found that the role of *Keujruen Blang* is still limited due to the lack of capacity of customary institution members in drafting rules and conflict mediation. These findings became the basis for the preparation of training and mentoring programs in the next stages.

The *second stage* was the delivery of materials through training and workshops. The training was designed to increase the capacity of farmers and *Keujruen Blang* members with a focus on human resource management. The training involved presenters with expertise in human resource management and community management. The materials presented included strengthening the role of *Keujruen Blang* as a local leader, effective communication strategies in conflict resolution, and the importance of teamwork in supporting agricultural productivity. The training session began with a presentation of basic HR management theories, such as the role of leaders in decision-making, how to build collective motivation, and mediation-based conflict resolution techniques. Next, participants were given examples of case studies relevant to the local context, such as conflicts between farmers over irrigation water distribution or differences of opinion in determining planting schedules. These case studies were used as the basis for group discussions guided by the facilitator. After the discussion, participants were invited to take part in a simulation of mediation practice. In this simulation, *Keujruen Blang* members played the role of mediators, while other farmers played the role of disputing parties. The simulation process not only improved participants' understanding of the importance of effective communication, but also gave them hands-on experience in applying mediation techniques. At the end of the session, participants developed a work plan that included steps to improve collaboration between farmers and *Keujruen Blang* (Sastro et al., 2014). This work plan serves as a guide for implementation in the field, such as coordinated planting schedules and task allocation based on mutual agreement.

This approach ensures that the material presented is not only understood, but can also be applied directly.

The *third stage* is interactive discussion and evaluation, which aims to assess the impact of the training and provide space for participants to share experiences and insights they have gained during the activities. This discussion was conducted in groups involving farmers, *Keujruen Blang* members, and training facilitators. At this stage, each participant is asked to present the work plan they have developed in the previous stage. The *Keujruen Blang* acts as the main evaluator, providing feedback on the feasibility of the plan and its relevance to the needs of the community. The process also included a discussion of the challenges that might be faced in implementing the plan and solutions that could be implemented collectively. The discussion encourages the exchange of ideas, strengthens the sense of community, and builds agreement in resolving conflicts. Evaluation is conducted using an HR management approach, namely competency-based assessment. In this case, the facilitators measured the improvement of participants' abilities in several aspects, such as the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to resolve conflicts, and the ability to develop collaborative strategies. The evaluation results showed that participants experienced significant improvement, especially in terms of communication and mediation (Figure 1). In addition, the interactive discussions also provided an opportunity for *Keujruen Blang* members to reflect on their role as community mobilizers. With input from farmers, *Keujruen Blang* gained a better understanding of the community's expectations of adat institutions. This motivates them to develop programs that are more responsive to farmers' needs (Mardhiah et al., 2024).

This service activity provides great benefits for both the farming community and the *Keujruen Blang* customary institution, which is closely related to human resource management (HRM). In this context, HRM can be seen in two main aspects: institutional capacity building and strengthening the ability of individual farmers. Capacity building of customary institutions (*Keujruen Blang*): *Keujruen Blang* customary institutions have gained a better understanding of their strategic role in farmer empowerment. This has led to an increase in the ability of customary institution members to develop relevant customary rules that support more organized farming practices. In addition, adat institutions play an important role in mediating conflicts between farmers, particularly related to the distribution of irrigation water. This reflects the importance of human resource management in an institutional context that can improve the ability of adat institutions to carry out their duties and functions more effectively (Rihi et al., 2023).

Enhancing farmers' capacity to work in groups: The main objective of the training was to strengthen farmers' capacity to work collectively and meet their needs through community-based cooperation. Farmers not only learn to improve farming yields

individually, but also understand the importance of cooperation in groups to improve farming efficiency and sustainability. One of the concrete steps implemented is the "*meunasah blang*" system, where the community jointly determines planting schedules and water distribution, and supports each other in collective efforts (Mcfarlane et al., 2024). This shows how HRM in a community context can improve social cohesion and collective productivity.

4. Conclusion

This service activity is expected to provide significant benefits to the farming community and the *Keujruen Blang* customary institution. From the institutional side, *Keujruen Blang* now better understand their strategic role in empowering farmers, and are more confident in formulating customary rules that are relevant and support modern agricultural practices. In addition, they are able to mediate conflicts between farmers, especially those related to the distribution of irrigation water, indicating an improved institutional capacity in conflict management. For farmers, the training provided focused on improving their capacity to work in groups to meet their agricultural needs. Through the implementation of the "*meunasah blang*" system, farmers are able to work collectively in determining planting schedules and water distribution, which in turn increases farming efficiency and productivity. The expected increase in crop yields could be the success of an empowerment model based on community cooperation, not just technology.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Acknowledgment


We would like to thank the Institute for Research, Community Service, and Quality Assurance (LPPM-PM) of Teuku Umar University for supporting this service program and the indigenous people of Nagan Raya district, especially the adat keujereun blang institution of Nagan Raya district.

ORCID

Muntaha Mardhatillah  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7301-0551>

Mutia Kahanna  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4816-8841>

Ikhwan Rahmatika Latif  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3359-2180>

Agus Pratama  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9778-0274>

References

- Mansur, M. (2023). A theoretical model of relational leadership for the administration of christian schools. *Nucl. Phys.*, 13(1), 104–116.
- Mardhatillah, M., Husna, C. A., Sari, N., Umar, U. T., Peunyareng, A., & Barat, A. (2021). *Integrasi Lembaga Adat Keujruen Blang dalam Pemberdayaan Petani di Kabupaten Nagan Raya*, 8(2), 868–876. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31604/jim.v8i2.2024.868-876>
- Mardhiah, N., Marefanda, N., Jonsa, A., & Afriandi, F. (2024). Socialization on the Urgency of Establishing the Keujruen Blang Customary Institution Towards an Inclusive Farmer Community. *Bubungan Tinggi: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 6(2), 389. <https://doi.org/10.20527/btjpm.v6i2.10454>
- Sastro, M., Ramzati, & Herinawati. (2014). Strengthening the Role of Keujruen Blang in Irrigation Management in North Aceh District. *Kanun: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, 25(1), 17–30. <https://doi.org/10.24815/kanun.v25i1.26359>
- Mcfarlane, K., Wallace, K. J., Shanahan, D. F., & Clapcott, J. E. (2024). Working together to scale ecosystem restoration: collective approaches to community action in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Ecology and Society*, 29(2). <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-15152-290217>
- Putri, E. I. K., Dharmawan, A. H., Hospes, O., Yulian, B. E., Amalia, R., Mardiyarningsih, D. I., Kinseng, R. A., Tonny, F., Pramudya, E. P., Rahmadian, F., & Suradiredja, D. Y. (2022). The Oil Palm Governance: Challenges of Sustainability Policy in Indonesia. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031820>
- Rahim, M. A. (2023). From Global Models to Local ICT4D and its domestication in Bangladesh. *Tampere University Master's Programme in Social Science Research – Global and Transnational Sociology*, November.
- Rihi, D. W., Daeng, E., Benyamin, R. A., Anggelina, D., & Seran, N. (2023). Implementation of Community Empowerment Policy (Study on the Customary Institution of Haumeniana Village, Bikomi Nilulat Subdistrict, North Central Timor District, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia). *Journal Of Social Research*, 3(11), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v3i11.2289>
- Sugito, T., Windiasih, R., Prastiyanti, S., & Sulaiman, A. I. (2022). Empowerment Communication in the Corporate Social Responsibility Program in Rural Areas. *Technium Sustainability*, 2(4), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.47577/sustainability.v2i4.7299>