A peer-reviewed journal published by Faculty of Law Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia. The title has been indexed by SCOPUS, SINTA, GARUDA, BASE, OneSearch.
ISSN 2654-8313 (Print) 2654-8305 (Online)
Online at https://journal.unnes.ac.id/journals/JPHI/index
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15294/jphi.v9i2.62111

JURNAL PENGABDIAN HUKUM INDONESIA
Indonesian Journal of Legal Community Engagement

Submitted : August 4, 2025
Revised : September 2, 2026
Accepted : October 2, 2026
Published : October 2, 2026
Available Online : October 3, 2026

Pepitu Deso as a Legal Information and Consultation Service from the Perspective of Legal Empowerment in Keji Village, Semarang Regency

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Abstract

Formal legal aid in Indonesia has not yet reached most villages, creating a gap between the constitutional guarantee of equality before the law and the actual access to justice available to rural communities. This study examines *Pepitu Deso*, a legal information and consultation post launched on 28 June 2026 in Keji Village, Semarang Regency, by the Penal Study Club of the Faculty of Law, Universitas Negeri Semarang. The study aims to describe the design of the service, examine how its mechanism facilitates access to legal assistance, identify challenges during its initial implementation, and explore the conditions necessary for adapting the model to other villages. A descriptive qualitative single-case study design was employed. Semi-structured interviews with a supervising lecturer, student implementers, village officials, and residents, supplemented by program documents, were analyzed based on the components of a legal service model and interpreted through Stephen Golub's distinction between service-delivery and empowerment approaches. The findings indicate that *Pepitu Deso* operates through a community legal liaison, *Jagakeji*, which provides legal education, initial consultations, and preliminary assistance before referring residents to formal legal aid services. Its preventive and educational design differs from the curative orientation of state-established village legal aid posts (*Pos Bantuan Hukum* or Posbankum) and reflects a stronger emphasis on legal empowerment. The main challenges identified during the initial implementation include the limited program duration, reliance on student-program funding, and the absence of standardized operating procedures. As the study covers only the launch and early implementation period, its effects on residents' long-term legal capabilities remain untested. This study provides an initial account of a campus-initiated village legal service and identifies adaptable design principles rather than proposing a uniform institutional model for other villages. The initiative also contributes to the broader objectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

KEYWORDS *Legal Empowerment, Village Legal Access, Legal Consciousness, Legal Consultation Services, Pepitu Deso.*

Introduction

Legal aid is one of the most fundamental instruments for realizing public access to justice.[1] Legal aid functions not only as a means of formal dispute resolution, but also as a vehicle for cultivating public legal consciousness and strengthening citizens' ability to recognize and assert their own rights.[2] Its presence becomes increasingly crucial for population groups that are economically, geographically, or socially vulnerable, including rural residents whose access to formal legal services remains limited. Legal aid that is easy to access, straightforward, and responsive to local community needs is an important element in bringing the state closer to its citizens. Effective legal aid enables communities to adapt to and respond more independently to the everyday legal problems they face. Legal aid thus plays a fundamental role in upholding the principle of equality before the law as mandated by the Indonesian constitution.

Indonesia's constitutional guarantee of equality before the law and the state's obligation to provide legal aid have not been fully realized in an equitable distribution of access down to the village level.[3] This constitutional guarantee aligns with Indonesia's international commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified through Law No. 12 of 2005, which guarantees equality before the courts and the right to legal aid for every litigant.[4] In 2024, the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) recorded 84,276 village-level administrative units across Indonesia, consisting of 75,753 villages (*desa*)

[1] Mauro Cappelletti, "Alternative Dispute Resolution Processes within the Framework of the World-Wide Access-to-Justice Movement," *The Modern Law Review* 56, no. 3 (1993): 282–96, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1993.tb02673.x.

[2] Zainudin Hasan and Daffa Renaldy, "Peran Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Dalam Memberikan Bantuan Hukum Bagi Masyarakat," *Legalitas: Jurnal Hukum* 17, no. 1 (2025): 95, https://doi.org/10.33087/legalitas.v17i1.1041.

[3] Indonesia Government, "The 1945 Constitution of Indonesia," *Republic of Indonesia* 1, no. 1 (2002): 1–14.

[4] Government of Indonesia, "Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 12 of 2005 on the Ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," 2005.

and 8,486 urban wards (kelurahan).[5] Amid this vast administrative landscape, the National Legal Development Agency Agency (*Badan Pembangunan Hukum Nasional* [BPHN]) reported that as of mid-2025, only 5,008 Legal Aid Service Posts (*Pos Bantuan Hukum* [Posbankum]) had been established at the village and ward level, far short of the government's own target of 7,000 posts.[6] This gap represents a measurable shortfall in the state's primary instrument for extending legal aid to the grassroots, notwithstanding the mandate under Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid, which requires the state to guarantee legal aid for people experiencing poverty as a fulfillment of the constitutional right to legal certainty and equal treatment before the law.[7] As a result, a persistent structural condition has emerged in which most villages in Indonesia remain beyond the direct reach of state-facilitated formal legal aid, leaving residents dependent on informal community figures or village officials, or even causing them to abandon legal recourse altogether when disputes arise.

Implementing legal aid services for people experiencing poverty is still hampered by regulatory ambiguity, uneven professionalism among legal aid providers, and the public's limited understanding of how to access available services.[8] State-funded legal aid coverage remains concentrated in urban areas, and it has been recommended that outreach be extended to the village/ward level along with more systematic data collection on legal aid recipients. At the community level, legal counseling in Sumber Brantas Village shows that unresolved agrarian, civil, and family disputes among residents stem more from low legal literacy and limited access to legal aid institutions than from an absence of legal recourse itself. Local government involvement in providing legal aid is urgent, on the argument that, without

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[5] Raka Maheswara, "Number of Villages in Indonesia in 2024 by Province," 16 December 2024, 2024.

[6] Humas Kemenkum Jambi, "Launching Village/Subdistrict Legal Aid Posts and Legal Aid Information Portal, as Well as the Opening of Paralegal and Peacemaker Training in 2025," 05 June 2025, n.d.

[7] Government of Indonesia, "Law No. 16 of 2011 Concerning Legal Aid," 2011.

[8] A hyar Ari Gayo, "Optimization of Legal Aid Services for Poor Communities," *Jurnal Penelitian Hukum* 20, no. 3 (2020): 409–34, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.30641/dejure.2020.V20.409-434.

a local regulatory framework, the constitutional principle of equal treatment under Article 27(1) of the 1945 Constitution is only partially realized for marginalized residents.[9] Complementing this state- and local-government-oriented literature, research on community-based paralegals in Tuwed Village, Jembrana Regency, shows that lay legal facilitators trained within the community can meaningfully narrow the gap between village residents and formal legal protection, particularly in handling gender-based violence and land disputes.[10] Overall, this literature indicates that research on legal aid in Indonesian villages has largely examined government programs (Posbankum, regional regulations) and civil-society paralegal training. In contrast, academic attention to legal aid models initiated by universities and student organizations as independent, campus-based channels remains relatively limited.

This study situates its analysis within the legal empowerment framework formulated by Stephen Golub, who critiques what he calls "rule of law orthodoxy", the dominant development paradigm that channels legal aid and legal reform resources primarily toward state institutions, judicial bodies, and formal legal apparatus, often with limited attention to whether marginalized communities actually gain the capacity to recognize, pursue, and defend their own legal interests.[11] As an alternative, Golub proposes legal empowerment: using legal services and related development activities to increase marginalized communities' control over their own affairs, often carried out by civil society, universities, or other non-state actors working directly with communities rather than solely through formal

[9] Bachtiar Baital, "The Urgency of Providing Legal Aid for Poor Communities by Local Governments," *SALAM: Jurnal Sosial Dan Budaya Syar-I* 3, no. 2 (2016): 137–52, https://doi.org/10.15408/sjsbs.v3i2.7854.

[10] Ida Ayu Tara Masari Budiana, "The Existence of Paralegals in Providing Legal Aid in Tuwed Village, Melaya District, Jembrana Regency" 3, no. 2 (2022), https://doi.org/10.55637/jkh.3.2.4820.327-332. *See also* Aan Kurniawan. "Access to Justice in Rural Indonesia: A Human Rights Approach to Legal Empowerment". *Contemporary Issues on Indonesian Human Rights Law and Policy* 2, no. 1 (2025). https://doi.org/10.65815/a0yph850

[11] Stephen Golub, "Beyond Rule of Law Orthodoxy: The Legal Empowerment Alternative" (Washington, D.C., 2003).

judicial channels.[12] This framework is analytically useful because it distinguishes two possible orientations that a legal aid model may take: a service-delivery orientation, in which residents remain passive recipients of case-by-case assistance, and an empowerment orientation, in which the model also cultivates residents' legal consciousness and their capacity to act on their own legal problems. This distinction is further supported by the Indonesian Ministry of Law's regulatory recognition of the paralegal function as a means of expanding legal aid participation to community members themselves, not merely to licensed advocates.[13] This study uses the service-delivery/empowerment distinction as its primary analytical lens to examine *Pepitu Deso*'s design, mechanisms, and early trajectory.

Pepitu Deso is a legal information and consultation post launched on 28 June 2026 in Keji Village, Ungaran Barat District, Semarang Regency, Central Java, as part of the 2026 Student Organization Capacity-Strengthening Program (*Program Penguatan Kapasitas Organisasi Kemahasiswaan* [PPK Ormawa]) carried out by the Penal Study Club (PSC) of the Faculty of Law, Universitas Negeri Semarang (FH UNNES).[14] This launch, opened by the Dean of FH UNNES together with the Head of Keji Village and the program's supervising lecturers, formed part of a broader community-service agenda entitled "Climate Change Mitigation Education: Strengthening the Capacity of Keji Village Communities," which combined environmental mitigation activities, including the handover and planting of 1,000 tree seedlings to reduce landslide risk, with the establishment of *Pepitu Deso* as a legal aid post staffed by FH UNNES lecturers and equipped with a dedicated hotline for residents to obtain legal

[12] Golub.

[13] Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia, "Regulation of the Minister of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia No. 3 of 2021 Concerning Paralegals in the Provision of Legal Aid," 2021.

[14] Universitas Negeri Semarang Faculty of Law, "Faculty of Law UNNES Collaborates with Keji Village Government to Strengthen Community Capacity in Climate Change Mitigation," Universitas Negeri Semarang, 2026.

information and consultation.[15] Situated within this dual agenda of environmental and legal protection, *Pepitu Deso* presents a distinctive case: a legal aid channel initiated not by the central government's Posbankum scheme or an established legal aid organization, but by a university student organization operating under a nationally funded higher-education community-service scheme.

Notwithstanding the conceptual richness of the legal empowerment framework and the practical relevance of campus-community legal aid initiatives, the academic literature reviewed above reveals a clear gap: academic study of campus- and student-initiated legal aid models at the village level remains very limited in Indonesia, even though such programs are established every year under the national higher-education community-service scheme. Existing studies have examined government-run Posbankum, civil-society paralegal training, and regional legal aid regulations. Still, none of the identified studies specifically analyzes how a university-initiated model such as *Pepitu Deso* is designed, how it operates as an information and consultation channel, or whether its early implementation reflects a shift toward a legal empowerment approach rather than a conventional service-delivery pattern. This gap carries practical significance: with universities across Indonesia running similar student community-service programs in various villages every year, understanding whether and how such initiatives can function as vehicles for legal empowerment rather than merely one-off service activities has direct implications for how future campus-based legal aid programs can be designed to achieve greater sustainability and impact.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of community-based legal intervention and legal awareness in strengthening access to justice at the local level. Baiquni and Adiyatma argue that legal intervention in domestic violence should extend beyond criminal prosecution to include victim-centered protection, community transformation, preventive legal education, and institutional responsiveness, because formal legal rules may

[15] Universitas Negeri Semarang Faculty of Law, "Dean of the Faculty of Law UNNES Opens PPK Ormawa by Striking the Gong, Hands Over 1,000 Trees, and Inaugurates the 'Pepito Deso' Legal Aid Post," Universitas, 2026.

be ineffective when community norms, family reputation, and social expectations discourage victims from seeking protection.[16] Similarly, A. B. Sanjaya shows that community responses to legal problems are shaped by perceptions of justice and institutional trust, and proposes a community-responsive approach that combines legal education, restorative mechanisms, and institutional accountability instead of relying on punitive intervention alone.[17] These findings are relevant to *Pepitu Deso* because a village-level legal information and consultation service can act as an accessible intermediary between formal legal institutions and residents, giving legal information and initial consultation before a problem grows into a more serious dispute.

The role of local institutions in promoting legal empowerment is emphasized further by M. B. Sanjaya, who finds that village governance can serve as a bridge between formal legal institutions and local communities through legal education, dispute mediation, and community participation, and who identifies social trust, cultural values, institutional legitimacy, and community engagement as factors shaping legal awareness.[18] On gender and access to justice, Prameswari shows that community-based institutions, including *pesantren*, can contribute to social transformation by promoting interpretations of law that emphasize justice, dignity, and women's rights, while Utari et al. show that progressive legal frameworks on gender-based violence still face implementation problems because of limited institutional capacity, inadequate legal training, stigmatization, and persistent

[16] Muhammad Iqbal Baiquni and Septhian Eka Adiyatma, "'Keep It Within the Family': Legal Intervention in the Social Normalization of Domestic Violence in Indonesian Communities," *The Indonesian Journal of Legal Intervention in Social Problems* 1, no. 1 (2026): 31–70. *See also* Waspiah Waspiah, Dian Latifiani, and Muhammad Tuhar. "Addressing Legal Illiteracy in Wonosobo's Rural Communities: The Impact of Legal Outreach Programs". *Lentera Masyarakat Hukum* 1, no. 4 (2024). https://doi.org/10.65815/ajsbvf63

[17] Andi Bangun Sanjaya, "When Vigilantism Becomes Social Justice: Legal Intervention in Community-Based Punishment in Indonesia," *The Indonesian Journal of Legal Intervention in Social Problems* 1, no. 1 (2026): 1–30.

[18] Muhammad Bagus Sanjaya, "The Role of Village Governance in Strengthening Legal Awareness in Indonesian Local Communities," *The Indonesian Journal of Sociolegal Development* 1, no. 1 (2026): 31–56.

patriarchal structures.[19] Taken together, these studies indicate that legal empowerment requires more than formal law: it also needs accessible legal information, trusted local institutions, community participation, and mechanisms that help individuals understand and exercise their legal rights. However, none of them examines *Pepitu Deso* as a village-based legal information and consultation service or its contribution to legal empowerment at the village level. This study therefore examines how *Pepitu Deso* operates as a community-based legal service and what its early implementation suggests about legal knowledge, access to consultation, community participation, and the capacity of Keji Village residents to understand and exercise their legal rights.

Building on this gap, this study aims to describe and analyze *Pepitu Deso* as a campus-based legal information and consultation service model in Keji Village. Specifically, this study addresses four research questions: first, how the design of the *Pepitu Deso* service is structured as a vehicle for legal information and consultation for the Keji Village community; second, how the *Pepitu Deso* service mechanism operates in providing legal access to residents, viewed through the lens of legal empowerment; third, what initial challenges have arisen in the implementation of *Pepitu Deso* as a campus-initiative-based legal aid model; and fourth, the extent to which *Pepitu Deso* demonstrates potential for replication as a legal empowerment model for other villages, and under what conditions such transferability could reasonably be expected. By answering these research questions, this study seeks to contribute an empirical account of a legal aid model occupying a still rarely examined space between state legal aid infrastructure and civil-society paralegal practice initiated from within the higher-education sector itself, while also offering an initial basis for assessing the sustainability and replicability of similar campus-community legal aid initiatives elsewhere in Indonesia.

[19] Indah Sri Utari, Ridwan Arifin and Sergi Fernandez Alejandro, "Gender-Based Violence and the Implementation of the Sexual Violence Crime Law in Indonesia," *The Indonesian Journal of Feminist Legal Studies* 1, no. 1 (2026): 1–32.

Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study design, which suits the examination of a contemporary phenomenon of limited scope.[20] The case is the design, mechanisms, and early implementation of one legal aid initiative in its institutional and community setting. The research was conducted in Keji Village, Ungaran Barat District, Semarang Regency, Central Java, where *Pepitu Deso* was launched and continues to operate; data were collected during the program's launch and early operational period in June 2026. A single case was chosen because, at the time of the research, *Pepitu Deso* was the only example of a campus-initiative-based legal aid post, rather than one case within a well-known population of similar programs. An in-depth, contextual account was therefore judged more appropriate than a comparative multi-case design at this stage of the model's development.

Because the study concerns how *Pepitu Deso* delivers legal information and consultation as a village-level legal service, the analysis is organized around the components of a legal service model and not only around general themes. Drawing on the legal capability and access-to-justice literature, eight components were identified and operationalized: legal information provision, legal consultation, referral mechanisms, accessibility, responsiveness, community participation, follow-up, and strengthening of residents' capacity to understand and exercise their legal rights.[21] Table 1 states what was examined for each component and the data sources used. The components are the units through which the research questions are answered. Service design (research question 1) is described through information provision, consultation, and referral; the service mechanism (research question 2) through accessibility, responsiveness, participation, and follow-up; and implementation challenges and

[20] Ruth Ellen Greenwood, "The Case Study Approach," *Business Communication Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1993): 46–48, https://doi.org/10.1177/108056999305600409.

[21] Ingrid Habbig, Ann-Katrin, Robeyns, "Legal Capabilities," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 23, no. 4 (2022): 611–629, https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2022.2082392.

replication potential (research questions 3 and 4) are assessed across all components.

Table 1. Components of the Legal Service Model and Their Operationalization in This Study

Component	Operational focus	Main data sources
Legal information provision	Which legal topics are explained to residents, through which channels (counseling, outreach, hotline), and in what language	Interviews with the lecturer and students; outreach materials; launch documentation
Legal consultation	How residents raise a problem, who responds, and how the problem is identified and initial options are explained	Interviews with the lecturer, students, and residents
Referral mechanisms	When and to whom residents are referred (Posbankum, OBH, or another competent authority) and how the decision to refer is made	Interviews with the lecturer, students, and village officials; program documents
Accessibility	Distance, cost, language, and procedural barriers to using the service; availability of the hotline and the local liaison	Interviews with residents and village officials; program documents
Responsiveness	How quickly and how closely responses fit the problems residents actually raise, as described by users and implementers	Interviews with residents and students
Community participation	The part played by *Jagakeji* and village officials in running the	Interviews with all informant groups;

	service; whether residents act as participants or only as recipients	launch documentation
Follow-up	What happens after an initial consultation: assistance, facilitation of deliberation, and monitoring of referred cases	Interviews with students and residents; the illustrative case (Informant A)
Capacity strengthening	Signs that residents understand the process and can act on similar problems themselves (knowledge, decisions, use of remedies), as reported by informants	Interviews with residents and students; documentation

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Habbig and Robeyns (2022), Pleasence and Balmer (2019), Sandefur (2019), and Golub (2003).

The service-delivery/empowerment distinction in Golub's framework is treated as an interpretive lens that is part of the research design from the start, not an addition at the analysis stage. A service-delivery orientation is understood as one in which residents receive case-by-case assistance as passive recipients; an empowerment orientation is one in which the service also builds residents' legal consciousness and their capacity to act on their own legal problems. The capacity-strengthening, participation, and follow-up components indicate which orientation the service's practice leans toward. The distinction is used to characterize the orientation of the service as described by informants and documents; it is not used to measure outcomes.

This study drew data from primary and secondary sources.[22] Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with key informants directly involved in or affected by the program: the FH UNNES lecturer

[22] Undari & Mohamad, "Jurnal Edu Research Indonesian Institute For Corporate Learning And Studies (IICLS) Page 110," *Jurnal Edu Research Indonesian Institute For Corporate Learning And Studies (IICLS)* 5, no. September (2024): 110–16.

who supervised the legal consultation post, the PPK Ormawa PSC students responsible for day-to-day operations, Keji Village officials who facilitated the program's integration into the village governance structure, and residents who had used or were aware of the *Pepitu Deso* service.[23] The interview guide was organized around the components in Table 1. Secondary data came from documentation of the official launch, outreach materials distributed to the community, and official FH UNNES publications on the PPK Ormawa PSC program and the establishment of *Pepitu Deso.*

The data were analyzed using thematic-descriptive analysis in three steps. First, interview transcripts and documents were coded against the eight components in Table 1. Second, the coded material was grouped under the four research questions on service design, service mechanisms, implementation challenges, and replication potential. Third, the results were read through the service-delivery/empowerment distinction to describe not only what *Pepitu Deso* does but also whether its practice leans toward case-by-case service or toward building residents' own legal capacity.[24] As a single-village case study covering only the launch and early operation, the findings are contextual and are not intended to be statistically generalized. They describe design, mechanisms, and early challenges; they do not establish effectiveness, sustainability, or an impact on residents' legal literacy or independence. They are presented as an analytically structured account from which potentially transferable design elements, and the conditions that would enable their transfer, can be identified with care.

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[23] Barbara DiCicco-Bloom and Benjamin F. Crabtree, "The Qualitative Research Interview," *Medical Education* 40, no. 4 (2006): 314–21, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x.

[24] Stephen Golub, "The Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor: One Big Step Forward and A Few Steps Back for Development Policy and Practice," *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 1 (2015): 101–116, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S1876404509001018. *See also* Sisilia Gunawan Saridevi, and Tajuddin Ahmad Soleh Muhammad Ehsan. "Access to Justice for Coastal Communities Affected by Reclamation Projects in Indonesia". *The Indonesian Journal of Sociolegal Development* 1, no. 1 (2026): 79-100. https://publications.inleads.id/index.php/IJSLD/article/view/12

Results and Discussion

A. The Structure of Legal Access and Legal Vulnerability before *Pepitu Deso*

Before *Pepitu Deso* arrived in Keji Village, Semarang Regency, community access to legal information was marked by sharp information asymmetry between rural communities and state legal institutions. National Access to Justice indicator reports show that more than 70% of rural communities were unaware that accredited Legal Aid Institutions (*Lembaga Bantuan Hukum* [LBH]) existed or that the state provides free legal aid under Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid.[25] Most village residents operated under conditions that can be described as a legal blind spot, an area in which knowledge of constitutional rights, formal legal protection mechanisms, and complex state administrative procedures is minimal or entirely inaccessible. This inequality is not merely a technical problem of ignorance, but a form of structural neglect that places village residents in a marginal position within the national legal system.[26]

One factor driving limited access to legal information in Keji Village is what may be termed Legalese Alienation: practitioners' use of formal legal language (legalese) and state legal documents appear highly elitist, rigid, and laden with technical jargon. This creates a cultural distance between positive law and the everyday linguistic reality of village communities, so that law is perceived as a foreign instrument belonging solely to the highly educated or to government officials. This systematic information asymmetry creates a structural barrier that paralyzes the earliest stage of pursuing justice (access to justice): residents' ability to identify and recognize that the harm or injustice they experience is a problem with legal consequences and a formal legal solution (legal naming). Without such legal naming, a legal problem such as a land dispute or fraud is regarded merely as bad luck or an ordinary personal conflict that cannot be pursued legally.

[25] Indonesia, "Law No. 16 of 2011 Concerning Legal Aid."

[26] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Leading the Transformation of the Justice System: Making Justice Systems More Effective and People Centred" (Paris, 2025).

From the perspective of the sociology of law, this vulnerability reflects high legal illiteracy (legal blindness) and low legal capability at the grassroots level. A direct consequence of this widespread legal illiteracy is residents' inability to assert their basic rights when other parties or institutions violate them. Before the intervention of *Pepitu Deso*, access to legal information in Keji Village was highly passive, with information from the village government generally limited to routine administrative announcements (such as land and building tax obligations or social assistance outreach), rather than the provision of substantive legal empowerment or the availability of a legal consultation space responsive to residents' real needs.[27]

Without direct access to professional legal assistance such as accredited advocates or certified paralegals, the Keji Village community has historically relied on conflict-resolution patterns based on cultural figures and informal mechanisms. Everyday legal problems, ranging from boundary disputes to family civil disputes, have been left entirely to local figures such as hamlet heads, religious leaders, or customary and community leaders, and resolved through the principle of family deliberation. This conflict-resolution structure operates within a patron-client framework, in which community leaders serve as protective patrons and arbiters of justice. At the same time, residents act as parties who comply with moral direction without understanding its underlying positive-law basis.[28]

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[27] Ema Rahmawati Yosia Hetharie, Isis Ikhwansyah, "Legal Empowerment of Indonesian Micro Small Medium Enterprises in the Digital Era: A Comparing with China," *Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum Dan Keadilan* 13, no. 2 (2025): 327–45, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.29303/ius.v13i2.1688. *See also* Wahyu Wibowo, and Achmad Zevano Al-Khalif. "Public Legal Education As a Tool for Addressing Social Problems: A Community-Centered Approach". *Lentera Masyarakat Hukum* 1, no. 3 (2024). https://doi.org/10.65815/7msxes57; Ardhitama Sucahyanto. "Digital Society and the Transformation of Community-Based Dispute Resolution in Indonesia". *The Indonesian Journal of Sociolegal Development* 1, no. 1 (2026): 57-78. https://publications.inleads.id/index.php/IJSLD/article/view/14

[28] Yosia Hetharie, Isis Ikhwansyah. *See also* Kyrel Alvano Razeen. "The Role of Legal Empowerment in Community Service: Solving Social Problems Through Legal Interventions". *Lentera Masyarakat Hukum* 1, no. 1 (2024). https://doi.org/10.65815/hr4xb535

Sociologically, this informal dispute resolution mechanism has substantive advantages in maintaining social cohesion and preserving rural community harmony, so an adversarial judicial process does not fracture it. In addition, affordable settlement costs and flexible procedures make this informal pathway the most practical option for village residents. Nevertheless, culturally patterned resolution of this kind harbors several fundamental structural vulnerabilities:

Power Imbalance: Informal mediators or local figures are often not fully neutral. The resolution process is highly susceptible to the influence of one disputing party's social status, economic capital, or kinship ties. Parties with stronger relationships with local figures tend to prevail in mediation, so that the resulting justice is subjective and favors the holders of local power.[29]

Lack of Legal Certainty: Agreements reached through customary or family deliberation are generally recorded only as oral agreements or private (underhand) instruments without official registration. As a result, informal mediation outcomes lack executory force or legally binding civil certainty. When one party later breaches the agreement, it is difficult to enforce it under positive law, which often triggers recurring conflict over the long term.[30]

Subjugation of Vulnerable Groups: Within the rigid patriarchal and social-hierarchical structure of the village, vulnerable groups such as women, people experiencing poverty, and farm laborers hold an extremely weak bargaining position. Informal mediation without fair legal assistance often forces these vulnerable groups to concede to preserve an illusory "peaceful" settlement, so their constitutional rights are frequently sacrificed in the name of village social harmony.[31]

This condition reaches a critical point when community legal problems develop into complex formal cases, such as chain land-certification disputes, loan fraud cases, or criminal matters. Without formal assistance from the earliest pre-litigation stage, communities remain highly

[29] Yosia Hetharie, Isis Ikhwansyah.
[30] Yosia Hetharie, Isis Ikhwansyah.
[31] Yosia Hetharie, Isis Ikhwansyah.

vulnerable. They can easily fall prey to unlicensed mediators, legal brokers, or non-transparent officials or law enforcement personnel who exploit residents' lack of understanding, ultimately compounding material losses and legal trauma among rural communities. Structural inequality in access to formal adjudication, together with the absence of an affordable legal consultation channel, created a multidimensional legal vulnerability in Keji Village before the *Pepitu Deso* intervention. This vulnerability is not merely a theoretical abstraction, but a real condition that directly threatens the certainty of asset rights, family civil status, and the economic wellbeing of village residents.[32]

Tabel 2. Matrix of Legal Access, Resolution Patterns, and Forms of Legal Vulnerability of the Keji Village Community before *Pepitu Deso*

Category of Legal Problem	Dominant Resolution Pattern	Form of Legal Vulnerability	Implications for Residents
Land & Inheritance Disputes	Oral deliberation with customary/family leaders	No certainty of formal certification; recurring intergenerational disputes	Potential loss of assets; uncertainty of ownership rights
Family Law & Civil Registration	Unregistered marriage (*nikah siri*)	Civil rights of wife and children not guaranteed under positive law	Administrative discrimination; barriers to birth certificates & inheritance
Debt Agreements	Oral agreements/pri	Exploitative clauses by informal	Financial loss; collection

[32] Uche Nnawulezi et al., "Evaluating the Right to Life: Lessons from Nigeria, the African Charter, and Indonesian Regulations," *Jurnal Hukum Novelty* 16, no. 1 (2025), https://doi.org/10.26555/jhn.v16i1.29985.

	vate instruments	lenders/online loan services	intimidation; debt entrapment
Informal Employment	Oral partnership without an employment contract	Absence of social security protection and unilateral termination	Uncertainty of income and occupational safety protection

Read against the sociology of disputes, the patterns in Table 2 suggest where legal problems in Keji Village drop out of the legal system. Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat describe disputes as emerging through three steps: naming an experience as injurious, blaming another party, and claiming a remedy.[33] The four categories in Table 2 suggest that the chain tends to break at the first step. A boundary disagreement, an unregistered marriage, an informal loan, or an unwritten work arrangement is often not recognized as a legal matter, so it is not named as one, and the claiming step is never reached through a legal channel. Oral deliberation then becomes the default route. This fits the problem of legal naming described above and helps explain why limited use of legal services should not be read as indifference to the law.

Research on legal consciousness adds that people's relationship to law is formed in everyday practice and not only through what they know about rules. Ewick and Silbey show that people may stand before the law as something remote and authoritative, engage with it strategically, or act against it.[34] Reliance on hamlet heads and religious leaders in Keji Village may reflect the first of these: the formal legal system is seen as distant, so local figures are approached first. Legal capability scholarship points in the same direction. Habbig and Robeyns, and Pleasence and Balmer, treat the ability to deal with legal problems as depending on both the knowledge and skills of the individual and the resources and institutions around that

[33] Richard L. Abel and Austin Sarat William L.F. Felstiner, "The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming...," *Law & Society Review* 15, no. No. 3/4 (n.d.): 631–54, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/3053505.

[34] Susan S. Silbey, Patricia Ewick, *The Common Place of Law Stories from Everyday Life*, 1998.

person.[35] Sandefur's question, access to what, directs attention to what people can actually obtain from legal institutions and not only to whether those institutions exist.[36] Applied to Table 2, the debt and informal employment rows show capability gaps that are practical (time, cost, unfamiliar documents) as well as informational.

Galanter's analysis of repeat players and one-shotters helps explain the power imbalance noted above.[37] Parties that deal with the legal system often, and have the resources to do so, gain advantages over those who meet it rarely. By analogy, informal lenders and online loan services act as repeat players against residents who borrow only occasionally, and local figures who mediate disputes may favor parties with more status or stronger kinship ties. Galanter's argument concerns courts and legal change, so the parallel drawn here is an analogy and not a finding. It is consistent, however, with Golub's critique of approaches that invest mainly in institutions, which may leave the position of the weaker party unchanged.[38]

Legal pluralism offers a last frame. Merry describes legal pluralism as a situation in which more than one normative order operates in the same social field.[39] In Keji Village, family deliberation and state law operate side by side but, as Table 2 shows, the two do not connect: agreements reached informally are not registered, certified, or written in a form that state institutions recognize. The problem is therefore less the existence of informal resolution than the missing link between it and formal law. This is the gap that the referral and assistance functions of *Pepitu Deso*, discussed in Section III, are meant to address, in line with a legal empowerment approach that supports existing community mechanisms and does not replace them. The theories above are used here to describe conditions before the service. They frame the analysis in the following sections but are not evidence that the service has changed these conditions.

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[35] Habbig, Ann-Katrin, Robeyns, "Legal Capabilities."

[36] Rebecca L. Sandefur, "Access to What?," *Dædalus* 148, no. 1 (2019): 49–63, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00534.

[37] Marc Galanter et al., "Why The " Haves " Come Out Ahead : Speculations on The Limits of Legal Change *," 1973.

[38] Golub, "Beyond Rule of Law Orthodoxy: The Legal Empowerment Alternative."

[39] Sally Engle Merry, "Legal Pluralism" 22, no. 5 (2017): 869–96.

B. Structural and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Realizing Community Legal Empowerment

A frequently encountered assumption in studies on access to justice is that low utilization of legal services by communities directly results from low legal consciousness. This assumption rests on the view that individuals who understand their legal rights and obligations will automatically use legal mechanisms when facing a problem. However, developments in the legal empowerment and legal capability literature show that the relationship between legal consciousness and legal help-seeking behavior is not linear.[40] Legal knowledge is an important prerequisite, but it does not always translate into a genuine ability to access or use legal services when individuals still face institutional, economic, or social barriers. Low use of legal services should not be understood merely as insufficient public legal consciousness. It must also be understood in the broader context of individual capacity and the institutional environment that affects access to justice.[41] Law is therefore not merely a set of norms the public must know, but an instrument that must be used effectively to protect rights, resolve disputes, and strengthen the bargaining position of vulnerable groups, as reflected in the legal empowerment perspective. Legal empowerment is measured not only by rising public legal literacy, but also by the extent to which communities can recognize a problem as a legal problem (legal problem recognition), obtain information on available dispute-resolution alternatives, access competent institutions, and secure adequate legal assistance.[42] On this basis, legal empowerment frames access to justice as the outcome of an interaction between individual capability and the availability of an inclusive, accessible, and responsive institutional system.

Low utilization of legal services by village communities is better understood as a consequence of accumulated structural, informational, and

[40] Habbig, Ann-Katrin, Robeyns, "Legal Capabilities."

[41] Monica Taylor, "Reimagining Legal Capability: Access to Justice in a Time of Climate Change," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 2026, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2026.2662009.

[42] Taylor.

socio-cultural barriers rather than simply low legal consciousness. Limited availability of legal services, distance to legal aid institutions, high costs, complex administrative procedures, limited information about the right to legal aid, and a strong preference for informal dispute resolution genuinely influence communities' decisions about whether to use formal legal mechanisms.[43] These barriers mean communities lack an effective opportunity to obtain legal protection, even though the state has normatively guaranteed the right of access to justice.[44] This means legal empowerment efforts should not focus solely on improving public legal knowledge, but should also build a legal service system that is more accessible, affordable, simple, and responsive to local needs.

Indonesia has constitutionally guaranteed every citizen's right to recognition, guarantee, protection, and fair legal certainty under Article 28D (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. This constitutional mandate affirms that access to law is inseparable from the rule of law principle and a prerequisite for fulfilling citizens' constitutional rights. This commitment was subsequently implemented through Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid, which affirms that the provision of legal aid aims to guarantee access to justice, realize the equal standing of every citizen before the law, and ensure the availability of legal aid services accessible to the entire public, particularly in areas far from urban centers. Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, as most recently amended by Law No. 3 of 2024, even provides broader latitude for village governments to deliver public services and empower communities in accordance with local characteristics and needs. Through authority based on origin rights and village-scale local authority, village governments can develop institutional innovations to improve community welfare, including services that support residents' legal rights. From a legal empowerment perspective, this authority provides a strategic foundation for villages to establish legal service mechanisms that

[43] Marsha Maharani et al., "Community-Based Paralegals for Access to Justice in Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Sociological Issues* 4, no. 2 (2024): 144, https://doi.org/10.19184/csi.v4i2.45781.

[44] Kathryne M. Young and Heidi H. Liu, "What Can Legal Knowledge Do for Access To Justice?," *Duke Law Journal* 75, no. 4 (2026): 643–706.

are closer, more accessible, and better adapted to rural communities' social dynamics.

Despite these legal instruments, they have not translated into substantive access to justice. Several studies show that implementing legal aid services in rural areas still faces constraints, including a limited number of legal aid-providing organizations, service distribution still concentrated in urban areas, low awareness of the right to legal aid, and limited community capacity to use formal legal mechanisms.[45] This condition reveals a gap between the normative guarantees provided by legislation (law in the books) and the reality of their implementation at the community level (law in action). This situation means that the right to legal aid, though formally guaranteed by the state, has not been fully enjoyed by village communities with significant legal needs. This condition shows that, within the access-to-justice framework, the effectiveness of legal protection depends not only on the existence of regulation but also on the legal system's capacity to deliver services that are accessible, affordable, and responsive to community needs.[46] From this position, efforts to expand access to justice require an approach that not only supports the normative provision of legal aid, but also encourages the formation of a community-based legal empowerment mechanism capable of bridging the gap between communities and formal legal institutions.[47] This approach forms the conceptual basis for developing the *Pepitu Deso* model as a vehicle for legal information, consultation, and community legal empowerment at the village level.

Turning to the first barrier, the barrier that contributes to the low utilization of legal services by village communities is structural and can also be understood as a limitation in the institutional infrastructure that provides access to legal services. From an access-to-justice perspective, the

[45] Young and Liu.

[46] Pascoe Pleasence and Nigel J. Balmer, "Justice & the Capability to Function in Society," *Dædalus* 148, no. 1 (2019): 140–149, https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_00547.

[47] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Making Justice Systems More Effective and People Centred: Advancing a Responsive Rule of Law" (Paris, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1787/e02fd90b-en.

right to legal aid requires not only normative regulation but also the availability of institutions, mechanisms, and resources that enable communities to obtain legal services effectively.[48] Consequently, when legal services are not adequately available at the local level, communities struggle to use law as an instrument of rights protection or dispute resolution. The limited number of Legal Aid Provider Organizations (OBH) and legal consultation institutions accessible to village communities is a concrete structural barrier. Most legal aid services remain concentrated in provincial or regency capitals, while rural communities must travel relatively far to obtain legal consultation or assistance. This geographic distance not only increases travel time but also adds transportation and indirect costs, such as lost income-earning or working opportunities. For communities whose livelihoods depend on agriculture, plantations, or informal work, these costs often outweigh the benefits of formal dispute resolution. This leads communities to delay, avoid, or never access legal services, even when facing legal consequences. Research findings in Keji Village show that communities still depend on village officials or community leaders when facing legal problems because of limited access to formal legal aid services. This suggests that structural barriers remain the main factor limiting use of formal legal mechanisms, so a community-based legal service model that brings access to justice closer to village communities is needed.

Complex administrative procedures also create an informational barrier that reduces community access to legal services, alongside geographic and economic factors. Layered administrative requirements, the use of legal terms that are difficult to understand, and relatively bureaucratic service mechanisms often create the perception that legal services are accessible only to residents with particular administrative competence or legal knowledge. From a legal capability perspective, this condition shows that the existence of legal institutions has not been fully accompanied by the provision of inclusive, easily understood procedures.[49] As a result, the population groups with the greatest legal needs are precisely the ones who find it most difficult to make use of the available services. This

[48] (OECD).
[49] (OECD).

structural barrier is further compounded by the limited time available to village communities. Most community members work in sectors dependent on daily income, so that time spent on consultation or legal processes is regarded as a lost income-earning opportunity. If resolving a legal problem requires several visits to a legal aid institution or government agency, the economic cost increases further. This condition drives communities to choose informal mechanisms that are faster, simpler, and less costly, even though they may not provide optimal legal certainty or protection.

These barriers show that access to justice depends not only on regulations guaranteeing the right to legal aid, but also on the legal system's capacity to deliver services that are genuinely accessible to communities.[50] Within the people-centered justice framework, access to justice can only be realized when communities have a real, effective opportunity to obtain information, consult, and receive legal assistance without facing excessive geographic, economic, or administrative barriers.[51] On this basis, strengthening legal service infrastructure at the village level is an important prerequisite for improving community legal capability while also reducing the gap between the normatively guaranteed right to legal aid and its implementation in everyday life. Because of informational barriers, many residents still do not understand their legal rights, dispute-resolution procedures, the required administrative documents, or which institutions to contact when facing a legal problem. This limited information leads communities to delay resolving problems, let disputes develop, or even accept conditions detrimental to themselves because they are unaware of available resolution alternatives. From a legal capability perspective, this shows that access to law cannot be achieved through regulation alone; it also requires strengthening community capacity so people can recognize, use, and defend their own rights independently.

Beyond structural and informational barriers, community behavior in using legal services is also shaped by various socio-cultural factors that develop within social life. Within these communities, resolving problems

[50] Sandefur, "Access to What?"

[51] (OECD), "Making Justice Systems More Effective and People Centred: Advancing a Responsive Rule of Law."

through deliberation, family ties, or mediation by community leaders is a deeply rooted practice that forms part of the social capital sustaining social cohesion and preserving community harmony. This practice essentially reflects the community's high level of trust in community-based dispute-resolution mechanisms, and thus cannot be regarded as a form of low legal consciousness. On the contrary, this mechanism shows that communities manage conflict in their own way, based on local values that remain alive within society. However, informal dispute resolution cannot always address the full range of legal problems communities face. In practice, resolution through deliberation often lacks adequate legal assistance, so the resulting agreement may fail to provide legal certainty, may not be well documented, or may even create an imbalance in the parties' bargaining positions. This becomes more complex when the dispute involves matters with broader legal consequences, such as land, inheritance, contractual disputes, or certain criminal offenses. In such situations, family-based resolution retains value as an initial resolution mechanism, but requires information and legal support. As a result, its outcomes remain aligned with principles of justice and the protection of the parties' rights.

Various perceptions circulating within the community further contribute to the low tendency to access formal legal services. Some community members still regard dealing with legal institutions as synonymous with a complicated process, high costs, and lengthy time, needed only once a conflict has escalated into a serious dispute. This perception leads communities to delay seeking legal aid until the problem faced becomes increasingly complex and difficult to resolve. Viewed from a legal capability perspective, this condition shows that a person's decision to make use of legal services is influenced not only by knowledge of their rights, but also by the level of institutional trust, prior experience in interacting with the legal system, and perceptions of the benefits and costs to be borne when using formal legal mechanisms.[52]

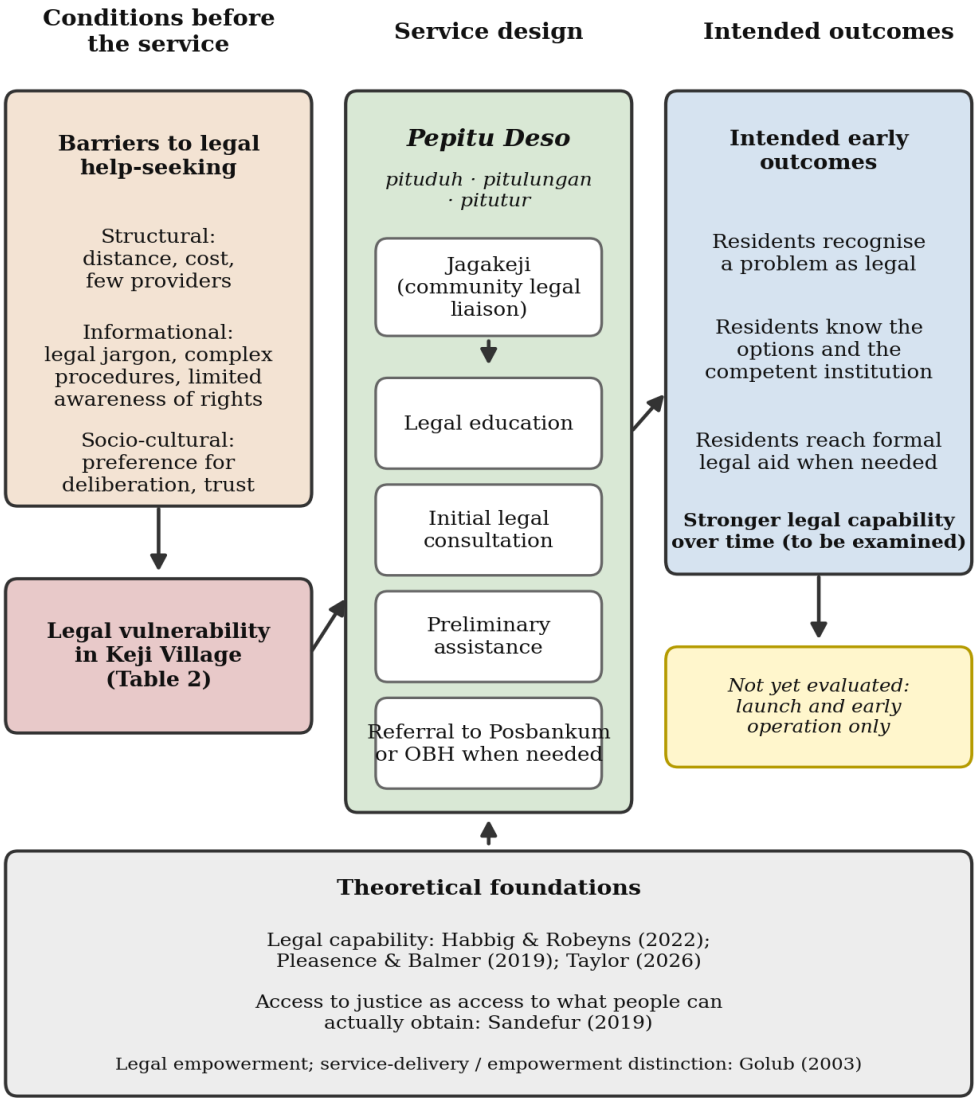
These socio-cultural barriers ultimately contribute to legal vulnerability, a condition in which individuals or groups within the community have legal needs but are unable or unwilling to use available

[52] (OECD).

legal mechanisms to protect their rights. This vulnerability does not arise because communities reject the law, but because the legal system has not yet built a relationship that is close, trusted, and suited to the social characteristics of village communities. The legal empowerment approach is not intended to replace the deliberation mechanisms already alive within the community, but to strengthen them by providing legal information, initial consultation, and assistance that enable communities to reach dispute resolutions that respect local values while also providing legal certainty and protection. In this context, the community-based legal empowerment model serves as a bridge between community-based dispute-resolution mechanisms and the formal legal system, so access to justice can be realized without erasing the social characteristics that have developed within the community.

These barriers show that low utilization of legal services in the Keji Village community cannot be reduced to a problem of low legal consciousness. Rather, this condition results from the interaction of structural, informational, and socio-cultural barriers that constrain community legal empowerment. Efforts to improve access to justice therefore require a mechanism that not only provides legal information but also bridges communities with legal resources, provides assistance from the earliest stage a problem arises, and integrates an approach that is accessible, participatory, and suited to the social characteristics of village communities. This need became the conceptual foundation for developing *Pepitu Deso* as a model of community legal engagement in Keji Village. Figure 1 summarizes how these barriers, the design of the service, and its intended outcomes relate to one another.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Community-Based Legal Empowerment through *Pepitu Deso*



Source: Compiled by the authors based on a synthesis of Habbig & Robeyns (2022), Pleasence & Balmer (2019), Sandefur (2019), Taylor (2026), and the results of the study's analysis.

C. *Pepitu Deso* as a Non-Governmental Intervention Model for Strengthening Community-Based Access to Legal Information and Consultation

Access to justice depends not only on the existence of regulation and legal aid institutions, but also on communities' ability to obtain legal information and consultation easily. Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid provides the legal basis for providing legal aid to communities. The Keji Village community still faces barriers at the initial stage of resolving legal problems, particularly low legal literacy, limited information, and a lack of easily accessible consultation mechanisms. The main challenge is communities' limited access to legal services before they enter formal legal aid mechanisms, rather than the absence of regulation. This argument aligns with the concept of access to justice put forward by Cappelletti and Garth (1978), who state that access to justice must be understood as communities' ability to obtain effective legal-resolution mechanisms, not merely access to the courts. The people-centered justice approach emphasizes that legal services must match community needs and be easily accessible. Both concepts affirm the importance of providing a mechanism that can connect communities with formal legal services from the earliest stage of problem resolution.

In response, PPK Ormawa PSC of the Faculty of Law, Universitas Negeri Semarang, developed *Pepitu Deso* and launched it on 28 June 2026 in Keji Village, Ungaran Barat District, Semarang Regency. *Pepitu Deso* is not a legal aid institution, but rather a community-based, non-governmental intervention model aimed at strengthening access to legal information and consultation. The model is grounded in Javanese philosophy, *pituduh* (providing guidance), *pitulungan* (providing help), and *pitutur* (providing advice), reflecting an educational, participatory, and preventive approach to resolving legal problems. This local philosophy strengthens community acceptance of the *Pepitu Deso* model by combining cultural values with efforts to raise legal consciousness. *Pepitu*

Deso 's distinctiveness lies in the presence of *Jagakeji* as a community legal liaison. *Jagakeji* are Keji Village residents who have received basic training in legal literacy and referral mechanisms, thereby functioning as a bridge between the community and legal services. Unlike advocates, paralegals, or Posbakum officers, *Jagakeji* do not provide professional legal aid or litigation assistance; instead, they identify legal problems, provide initial information, and connect communities with the appropriate resolution mechanism. This concept aligns with the legal empowerment idea developed by UNDP (2005), namely empowering communities to understand and use the law to protect their rights.[53] *Jagakeji* differ from community paralegals, as they function more as a bridging mechanism than as direct providers of legal aid. The novelty of *Pepitu Deso* lies not in establishing a new legal aid institution, but in developing a non-governmental intervention model that uses a community actor as a legal liaison to strengthen access to legal information and consultation. This model complements the formal legal aid system by shortening the distance between communities and legal services, making access to justice more inclusive, participatory, and accessible.

As a non-governmental intervention model, *Pepitu Deso* focuses not on dispute resolution through litigation, but on a preventive legal approach and community-based assistance. Based on the research findings, the *Pepitu Deso* service consists of three main forms: legal education, initial legal consultation, and preliminary assistance. These three services form a complementary sequence that helps communities recognize legal problems early, understand available resolution options, and build capacity to resolve similar problems independently in the future. This preventive orientation distinguishes *Pepitu Deso* from formal legal aid services, which are generally accessed only after a dispute has occurred. The first service is legal education, carried out through counseling, outreach, and the dissemination of information on community rights and obligations, dispute-resolution procedures, and mechanisms for obtaining legal aid. This education aims

[53] Anis Widyawati et al., "Empowering Boja Village through Equilibrium Theory Based Gender Equality for the Enhancement of Family Welfare," *Jurnal Pengabdian Hukum Indonesia (Indonesian Journal of Legal Community Engagement) JPHI* 7, no. 2 (November 2024): 171–90, https://doi.org/10.15294/jphi.v7i2.2937.

not only to raise legal literacy but also to build legal consciousness in the community so they can recognize potential problems before they develop into disputes. Legal empowerment is carried out by strengthening communities' capacity to understand and use the law to protect their rights. Legal education within *Pepitu Deso* has a long-term function, since the knowledge residents gain is expected to help them face similar legal problems in the future without always depending on outside assistance.

The second service is initial legal consultation, which involves providing information and initial guidance on the legal problem raised by residents through *Jagakeji*. At this stage, residents are helped to identify the root of the problem, understand available resolution options, and get an overview of the steps to take based on the problem's characteristics. This approach aligns with the people-centered justice principle developed by the OECD (2023), which holds that legal services must be accessible, simple, and oriented toward community needs. Initial legal consultation not only resolves the current problem but also clarifies the legal-resolution process. As a result, communities gain experience and knowledge they can apply when facing similar problems in the future.

The third service is preliminary assistance, namely facilitation provided to communities in resolving legal problems before entering formal legal aid mechanisms. This assistance includes administrative support, facilitating communication with relevant parties, and referring to Posbakum, a Legal Aid Organization (OBH), or the competent authority when necessary. However, *Pepitu Deso's* assistance does not stop at referral. During this process, communities also understand the reasoning behind each stage of resolution, so they are not merely recipients of the service but also understand the legal process they are undergoing. This approach shows that the main purpose of *Pepitu Deso* is not to create community dependence on assistance, but to build community independence by learning from each legal problem resolved.

Pepitu Deso's service not only resolves ongoing legal problems, but also prevents them and empowers communities legally. The combination of education, consultation, and preliminary assistance produces a continuous legal-learning process. This enables communities not only to solve the problems they currently face, but also to gain the knowledge and

ability to recognize, prevent, and resolve similar legal problems more independently in the future. This preventive approach is a key characteristic of *Pepitu Deso*, as discussed further in the following subsection on its contribution to addressing the gap in formal legal access. Although Indonesia already has a range of legal instruments to guarantee community rights to legal aid, their implementation still faces various challenges, particularly at the village level.

Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid, Legal Aid Posts (*Pos Bantuan Hukum* [Posbakum]), and Legal Aid Organizations (OBH) shows that the state has provided formal legal protection mechanisms. The Keji Village community still struggles to access these services, particularly at the early stage when they must recognize the legal problem, understand the resolution procedure, and identify the appropriate institution to contact. This suggests that the gap in legal access is shaped not only by service availability, but also by communities' limited ability to reach and use those services effectively. This finding aligns with the World Justice Project (2024) statement that access to justice depends not only on the existence of legal institutions, but also on communities' ability to obtain legal information, understand their rights, and access dispute-resolution mechanisms easily. The problems faced by the Keji Village community reflect this challenge: the main barrier is not the absence of legal aid services, but the as-yet-suboptimal bridge connecting communities with formal legal services.

Pepitu Deso connects communities with the formal legal aid system. Through *Jagakeji*, the community's legal liaison, residents have a space to raise legal issues, get basic information, and receive guidance on appropriate next steps. If the community can resolve a problem through education, consultation, or mediation, it does so. However, if further action is required, residents are referred to Posbakum, a Legal Aid Organization, or the competent agency, depending on the nature of the problem. This mechanism shows that *Pepitu Deso* does not replace formal legal services, but rather increases their effectiveness by providing more accessible initial access for communities.

Table 3. Conceptual Distinction between Legal Aid Posts and the *Pepitu Deso* Intervention Model

Aspect	Legal Aid Post	Pepitu Deso Intervention Model
Nature	Formal legal aid service	Community-based, non-governmental intervention model
Main objective	Providing legal aid services in accordance with statutory provisions	Strengthening access to legal information, consultation, and assistance from the earliest stage
Orientation	Curative (handling once a legal problem has arisen)	Preventive, educational, participatory, and community-empowering
Implementer	Advocates, legal aid providers, or Posbakum officers	The *Pepitu Deso* team and *Jagakeji* as community legal connectors
Role of community actors	Community as service recipients	Community plays an active role through *Jagakeji* as a liaison between residents and legal services.
Form of service	Legal consultation, legal aid, and services within Posbakum's authority	Legal education, initial consultation, preliminary assistance, identification of legal problems, and referral to Posbakum/OBH when necessary
Access mechanism	Community submits a request to Posbakum.	Community reports to *Jagakeji* → identification → education/consultation → assistance → referral if necessary

Output	Resolution of legal problems through the formal legal aid mechanism	Improved legal literacy, community independence, and readiness to access formal legal services
Contribution to access to justice	Providing formal legal aid services	Serving as a bridging mechanism that shortens the distance between communities and the formal legal aid system

Source: Processed by the authors based on the research findings and analysis of the Posbakum mechanism and the *Pepitu Deso* model.

Table 3 shows that the difference between Posbakum and *Pepitu Deso* does not lie in their objective of legal protection, but in their respective position and function within the legal aid ecosystem. Posbakum provides formal legal services within its authority, whereas *Pepitu Deso* serves as a non-governmental intervention model that strengthens communities' initial access through community-based education, consultation, and assistance. *Pepitu Deso* thus does not replace Posbakum but complements the formal legal aid mechanism through a more preventive, participatory approach oriented toward community empowerment.

The *Pepitu Deso* model shifts legal access from institution-centric to community-centric. Before *Pepitu Deso* existed, communities often waited until a problem became a dispute before seeking legal aid. In contrast, through the *Jagakeji* mechanism, communities are encouraged to identify legal problems early so they can obtain information, consultation, and preliminary assistance before the problem develops into a more complex conflict. This shift is *Pepitu Deso's* principal contribution to strengthening access to justice, because it makes prevention and community empowerment part of the legal-protection process.

In addition to expanding access to information, this model also produces a continuous process of legal learning. Communities not only obtain solutions to the problems they face, but also understand the resolution process, the competent institutions, and the steps to be taken

should they face similar problems in the future. Thus, the assistance provided by *Pepitu Deso* does not create community dependence on legal services; rather, it increases their capacity to resolve their own legal problems more independently. This is precisely the added value of *Pepitu Deso* compared with an approach oriented solely toward case resolution, because this model simultaneously builds community legal consciousness and legal independence. Based on these findings, this study shows that *Pepitu Deso* is a non-governmental intervention model that is complementary to the national legal aid system. The novelty of *Pepitu Deso* lies in reconstructing the pathway to legal information and consultation access, not in establishing a new institution. It involves a community actor as a liaison between communities and formal legal services. *Pepitu Deso* thus offers an approach that not only strengthens legal aid implementation, but also broadens the meaning of access to justice by positioning community empowerment as the principal subject in the process of legal protection.

The implementation of *Pepitu Deso* shows that a community-based approach not only expands access to legal information, but also increases communities' capacity to resolve legal problems independently. Based on observations and interview findings, *Jagakeji's* presence as a community legal liaison makes it easier for residents to raise legal problems early, without having to confront formal procedures often regarded as complicated. The social closeness between *Jagakeji* and the community is an important factor encouraging residents to consult earlier, minimizing the chance that a problem will develop into a dispute. One research finding is illustrated through the case of Informant A (name disguised), a Keji Village resident who faced a dispute over a land-ownership boundary with a neighbor. Initially, the informant did not know what legal steps to take and worried the problem would lead to a prolonged conflict. Through *Jagakeji*, the informant received an explanation of the relevant legal basis, the importance of gathering supporting documents, and the option of resolving the issue through deliberation before pursuing a legal pathway. After providing preliminary assistance, both parties were facilitated to hold a deliberation at the village level. Although the village government remained the competent party in the final resolution, the initial process facilitated by

Pepitu Deso helped the parties better understand the resolution procedure and reduced the potential for conflict escalation.

This finding shows that *Pepitu Deso's* role goes beyond providing legal information; it also builds community understanding of the stages involved in resolving a problem. After receiving education and assistance, Informant A said she now understands the procedure to follow if she faces a similar problem in the future, including the importance of preparing supporting documents and resolving disputes gradually before pursuing litigation. This change shows that the main impact of *Pepitu Deso* lies not only in resolving a single case, but also in improving legal literacy and communities' ability to make legal decisions more appropriately. This finding reinforces the argument that *Pepitu Deso* functions as a preventive, educational non-governmental intervention model.

The success of this model is measured not only by the number of problems resolved, but also by communities' growing ability to recognize legal problems, understand the resolution process, and know when to use formal legal services. This approach complements the formal legal aid system by building community readiness before people enter the state's legal mechanisms. The implementation of *Pepitu Deso* thus shows that strengthening access to justice need not always be achieved by establishing a new institution; it can also be realized through a community-based mechanism that integrates legal education, initial consultation, and continuous assistance. This model not only addresses the legal problems communities face, but also builds a culture of legal consciousness that can increase the effectiveness of legal protection at the village level.

D. *Pepitu Deso* and the Shift from Rule of Law Orthodoxy toward Legal Empowerment

The development of access-to-justice scholarship reflects a paradigm shift from an approach oriented toward strengthening legal institutions to one centered on communities. For decades, legal development success was measured mainly by the formation of regulations, the modernization of

judicial institutions, and the strengthening of law-enforcement capacity.[54] This approach assumed that strong legal institutions would automatically improve public access to justice.[55] However, recent research shows that well-functioning legal institutions do not necessarily translate into increased communities' ability to obtain justice. The main barriers instead lie in low legal literacy, limited information, procedural complexity, and communities' inability to recognize their rights and the available resolution mechanisms.

From a people-centered justice perspective, access to justice is no longer understood solely as access to courts, but as communities' ability to recognize legal problems (legal problem identification), obtain accurate information, and determine the most suitable resolution mechanism. The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) affirms that most legal problems communities face never end up in court but are resolved through initial consultation, administrative settlement, mediation, or independent decision-making after obtaining adequate legal information. Legal information provision therefore forms an integral part of a community-oriented justice system and serves as early legal intervention to prevent conflicts from developing into more complex disputes.[56]

This shift has given rise to the legal empowerment paradigm, an approach that positions communities as the principal subject in realizing access to justice. The success of a legal system is no longer determined solely by the quality of regulation and the effectiveness of formal institutions, but also by communities' capability (legal capability) to understand their rights, obtain accurate legal information, and independently determine a course of resolution. In this context, legal empowerment is achieved through legal information, consultation, public legal education, strengthening community paralegals, and multi-stakeholder collaboration among

[54] Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas RI Directorate of Law and Regulation, "Access to Justice Index in Indonesia 2021" (Depok, 2023).

[55] Emily S. Taylor Poppe, "Institutional Design for Access to Justice" 11, no. 3 (2021): 781–809.

[56] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Toolkit for Access to Justice and People-Centred Justice Systems" (Paris, 2025).

government, universities, civil-society organizations, and local communities.[57]

This framework provides the conceptual basis for positioning *Pepitu Deso* as a community-based legal-service innovation. Unlike legal aid organizations or Posbankum, which are oriented toward case assistance, *Pepitu Deso* is more accurately understood as a community legal information and consultation hotline, a legal information and consultation service that provides initial access for village communities to obtain an explanation of the legal problem they face. This service helps communities understand their rights and obligations, resolution procedures, and the institutions with authority to handle a given problem, without first having to access the courts or a legal aid organization.

From a people-centered justice perspective, *Pepitu Deso* can be conceptualized as a first-tier access to justice mechanism, namely an initial mechanism that bridges communities with the formal legal system. Its innovative value lies not in providing litigation assistance, but in reducing the legal information asymmetry that has long contributed to low community access to justice.[58] With a fast, accessible, and responsive consultation service, communities can resolve problems through deliberation, mediation, or administrative mechanisms before they develop into disputes requiring litigation.

This model simultaneously reflects the principle of community-based legal empowerment. *Pepitu Deso* emerged through collaboration among the Faculty of Law, Universitas Negeri Semarang, the student organization, the Keji Village Government, and the village community. This collaboration shows that legal empowerment need not always be built through the state's formal institutions, but can also be developed through campus-based mechanisms closer to community needs. In this model, communities are positioned as active subjects who improve their legal literacy and make

[57] Laura Goodwin and Vivek Maru, "What Do We Know about Legal Empowerment? Mapping the Evidence," *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 9, no. 1 (2017): 157–94, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40803-016-0047-5.

[58] The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL), "The Promise of People-Centred Justice," 2021.

decisions based on the information they obtain, rather than merely as recipients of legal services.

Nevertheless, *Pepitu Deso's* success depends not only on the innovativeness of its service but also on the sustainability of its implementation. At present, *Pepitu Deso* is still being developed through the Student Organization Capacity-Strengthening Program, which has a limited implementation period. Institutionalization is therefore needed through integration into village government policy, for example through a Village Head Decree, the Village Government Work (*Plan Rencana Kerja Pemerintah Desa* [RKPDes]), or formal partnerships with universities and legal aid organizations. This step is important so *Pepitu Deso* does not remain merely a community-service program, but becomes part of the village public-service system.

Sustainability also depends on funding and human resources. Diversifying financing through Village Funds, local government support, the National Legal Development Agency (*Badan Pembangunan Hukum Nasional* [BPHN]), universities, or corporate social responsibility programs can strengthen the service's operations. Another important aspect is service governance. As a provider of legal information, *Pepitu Deso* requires standard operating procedures (SOPs) governing the consultation mechanism, classification of legal problems, referral system, personal data protection, and regular monitoring and evaluation. Good governance will improve accountability and build community trust in the community-based legal consultation service.[59] The OECD affirms that governance quality is a key prerequisite for an effective, people-centered justice system.

With these characteristics, *Pepitu Deso* can be replicated in other villages across Indonesia.[60] The model is relatively simple, uses readily

[59] Didik Purnomo et al., "Community Service Order in Indonesia: Between Alternatives and Transformation in the Reconstruction of the Penal System," *Indonesian Journal of Criminal Law Studies* 11, no. 1 (2026): 283–316, https://doi.org/10.15294/ijcls.v11i1.34493.

[60] Widyawati Anis, "Potential Alternative Dispute Resolution as an Effort to Resolve Minor Criminal Acts in the Karimunjawa Community During the Disruption Era," in *Challenges of Law and Governance in Indonesia in the Disruptive Era II* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 293–308.

accessible communication technology, and does not require establishing a complex new institution. However, replication must be adapted to each village's social conditions, institutional capacity, and needs. What is replicated, therefore, is not the organizational form but the underlying principle: providing community-based legal information services, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and a clear referral mechanism to the formal legal aid system.

Taken together, the discussion suggests that *Pepitu Deso* is best read as an attempt to move legal service delivery from an institution-centered toward a community-centered pattern. As a hotline backed by village liaisons, it offers a first point of contact where residents can ask about a legal problem before it becomes a dispute. Whether this first layer strengthens residents' legal capability is not something this study can show; that would require follow-up with service users over a longer period. What the study can say is what the service depends on if it is to last: backing from the village government, steady funding, local actors who stay involved, clear procedures, and a policy place for legal information services within village public services.

Conclusion

This study examined *Pepitu Deso*, a community-based, non-governmental legal information and consultation service, during its launch and early operational period. On the evidence gathered, the four research questions can be answered as follows. First, the service draws on the Javanese concepts of *pituduh*, *pitulungan*, and *pitutur* and is organized into three forms of service: legal education, initial legal consultation, and preliminary assistance. *Jagakeji*, trained village residents, act as community legal liaisons and not as professional legal aid providers. Second, residents raise problems with *Jagakeji*, who help identify the legal issue, give initial information, and refer residents to Posbankum, an OBH, or another competent body when community-level resolution is not enough. The design puts weight on helping residents understand the process and not only on resolving a case, which is consistent with an empowerment

orientation in Golub's sense. The single illustrative case reported here suggests that this intention is being put into practice, but it is one account and does not show that residents' legal knowledge, decisions, or ability to pursue remedies have changed. Third, the early challenges are mainly institutional: the limited duration of the PPK Ormawa program, dependence on student-program funding, the absence of a binding village policy framework, and the lack of standard operating procedures for consultation, referral, and the protection of residents' data. Fourth, the findings point to design elements that other villages might adapt, namely community-based legal information, collaboration among several parties, and a clear referral pathway to formal legal aid. Because only one village was studied, however, this study cannot say whether, or under what conditions, the model would work elsewhere.

These findings are descriptive. The study covers the launch period only, relies on a single case, and did not measure outcomes, so it cannot establish that *Pepitu Deso* narrows the legal access gap or that any effects will last. If the initiative is to continue beyond the PPK Ormawa period, the Keji Village Government could consider integrating it into village policy, for example through a Village Head Decree or the Village Government Work Plan, diversifying funding through Village Funds, BPHN, or university partnerships, and adopting standard operating procedures on the classification of problems, referral, and the protection of personal data. Other universities running similar community-service programs may use the underlying principles as a starting reference, adapted to each village's social characteristics and institutional capacity. Further research is needed on the service's sustainability after the PPK Ormawa program ends, on changes over time in residents' legal knowledge, decisions, and use of legal remedies, and on comparisons across villages to assess the conditions under which the model can be transferred.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

Funding Information

This research was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, Sains, dan Teknologi [Kemdiktisaintek]) of the Republic of Indonesia through the 2026 Student Organization Capacity-Strengthening Program (PPK Ormawa) scheme, in the amount of IDR 25,000,000 (twenty-five million rupiah).

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, Sains, dan Teknologi [Kemdiktisaintek]) of the Republic of Indonesia for its funding support through the 2026 Student Organization Capacity-Strengthening Program (PPK Ormawa) scheme. The authors also thank the Dean and supervising lecturers of the Faculty of Law, Universitas Negeri Semarang, who guided the implementation of the Pepitu Deso program; the Village Head and officials of Keji Village, Ungaran Barat District, Semarang Regency, who facilitated the conduct of the research; all members of the Penal Study Club (PSC) FH UNNES involved in implementing PPK Ormawa; and the residents of Keji Village who were willing to serve as informants in this study.

Generative AI Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative AI tools to assist in paraphrasing and refining the language to make it more concise and easier to understand. After this process, the authors critically reviewed, edited, and validated the output to ensure accuracy and scholarly integrity. The authors take full responsibility for the final content. AI was used solely as a supporting tool and was not granted authorship status. No data analysis or original interpretation was performed by AI without human supervision.