
The Effectiveness of Local Government in Providing Legal Aid in Bali

I Putu Rasmadi Arsha Putra¹ | Putu Devi Yustisia Utami¹ | Ni Kadek Rista Puspa Sari¹ |
Ni Wayan Luh Dutı Ari Anggreni¹

1. Faculty of Law, Udayana University, Indonesia

Correspondence:

I Putu Rasmadi Arsha Putra, Faculty of Law, Udayana University, Indonesia
putu_rasmadi@unud.ac.id

How to cite:

Putra, I. P. R. A., Utami, P. D. Y., Sari, N. K. R. P., & Anggreni, N. W. L. D. A. A. (2025). The Effectiveness of Local Government in Providing Legal Aid in Bali. *Sociological Jurisprudence Journal*. Volume 8, Issue 2, Page 198-205. <https://doi.org/10.22225/scj.8.2.2025.198-205>

Abstract—This study will investigate the role of local governments in providing legal aid to underprivileged communities in Bali and evaluate the effectiveness of legal aid for underprivileged communities in Bali. This study uses empirical legal research with primary and secondary data analyzed using qualitative methods. From this study, it can be seen that the role of local governments in providing legal aid to underprivileged communities in Bali is still ineffective. Local regulations on legal aid have not been established in all districts in Bali. Local regulations are a manifestation of the seriousness, obligation, and political will of each local government in carrying out its duties towards the people in its region who are in need. The ineffective provision of legal aid to the underprivileged in Bali is influenced by five factors, namely legal factors, law enforcement factors, infrastructure and facility factors, community environment factors, and community cultural factors. Therefore, in addressing such conditions, proactive efforts are needed from local governments to provide legal aid to the underprivileged by improving the legal aid system, starting from regulations, empowering law enforcement agencies, conducting structured and planned outreach, and striving to create a more effective and modern legal aid mechanism.

Keywords: Local government; legal aid; optimization; underprivileged community

Introduction

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, citizens are guaranteed justice and equality before the law. (Frans Hendra Winarta, 2009) Therefore, the Republic of Indonesia has an obligation to prioritize the law and recognition of human rights over other interests. Based on Article 27(1) of the Constitution, which states that every citizen has an equal standing under the law and government, and is obligated to respect the law and government without exception. (Risdianto, 2017) Furthermore, Article 28D (1) of the Constitution states that every individual has the right to recognition, guarantees, protection, and certainty of fair law, as well as equal treatment before the law. (Hutabarat, Shiami, & Dinanti, 2025). Thus, the guarantee of justice and equality before the law is the responsibility of the state to realize.

The Indonesian government strives to fulfill the mandate of the constitution by providing legal aid to every citizen who experiences or faces legal problems. The provision of legal aid is a fundamental right of every individual that must be fulfilled. All citizens must obtain this right regardless of time and place,

without discrimination or unequal treatment, as this right is universal in national and state life. (Pratiwi, & Ramadhan, 2023). Receiving free legal aid is the fulfillment of a right that is equal to health, employment, and freedom of thought. (Prabowo, 2018) The state is responsible for providing free legal aid to its citizens in the interest of justice. Such legal aid may take the form of legal services for the underprivileged in litigation and non-litigation processes as a representation of equality before the law and to ensure that the rights of these citizens are protected and that they receive fair treatment without discrimination based on applicable law (Suryantoro, 2021). To implement the government's commitment to fulfilling the constitutional mandate to ensure justice and equality before the law, Law No. 16 of 2011 on Legal Aid (UUBH) was enacted, which regulates the provision of legal aid to the underprivileged by the government. This responsibility is not only borne by the central government but also by local governments. The provision of legal aid by local governments as autonomous administrators is regulated in Article 19 of the UUBH.

The principle of decentralization with the establishment of autonomous regions applied in regional administration differs from governments that apply the principle of deconcentration with the delegation of central government affairs to regional heads or central government agencies in the regions (Sugiarto, Anton Hutomo, 2019). The administration of government based on the principle of assistance ensures the assignment of tasks from the central government to local governments or from first-level local governments to second-level local governments, with accountability for the tasks to the government that assigned them. (Rauf, 2018) This basic principle of government serves as a guideline for local governments in managing their regions according to their unique characteristics in order to improve regional welfare. In accordance with Article 18 paragraph 6 of the Constitution, local governments have the right to establish regional regulations and other regulations to implement regional autonomy and assistance tasks. Article 12(1) of Law No. 23 of 2024 on Regional Government (Regional Government Law) states that protecting the community is one of the responsibilities of local governments, including providing basic services. However, in reality, preliminary research has found that legal assistance from local governments is not yet optimal. This indicates a gap between what should be and what is actually happening in the community. This gap is worth investigating, particularly when the poor are unable to obtain legal assistance from the government, and whether local governments have played a maximal role in providing legal assistance.

There have been many previous studies that discuss the same theme as this study, such as the study by Siti Maimunawaroh and Antikowati conducted in 2018 entitled "The Authority of Local Government in Providing Legal Aid to the Poor in Jember Regency." This study focuses on examining the regulation of local government authority in providing legal aid to the poor and the forms of legal aid provided to the poor in Jember Regency. Another study was conducted by Evi Risnawati, Muhammad Jufri Dewa, and Gismn Tatawu in 2021, titled "Legal Analysis of the Provision of Legal Aid by Local Governments," which analyzed the allocation of legal aid budgets by the government through the State Revenue Budget (APBN) and the Regional Revenue Budget (APBD) and analyzing the authority of local governments in the provision of legal aid. However, there has been no research discussing the effectiveness of the role of local governments in fulfilling legal aid, especially in Bali, so this is important to study. The fulfillment of legal aid in Bali is still considered suboptimal, and there are still obstacles that hinder the provision of legal aid to the poor.

Method

Legal research is divided into normative research and empirical legal research. (Sukmawan, & Damayanti, 2025) This study uses empirical legal research that examines issues by looking for discrepancies between legal theory and reality with a descriptive nature. Empirical legal research involves studying the implementation of legal rules in society through legal events that occur (in concreto). (Rizkia, & Fardiansyah, 2025) In other words, empirical legal research is about investigating how normative legal provisions are applied or implemented in everyday practice. Primary data obtained from interviews and secondary data collected from primary legal materials in the form of legislation and secondary legal materials sourced from

books and journals, as well as tertiary legal materials obtained from legal dictionaries, were processed using qualitative data analysis. The research location was determined using purposive sampling techniques in regencies and cities in Bali. The researcher chose the research area to enhance the argumentation of the data obtained from the informants. The selection of the research location was based on the objective of limiting the scope of the research. The criteria for selecting the research location were based on the existence of local government regulations that have or have not regulated legal aid.

Discussion

The Role of Local Government in Providing Legal Aid to the Poor in Bali

Receiving legal aid is a universal human right and a non-derogable right, meaning that it cannot be reduced or suspended under any circumstances. Access to legal aid is also a procedural justice that is parallel to rights related to judicial independence and impartiality of judges. (ILRC & Forum Solidaritas LKBH Kampus 2010). In fulfilling this basic need, it is important for the state to be responsible for all members of society without exception in ensuring that they obtain their right to access to justice. Although in Indonesia it is not specifically stipulated that legal aid is the responsibility of the state, this right is fundamentally guaranteed by the constitution and the basic principles of the Pancasila state ideology, as enshrined in the second principle, “just and civilized humanity,” which implies the realization of human values in accordance with their dignity and status as cultured, moral, and religious beings. The fifth principle also enshrines the value of “social justice for all Indonesian people,” affirming recognition of justice in legal, economic, political, and cultural spheres to create a just and prosperous society. The implementation of the state's responsibility must be based on the principle of the rule of law as stipulated in the constitution, whereby the law must be the foundation of state power and power must be based on the law. Therefore, the logical consequence is that the system of state administration must be based on the constitution, both in the legislative, judicial, and executive branches. (Asdhie & Ista 2019)

A person's limitations should not be a reason for them to be denied justice before the law. Legal representation should always be encouraged without discrimination to ensure that legal aid is achieved. Human rights and the principle of equality before the law, as enshrined in the constitution, are at risk if they are not upheld by the law. The enforcement of the right to legal assistance is not only about defending victims and violations of civil and political rights but also includes defending economic and social and cultural rights (Nugraha & Bangas, 2024). Legal aid must also be provided without discrimination based on skin color, race, gender, nationality, religion, political views, or other status (Kurniawan, 2020). To ensure that citizens have access to justice and legal assistance, especially for those who are unable to afford it, it must be in accordance with the law.

The existence of the UUBH as a regulation on the provision of legal aid demonstrates how seriously the government takes the legal protection of the underprivileged in accessing justice as a manifestation of the constitutional right to ensure legal certainty, thereby realizing an effective, efficient, and accountable judicial system. The provision of legal aid is an integral part of human rights in the Republic of Indonesia, as it reflects equality before the law. The relationship between legal aid and human rights is very close, as legal aid is a means of ensuring the fulfillment of human rights for economically disadvantaged communities. (Suhayati, 2016) The provision of legal aid to disadvantaged communities is not only the responsibility of the central government, but this opportunity is also expected to be fulfilled by local governments. In 19 UUBH, it has been emphasized that local governments can participate in providing legal aid using the APBD, which is then regulated in detail in local regulations.

When discussing the role of the government in providing legal aid to the poor, it is important to look at the authority of local governments in providing legal aid to the poor. Without authority, the government cannot take action or make policies, and if that happens, the government's actions or policies can be considered arbitrary (legally flawed). As a country governed by the rule of law, which has the basic principle

that every action or deed of the central government or local government must adhere to the applicable laws and regulations, or must be based on legitimacy and authority, whether in the form of attribution, delegation, or mandate, so that the government's actions or deeds are declared valid. In other words, the central government's actions in delegating its affairs to local governments must be based on laws and regulations.

Upon further examination, the role of local governments in providing legal aid is a legitimate authority of local governments. Pursuant to Article 19(1) of the UUBH, the term “may” grants local governments the authority to allocate their regional budgets for legal aid purposes. This is further reinforced in the provisions of Article 1 letter (c) of Government Regulation Number 25 of 2000 concerning the Authority of the Central Government and the Authority of Provinces as Autonomous Regions, which states that government authority is the right and obligation of the government to determine or take policies in the context of governance. Therefore, the role of local governments is very important in providing legal aid to those who are unable to afford it, as the central government's budget through the State Budget (APBN) has limitations in providing legal aid. Local governments are the implementation of the principle of decentralization, where the central government delegates some of its tasks to local governments to be managed autonomously. Local governments have the freedom to exercise regional autonomy through the authority vested in them, thereby having a significant opportunity to implement legal aid.

Based on the provisions of Article 19(1) of Law No. 23 of 2014, as amended by Law No. 9 of 2015 on Regional Government, it can be seen that legal aid is a concurrent matter of regional government, determined based on the principles and criteria for the division of concurrent matters, as it is an authority based on the structure of government, including regional government at the provincial level and district or city governments. Based on the findings of a survey conducted in several regencies and cities in Bali as the research location, it was found that Denpasar City and Tabanan Regency already have local regulations governing the provision of legal aid in those cities and regencies, but Buleleng and Klungkung Regencies do not yet have local regulations governing the provision of legal aid.

Table 1. Local Regulations on Legal Aid

No	Regency/City	Local Regulation
1	Denpasar	Denpasar City Local Regulation No. 11 of 2016 on Legal Aid
2	Tabanan	Tabanan Regency Local Regulation No. 17 of 2017 on the Provision of Legal Aid for the Poor
3	Buleleng	-
4	Klungkung	-

The provision of legal aid in Denpasar City and Tabanan Regency is based on existing local regulations in each city and regency, while Buleleng Regency and Klungkung Regency, which do not yet have local regulations, always strive to provide legal aid through the regency government's legal department by providing preventive legal aid through counseling and socialization regarding existing legal products, as well as coordinating with the community on legal issues they are facing. According to the Head of the Legal Department of the Buleleng Regency Government, the legal aid that can be provided is only passive legal aid in accordance with the legal department's duties and functions to the underprivileged community in the Buleleng Regency, such as providing solutions to community problems. The lack of a local regulation on legal aid limits the government's role in providing active assistance in Buleleng Regency. (Made Bayu Waringin, 2023)

Meanwhile, the Klungkung Regency Government provides legal assistance to the underprivileged through a policy of collaborating with accredited legal aid organizations. This collaboration aims to provide access to legal aid for the underprivileged by connecting them with legal aid organizations that collaborate

with the Klungkung Regency Government. This collaboration not only aims to obtain legal aid funds from the central government, which are channeled through the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, but also to enhance public understanding of legal aid through knowledge exchange via outreach programs, both for the general public and through paralegal training. The actions taken by the Klungkung Regency Government have had a positive effect in providing preventive legal aid, even though the Klungkung Regency Government does not yet have a local regulation on legal aid. (Eke Andriyan Prawira, 2023)

The role of local governments in providing legal aid to the poor is very important, but in practice, it often fails to meet the expectations of various parties due to numerous obstacles that hinder its implementation. (Shokhikhah, 2024). The difficulties frequently encountered by local governments include insufficient funding and a lack of political will on the part of the local government itself to fulfill the constitutional mandate clearly outlined in the UUBH regarding the role of local governments in providing legal assistance.

Effectiveness of Legal Aid for the Poor in Bali

It has been explained many times that the task mandated by the constitution gives the state the authority to allocate resources for important aspects of providing legal aid to the poor. This aspect is established as a regulation, a mechanism for providing legal aid and community development so that the arrangements made can run effectively. The provision of legal aid is a structural activity aimed at bringing about social change and freeing the community from the pressures of political, economic, and social structures.

Frans Hendra Winata defines legal aid as legal services provided specifically to those who are unable to afford it and require representation in court or outside of court in the areas of criminal, civil, or administrative law by individuals with legal expertise. (Insan, Sukmana, & Priatna, 2022) This is done because providing legal aid is an important right of those who have legal knowledge and expertise to communities that do not have a strong understanding of the law. To obtain legal aid, there are four concepts that can be used, including the traditional concept of providing legal services individually and formally to the poor. The constitutional concept involves providing legal assistance through more extensive and comprehensive efforts, recognizing that the underprivileged are subjects of the law, and promoting human rights as rights that must be fulfilled by the state. (Rengrengulu, Titahelu, & Supusepa, 2025) The structural concept is the provision of legal aid that focuses on structures, regulations, and law enforcement that have an impact on changes toward a more just structure. (Amiruddin, 2020) Meanwhile, the responsive concept is legal aid that does not distinguish between individual and collective legal provision but has a broader scope in the field of law and human rights. Legal aid in this concept includes providing legal advice, representing legal aid organizations, or acting as a lawyer for assistance in and out of court. (Muhlizi, 2019)

Although the provision of legal aid is a constitutional mandate for the fulfillment of human rights and is clearly regulated in legislation, so far it still leaves problems, especially in areas where the community is classified as poor. Therefore, this study provides an assessment of the effectiveness of legal aid, whether the target of legal aid can be achieved or not in accordance with the predetermined objectives. The term “effectiveness” originates from the English word “effective,” which means “successful.” In a legal context, effectiveness refers to the success in implementing the rules themselves. The effectiveness of law can be analyzed using two variables: the character or dimension of the object used as the target. (Ahadi, 2022) According to Soerjono Soekanto, the effectiveness of a regulation is its ability to influence society in accordance with applicable provisions. If someone acts in accordance with the expectations or guidelines of the regulation, then the regulation is considered successful. (Sahabat, Arti & Insani, 2023) The effectiveness of a law can be tested using the theory of effectiveness proposed by Soerjono Soekanto with five testing factors. These five factors include legal factors, law enforcement, enabling facilities, community environmental factors, and community cultural factors. (Permana, 2023).

If the current legal aid issues in Bali are tested using the theory of legal effectiveness with its five

testing factors, starting with the legal factor, it will be found that not all district governments in Bali have local regulations on legal aid. This is because the commitment and political will of local governments do not yet reflect the constitutional objectives. With the existence of local regulations governing legal aid, local governments will have a legal basis for using the regional budget for legal aid programs for the poor, including legal aid in and outside of court.

The second factor concerns law enforcement. Although the rules regarding refusal to provide free legal aid have been clearly established, and sanctions against lawyers who refuse to provide free legal aid range from a verbal warning as the lightest sanction to permanent dismissal from the profession as the heaviest sanction, as stipulated in Article 14 of Government Regulation No. 83 of 2008 on the Requirements and Procedures for Providing Free Legal Aid, the interest of lawyers in providing free legal aid remains low. A change is needed as an effort to address this issue, starting from regulations, the role of the government, organizations, and individuals, to increase awareness about the provision of free legal aid. The provision of legal aid must be implemented and cultivated within the government, lawyer organizations, individual lawyers, and the judicial system, regulated by a regulation, so that those seeking justice, especially the underprivileged, feel assisted, even if it is merely to obtain basic information in the process of seeking justice. Additionally, law enforcement officials must be required to work actively, responsively, and systematically in providing legal aid. Oversight must also be conducted by organizations regarding lawyers who have been imposed with temporary or permanent suspension sanctions. Lawyers listed under such sanctions must be reported to the Supreme Court so that the Supreme Court is aware of which lawyers are currently under sanctions. Furthermore, lawyers who have been permanently suspended must also be removed from professional membership and not allowed to join other lawyer organizations. This is necessary as a deterrent for lawyers to avoid violating existing regulations and to restore the dignity of lawyers as an “*officium nobile*.” Regarding the provision of legal services, Law No. 18 of 2003 on Lawyers (Law on Lawyers) also regulates the provision of free legal aid (*pro bono*), but there is no guarantee that the legal aid provided by lawyers *pro bono* will be as good as the services provided to paying clients. Regarding this issue, it is necessary to regulate the number of lawyers required to provide *pro bono* legal assistance, and lawyers must be affiliated with legal aid organizations.

The third factor is enabling facilities, as means and facilities that support law enforcement. The existence of legal aid institutions as facilitators between the poor and legal aid providers. Indonesia uses a legal aid system operated by the government, as seen in the UUBH, which is more inclined towards a legal service center managed by the NGO Legal Advice Center. In carrying out the constitutional mandate to provide legal aid and create access to justice for the underprivileged, the government is highly dependent on the legal aid practices of legal aid institutions. So far, Legal Advice Centers as a type of NGO have weaknesses in sustainability, which tend to be unstable in providing services. NGOs granted access by the government to provide legal aid will be more focused on their own goals and interests. This is especially true if the NGO depends on external funding sources. Such NGOs may tend to prioritize the interests of donor institutions, especially if the funds obtained from donor institutions are greater than those provided by the government. Therefore, in addition to using the NGO Legal Advice Center system, the government should also implement legal aid practices from the State Legal Aid Bureau, with the aim of balancing the existence of NGOs as providers of legal aid. Furthermore, this government legal aid institution will be able to easily adapt to changes in government policy regarding the legal aid system and can also serve as a model for the proper management of legal aid institutions for NGOs. In Indonesia, legal aid is not categorized into primary and secondary legal aid, despite the existence of legal aid institutions with diverse backgrounds, such as those providing general legal aid services, NGOs focused on specific issues, institutions based on structural legal aid, campus consultation institutions, and *Posbakum* (legal aid posts). Despite their differing strengths and experiences, the functions of these legal aid institutions are not distinguished. The perception that these institutions have the same role results in suboptimal legal aid provision. Additionally, another challenge is the uneven distribution of legal aid institutions across districts and cities. Currently, legal aid institutions are concentrated in provincial cities, leading to limited access for rural communities. Regulations regarding the establishment of legal aid institutions based on occupancy in each region are needed to

prevent disparities in the number of legal aid institutions across regions.

The fourth factor is that the community still refuses to utilize legal aid because the process of fulfilling administrative requirements such as the Certificate of Poverty (SKTM) and other documents is complicated. Furthermore, due to unclear criteria, more detailed improvements are needed in determining the qualifications of the poor.

The final factor is the cultural factor, where there is still a lack of understanding among the community about the importance of legal aid. To date, many people who are unable to afford legal assistance still do not utilize the legal aid available to them. This is due to a lack of understanding within the community about the importance of legal aid, including

- a. a lack of information from the government about legal aid;
- b. Fear of becoming a victim of fraud by legal aid providers; and
- c. negative perceptions of lawyers, such as high fees and a focus on profit.

Conclusion

Currently, the role of local governments in providing legal aid to the poor is carried out based on existing local regulations (*perda*), such as in Tabanan Regency and Denpasar City. In areas that do not yet have local regulations related to legal aid, local governments provide legal aid based on the main tasks and functions of the legal departments of each regency, such as providing preventive legal aid through counseling and dissemination of information about legal products, as well as coordinating with regard to legal issues faced by the community in the area. The limitations of the government's role in the effectiveness of legal aid for the underprivileged are influenced by five factors: legal factors, law enforcement factors, enabling facilities factors, community environment factors, and community cultural factors.

Given these conditions, proactive measures are needed to provide legal aid by improving the legal aid system, starting with regulations, empowering law enforcement, conducting structured and planned socialization, and seeking better and more modern mechanisms. Local governments need to demonstrate their commitment and political will to provide legal aid to the underprivileged by enacting local regulations in accordance with constitutional provisions.

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