

P-ISSN: 2338-8617

E-ISSN: 2443-2067

*Jurnal Ilmiah*  
**PEURADEUN**

**Vol. 8, No. 2, May 2020**



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DOI Prefix Number: 10.26811



ACCREDITED "B" by the Ministry of Ristekdikti  
from October 30, 2017 until October 30, 2022

**Banda Aceh as a Civilized City Model  
(A Theory and Reality Study)**

**Abdul Manan<sup>1</sup>; Muhazar<sup>2</sup>; Rahmad Syahputra<sup>3</sup>; Cut Intan Salasiyah<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,3</sup>Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Indonesia

<sup>2,4</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Indonesia

**Article in Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun**

Available at : <https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun/article/view/489>

DOI : <http://dx.doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v8i2.489>

**How to Cite this Article**

APA : Manan, A., Muhazar, M., Syahputra, R., & Salasiyah, C. (2020). Banda Aceh as a Civilized City Model. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 8(2), 243-258. doi:10.26811/peuradeun.v8i2.489

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## BANDA ACEH AS A CIVILIZED CITY MODEL (A Theory and Reality Study)

**Abdul Manan<sup>1</sup>; Muhazar<sup>2</sup>; Rahmad Syahputra<sup>3</sup>; Cut Intan Salasiyah<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,3</sup>Faculty of Adab and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Indonesia

<sup>2,4</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>Contributor Email: mananaceh@yahoo.com

**Received:** Jul 21, 2019

**Accepted:** Mar 12, 2020

**Published:** May 30, 2020

**Article Url:** <https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun/article/view/489>

### Abstract

*This research studied the City Government's endeavor of Banda Aceh to make the city as a civilized city model. Describing the efforts and constraints faced by the government, revealing responses of local citizens, and defining the present conditions of the city became the objective. A qualitative approach covering field observations, documents, and interviews, was applied and followed by data reduction, data display, and concluding. By involving related stakeholders, the new government duo headed by Aminullah Usman and Zainal Arifin has extended the Medium-term Development Plan to realize anew Long-term Development, Land Use, and Area Plan. Nevertheless, a lack of participation in the implementation of sharia appeared, less than optimal governance systems and uneven economic empowerment. Those generated varied responses from the lower, middle, and upper-class citizens. Therefore, to bring the glory of Banda Aceh, the duo has launched the concept of Banda Aceh the Brilliant City.*

**Keywords:** *Civilized City, Islamic City, Concept, Banda Aceh.*



## A. Introduction

An Islamic city refers to a city developed with its foundation and guidance from the Quran and the Sunnah, where its people follow and implement the tenets of Islam. Great cities in the golden era of Islamic civilization like Madinah, Baghdad, Cordova, Granada, Al Hambra, and Isfahan were developed and built up following Islamic principles, whereby a Grand Mosque was located at the center of the city. It played a key role as a public space at the center of communal activities.

Cities like Damascus in Syria, Isfahan in Iran, and Cordova and Granada in Spain, are ideal Islamic cities and facilities as in the Islamic Emperor. Those include Mecca, where the Kiblah for every Muslim is located, and Medina, which was expanded by Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H. To become a Madani city, a city that is modeled on Medina, clear beneficial concepts and strategies are required synthesizing the aspects of governance with those of urban development.

Aceh is the westernmost and the northernmost province in Indonesia: It is strategically located on the eastern border of the Indian Ocean at the entrance from "the West" to the straits of Malacca and the countries of Southeast Asia. Cities on the coast of Aceh became transit points for foreign merchants from Europe, the Middle East, and South Asian countries. The capital of Aceh is Banda Aceh, is formerly known as Bandar Aceh Darussalam and Kuta Raja. It had a great reputation for centuries as one of the most advanced and civilized cities in Southeast Asia since the era of the Acehnese Sultan, Iskandar Muda in the 16th C. Banda Aceh is very old having been established 809 years ago: it is as old as the rule of Bani Umayyah who established the city of Cordova in Spain under the leadership of Thariq bin Ziyad. Banda Aceh is about twice as old as Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. However, as time has passed, due to changes in the political situation and conditions of trade of this provincial capital, it has not grown as it should have, compared to Medan, Jakarta, and other large cities in Indonesia and Malaysia (Usman, 2014).

Banda Aceh has, however, developed into a civilized city, based on concepts from Medina, i.e. as a properly planned city with a strong Islamic culture and an historical background as a major city in Indonesia, from the time of the Islamic sultanate up until the present day as stated by Illiza Sa'aduddin, the former mayor of Banda Aceh during an interview in 2014 (Interview A). Also, Wirzaini stated that the majority of the people in Banda Aceh are Muslim and that many famous Islamic scholars have come from the city which has good facilities and high levels of economic activity and education. Moreover, the city is not too large with many good manufactured and natural recreation facilities. Then, the disaster of the Aceh Tsunami in December 2004 destroyed half of the city which was followed by a major rehabilitation and rebuilding program. This became an opportunity to redevelop Banda Aceh to be a more civilized city, a dream requiring participation and work from many of the residents to make it come true (Interview B).

The idea to develop Banda Aceh as a civilized city was raised during the debate between the candidates for selecting mayor of Banda Aceh for 2012-2017. It was held on April 4th, 2012, in the Hermes Palace Hotel, Banda Aceh, where the candidate pair number four, Mawardi Nurdin and Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal, proposed their vision for the "*Terwujudnya Banda Aceh Model Kota Madani; Kota Ramah dan Bermartabat* (To Develop Banda Aceh as a Model Civilized City, Friendly and Respectful).<sup>1</sup> Their proposals explained that a civilized city was a city where the majority of the residents believed in one God, Allah, had good morals, maintained peace and unity, obeyed the law, supported diversity and lived in well-planned areas with good infrastructure and public facilities. The candidate pair also asked the people of Banda Aceh to participate actively in the development of their city. Then, it is envisaged the civilized city will guide the people to have good character, to be friendly, peaceful, prosperous, cultured and civilized.

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<sup>1</sup>From data obtained from the Independent Election Commission Office of the City of Banda Aceh or *Komisi Independen Pemilihan*, on March, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018.



## **B. Method**

This study was made using a qualitative approach. The data was collected using observations and interviews. The interviews were done with people chosen by purposive sampling (Krathwohl, 1993). The sample included the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and other public figures from the City of Banda Aceh plus other parties including university students, religious leaders, and persons capable of discerning and comprehending the true conditions in Banda Aceh. The interviews were open-ended as described by (Sugiono, 2005). The data was analyzed using data reduction, data display, and drawing of conclusions (Lexy, 2000).

## **C. Finding and Discussion**

### **1. Efforts Made by the Government of Banda Aceh to Realize a Civilized City**

The government of Banda Aceh has made and implemented various plans to achieve a civilized city. The first stage was preparing the Medium-term Development Plan (RPMD) of 2012-2017. Continuity was also planned as the city government then also prepared its Long-term Development Plan (RPJP) of 2007-2027. Both were prepared by combining plans and guidance from each separate department in the city government to create the Strategic Plan (Renstra), and to implement RPMD and RPJP for the city.

The government of Banda Aceh also prepared the Land-Use and Area Plan (RTRW) for 2029 as guidance for the development of all areas in the city. The central sub-areas of Baiturrahman, Kuta Alam, and Kuta Raja were planned for government and central trading uses. The areas of Banda Raya and Lueng Bata included planning for a sports area including the major stadium complex, the main city bus terminal, warehousing, and other uses. Areas in Keutapang and Meuraxa, Jaya Baru, and Banda Raya were set aside for port and tourism uses while areas in Syiah Kuala and Ulee Kareng were planned as centers for education, health, commerce, and other related activities.

All the plans made for the development of Banda Aceh were made based on the implementation of sharia. This was stated in the seven



principle aims for the following developments. They were the plenary implementation of sharia; good, fair, and trustful governance along with the supremacy of law; convenient, safe, and environmentally friendly city; sustainable education; centers for trades, industries and fisheries; healthy, intelligent, and good citizens; and society and tourism based on sharia.

The implementation of sharia emphasized aspects of education to improve the people's comprehension of the tenets of Islamic sharia. It was done by holding meetings in the urban villages where Islamic preachers provided teaching and counseling. The enforcement of sharia also referred to the enforcement of Islamic law. City patrols along with Islamic courts and sharia punishments for offenders including canings were also performed regularly. The Sharia Law Division also improved the management of almsgiving or zakat along with traditional Islamic schooling plus the operations of the Consultative Council of Ulama (Islamic religious leaders) in Aceh.

The efforts also directed to providing good governance and professionalism to the government staff and their services. This is being done by updating the knowledge of staff through training, offering scholarships for graduate and postgraduate studies and special training courses, and arranging attendance at workshops. To improve the public service, the Banda Aceh government is also implementing information-technology-based services.

The economy of micro-enterprises and small businesses were also put into account. The city government provided free courses and training for local entrepreneurs to improve their capability to compete in this global era. The city government also worked to improve the local human resources by setting up a training center to provide training. The improvements in economic aspects also included improvements in public welfare, in particular improvements in public health facilities, public information services, markets, public transport.

Moreover, the city government implemented many programs to support various aspects of health such as integrating public health services electronically to accommodate rural areas and improving the standards of many public health services. The education sector also has



been provided under the Islamic education system. The governments also listed and supported the conservation of traditional arts and handcrafts.

Furthermore, the tourism aspects based on sharia were built, repaired, and maintained much infrastructure including roads, bridges, drainage, markets, and a public sewage system for part of the city. It also occurred in public recreation facilities like stadiums, parks, and museums. The city government also sponsors, manages, and holds many sports and art events every year to promote recreation and tourism.

Other aspects like gender equality and protection for women and advancing the role of youths in society also have been organized by conducting certain training, workshops, and programs. Those were related to emphasizing the role of women and the development of youth life skills.

Constraints on Developing a Civilized City Several constraint found to discuss Banda Aceh as a civilized city. It still has many people who take issue with variations in practicing Islam, which they call deviant sects unlike the original principles from Medina, which accepted variations in religion. Thus, the city government has tried to find methods to prevent the people of Banda Aceh, particularly the youth. Related to sharia, many lawbreakers from outside of Banda Aceh believed that the Sharia-based method, as implemented by the government, was just a mere warning, not the real punishment. This led to the fact that some people and parties opposing the sharia policies of the city government.

The life quality of the poor in Banda Aceh contributed to the constraints. Ten percent of the people in Banda Aceh are poor; which are almost 9% of its able-bodied adults were unemployed. The latter problem leads to a low level of participation in education. The relatively poor quality of life was also indicated by the availability and access to good public facilities, insufficient health services, and low participation of youth in society.

The aspect of the economy, in the same way, was poorly managed due to frequent traffic congestion occurred. There was a low synergy between the government and financial institutions. Fundamentally, the government should collaborate with Islamic banking institutions to participate in public economic empowerment programs.



Responses of the Community to the Manifestation of Banda Aceh as a Civilized City According to the views of some locals, the concept of Banda Aceh as a civilized city cannot fully reflect that of Medina because of the poor management in the areas of religion, education, trade, health, tourism, art and others (Interview H). In addition, according to them, their city has had a multidimensional crisis. The programs planned by the government should have been based on a humanitarian approach rather than a political approach (Interview H). In addition, by reflecting on the system of developed countries, those should focus gradually on certain elements like financial governance, codes of conduct, managing road traffic and parking, and so forth (Interview H). Even socialization in terms of religion and education requested by the citizens were not covered comprehensively by the government (Interview J). The implementation of which has been found to be difficult due to low levels of education. Besides, disorderliness concerning parking illegally stalls on the street pavement (Interview K), littering and waste disposal reflected the unpreparedness of the Banda Aceh becoming as a civilized city.

Nevertheless, behind all the critical responses from the people, they expressed belief that the embodiment of Banda Aceh as a civilized city was as part of the implementation of sharia (Interview I). Building a civilized city is not an easy task that can be done quickly. This can be seen in the struggles of the Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H. to Islamize the people of Mecca and Medina. A local believed that showing appreciation to the local government for trying to create orderliness was a civilized resident should be, although some – newcomers and ordinary ones – were difficult to accept (Interview I). Culturally, the aforementioned manifestation fits perfectly with the situation in Banda Aceh since it is closely related to the various local cultures, religions, traditions and sociological values (Interview L). The embodiment of this can also benefit the minority communities in Banda Aceh, such as the Hindus, Buddhists and Christians (Interview L). Accordingly, the Government of Banda Aceh should prioritize ways to make the local people more civilized first. If they understood the concept of Banda Aceh as a civilized city, then, it will not be just an empty dream (Interview I).



Soon after the inauguration of the new Mayor and Vice Mayor in 2017 for the 2017 to 2022 period, Aminullah Usman and Zainal Arifin, they unveiled a new vision for development called “Banda Aceh, a Brilliant City”. There are three major focuses for this concept, namely religion, economy and education. In details, the focuses are enhancing the Islamic sharia implementation; improving the educational, cultural, youth, and sport programs; increasing the growth of the economy, tourism, and community prosperity; improving the quality of public health services and the community health; improving the governance quality; building a sustainable and eco-friendly city; and strengthening the empowerment of women and the protection of children.

Those concepts have been combined to form the vision and mission for the future development of Banda Aceh. In fact, these concepts provide for the continuation of the previous concept planned by the former Mayoral duo for the city. They are also in line with Islamic sharia, so that the processes of organizing the implementation of governance, development, and community social life are in accordance with it. Associated with the outlined vision and mission, the Mayoral team appointed a team to prepare the 2017 to 2022 Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMD) in accordance with the mandate given in Act No. 32 of 2004 related to local governance (Interview F). Its drafting was based on issues, challenges, and limitations faced by the principal strategies, development programs, macro-economic framework, and finance for development, which had been set out in the Regulations for local government for the next five years. It is also in agreement with the provisions of law No. 25 of 2004 related to the National Development Planning System (SPPN) (Interview F).

A number of proposed programs such as the death benefits, the birth assistance package and others, have already been realized by the new mayoral duo, even though they have only been in office less than a year (Interview C). In the field of religion, the new city government has prioritized expansion of Islamic sharia practices and Islamic events such

as zikr, lectures about Islam and such like. The commitment of both the provincial and the local government could be clearly seen from the efforts made for preparation, accommodation and transportation for the event.

Furthermore, the city has also built the Nurul Arafah Islamic Center. According to the Mayor, this magnificent building, which is built over water, has been designed to facilitate the worship of Islam by the people of Banda Aceh (Interview M). Moreover, it will have several functions like becoming centers for international zikr, Islamic activities, Islamic education, Islamic tourism object, implementation of sharia principles, and strengthening *silaturrahmi* (friendship) amongst Muslims from around the world.

The building, which is symbolic of a civilized city, can also be seen from the Banda Aceh Madani Education Center (BMEC) building and will be a center for education and training with complete facilities, such as an eco-park, accommodation and a hall, which can accommodate 4,000 participants. This building complex, which has cost 150 billion Indonesian Rupiah, has been designed with modern Islamic architecture in a contemporary style on a strategically located site, opposite the office of the Provincial Governor and will now become a new landmark in Banda Aceh based on Islamic and Acehnese cultural values.

Meanwhile, in the sector of security and public order, the data obtained from the Municipal Police and from the Municipal Islamic Police showed that offences against public order and Islamic sharia have decreased. While 1532 violations against public order were recorded in 2015, this decreased to 531 cases in 2018. Similarly, while 228 people were arrested for offences against Islamic sharia in 2015, this decreased to 183 in 2017 (Interview D). These decreases show that awareness of Islamic sharia by the citizens has increased (Interview M).

In the economic sector, the Islamic Microfinance Institute (LKMS) established on 15 December 2017 to provide a wide range of sharia savings and credit products, to help the people of Aceh manage their finances. These products are all based on the principles of Islamic finance



in particular they are interest-free loans. This institute, which has its own limited liability company, namely: *Mahirah Muamalah Sharia* (MMS), is a Government-owned Enterprise of Banda Aceh (BUMPK). According to its director, Teuku Hanansyah, the establishment of the LKMS will help to keep small and medium enterprises out of the clutches of loan sharks (Interview C). However, for businesses needing larger amounts, the LKMS requires a guarantor for the loan (Interview G). The positive response can be seen from the number of businesses joining the program about 627 people have already joined the program as customers (Interview G). Indirectly, the establishment of the LKMS has resulted in the loan sharks no longer offering interest-based loans to traders in the city center at Peunayong and at Pasar Aceh, the traditional central market in Banda Aceh (Interview E).

In other areas, the city government has reintroduced the Car Free Day (CFD) on Sunday mornings along Daud Beureueh Road, the main road to the east from the city center between the junctions of Simpang Lima and the Simpang Jambo Tape in Banda Aceh. This program, which was begun in the previous mayoral period, provides a public space for people who want to do exercises or have a leisurely time with their family and it held every Sunday morning from 6 to 10 AM. In addition, the people of Banda Aceh can now interact directly with the mayor in a program called "The Mayor Answers (Your Questions)" or Wali Kota answered in a program that involves 10 local radio stations (Interview D).

Next, in terms of cleanliness of the city, the government has asked an investor to develop a Waste-to-Energy Project at the sanitary landfill in Jawa Village in Banda Aceh. Furthermore, by working with the Drinking Water Supply company, and a third party the local government has targeted to supply the whole city with potable (i.e., drinkable) water by 2020 (Interview D). At present around 40% of the water supply is lost & the water is contaminated due to leakages and illegal tapings (Interview D).

Furthermore, in the field of culture, despite Banda Aceh being turned into a modern city, the life of the people is still based on local mores and the

cultural traditions of Aceh. This can be seen from the achievement of Banda Aceh City taking third place in the seventh Aceh Cultural Week in 2018.

## **2. Discussion**

Historically, the concepts of a civilized city and of a civil society are indeed not quite the same. The concept of the first term mentioned is associated with the background of Islam, particularly from the period of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. In political Islam, the concept of a civilized society is based on the principles that governed the running of Medina under the leadership of the prophet. According to al-Umari's records, there are five basic principles, which can be identified in the manifestation of a civilized society namely: the presences of fraternity, faith bonds, love bonds, status equality, and religious tolerance (W. Usman, 2014). However, both concepts are similar. In addition to having strong principles, both value equality of the citizens, justice, participation, tolerance and following the rule of law as the basic principles to be followed within a civilized community (Mahyudin, 2004).

Anwar Ibrahim has said that a civilized city is a social system based on moral principles, which ensure that there is a balance between the rights and freedom of the individual and those of the city for maintenance of stability (Sumarsono, 2001). A civilized city is the process of constructing a civilization requiring shared values for creating policies (Rahardjo, 1999). He also added that people living in a civilized city would work together to establish social bonds, productive networks and human solidarity based on unity and social integration; one goal of which is to avoid conflicts and hostility. Meanwhile, Nurkholis Madjid has defined a civilized city as one where there is tolerance and the willingness of individuals to accept a variety of political views and to have civilized behavior (Sumarsono, 2001). It is not merely one with a pro-democracy movement but it refers to city life, which has quality and culture. Such city has its residents accepting various political views and different social attitudes. This implies that there is no intervention coming either from the government or from pro-democracy movements to inhibit the aspirations and civilized activities of the people (Azra, 2004).



Such cities have existed in the past when the personal power of a ruler reigned supreme (Mahyudin, 2004). Those were modeled on the cities from the era of Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H., who combined the principles of equality, justice and public participation within his cities with his people (Hakim, 2003). As a democratic city, a civilized city appreciates human dignity, human rights and responsibilities (Tilaar, 2002). It is a manifestation of an ideal society, which has a vision and sticks to the values of democracy, justice, egalitarianism and high moral behavior (Yahya, 2005). In this model of a city, people have the right to participate in the responsibility of government and of what is done in the name of governing the city (Hikam, 1996).

Some experts believe that there are numerous concepts for a civilized city and those remain the same. It would have the character of an orderly city with a well-defined culture, forward thinking, modern and with high morals. Its residents will be concerned to exercise their rights and responsibilities to their city, their country, their nation, their religion, and their community. Besides, they will obey the rules that have been set down for the governing of the city so that the goal of being a civilized city can be achieved. Contextually, the people and the city must have a good attitude, mature and transparent to clarify issues and to resolve any differences that may occur.

The plan to develop Banda Aceh as a civilized city was initiated by the late mayor of Banda Aceh, Mawardi Nurdin, at a seminar on Thursday, 27 December 2017. He also created a team to prepare the Medium Term City Development Plan (RPMJK) (W. Usman, 2017).

This aim was reasonable considering the long history of Banda Aceh as the capital city of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam as well as being a major center for trade in previous time. During that time, Banda Aceh was governed under the principle of truth, fairness, goodwill, egalitarianism, peace, sincerity, and love; nobody was allowed to go against those principles (Hasymy, 1980). While, Ibrahim (1977) stated that the name "Banda Aceh Darussalam" was changed to Kuta Raja by the Dutch, in 1963, the city was renamed again as Banda Aceh to regain the spirit of glory from the previous



ages. Hence, inspired by this spirit, the government of Banda Aceh once again wants to develop the city based on Islamic sharia principles in order to inspire the glory from those past eras.

#### **D. Conclusion**

A major vision and mission in the 2017-22RPJMD was to establish Banda Aceh as a civilized city. Many problems have occurred in the realization of that goal such as a low level of public awareness and participation in sharia practices, drivers not following traffic rules and public cleanliness in the city. Other problems include low levels of economic development, health, education and empowerment of the community plus weak enforcement of sharia. However, regardless of the polemic the concept of Banda Aceh the Pleasing City, which has been promoted by the new mayoral duo, is, considered, will be opportune and able to ensure that Banda Aceh becomes a civilized city in the future.

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## Interview

- Interview A. Interview with Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal, the former Mayor of Banda Aceh, Banda Aceh, March 28, 2018.
- Interview B. Interview with Wirzaini, the Head of Document Preparation for Public Relations for the City of Banda Aceh, Banda Aceh, April 13, 2018.
- Interview C. Interview with Zainal Arif, the Vice Mayor of Banda Aceh, Banda Aceh, June 29, 2018
- Interview C. Interview with Teuku Hanansyah, the Director of Mahirah Muamalah Syariah, Banda Aceh, June 29, 2018
- Interview C. Interview with Aminullah Usman, the Mayor of Banda Aceh (2017-2022), Banda Aceh, June 29, 2018.

- Interview D. Interview with Noviyal Aiyub, the Managing Director of Water Supply Corporation of Banda Aceh, Banda Aceh June 29, 2018.
- Interview D. Interview with Aminullah Usman, Mayor of Banda Aceh (2017–2022), Banda Aceh City, June 29, 2018.
- Interview E. Interview with Usman, a youth leader from Lambaro Skep village, Banda Aceh, July 6, 2018.
- Interview F. Interview with Aminullah Usman, the Mayor of Banda Aceh (2017–2022), Banda Aceh, July 10, 2018.
- Interview F. Interview with Zainal Arifin, the Vice Mayor of Banda Aceh (2017–2022), Banda Aceh, July 10, 2018.
- Interview G. Interview with Teuku Hanansyah, the Director of Mahirah Muamalah Syariah, Banda Aceh, July 20, 2018.
- Interview G. Interview with Rahmad, an employee of Mahirah Muamalah Syariah, Banda Aceh, July 20, 2018.
- Interview H. Interview with Abjari, a youth figure from Lamlagang village, Banda Aceh, August 2, 2018.
- Interview H. Interview with Anton, a youth figure from Mibo village, Banda Aceh, August 2, 2018.
- Interview H. Interview with Fahmi, a community figure from Cot Mesjid village, Banda Aceh, August 2, 2018.
- Interview I. Interview with Jakfar, a community figure from Pande village, Banda Aceh, August 3, 2018.
- Interview I. Interview with Nurjannah, a resident from Ie Masen Kayee Adang village, Banda Aceh, August 3, 2018.
- Interview I. Interview with Nurdin AR, a lecturer in the Faculty of Adab and Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, August 3, 2018.
- Interview J. Interview with Suraiya, a resident from Peurada village, Banda Aceh, August 5, 2018.
- Interview K. Interview with Rini, a resident from Lambaro Skep village, Banda Aceh, August 6, 2018.
- Interview L. Interview with Mastur Yahya, a community leader from Lampoh Daya village, Banda Aceh, August 14, 2018.
- Interview M. Interview with Aminullah Usman, the Mayor of Banda Aceh (2017–2022), August 18, 2018.



