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Sustainability Stories of the Lives We Touched

Bawal Island: Rising Above to Deliver Quality Education

SDN 16 Kendawangan
Bawal Island, West Kalimantan



Additional classrooms at SDN 16 Kendawangan from Bumitama Berdaya Pendidikan

The sun was shining bright and the breeze was gently blowing over the palm trees, creating a serene atmosphere. It was the perfect day to visit Bawal Island, off the coast of West Kalimantan. Our journey led us to SDN 16 Kendawangan, the island's sole elementary school. As we strolled through the school grounds, a modest green structure with a weathered tin roof stood before us. The lively buzz of a teacher and students deliberating a challenging math problem emanated from one of its classrooms. At 9 am on this Friday, the school day was nearing its end, with students soon dispersing for the weekend. While some would walk a short distance to their beachside homes, others would hop onto Bumitama's blue school bus, weaving through stretches of oil palm trees to reach the island's opposite end.

Established in 1983, this public school caters to the educational needs of residents on the remote island. It's home to 93 students, from first to sixth grade. Before, younger kids used the rooms first, then the older ones took their turn. Even with government help from the

Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (BOS) program, the school couldn't afford to build more rooms for everyone to study at the same time. Most of the money went to buying teaching tools and keeping the school in good shape.



Front view of SDN 16 Kendawangan

Seeing the hurdles this school faced, Bumitama stepped in to help. Our first big move was funding construction of three new classrooms. But the support didn't stop there, launching the *Bumitama Berdaya Pendidikan* initiative, aiming to boost the skills and qualification of the teachers. The company believes that empowering teachers is crucial in improving the quality of education for all students.



Wawan, the school principal

Wawan, the head of the school shared, "Not only does Bumitama provide us with essential items such as desks, chairs, and school bus, but they also supply us with new books and the highly valuable teacher trainings. This ensures that our learning methods remain up-to-date and effective. Our teachers are empowered to enhance their approach to teaching by integrating character building lessons and encouraging hands-on participation in everyday tasks."

Considering its remote location which requires two-hour trip by a traditional boat called klotok from Kendawangan Port, it's no surprise that teaching at this school is not a preferred choice among the teachers who prefer an urban lifestyle. Apart

from its secluded location, most of the teachers who had previously worked here resigned due to the limited opportunities for professional development.

Back in 2017 *Bumitama Berdaya Pendidikan* initiative brought two skilled teachers to the school. One of them was the math teacher who moved to Bawal Island with his wife, Mirna. Mirna, too, is a devoted teacher at SDN 16 Kendawangan, handling the first and second grades. She opened up about her journey over the past six years after a school day. "Even with the challenges we face, like not having enough teachers, our students' education remains our top priority. We aim to inspire them to pursue their studies further and grow personally through hands-on activities. Here, we teachers are more like guides, encouraging students to actively participate in the learning process through methods like group discussions and showcasing their projects," shared Mirna.



Mirna



Mirna with the grade one students

"Living in this rural, coastal area with spotty internet, the COVID-19 pandemic added layers to our educational hurdles. Many of our students aren't familiar with daily tech use, and reliable online learning requires stable internet, which we often lack. Yet, we refused to let these issues disrupt our students' learning," Mirna emphasized. Determined, she and her fellow teachers ramped up their efforts, making house visits to ensure uninterrupted learning during these unprecedented times.

"Education is a journey filled with its fair share challenges, but it is not just about overcoming them. We also need to shift the local perspective. Many island families, despite having the resources, choose to prioritize family trades over their child's education, wishing for them to carry on the family legacy in palm oil, transportation, construction, or fishing. However, Bumitama's presence has been instrumental in helping us to slowly change this mindset. Their support enabled us to build three fresh classrooms for the adjacent junior high school, inspiring more kids to aim higher academically and aspire to lead this island in the future. We are grateful for Bumitama's help in achieving our aim," Wawan explained.



Ready to go home

Despite the obstacles, this school offers an array of extracurricular activities that cater to diverse range of interests. From sports to music, there is something for everyone. But what really stands out are the religious programs, like Tahfidz Qur'an and Nasheed which have become wildly popular among students.

“While it is possible that I may not hold great significance to this country, and perhaps, my contributions may not be as substantial as those in other parts of the nation, I take solace in knowing that I have given all that I could – no matter how small – toward the betterment of education for the children on this island,” said Mirna.

“Though it has been almost six years now, I’m not giving up because I firmly believe that good education is the key to unlocking a welfare development, especially for those living in Indonesia's remote regions,” Mirna added.



Happy laughter inside and outside the classrooms