# THE LOCAL WISDOM OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, AND INTELLECTUALS IN MITIGATING THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF ILLEGAL GOLD MINING IN WEST PASAMAN, WEST SUMATRA

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Abstract: This study explores the role of indigenous, religious, and intellectual institutions in mitigating the social impacts of illegal gold mining on communities in West Pasaman, West Sumatra. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through interviews and observations involving ten key informants. Data analysis was conducted using the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman. The findings reveal that illegal gold mining has led to significant social consequences, including social conflict, economic disparities, moral degradation, and the proliferation of drug and alcohol abuse. These pressing issues have garnered serious attention from Tigo Tungku Sajarangan, a traditional leadership structure, which collaborates with the Nagari Customary Court to address these challenges. This collaboration involves various stakeholders, including nagari leaders, the Nagari Traditional Council, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of West Pasaman, local Islamic preachers, as well as members of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Additionally, non-governmental organizations and diaspora communities also play an active role in these efforts. The initiatives undertaken through this collaboration include moral appeals, public awareness campaigns, and the imposition of customary sanctions. However, customary institutions lack the legal authority to prosecute criminal offenses, limiting their ability to enforce legal consequences. Nonetheless, their efforts contribute significantly to fostering social harmony and strengthening community resilience against the adverse effects of illegal gold mining.

Keywords: Society, Impact, Illegal Gold Mining, Tigo Tungku Sajarangan

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#### Introduction

West Pasaman Regency in West Sumatra is deeply rooted in religious devotion and adherence to long-standing customary traditions. These two dimensions—religion and adat (custom)—form the foundation of social life, guiding individual conduct, regulating community interactions, and shaping the relationship between humans and the environment. Religion governs both the spiritual connection with God and ethical behavior in society, while customary law offers norms, sanctions, and values that ensure social harmony. This integrated worldview is best captured in the Minangkabau philosophy *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK), which affirms that tradition is grounded in Islamic law, and Islamic law is derived from the Qur'an.

For the Minangkabau people, this fusion of tradition and religion is not abstract. It permeates daily life, informs moral expectations, and underpins collective decision-making. Religious teachings and customary norms mutually reinforce one another, sustaining a community ethos centered on unity, social order, and ethical conduct. Islam, in this context, is not merely a spiritual doctrine but a socio-legal framework that intersects with *adat* to address communal challenges. This synthesis also embodies the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*—promoting good and preventing wrong—which guides responses to moral and social transgressions.

The longstanding harmony between cultural and religious systems has not only fostered a peaceful and cohesive society in West Pasaman but also instilled a deep respect for the nature. Nature is viewed as a divine trust—rivers are essential for livelihoods, forests are preserved for their ecological significance, and biodiversity is seen as part of God's creation. Environmental stewardship, therefore, is not separate from religious duty but part of a broader ethical commitment.

This moral and ecological balance, however, has come under severe strain. The rise of illegal gold mining—particularly since 2010—has caused extensive environmental destruction and moral decay, threatening the social fabric of the community. Areas once characterized by lush forests, clean rivers, and fertile farmland have been transformed into extraction zones. Mountains have been leveled, riverbeds dredged, and agricultural land repurposed for mining. Particularly in Kenagarian Pematang Panjang, these activities have persisted for nearly a decade, leading to significant degradation. The destruction of nature, as reflected in the Qur'an Surah Ar-Rum (30:41), underscores the moral dimensions of this crisis, warning that corruption on land and sea is the result of human hands, serving as both a reminder and a call to accountability.

From 2015 to 2024, the pace of this destruction intensified, driven by economic motives and facilitated by weak enforcement. This mirrors global trends. Research by Sehol et al. emphasizes the dual-edged nature of illegal mining: while it may offer short-term economic benefits, it poses lasting threats to ecological systems. Seloa and Ngole-Jeme report similar environmental degradation in South Africa, while Mubarak et al.,

Nasution,<sup>4</sup> and Irruba'i<sup>5</sup> highlight social disruptions and water quality deterioration caused by illegal mining in Indonesia. However, unlike most existing literature, which frames the issue through environmental sociology, this study takes a religious-sociological approach, analyzing how community-based religious and cultural institutions respond to these disruptions.

The impacts of illegal mining in West Pasaman go beyond the environment. They have generated significant social consequences. First, conflict has arisen between mining groups and local communities, especially those living upstream and downstream of the Batang Batahan River. Environmental degradation has led to disputes over water use, land access, and economic opportunity. Second, income disparities have widened. While miners often earn significantly more than traditional farmers, the benefits are unevenly distributed, creating tension and resentment.

Third, the erosion of traditional moral values is evident in changing social behavior. Cases of youth promiscuity, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, drug abuse, and alcohol consumption—once stigmatized—are increasingly normalized. The influence of mining settlements, along with increased access to entertainment venues and social media, has weakened the moral authority once held by elders and religious leaders. Lastly, the circulation of narcotics and alcohol has become a pressing issue, especially among adolescents and miners. The ease of access—facilitated by West Pasaman's strategic location as a border region—has made the area a transit point for illicit substances.

Faced with these challenges, *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*—the customary leadership triad consisting of *ninik mamak* (traditional leaders), *alim ulama* (Islamic scholars), and *cadiak pandai* (intellectuals)—has emerged as a key institution mobilizing local wisdom to mitigate the social impacts of illegal mining. This informal but influential leadership structure works alongside formal authorities, with each pillar playing a distinct role.

The *ninik mamak* collaborate with village leaders and the *Kerapatan Adat Nagari* (KAN), or Council of Traditional Leaders, to uphold customary law, mediate disputes, and preserve cultural values. The *alim ulama*, through institutions like the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), lead religious outreach, offer moral guidance, and reinforce the ethical imperatives of environmental care and social responsibility. The *cadiak pandai* engage through intellectual discourse and collaborate with civil society organizations, including PPSDM Saroha and MPKH, both locally and within the diaspora. Their focus is on research, advocacy, youth empowerment, and community education.

Together, these actors have implemented moral campaigns, delivered sermons, facilitated public discussions, and imposed customary sanctions to discourage participation in illegal mining and its associated behaviors. While these efforts play an essential role in raising awareness and restoring ethical norms, their authority is limited in practice. Customary institutions and the Nagari Customary Court lack legal jurisdiction to

prosecute mining-related crimes. Enforcement power resides with the police and state legal apparatus, which are often under-resourced or perceived as ineffective.

The erosion of environmental integrity and moral order in West Pasaman due to illegal gold mining reflects a broader socio-ecological crisis. Yet, amid these challenges, the resilience of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* reveals the enduring strength of local wisdom and religio-cultural leadership. Though constrained by institutional limitations, these leaders continue to safeguard the community's ethical core, promoting social harmony and advocating for a return to sustainable and dignified ways of life.

#### Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain in-depth, context-specific insights into how local wisdom is mobilized to address the social impacts of illegal gold mining in West Pasaman. Qualitative methods were chosen to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of community actors, emphasizing meaning-making over generalizability. As Creswell notes, qualitative inquiry is particularly effective in capturing the complexity of human behavior within its natural setting. This approach allowed the researchers to integrate participants' knowledge with their own interpretive lens, producing a nuanced understanding of community dynamics.

Fieldwork was conducted over a six-month period in 2024, focusing on Kenagarian Pematang Panjang, a community significantly affected by illegal gold mining. The study examined the role of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*—a triadic leadership institution comprising *ninik mamak* (customary elders), *alim ulama* (religious leaders), and *cadiak pandai* (intellectuals)—in responding to mining-related social challenges.

Ten key informants were selected through purposive sampling: four *ninik mamak*, three *alim ulama*, and three *cadiak pandai*. All were long-time residents, fluent in the Mandailing and Minangkabau languages, and actively engaged in local governance and moral leadership. These individuals were considered credible sources for capturing the role of traditional and religious wisdom in community-based mitigation strategies.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, enabling the researchers to triangulate findings across settings and perspectives. Analysis followed the Miles and Huberman<sup>11</sup> model, which involves iterative processes of data reduction, thematic display, and conclusion verification. This methodology ensured analytical rigor while maintaining cultural sensitivity and contextual relevance, aligning with the study's goal to illuminate grassroots responses to environmental and social disruption.

#### **Results and Discussion**

# The Sociocultural Profile of West Pasaman Society

West Pasaman Regency in West Sumatra represents a rich mosaic of religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. While Islam is the dominant religion, the region is also home to minority groups such as Catholics, Protestants, and Buddhists. Many Christians in the area are migrants from North Tapanuli, engaged in occupations ranging from farming and civil service to military and plantation work.

Ethnically, approximately 80% of the population identifies as Mandailing, carrying family names such as Nasution, Lubis, Rangkuti, Batubara, Matondang, and Harahap. These families trace their roots to Mandailing Natal and South Tapanuli, having migrated to West Pasaman during the Padri War (1803–1838) and the Dutch colonial period. Over the past 150 years, the Mandailing community has fully integrated into local society. <sup>12</sup> Many have even ceased using clan names in official documents, reflecting a deliberate choice to align with broader Minangkabau identity and Indonesian national culture.

Linguistically, residents of West Pasaman are typically multilingual, speaking Mandailing, Minangkabau (local Pasaman Barat dialect), and Javanese. Settlement patterns reflect ethnic composition, with hamlets (*jorong*) often populated by majority Mandailing, Javanese, or Minangkabau communities. Yet, daily interactions are marked by fluid linguistic exchanges. It is common for individuals to begin a conversation in one language and receive responses in another, illustrating a high degree of social integration and mutual respect.

This linguistic flexibility is further strengthened by interethnic marriages, which are widely accepted and culturally accommodated. Two main matrimonial customs exist: *sumando*—where husbands live with the wife's family, typical in Minangkabau tradition—and *menjujur*—where wives live with the husband's family, more common among Mandailing and Javanese. Today, individuals can freely choose either custom, guided by Islamic principles. Wedding ceremonies often blend cultural elements from different traditions, symbolizing unity rather than hierarchy. Such practices foster social harmony and reflect a form of cultural amalgamation rather than assimilation, contributing to a shared sense of belonging. <sup>13</sup>

Cultural expression in West Pasaman is both diverse and vibrant. Each ethnic group preserves distinct traditions. The Mandailing community maintains practices such as margondang sambilan (nine-drum ensemble), manortor (traditional dance), marsialapari (communal farming), upa-upa (blessing rituals), and marmoncak (martial arts). The Minangkabau uphold customs like sumando marriage, tari piring (plate dance), and talempong (musical ensemble). Meanwhile, Javanese communities continue traditions such as kuda kepang, ronggeng, klenik (ritual practices), and tingkeban (prenatal ceremonies).

Importantly, the regulation and preservation of these traditions fall under the authority of *ninik mamak* (customary elders) at the *jorong* level. Their role is formalized in regional laws, particularly PERDA No. 9 of 2000 and PERDA No. 7 of 2018, which affirm the relevance of customary institutions in contemporary governance and cultural preservation.

A notable example of cultural synthesis is the *ronggeng* dance, originally a Javanese performance from Ponorogo, East Java. Introduced in the 1950s by transmigrant laborers working on roads and plantations, *ronggeng* has since evolved into a hallmark of West Pasaman's cultural identity. <sup>14</sup> It is now performed at weddings, festivals, and government events, often incorporating musical and stylistic influences from Mandailing and Minangkabau traditions. Scholars such as Fernando and Ilyas have emphasized *ronggeng*'s significance as a symbol of local wisdom and multicultural harmony. It reflects not only aesthetic expression but also the social cohesion achieved through cultural integration. <sup>15</sup>

Social stratification in West Pasaman is equally diverse. Class, profession, and political ideology vary across the population, reflecting the region's pluralism. Professions range from agriculture and trade to education, civil service, and private enterprise. Political affiliations are similarly varied, contributing to an open and participatory democratic climate.

Importantly, this pluralism does not give rise to social fragmentation. Instead, it fosters tolerance and coexistence. As Nasiro argues, multicultural societies are often more resilient and inclusive, as their social interactions are multidirectional and grounded in mutual respect. In West Pasaman, this is evident in daily life—from shared marketplaces and mixed marriages to collective ceremonies and multilingual conversations. Ethnic and religious identities are not boundaries but bridges that connect diverse communities into a cohesive social fabric.

In sum, West Pasaman exemplifies a socially integrated, culturally rich, and pluralistic society. Its ability to sustain harmony amid diversity is rooted in deeply embedded traditions, interethnic cooperation, and respect for religious and cultural values. This social structure provides a vital foundation for navigating broader societal challenges, including the environmental and moral issues posed by illegal gold mining. <sup>16</sup>

# The Chronology of Illegal Gold Mining

Illegal gold mining in West Pasaman Regency—particularly in Kenagarian Pematang Panjang, Koto Balingka District—did not arise spontaneously. Rather, it was the outcome of deliberate planning and systematic coordination by actors who exploited local vulnerabilities. These operations took root by capitalizing on the simplicity, kinship-based loyalty, and limited economic awareness of the rural population. As Agus observes, villagers in this region often display strong communal bonds and professional dedication, yet possess limited knowledge of modern business practices, making them more susceptible to manipulation by external parties.<sup>17</sup>

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Mining operators strategically positioned themselves as contributors to local development, disguising their underlying interests. Through a series of calculated steps, they gradually introduced infrastructure and economic opportunities that gained the trust of residents and masked their real agenda.

One of the initial strategies involved constructing a permanent road to Lubuk Manggis along the Batang Batahan River. This development was presented as part of a broader effort to promote local tourism, with the addition of cafés, fish ponds, culinary spots, and rest facilities. The second step saw the private construction of a bridge linking Jorong Aek Nabirong to several previously isolated hamlets, including Jorong Taming Tonga, Silayang Julu, Tanjung Larangan, Sabajulu, and Sigantang. Previously, these areas relied on a simple suspension bridge for pedestrian access, limiting connectivity and economic activity. Third, land along the Batang Batahan River—once considered economically marginal—was purchased at inflated prices. For many residents, these land sales brought unprecedented financial relief, especially for families long burdened by poverty.

Behind this initiative was a central figure, anonymized here as NJ—a respected local who combined religious lineage with military prestige. As the son of a cleric and a retired TNI (Indonesian National Armed Forces) soldier, NJ commanded significant authority within the community. In rural Indonesian society, military and police figures are often perceived as symbols of power and discipline, surpassing the influence of religious leaders or civil servants in certain contexts. Leveraging this social capital, NJ promoted the philosophy of *Marsipature Huta Nabe* (building one's village independently), resonating deeply with residents of long-neglected hamlets beyond the river, whose isolation had persisted since Indonesia's independence.

The new roads and bridges were widely welcomed as long-overdue infrastructure, addressing real mobility challenges in a terrain dominated by mountains, hills, and forests. However, these projects also served as tactical entry points for illegal gold mining operations. Two primary access routes were established: the first followed the Batang Batahan River upstream through Jorong Aek Nabirong, Simaninggir, Ampung Pining, Paroman Guo, Aek Garingging, Panggambiran, and Rura Patontang. The second route cut through forests and steep hills, enabling the movement of excavators, trucks, motorcycles, and *dompeng* (portable gold dredging machines) to mining sites.

For most local residents, the environmental and economic implications of these new routes went unnoticed. Few were aware that the Batang Batahan region harbored significant gold deposits, a fact historically recognized when Koto Balingka was part of Sei Beremas. The name itself—Koto Balingka—refers to a place once known for its rich mineral reserves. This geological potential became the prime target of the orchestrators of illegal mining.

Over time, Kenagarian Pematang Panjang and Kenagarian Batahan Utara transformed into hotspots for unregulated gold extraction. The operations extended far beyond small-scale mining. A broad and interconnected network formed, involving local laborers, youth leaders, village officials, district administrators, elements of law enforcement, and business interests. These actors coordinated efforts to facilitate unauthorized mining, maintain logistical support, and evade legal scrutiny.

Field observations reveal that approximately 75 square kilometers along the Batang Batahan River have been repurposed as active mining zones. Key areas affected include Jorong Simaninggir, Aek Garingging, Paraman Guo, Panggambiran, and Rura Patontang. Access roads to these sites—informally named NL 1, NL 2, and NL 3—were constructed privately, without state funding or oversight. Though often framed as community development projects, these routes have enabled the steady movement of mining equipment and workers.

The environmental toll is increasingly visible. Large swathes of land have been stripped of vegetation. Mining pits, left unreclaimed, dot the landscape, posing both ecological and safety hazards. Sections of the Batang Batahan River—once crucial for irrigation, fishing, and drinking water—have been radically altered or destroyed. Vital ecosystems, including Lubuk Sipiongot, Parsariran (Salur), Lubuk Buaya, Lubuk Marojang, and Lubuk Simondan, have suffered irreversible damage.

What began as seemingly beneficial development has thus revealed itself as an environmental and social crisis. Under the guise of empowerment and accessibility, illegal mining networks have entrenched themselves in the region, exploiting both its natural wealth and its social fabric. The challenge moving forward lies in confronting not only the ecological damage but also the deeply embedded structures that allowed such operations to flourish unchecked.

# **Social Impacts of Illegal Gold Mining**

Illegal gold mining in West Pasaman Regency, particularly along the Batang Batahan River in Kenagarian Pematang Panjang, has evolved into a multifaceted crisis. These mining activities can be broadly categorized into two forms. The first involves large-scale operations that utilize heavy machinery such as excavators and *dompeng* machines, while the second relies on traditional manual techniques like panning (*dulang*), typically performed by small teams of local men and women.

The traditional method, largely perceived as low-impact, involves manual gold panning without the use of chemicals such as mercury. These small-scale practices are often viewed as less harmful to the environment and more sustainable in nature. However, in stark contrast, the mechanized operations have caused extensive environmental degradation. Heavy machinery employed in illegal mining operations runs on industrial diesel fuel, not standard gasoline. This contributes to oil spills and diesel leakage directly into the river system.

Findings from Wiriani et al. underscore the severe ecological consequences of these operations, including polluted riverbeds and dying aquatic life. <sup>18</sup> The once-clear Batang Batahan River has turned yellowish and oily, impacting both water quality and biodiversity. Comparable research by Ratnaningsih et al. in Jambi revealed similar effects, with mercury contamination in the Batang Hari Merangin River making the water unsafe for consumption. <sup>19</sup> Yunita et al. also emphasize that such environmental damage often leads to social disintegration among communities living along riverbanks, as the ecological balance they depend upon is fundamentally disrupted. <sup>20</sup>

# **Social Conflicts and Community Fractures**

Illegal gold mining has triggered complex social consequences, especially in Pematang Panjang. One of the most visible impacts is the emergence of both covert and overt conflicts between miners and local communities, particularly those living upstream and downstream along the river. While residents typically disapprove of these mining activities, their capacity to intervene is minimal. This underlying tension—described metaphorically as a "smoldering fire beneath the ashes"—reflects the community's silent frustration over irreversible environmental degradation.

This degradation includes deforestation, disruption of natural water sources, and the destruction of critical water absorption zones upstream. These changes significantly increase the risk of landslides and flash floods, endangering agricultural fields, rubber plantations, and corn farms downstream. Residential areas such as Tombang Padang, Bariba Nongo, Muaramais, Silayang, Lubuk Gobing, Aek Tolang, Kampung Baru, Kampung Musojid, and Desa Baru are increasingly vulnerable to flooding. While mining operators enjoy short-term financial gains, it is the broader community that bears the environmental and social costs.

Local resistance has begun to manifest more openly. Residents have voiced their grievances through letters to local and regional governments and have organized public demonstrations. This type of overt resistance, however, has yet to lead to significant policy changes or stronger enforcement measures. Research by Syafitri and Elsera notes that such tensions are not isolated to West Pasaman, with similar patterns observed in East Bintan District, Bintan Regency, and elsewhere, often resulting from clashes between economic ambition and indigenous welfare. <sup>21</sup> Rahmadi et al. classify these conflicts as "latent social conflict," reflecting unresolved structural inequalities akin to those witnessed along the Pepe River in Surakarta. <sup>22</sup>

# **Erosion of Agricultural Livelihoods and Growing Inequality**

Illegal mining has also deepened socioeconomic inequalities. The conversion of agricultural land into mining sites has led many villagers to abandon farming altogether. Traditional agriculture—particularly rubber and corn farming—requires long-term

investment and is susceptible to fluctuating market prices and seasonal disruptions. Farmers must wait months for returns: six months for general crops and at least four months for corn. Rubber farmers face additional challenges, including stagnant prices (around IDR 8,000/kg) and weather-dependent productivity.

In contrast, gold mining offers daily cash returns. An illegal miner asserts that miners typically earn between IDR200,000 to IDR300,000 per day, sometimes more than IDR1,000,000 on exceptionally productive days (AN, interview, June, 2024) This economic incentive has led to the emergence of a new wealthy class within rural communities. Many of these individuals have renovated homes, purchased land and vehicles, and adopted more consumerist lifestyles. Visible indicators of this newfound wealth include gold jewelry worn by miners' spouses at community gatherings and religious events.

However, this prosperity is precarious. The depletion of gold deposits is inevitable, and most mining sites are left abandoned without any restoration efforts. Once the resources are exhausted, the region risks entering a cycle of structural poverty. This looming socioeconomic downturn could affect not only current residents but also future generations, given the irreversible environmental damage and loss of agricultural viability.

# **Changing Social Norms and Moral Decline**

A particularly concerning impact of illegal gold mining is the growing erosion of moral and religious norms, especially among adolescents. The mining settlements have become hubs of unsupervised social interaction between young men and women, leading to the breakdown of traditional boundaries regarding *mahram* (permissible) and *non-mahram* (non-permissible) interactions. Behavior that was once considered taboo is now increasingly normalized, especially among youth.

This shift has contributed to a rising number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies (*manggampang*). Nafisa and Susilawati reported nine such cases in Kenagarian Air Bangis in 2023.<sup>23</sup> The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) in Kenagarian Pematang Panjang recorded five similar cases that year. The erosion of traditional oversight mechanisms—such as those exercised by *ninik mamak* (customary elders), *alim ulama* (religious scholars), and the *Kerapatan Adat Nagari* (KAN)—has left a vacuum in moral guidance.

Several factors contribute to this decline: the proliferation of unsupervised cafés and entertainment venues near riverbanks, increased social media exposure, and weak enforcement of customary sanctions. These venues have created private, unregulated spaces where youth can engage in risky behavior without consequence. Social media, too, introduces external cultural influences that challenge local values. Moreover, the enforcement of customary sanctions remains inconsistent. While the *tigo tungku sajarangan* (the triadic leadership model of religious, traditional, and administrative figures) is theoretically responsible for social regulation, its influence has waned due to the lack of formalized customary law. As Syatri et al. argue, Minangkabau customary

law is largely oral (*kaba*) rather than written, limiting its effectiveness in curbing contemporary social issues.<sup>24</sup>

# Narcotics, Alcohol, and Widening Social Decay

The circulation of narcotics and alcoholic beverages represents another alarming trend in mining communities. Religious and customary leaders in Kenagarian Pematang Panjang have raised concerns about the increasing use of such substances, particularly among youth and mining workers. This issue is intensified by the region's dual identity as both a mining hub and an emerging tourist destination, which increases its exposure to external actors and networks.

Accessibility is a key enabler of this problem. Whether by motorcycle, private car, or public transport, narcotics can easily be transported to and from the area. Its strategic location—at the border between Sampuran Village (Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra) and several *jorong* (hamlets) such as Taming, Silaping, and Ujung Gading—further enhances its role as a transit point for illegal substances. From these locations, drugs and alcohol flow toward Simpang Empat and eventually reach urban centers like Padang in West Sumatra (Interview with Ninik Mamak, July 20, 2024).

Empirical evidence from other regions supports the widespread nature of this issue. A study by Fringka in Kenagarian III Koto revealed similar patterns of drug and alcohol distribution,<sup>25</sup> as did research by Asrul Muda in Nagari Paraman Ampalu, West Pasaman.<sup>26</sup> These findings suggest that narcotic circulation is no longer confined to isolated areas but has become a broader regional concern.

According to Sari et al., several interlinked factors enable this phenomenon: weak law enforcement, inadequate parental supervision, and the declining authority of traditional institutions like the *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*.<sup>27</sup> The increasing connectivity between villages and hamlets has also allowed for faster and more extensive dissemination of narcotics. Without strong institutional checks and intergenerational guidance, this trend is likely to continue, further undermining community well-being.

# Institutional Role of Tigo Tungku Sajarangan in Mitigating Illegal Gold Mining in West Pasaman

The institutional existence of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*—the triadic leadership system comprising traditional leaders (*ninik mamak*), Islamic scholars (*alim ulama*), and intellectuals (*cadiak pandai*)—is not merely customary but is also formally legitimized by regional regulations in West Pasaman Regency. This formal recognition strengthens the institution's authority in guiding local governance, mediating conflict, and sustaining cultural resilience amid contemporary challenges, including the widespread proliferation of illegal gold mining.

Two key legal frameworks establish the legitimacy of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*: Regional Regulation (Peraturan Daerah, PERDA) No. 9 of 2000 on Nagari Governance and its updated version, PERDA No. 7 of 2018. Chapter III, Article 5 of PERDA No. 9 outlines the administrative structure of Nagari governance, highlighting the roles of elected *Wali Nagari* (village head), the Nagari Representative Council (*Badan Perwakilan Anak Nagari*), and the Nagari Customary and Religious Deliberation Council (*Badan Musyawarah Adat dan Syarak Nagari*), which includes *ninik mamak*, *alim ulama*, *cadiak pandai*, and *bundo kanduang* (female elders).

Recognizing the limitations of the earlier regulation to fully engage traditional, religious, and intellectual leadership within governance structures, the local government introduced PERDA No. 7 of 2018. Articles 15 through 18 of this regulation provide a detailed framework defining the institutional role and composition of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*:

- · Article 15 designates the triadic institution as both a representative and an executive entity within the *Kerapatan Adat Nagari* (KAN), Nagari governance, and judicial processes.
- · Article 16 defines *ninik mamak* as traditional leaders appointed by their respective clans as *pangulu adat* (customary chiefs).
  - · Article 17 identifies alim ulama as those proficient in Islamic knowledge.
- · Article 18 defines *cadiak pandai* as knowledgeable individuals capable of contributing intellectually to the community.

The elevation of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* to a legally codified role marks an important intersection between customary authority and formal governance, allowing for broader civic participation and integrative leadership across cultural, religious, and educational domains.<sup>28</sup>

#### Theoretical Framework: Structural-Functionalism

To understand the operational relevance of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*, this paper employs the lens of structural-functionalism, as elaborated by Robert K. Merton and his predecessors. While Herbert Spencer likened society to a complex organism where all parts work in synergy, Emile Durkheim emphasized the role of shared values and norms in achieving social order. Talcott Parsons added a systems-level approach with his AGIL model—Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, and Latency—to explain the stability of social systems.

Merton advanced this framework by introducing the concepts of manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are consciously and intentionally structured to produce desired social outcomes.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, latent functions are unintended yet crucial consequences of institutional behavior that contribute to social equilibrium.<sup>30</sup>

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In the context of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*, both manifest and latent functions are observable. Manifestly, the institution engages in governance-related duties such as dispute resolution, moral advocacy, and legal-cultural education. Latently, it preserves intergenerational wisdom, fosters communal identity, and anchors local responses to external disruptions—like the social and environmental crisis caused by illegal gold mining.

#### **Institutional Roles and Collaborations**

a. Ninik Mamak: Guardians of Custom and Land

The role of *ninik mamak* extends beyond ceremonial duties. As clan-based customary leaders, they serve as cultural custodians responsible for maintaining the integrity of *adat* (customary law) and mediating internal community affairs. Their authority is derived not only from tradition but also from their operational link to the *Kerapatan Adat Nagari* (KAN) and the *Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau* (LKAAM), which span from the sub-district to the provincial level.

Key responsibilities of *ninik mamak* include:

- 1. Upholding cultural practices and customs;
- 2. Acting as mediators in land disputes, particularly involving *ulayat* (communal) land;
- 3. Filtering harmful external influences;
- 4. Reinforcing religious and moral values through customary channels;
- 5. Raising awareness of environmental degradation caused by illegal gold mining.

Through collaboration with the *Wali Nagari* and KAN, *ninik mamak* serve as the first line of informal governance in rural areas, offering both preventative and corrective functions to reduce societal disruption.<sup>31</sup>

b. Alim Ulama: Moral and Religious Leadership

The second pillar, *alim ulama*, serves as a moral compass for the community, providing religious education and spiritual guidance. In West Pasaman, they collaborate with institutions such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the Kumpulan Da'i Nagari (KDN). Their role in Islamic preaching (*dakwah*) is structured around the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*—promoting virtue and preventing vice.

Their activities focus on:

- · Delivering sermons and religious talks at *majelis taklim* (study groups), Friday prayers, and communal gatherings;
  - · Publishing pamphlets and holding *pengajian ranting* (local Islamic discussions);
  - · Promoting environmental ethics grounded in Islamic principles, viewing nature

as a divine trust (amanah).

However, their influence remains largely moral rather than legal. As noted by one local  $da\ddot{i}$ , TN, the absence of punitive enforcement mechanisms renders their appeals less effective unless supported by formal legal and government action. (Representative of ulema, Interview, June 25, 2024) Studies on Lombok Barat<sup>32</sup> and East Java<sup>33</sup> came to a similar conclusion. This condition is to some degree inconsistent with the ulemas' effort to include environmental consideration in interpreting Islamic laws. A study on climate change in Banten shows that grass-root resilience seems to be more reliable.

#### c. Cadiak Pandai: Intellectual and Civic Engagement

The third component of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* is the *cadiak pandai*, or community intellectuals. These individuals often work in partnership with local NGOs such as PPSDM Saroha and Peduli Kampung Halaman, including diaspora-based organizations. Their contributions include:

- · Strengthening local community networks;
- · Advocating for environmental reclamation of abandoned mining sites;
- · Launching youth-centered environmental education programs;
- · Providing psychosocial support to families affected by mining disruptions.

This group plays a vital bridging role, translating local issues into policy-relevant narratives that can be communicated to government institutions and funding bodies. Their engagement enhances the community's capacity to mobilize both internal and external support in addressing illegal gold mining.

# **Limitations and Implementation Challenges**

While *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* holds both formal recognition and sociocultural authority, its functional effectiveness in curbing illegal gold mining has been significantly constrained. The key challenge lies in the insufficient integration between customary law and formal legal enforcement mechanisms. This institutional gap hampers the ability of customary leaders, religious scholars, and intellectuals to enforce sanctions against environmental violations or deter criminal economic behavior.

#### a. Weak Implementation of the Peradilan Adat Nagari

Regional Regulation No. 7 of 2018 mandates the establishment of a *Peradilan Adat Nagari* (Nagari Customary Court) within each Nagari to resolve disputes according to local customary law. Article 15 outlines that this court:

- · Operates under the jurisdiction of the *Kerapatan Adat Nagari* (KAN);
- · Uses traditional mediation processes such as bajanjang naiak, batanggo turun—

gradual negotiation from family to community level;

· Has authority to resolve conflicts over land (*pusako*) and titles (*sako*), enforce moral discipline, and issue decisions (*kato putuih*) based on consensus.

However, in practice, the court remains informal and lacks coercive power. Its procedures rely heavily on communal consensus and symbolic sanctions, such as public shaming, temporary social exclusion, and modest monetary fines. These measures, while culturally resonant, are often insufficient in the face of illegal mining operations that generate millions of rupiah in weekly revenue.

According to AN, a *ninik mamak* from Jorong Simaninggir, standard fines for environmental offenses—such as deforestation or polluting the Batang Batahan River—are capped at IDR 10,000,000 (approx. USD 640). This amount is insignificant when compared to the profits derived from illegal gold extraction. As a result, such penalties fail to function as credible deterrents (Interview, June 25, 2024).

#### b. Compromised Impartiality and Kinship Ties

A deeper structural issue arises from the sociocultural configuration of the community itself. *Peradilan Adat Nagari* personnel are predominantly *ninik mamak*, who often share kinship ties with those involved in mining. In West Pasaman, many mining workers are local: they may be relatives (*kahanggi*), elders (*barisan mora*), or in-laws (*anak boru*). This dense web of familial relations blurs the boundary between adjudicators and offenders, making strict enforcement of customary sanctions socially and politically delicate.

This condition undermines the perceived neutrality of customary courts and inhibits the enforcement of harsher penalties, even when violations clearly threaten communal well-being. Thus, while *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* embodies symbolic authority, it lacks the legal and psychological leverage necessary to challenge actors who wield both kinship protection and economic power.

#### c. Legal Fragmentation and Policy Gaps

The absence of codified customary law within district-level legal frameworks also restricts institutional effectiveness. While the *adat* system traditionally relies on oral transmission (*kaba*), the increasing complexity of social problems—particularly those involving transboundary environmental damage—demands a formal legal codification of customary sanctions. Without this, *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* remains disconnected from broader law enforcement mechanisms and unable to escalate cases to higher levels of adjudication.

This disjuncture is evident in the community's growing frustration. Protests, petitions, and online discourse criticizing illegal mining operations have intensified. Yet, formal responses from state institutions remain limited, reinforcing the perception that economic interests are prioritized over customary and environmental justice.

# The Rise of Economic Power over Customary Influence

One of the most significant sociological shifts observed in West Pasaman is the erosion of traditional authority in favor of economic influence. Illegal gold mining operators—many of whom originate from within the community—now hold disproportionate power due to their control over labor, land, and local wealth distribution.

#### a. The New Economic Elite

Mining entrepreneurs have rapidly transformed from community members into local elites. Their economic influence manifests in visible material upgrades: luxury homes, new vehicles, and expanded landholdings. This new wealth has elevated their social status, effectively supplanting the traditional role once held by *ninik mamak*, *alim ulama*, and *cadiak pandai* as central figures in village leadership.

Importantly, their wealth is not limited to symbolic consumption. These entrepreneurs also provide employment to dozens of workers and sponsor communal activities—roles traditionally performed by customary institutions. This economic patronage has made it difficult for the community to denounce their operations, despite awareness of the environmental and social costs.

#### b. The Decline of Traditional Influence

Comparative study in the United States confirm this global trend: religious and customary leaders are losing influence to economic actors who control capital and governance channels.<sup>36</sup> In Pasaman Barat, the traditional leadership once upheld by *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* now competes with informal networks formed around illicit economies. Mining entrepreneurs are not only wealthier but often more effective in mobilizing resources and influence.

This change has had several consequences:

- · Customary sanctions are increasingly seen as symbolic rather than enforceable;
- · Youth no longer view traditional leadership as aspirational;
- · Public respect is shifting from wisdom-based authority to wealth-based prestige.

This transformation signals a critical cultural juncture, where the foundations of *adat*-based governance are eroded by the allure and utility of economic prosperity.

The institutional presence of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*—an enduring triadic leadership model in Minangkabau society—remains central to the cultural and moral fabric of West Pasaman. Legally acknowledged through Regional Regulations No. 9/2000 and No. 7/2018, and supported by customary legitimacy, this institution operates at the intersection of tradition, religion, and intellectual engagement. However, its effectiveness in responding to contemporary challenges—most notably illegal gold mining—has been severely constrained by structural, legal, and sociocultural limitations.

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This paper finds that although *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* has successfully exercised both its manifest and latent functions as a traditional authority, its moral and cultural appeals are insufficient to curb the growth of illegal mining enterprises. The rise of informal economies, coupled with weak integration between customary sanctions and state legal enforcement, has shifted the balance of power from traditional leaders to economically influential actors. As a result, West Pasaman has experienced not only environmental degradation but also increasing social inequality, youth moral decline, and a weakening of intergenerational cultural transmission.

#### c. Legal and Institutional Recommendations

To revitalize the role of *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*, several structural reforms are needed:

- · Codify Customary Sanctions into Local Law: Regional governments should formally integrate *adat* provisions—especially those related to environmental protection—into binding legal instruments. This would enhance the legal standing of the *Peradilan Adat Nagari* and allow for enforceable sanctions against illegal activities.
- · Strengthen the Customary Court System: The *Peradilan Adat Nagari* must be operationalized not only as a symbolic institution but as a functional adjudicatory body. Training, resources, and partnerships with district courts can help bridge the gap between customary and formal legal systems.
- Create Accountability Mechanisms for Tigo Tungku Sajarangan: Given the potential for internal bias due to kinship ties, accountability measures should be established to ensure impartiality in handling mining-related violations. This may include external advisory boards or rotating leadership structures.

#### d. Socioeconomic Interventions

- Develop Alternative Livelihood Programs: One of the driving forces behind community participation in illegal gold mining is economic necessity. Sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, and cooperative-based enterprises should be promoted to provide viable alternatives, especially for youth and displaced farmers.
- · Environmental Reclamation and Education: Collaborative programs involving NGOs, local universities, and diaspora groups should focus on land rehabilitation, reforestation, and environmental education. These initiatives can be spearheaded by the *cadiak pandai* and serve as both employment and reformation tools.
- · Cultural Revitalization and Youth Engagement: The erosion of traditional values among younger generations is a serious concern. Intergenerational dialogue, cultural mentorship, and digital storytelling platforms could be used to reinforce pride in *adat* and reestablish the social relevance of traditional leaders.

#### e. Inter-Institutional Collaboration

Addressing the illegal gold mining crisis in West Pasaman cannot be achieved by *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* alone. The following strategic collaborations are recommended:

- · With Religious Institutions: Build stronger linkages with national and regional branches of MUI, Muhammadiyah, and NU to amplify environmental ethics as a component of Islamic teachings.
- · With Government Agencies: Regional development agencies and environmental authorities should formally include *ninik mamak*, *alim ulama*, and *cadiak pandai* in environmental governance boards and community-based monitoring systems.
- · With Law Enforcement: Establish multi-stakeholder enforcement task forces, ensuring that cultural leaders have a consultative voice in decisions regarding arrests, interventions, and policy enforcement in mining areas.
- The Minangkabau proverb "adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah" (custom is based on religion, and religion is based on the Qur'an) symbolizes the ideal of harmony between cultural heritage and religious values. *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* embodies this philosophy, serving as a moral, social, and cultural compass. However, as illegal gold mining challenges the ecological and ethical equilibrium of West Pasaman, it is evident that traditional institutions must evolve. Their survival depends not only on maintaining cultural relevance but also on building structural resilience, institutional integration, and economic foresight.

By transforming from symbolic custodians into proactive governance actors—aligned with legal, ecological, and economic imperatives—*Tigo Tungku Sajarangan* can reclaim its place at the heart of community leadership. It must be empowered not just to preserve the past, but to shape a more just, sustainable, and inclusive future.

#### **Conclusion**

Illegal gold mining in Kenagarian Pematang Panjang, Pasaman Barat Regency, has triggered profound social consequences, including overt and latent conflicts between miners and residents, widening economic disparities, and moral decline marked by increased cases of *manggampang* (out-of-wedlock pregnancies), substance abuse, and alcohol consumption. These disruptions stem from the conversion of agricultural land, forests, and riverbanks into mining zones. In response, *Tigo Tungku Sajarangan*—consisting of *ninik mamak*, *alim ulama*, and *cadiak pandai*—has collaborated with local institutions to promote moral advocacy, dialogue, and site reclamation. However, the *Peradilan Adat Nagari* remains limited by its informal, consensus-based structure and lack of codified legal authority, thus failing to deter ongoing mining activities.

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