

Revitalizing Local Village Wisdom as a Mechanism for Social Conflict Resolution amid Economic Change Pressures and Urban Cultural Penetration



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ABSTRACT

This study examines the revitalization of local village wisdom as a mechanism for social conflict resolution amid economic transformation and urban cultural penetration in rural communities. Rapid modernization, market integration, and urban cultural diffusion have weakened traditional values and social cohesion, increasing the potential for social conflict. This research aims to analyze the role of local wisdom in resolving conflicts, identify relevant forms of revitalization, and evaluate the effectiveness of customary mechanisms in maintaining social harmony. Using a qualitative approach with a literature study design, this study systematically reviews and synthesizes academic journals, books, and policy documents related to local wisdom, rural development, and conflict management. Data were collected from reputable databases and analyzed through thematic and content analysis. The findings indicate that local wisdom remains a culturally legitimate and adaptive mechanism for conflict resolution. Customary institutions, deliberative forums, and restorative practices emphasize reconciliation, collective responsibility, and social reintegration. Moreover, local wisdom demonstrates flexibility by integrating modern governance and legal elements without losing its core values. The study concludes that revitalizing local wisdom strengthens social cohesion, prevents prolonged conflicts, and supports sustainable rural development in the context of socio-economic change.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social changes in rural areas of Indonesia are increasingly influenced by rapid modernization, globalization, and economic transformation (Giddens, 2023; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). The processes of urbanization and industrialization have introduced new lifestyles that gradually displace traditional rural values (Santosa, 2011; Tjiptoherijanto, 1996). These shifts have weakened social cohesion and communal solidarity, which have long served as the foundation of rural social life (Koentjaraningrat,

2009; Putnam, 2000). This condition has contributed to the rising potential for social conflict due to differences in interests, access to resources, and changes in social structure (Bukraba-Rylska, 2024; Coser, 1998).

Local wisdom represents a system of values, norms, and social practices transmitted across generations as guidelines for regulating social relations within communities (Geertz, 1973; Keraf, 2010). In rural societies, local wisdom functions as an effective mechanism of social control that maintains harmony and social



stability (Sibarani, 2012; Suprpto, 2013). Values such as deliberation, mutual cooperation, and customary traditions play a crucial role in resolving conflicts peacefully and equitably (WIRADNYANI, 2024). However, the penetration of urban culture and global popular culture has contributed to the erosion of these local practices (Appadurai, 1996; Barker & Jane, 2016).

Changes in rural economic structures that increasingly orient toward market mechanisms have intensified competition among individuals and groups over economic resources (Chambers, 2014; Scott, 1976). Economic inequality resulting from these transformations has the potential to exacerbate social conflicts at the local level (Bebbington et al., 2006; Todaro & Smith, 2015). Moreover, external investments and economic activities often neglect local social and cultural norms (Hall et al., 2011; Li, 2020). This situation reduces opportunities for community-based, customary dialogue in addressing social problems (Fernando, n.d.; Satria, 2015).

The declining role of customary institutions and traditional community leaders further weakens the effectiveness of local conflict resolution mechanisms (Saptomo, 2010; WIRADNYANI, 2024). Younger generations in rural areas tend to adopt more individualistic values influenced by urban culture and digital media (Castells, 2011). As a result, deliberative and consensus-based conflict resolution practices are increasingly neglected. These conditions indicate that revitalizing local wisdom has become an essential requirement for sustaining rural social life.

Research on the revitalization of local wisdom as a mechanism for conflict resolution has become increasingly important amid the growing complexity of social problems in rural

communities (Bebbington et al., 2006; Satria, 2015). Strengthening local values is considered a viable alternative for conflict resolution that is more participatory, contextual, and sustainable than purely formal approaches (Ostrom, 1990). Furthermore, integrating local wisdom into rural social governance aligns with sustainable development agendas that emphasize social and cultural dimensions. Therefore, this study holds strategic importance in supporting inclusive and harmonious rural development.

Previous studies have demonstrated that local wisdom plays a significant role in reducing social conflicts within traditional communities. Research by Satria (2015) and Sulaiman (2018) found that customary institutions serve as effective mediators in agrarian and social conflicts. Studies by Bebbington et al. (2018) and Li (2014) further emphasize the importance of cultural contexts in community-based conflict management. However, most existing research has not sufficiently examined the challenges of revitalizing local wisdom under modern economic pressures and urban cultural penetration. Consequently, a research gap remains that requires more contextual and comprehensive investigation.

Based on the background and previous research findings, this study aims to analyze the role of local wisdom in rural communities in resolving social conflicts amid economic and cultural transformations. This study also seeks to identify forms of local value revitalization that remain relevant under contemporary social conditions. In addition, this research evaluates the effectiveness of customary mechanisms in maintaining social harmony in rural societies. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of culturally based rural development policies.



2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a literature study design. The qualitative approach is used to explore and interpret social phenomena related to the revitalization of local wisdom in rural communities as a mechanism for social conflict resolution amid economic transformation and urban cultural penetration. This approach allows researchers to understand social realities in a holistic and contextual manner based on existing scholarly sources (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2017). The literature study method is applied to systematically review, analyze, and synthesize academic publications, policy documents, and theoretical works relevant to the research topic, enabling the development of comprehensive conceptual insights (Snyder, 2019; Zed, 2018).

Data Sources

The data sources in this study consist of secondary data obtained from various academic and institutional publications. These include peer-reviewed national and international journal articles, scholarly books, research reports, government policy documents, and publications from reputable organizations related to local wisdom, social conflict, rural development, and cultural change. Data were collected through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Garuda using keywords including “local wisdom,” “social conflict,” “rural communities,” “urban culture,” and “economic transformation.” The selection of sources was conducted based on their relevance, credibility, publication year, and academic quality to ensure the validity and reliability of the data (Hart, 2018; Ridley, 2012).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through a systematic literature search and review process.

Relevant publications were identified, downloaded, and documented using reference management tools. Each selected source was critically read to identify key concepts, empirical findings, and theoretical perspectives related to the role of local wisdom in conflict resolution. The collected data were then organized and classified according to major thematic categories, such as forms of local wisdom, customary conflict resolution mechanisms, economic change impacts, and urban cultural influences. This process was conducted iteratively to ensure data completeness and consistency.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis in this study employed qualitative thematic analysis and content analysis techniques. Thematic analysis was used to identify, interpret, and construct meaningful patterns across the reviewed literature (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Meanwhile, content analysis was applied to examine documents and texts in depth to understand dominant narratives, perspectives, and arguments concerning local wisdom and social conflict resolution (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing conducted in a reflective and critical manner (Miles et al., 2020). To enhance data credibility, source triangulation was applied by comparing findings from different references, and peer debriefing was conducted to minimize interpretative bias.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Local Wisdom in Rural Social Conflict Resolution

Local wisdom in rural societies functions not merely as a moral guideline but as a living social institution that governs everyday interactions, power relations, and conflict management.



Unlike formal legal systems, which rely on codified rules and coercive enforcement, customary mechanisms are embedded in shared values, collective memory, and social obligations. This embeddedness gives them strong social legitimacy, which is crucial in conflict resolution processes.

Scholars argue that customary institutions operate through normative consensus, where compliance is ensured by moral sanctions, social pressure, and the desire to maintain communal harmony rather than fear of legal punishment (Bowen, 2003; Ostrom, 1990). In rural contexts, where social relations are dense and long-term, such mechanisms are often more effective than state-based legal systems.

Local wisdom typically manifests in:

- a. Deliberative forums (customary councils, village assemblies),
- b. Elders or traditional leaders as mediators,
- c. Symbolic communication (proverbs, ritual speech),
- d. Restorative sanctions aimed at reconciliation rather than retribution.

These elements collectively form what scholars describe as community-based restorative justice systems (Lederach, 1997a).

Economic transformation (market integration, land commodification, labor migration) and urban cultural penetration often intensify social tensions in rural areas. However, empirical studies show that local wisdom does not necessarily collapse under these pressures; instead, it often adapts and reconfigures itself.

Bowen (2003) demonstrates that in Indonesian rural societies, adat (customary law) continues to guide dispute resolution even as communities engage with modern state institutions. Rather

than being replaced, adat operates in parallel, offering solutions that are culturally resonant and socially accepted.

This adaptability stems from three key characteristics:

- a. Flexibility – customary norms are interpreted contextually rather than rigidly applied.
- b. Collective ownership – decisions are perceived as communal outcomes, reducing resistance.
- c. Relational focus – the goal is to repair social relationships, not merely resolve disputes.

After decades of armed conflict, rural communities in Aceh relied heavily on adat institutions to resolve land disputes, family conflicts, and inter-village tensions. Bowen (2003) documents how village elders (teungku and imeum mukim) mediated disputes through deliberation (musyawarah), emphasizing apology, compensation, and social reintegration rather than punishment.

These mechanisms proved effective because:

- a. They aligned with Islamic and local cultural values,
- b. They restored social trust after prolonged violence,
- c. They operated faster and with lower costs than formal courts.

In post-genocide Rwanda, the state revitalized Gacaca, a traditional community-based justice system, to address mass social conflict. Although adapted for a modern legal context, Gacaca relied on local norms of truth-telling, collective responsibility, and reconciliation.

(Clark, 2010) notes that Gacaca was effective in restoring social interaction in rural communities because it emphasized:

- a. Public participation,



- b. Moral accountability,
- c. Reintegration of offenders into society.

In rural Ghana, land conflicts arising from commercialization are frequently resolved through chiefs and customary councils rather than formal courts. (Ubink, 2008) finds that customary mediation remains preferred because it balances economic interests with social cohesion.

Across diverse contexts, empirical evidence confirms that local wisdom remains a powerful mechanism for social conflict resolution because it:

1. Is culturally legitimate,
2. Prioritizes reconciliation over punishment,
3. Adapts to socio-economic change,
4. Strengthens long-term social cohesion.

Rather than being an obstacle to modernization, local wisdom functions as a social stabilizer, ensuring that transformation does not lead to fragmentation or persistent conflict.

Local Wisdom in Responding to Economic Transformation and Urban Cultural Penetration

Rural communities across the Global South increasingly face structural pressures caused by market integration, land commodification, labor migration, and urban cultural diffusion. These processes often disrupt traditional social relations by shifting values from collective subsistence toward individual accumulation, efficiency, and competition (Harvey, 2007; Polanyi, 2002).

Empirical studies show that such transformations commonly generate new forms of social conflict, including:

- a. Land and resource disputes due to commercialization,

- b. Intergenerational tensions as youth adopt urban lifestyles,
- c. Erosion of customary authority caused by state or market dominance.

However, contrary to modernization theory—which assumes that traditional institutions inevitably decline—recent scholarship emphasizes that local wisdom is adaptive and transformative rather than static (Bebbington et al., 2004; Cleaver, 2017).

Local wisdom persists because it is contextually negotiated and socially embedded. Rather than rejecting modernity, rural communities selectively incorporate external influences while preserving core normative principles such as solidarity, reciprocity, and social balance.

Cleaver (2012) introduces the concept of institutional bricolage, explaining how communities combine customary norms with modern legal or administrative practices. In conflict resolution, this results in hybrid governance systems, where:

- a. Customary deliberation coexists with state law,
- b. Traditional leaders collaborate with local governments,
- c. Restorative justice principles complement formal ADR mechanisms.

This hybridity allows local wisdom to remain relevant amid rapid economic and cultural change.

In many Indonesian rural areas, adat institutions have adapted to economic liberalization and decentralization by collaborating with village governments. (Davidson & Henley, 2007) document how adat revival in post-Suharto Indonesia enabled communities to renegotiate authority over land and resources amid market



pressures.

Rather than resisting change, adat institutions:

- a. Mediated land disputes involving investors,
- b. Integrated formal ADR principles (mediation, consensus),
- c. Maintained legitimacy through cultural resonance.

In peri-rural Ghana, commercialization of land has intensified conflicts between local farmers, chiefs, and investors. (Ubink & Quan, 2008) show that customary land institutions adapted by formalizing dispute resolution procedures and engaging with statutory law.

Local councils of elders increasingly apply:

- a. Written agreements,
- b. Transparent mediation procedures,
- c. Compensation mechanisms aligned with market values.

(Andersson, 2002) demonstrates that rural-urban migration in Zimbabwe did not sever traditional ties. Instead, migrants maintained strong cultural obligations to their home villages, including participation in customary dispute resolution.

Urban exposure reshaped—but did not erase—local wisdom, leading to:

- a. New interpretations of kinship obligations,
- b. Expanded conflict arenas spanning rural and urban spaces,
- c. Continued reliance on elders for mediation.

In rural Nepal, economic pressures on forests and water resources increased conflict risks. Bebbington et al. (2004) show that indigenous institutions adapted by integrating donor-driven participatory governance models with local norms.

Customary leaders adopted:

- a. Participatory mapping,
- b. Consensus-based rule-making,
- c. Restorative sanctions.

Across contexts, evidence indicates that local wisdom responds to economic and urban pressures through selective adaptation. Its resilience is rooted in:

1. Normative flexibility,
2. Hybrid institutional arrangements,
3. Strong cultural legitimacy.

Rather than being an obstacle to modernization, local wisdom operates as a social buffering mechanism, preventing economic change from escalating into destructive conflict.

Table 1. Forms of Local Wisdom Revitalization in Contemporary Rural Communities

| No. | Form of Local Wisdom Revitalization | Description | Main Social Function |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 1 | Re-actualization of customary deliberation | Inclusive community dialogue involving elders, youth, and women | Peaceful conflict resolution and consensus building |
| 2 | Integration into local regulations | Incorporation of customary values into village or regional policies | Strengthened legitimacy and compliance |
| 3 | Transformation of traditional practices | Adaptation of mutual cooperation (e.g., gotong royong, soyo) to modern economic and managerial contexts | Social cohesion and collective resilience |
| 4 | Informal value transmission | Intergenerational transfer through family, elders, and community role models | Sustainability of local norms and harmony |



Effectiveness of Customary Mechanisms in Maintaining Rural Social Harmony

Customary mechanisms are widely regarded as effective in maintaining rural social harmony because they are grounded in restorative justice principles, collective responsibility, and long-term social relations. Unlike formal legal systems that prioritize rule enforcement and legal certainty, customary systems emphasize social repair, reconciliation, and moral accountability (Lederach, 1997b).

In rural societies, social relationships are enduring and interconnected through kinship, land tenure, and ritual obligations. As a result, unresolved conflicts risk disrupting not only individual relations but also collective stability. Customary mechanisms address this risk by:

- a. Promoting dialogue and consensus (musyawarah),
- b. Encouraging apology and compensation,
- c. Reinforcing shared moral values and collective identity.

Empirical studies consistently show that these features enhance voluntary compliance and reduce the recurrence of conflict (Merry, 1988).

The effectiveness of customary institutions largely depends on three interrelated factors:

1. Cultural Legitimacy

Customary authorities derive legitimacy from tradition, collective belief, and moral authority rather than state coercion. This legitimacy increases trust in dispute outcomes and acceptance of decisions (Merry, 1988).

2. Leadership Capacity of Traditional Authorities

Skilled elders or customary leaders act as mediators who understand both social norms and interpersonal dynamics. Their moral

credibility is crucial in persuading conflicting parties to accept reconciliation (Bowen, 2003).

3. Intergenerational Transmission of Customary Knowledge

The weakening of customary education among younger generations can reduce effectiveness. Where youth no longer understand adat norms, compliance declines and conflicts tend to escalate into formal legal arenas (Ubink, 2008).

In post-conflict Aceh, customary institutions (adat gampong) played a critical role in resolving land disputes, family conflicts, and minor criminal cases. Bowen (2003) documents how village elders used deliberation and restorative sanctions—such as public apology and compensation—to rebuild trust after prolonged armed conflict.

These mechanisms were effective because they:

- a. Reintegrated offenders into the community,
- b. Reduced reliance on formal courts,
- c. Reinforced collective norms of harmony and mutual respect.

Following the 1994 genocide, Rwanda revitalized the Gacaca courts, a traditional community-based justice system, to address massive social conflict. Clark (2010) finds that despite limitations, Gacaca was effective in restoring everyday social interaction in rural communities.

The effectiveness stemmed from:

- a. Community participation,
- b. Emphasis on truth-telling and reconciliation,
- c. Reintegration rather than long-term exclusion.

In rural and peri-urban Ghana, land conflicts caused by economic commercialization are frequently resolved through customary councils



led by chiefs. Ubink (2008) shows that customary mediation remains preferred over formal courts due to its perceived fairness and cultural relevance.

However, effectiveness declines where:

- a. Customary authority is contested,
- b. Youth and migrants reject traditional norms,
- c. Economic incentives undermine moral authority.

Among the Navajo Nation, customary peacemaking courts emphasize harmony (hozho), dialogue, and collective healing. (Zion & Yazzie, 1997) demonstrate that this system effectively resolves family and community disputes by prioritizing relational repair over punishment.

Across diverse cultural settings, evidence shows that customary mechanisms are effective in maintaining rural social harmony when they retain legitimacy, leadership capacity, and intergenerational continuity. Their restorative orientation makes them particularly suitable for rural societies where long-term relationships and collective identity are central.

However, their effectiveness is not automatic. It must be:

1. Reinforced through education and socialization,
2. Supported—but not dominated—by formal institutions,
3. Adapted to contemporary social and economic realities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that local wisdom plays a crucial role in maintaining social harmony and resolving conflicts in rural communities amid economic transformation and urban cultural

penetration. Customary institutions, traditional leaders, and deliberative practices function as culturally legitimate mechanisms that prioritize reconciliation, collective responsibility, and long-term social cohesion. Despite external pressures from modernization and market-oriented development, local wisdom has demonstrated strong adaptive capacity through flexible norms and hybrid governance arrangements. Rather than being displaced by formal legal systems, customary mechanisms continue to coexist and complement modern institutions. Therefore, the revitalization of local wisdom is essential for preventing social fragmentation and ensuring inclusive and sustainable rural development.

Practical Recommendations

Practically, local governments and community leaders should actively support the revitalization of customary institutions by integrating local values into village regulations and development programs. Capacity-building initiatives for traditional leaders and community mediators should be strengthened to enhance their conflict management skills. In addition, educational programs and cultural activities should be promoted to facilitate intergenerational transmission of local values, particularly among youth. Collaboration between customary authorities and formal legal institutions is also necessary to ensure that conflict resolution processes remain fair, transparent, and socially accepted.

Research Recommendations

For future research, empirical field-based studies are recommended to examine the practical implementation of local wisdom in specific rural contexts. Comparative studies across regions and cultures may provide deeper insights into different adaptation patterns of customary institutions. Further research may



also explore the impact of digital media and migration on the sustainability of local wisdom. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches could be applied to measure the long-term effectiveness of customary mechanisms in reducing social conflict and enhancing community resilience.

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