

Empowering Nagari Through Diaspora: The Collective Capital of Minangkabau Migrant Organisations

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the role of Minangkabau diaspora organisations as collective actors in empowering nagari (indigenous villages) in West Sumatra. The deeply rooted merantau (outmigration) tradition in Minangkabau culture has fostered expansive social and cultural networks that have evolved into institutionalised diaspora organisations. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research draws on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis of organisations such as IKSP, PKDP, and S3. Findings reveal that these organisations maintain strong institutional frameworks and efficiently manage collective capital, encompassing social, cultural, and economic resources. This capital is mobilised through participatory and transparent development programs rooted in musyawarah nagari (local deliberative councils), focusing on infrastructure, education, productive economy, and cultural preservation. The programs reflect not only community-driven development but are also deeply informed by Minangkabau customary values and Islamic principles. The study concludes that Minangkabau diaspora organisations serve as strategic transnational actors in local development. Their contributions extend beyond financial remittances to embody social piety and collective agency. The article offers a theoretical contribution to diaspora-led development discourse, highlighting the relevance of institutionalised gotong royong (mutual cooperation) within localised governance systems.

Keywords: *Minangkabau, diaspora, migrant.*



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1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction The Minangkabau are recognised as one of Indonesia's major ethnic groups with a deeply rooted tradition of migration (merantau), embedded both historically and culturally. This practice is not merely a geographical movement in search of livelihood; rather, it is a core element in the social construction and collective identity of Minangkabau society (Naim, 1979; Marta, 2014). For Minangkabau men, merantau serves as a rite of passage—a symbol of maturity, social responsibility, and readiness to contribute meaningfully to their kaum (clan) and nagari (indigenous village). As the Minangkabau proverb states, “karantau madang dihulu, babuah balun babuah, marantau bujang dahulu, di kampuang paguno balun”, emphasising that migration is a journey toward honor and social dignity. This tradition of outward mobility has given rise to expansive Minangkabau social and cultural networks that transcend geographical boundaries. Over time, these networks have evolved into formal

diaspora organisations that not only serve as spaces for cultural solidarity and identity reinforcement but also act as socio-economic engines for nagari development (Eliza & Pratama, 2019; Levitt, 1998).

The role of these diaspora organisations is particularly critical in addressing development gaps that cannot be fully bridged by state resources. In the West Sumatra context, more than 60% of nagari remain heavily dependent on Dana Desa (Village Funds), which are limited in scope and insufficient to meet broader strategic development needs (Bappeda Sumbar, 2022). The contributions of the Minangkabau diaspora extend beyond financial remittances to include social piety—a collective commitment to the welfare of their homeland. Organisations such as the Ikatan Keluarga Sungai Pua (IKSP), Persatuan Keluarga Daerah Pariaman (PKDP), and Solok Saiyo Sakato (S3) have emerged as institutional actors driving development initiatives based on what Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (2000) conceptualise as collective capital. This includes economic capital (social funds, cooperatives, scholarships), social capital (inter-regional networks, collective trust), and cultural capital (preservation of the arts, customary values, and religious traditions).

Research by Eliza and Pratama (2019) indicates that following the Gebu Minang (Gerakan Seribu Minang) movement in 1982, Minangkabau diaspora organisations have undergone a significant process of institutionalisation. What initially relied on spontaneous donations has transformed into modern institutions characterised by structured work programs, financial reporting systems, and participatory decision-making mechanisms. Events such as musyawarah besar nagari (grand village deliberation meetings) and pulang basamo (collective homecomings) have evolved from mere cultural ceremonies into deliberative instruments for planning, evaluating, and funding local development. In practice, organisations like IKSP have established Rumah Belajar (Learning Centers) and funded tahfiz (Qur'anic memorisation) teachers. Similarly, S3 Jakarta has developed nagari-based cooperatives to facilitate microcredit access for local entrepreneurs, while PKDP Jakarta has supported the Tabuik Festival in Pariaman by organising rabab (traditional violin) arts training for youth. These initiatives demonstrate that the Minangkabau diaspora community functions not only as a financial resource but also as a transnational actor in local development (Portes, Escobar, & Walton, 2007).

In the broader Minangkabau sociocultural context, diaspora organisations represent a modern institutionalisation of the long-standing collectivist ethos inherent in traditional society. Organisations such as IKSP, Ikatan Keluarga Bukittinggi Agam (IKBA), S3, and PKDP serve as representative bodies for their respective nagari communities in the diaspora, actively harnessing economic, intellectual, and cultural potential. These organisations reinforce the Minangkabau values of sakato (consensus) and kinship, which form the social foundation connecting the homeland (ranah) with the diaspora (rantau). Field data show that the role of these diaspora organisations extends beyond material remittances to encompass systematic and sustainable contributions. In an interview with the Chairman of IKSP Jakarta (October 17, 2023), he stated,

"Every year we design work programs tailored to the needs of the nagari back home—such as school construction support, road development, scholarships for religious students, and backing for local cultural festivals." These work plans are formulated through Musyawarah Besar Nagari, a collective forum that brings together stakeholders from both ranah and rantau. Such contributions are particularly significant given the persistent budgetary limitations faced by nagari governments.

A 2022 report by Bappeda Sumbar (the West Sumatra Regional Development Planning Agency) noted that over 60% of nagari in the province rely heavily on Village Funds (Dana Desa) as their main source of development financing. These funds, however, are limited in scope and insufficient to support medium-term strategic development programs. In this context, Minangkabau diaspora organisations have emerged as alternative development partners capable of addressing financing gaps through community-based approaches (Bappeda Sumbar, 2022). Moreover, the tradition of pulang basamo—a mass homecoming event organised by diaspora associations during Eid or major customary ceremonies such as batagak penghulu (the inauguration of traditional leaders)—serves not only as a cultural reunion

but also as a strategic opportunity for resource consolidation and redistribution. In an interview with a community leader from Nagari Lubuk Jantan, Tanah Datar (September 24, 2023), it was stated that,

“Every pulang basamo, the diaspora organisations bring programs for educational support and skills training for the youth. They don’t just return with money—they bring change.”

Earlier research by Eliza and Pratama (2019) confirms that since the launch of the Gebu Minang movement in 1982, the participation of Minangkabau migrants in nagari development has evolved from sporadic donations into a formal institutional system. This includes structured annual work plans, financial accountability, and performance reporting—demonstrating the institutionalisation of diaspora efforts and the sustainability of their contributions. The project management maturity of these organisations is evident in initiatives such as the construction of rumah tahfidz (Qur’anic boarding schools) and the digitalisation of madrasah led by the Ikatan Keluarga Tanjung Bonai (IKTB) in Payakumbuh, in collaboration with alumni based in Bandung and Yogyakarta. These projects not only provide physical infrastructure but also involve knowledge transfer through the deployment of young tahfidz instructors from the diaspora (IKTB Document, 2022). In the economic sector, organisations like S3 Jakarta have established savings and loan cooperatives for nagari communities in Solok Regency. According to its chairperson (Interview, October 12, 2023), the cooperative offers affordable financing access to local MSMEs with interest rates significantly lower than those charged by formal financial institutions.

This illustrates a broader shift from merely consumptive aid toward productive, community-based economic empowerment. Minangkabau diaspora organisations are also actively involved in cultural preservation. For example, observations during the 2023 Tabuik Piaman Festival in Pariaman revealed the central role played by PKDP Jakarta, which acted not only as the main sponsor of the event but also as the organiser of rabab (traditional Minangkabau music) training for local youth. This demonstrates that beyond economic initiatives, diaspora organisations also bear the responsibility of safeguarding Minangkabau cultural heritage, ensuring its vitality amidst the currents of modernity. What is particularly noteworthy is that all these processes are conducted in accordance with the principle of musyawarah mufakat (deliberative consensus), which functions not only as a customary norm but also as a participatory leadership model. As emphasised by a central board member of IKSP (Interview, October 17, 2023),

“Every assistance decision must be the result of joint deliberation between ranah and rantau, because the development we support is not only about infrastructure, but also about strengthening the social systems of nagari communities.”

Thus, Minangkabau diaspora organisations are not merely cultural entities preserving ethnic identity; they are also dynamic social institutions that mobilise collective capital for sustainable development. Their role becomes even more critical amid regional fiscal constraints, limited access to national development programs, and the urgent need for inclusive, community-driven empowerment models. Based on this context, the present article aims to critically and systematically examine how Minangkabau diaspora organisations operate as collective entities in accumulating and distributing collective capital for the empowerment of nagari. The analysis focuses on the types of contributions made by diaspora organisations to local development, their organising strategies, and the integration of customary and Islamic values into the institutional framework of modern gotong royong (mutual cooperation).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To comprehensively understand how Minangkabau diaspora organisations play a strategic role in nagari empowerment, this article adopts a complementary multi-theoretical approach. The selected theoretical perspectives not only explain the types of capital possessed by diaspora communities but also highlight how this capital is mobilised within modern institutional structures and embedded local

value systems. Conceptually, this study is grounded in theories of social and cultural capital, which help explain the collective resources that underpin diaspora organisations. The concepts of social remittances and transnationalism are employed to examine how migrant ideas and practices influence social transformation in their places of origin. Furthermore, the theories of embeddedness and collective efficacy provide the foundation for understanding the role of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and community solidarity within institutional contexts. Lastly, the approaches of diaspora philanthropy and community-driven development (CDD) enrich the analytical framework by framing participatory development models that are rooted in local values and informed by the global capacities of diaspora actors.

Social and Cultural Capital in the Diaspora Pierre Bourdieu (1986) posits that social structures are shaped by three primary forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Social capital comprises relational networks, trust, and shared norms that enable coordination and collaboration within a community (Putnam, 2000), while cultural capital refers to knowledge, values, skills, and symbolic practices inherited and reproduced within social groups. In diaspora contexts, the accumulation of social and cultural capital often transcends geographical boundaries and takes on a transnational character. Recent research by Adeola and Evans (2020) demonstrates that African diaspora communities harness social networks for collaborative local development, grounded in their cultural value systems. This finding aligns with the case of the Minangkabau diaspora, which mobilises both customary and religious values as collective resources for nagari development.

2.1 Social Remittances and Transnationalism

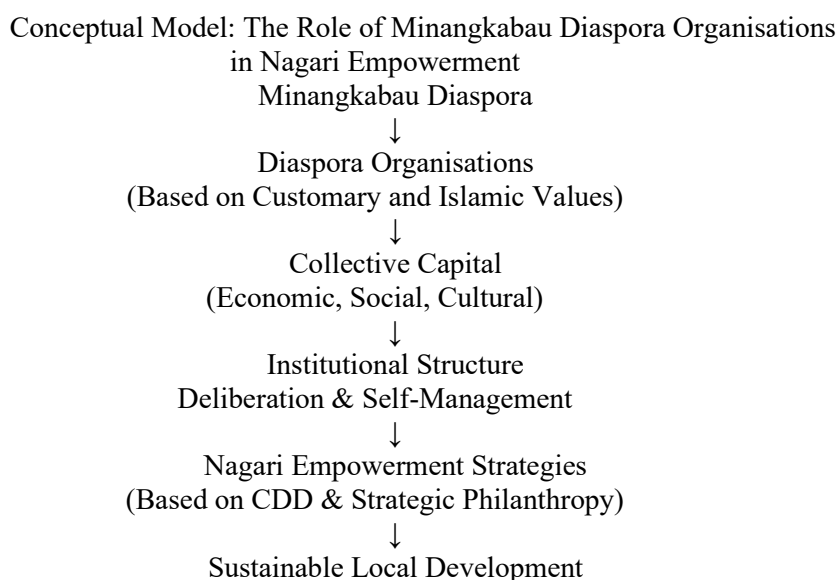
Levitt (1998) introduced the concept of social remittances to describe the ideas, practices, and norms that migrants transmit back to their communities of origin. These include forms of governance, work ethics, educational strategies, and development models. Within Minangkabau diaspora organisations, social remittances manifest in practices such as participatory decision-making (*musyawarah*), the structured management of zakat (Islamic almsgiving), and religious education programs such as tahfiz schools. Portes, Escobar, and Walton (2007) further developed the theory of transnationalism, emphasising the simultaneous embeddedness of migrant communities in both host and home countries through sustained social and organisational ties. In this framework, diaspora organisations are not passive conduits of remittances but active agents of institutional and cultural transfer. More recently, Brandhorst, Heins, and Müller (2020) argue that diasporas have increasingly become legitimate actors in local development policy-making. This perspective is highly relevant to Minangkabau diaspora organisations such as IKSP and PKDP, which not only provide financial support but also facilitate the transmission of social values, cultural knowledge, and governance strategies to their nagari of origin.

2.2 Mutual Cooperation as a Social Institution

In Minangkabau tradition, the principle of *gotong royong*—mutual cooperation—is embodied in the cultural concepts of *sakato* (consensus) and *bajalan barito* (collective action). Today, this traditional practice has undergone a transformation into modern social institutions such as village-based cooperatives, deliberative forums, and community zakat management systems. Granovetter's (1985) theory of embeddedness explains that economic and social actions are deeply rooted in relational networks and community norms. This theoretical lens helps to clarify why Minangkabau diaspora organisations are particularly effective in driving community-based development: their activities are grounded in trust, shared values, and strong social ties. Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) introduced the concept of collective efficacy, which refers to a community's capacity to take collective action based on mutual trust and shared norms. Recent studies, such as Van der Have and Rubalcaba (2021), affirm that diaspora communities with strong normative frameworks and participatory systems are more likely to generate sustainable and adaptive development outcomes, especially in times of crisis. The Minangkabau case illustrates how a culturally embedded ethic of mutual cooperation has been institutionalised in diaspora organisations, reinforcing their legitimacy and social cohesion while enhancing their ability to mobilise resources for collective development.

2.3 Diaspora Philanthropy and Community-Driven Development (CDD)

The community-driven development (CDD) model emphasises the active participation of local communities in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of development initiatives (World Bank, 2003). Within this framework, Minangkabau diaspora organisations have informally implemented CDD principles through community forums such as *musyawarah nagari*, *pulang basamo* events, and self-managed development programs. These practices align with the concept of strategic diaspora philanthropy, which emphasises data-driven approaches, measurable outcomes, and social impact (Johnson, 2007). Rather than simply donating funds, diaspora actors strategically allocate resources based on community needs, guided by participatory governance and cultural legitimacy. Brinkerhoff's (2022) recent research demonstrates that diaspora groups with formal structures, participatory mechanisms, and strong ethical commitments are especially effective in supporting inclusive and adaptive development, particularly in contexts with limited state capacity. In the case of the Minangkabau diaspora, philanthropy is not only a financial gesture but a culturally grounded act of social responsibility—integrating customary values (*adat*) and Islamic principles in the effort to empower *nagari* from the ground up.



The conceptual model that illustrates the role of Minangkabau diaspora organisations in nagari empowerment reveals a strong interconnection between *merantau* cultural traditions, social capital, and community-based development. The Minangkabau diaspora acts as a key agent whose engagement is rooted in *merantau*—a cultural tradition that forms both a collective identity and a source of social motivation. Grounded in customary (*adat*) and Islamic values, the diaspora has established migrant organisations that serve as institutional platforms for managing collective capital—economic, social, and cultural. These forms of capital are then mobilised through institutional structures that prioritise deliberative decision-making and self-management, creating democratic and participatory governance mechanisms. Within this framework, diaspora organisations formulate and implement nagari empowerment strategies that align with the principles of community-driven development and diaspora philanthropy. These strategies aim to foster sustainable local development by encouraging active community participation and promoting local wisdom. Thus, Minangkabau diaspora organisations function not only as managers of capital but also as development catalysts, integrating cultural and religious values into the broader process of nagari empowerment.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon concerning the role of Minang diaspora organisations in empowering nagari in the Minang

region (Creswell, 2014). The research design is a multiple case study focusing on the organisations IKSP, PKDP, and S3, which allows for a contextual exploration of the social and institutional dynamics within each organisation (Yin, 2018). The research sites include Jakarta, Pekanbaru, Padang, Batam, as well as the original nagari such as Sungai Pua, Lubuk Jantan, and Koto Baru. Key informants consist of diaspora organisation administrators, customary leaders, nagari government officials, and beneficiary community members, selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 informants, participatory observations during pulang basamo events and Musnag meetings, as well as organisational document analysis. All data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data credibility was ensured through source and method triangulation, as well as member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), while dependability, confirmability, and transferability were reinforced through systematic documentation, direct quotations, and rich contextual presentation of the social setting.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Collective Capital and Empowerment Strategies

Collective capital constitutes a fundamental pillar of the success of Minang diaspora community organisations in functioning as drivers of development and socio-cultural strengthening. In this context, collective capital refers not only to financial resources but also to social and cultural capital, which serve as the primary foundation for mobilising resources and building shared capacity (Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986). The social capital embedded in kinship networks and regional solidarity provides strong access for organisation members to trust one another and collaborate effectively. This is reflected in the open communication patterns and consensus deliberation mechanisms practiced within the organisations, consistent with the Minangkabau local wisdom that emphasises deliberation and consensus in decision-making (Azra, 2001). As stated by a PKDP administrator during an interview:

"We always emphasise the importance of mutual trust and mutual assistance, as these are our main capital to build synergy for collective progress." (Interview, 2023)

From a cultural capital perspective, Minangkabau customary values such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and balimau (ritual purification) internalised by organisation members serve as strong emotional and normative bonds. According to Schein (2010), these deep-seated cultural values shape member behavior that consistently prioritises collective interests over individual ones, thereby reinforcing social cohesion and a spirit of togetherness in organisational activities. The empowerment strategies employed by the diaspora organisations also demonstrate an integration of community empowerment theory, which emphasises capacity building through training, mentoring, and the formation of supportive networks (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). For instance, PKDP regularly conducts entrepreneurship and financial management training for its members to optimise their contributions to hometown development. This is reinforced by the statement of one administrator:

"We want our members not only to be able to provide assistance but also to be economically independent, so their contributions can be more sustainable." (Interview, 2023)

Thus, collective capital — encompassing social, cultural, and economic capital — is managed synergistically within a sustainable empowerment framework aimed at strengthening members' capacities as well as developing their origin communities.

4.2 Modern Gotong Royong Institutionalisation

The institution of gotong royong within Minang diaspora community organisations has undergone a transformation from traditional practices to an adaptive and structured modern institutional system. The principle of gotong royong, which has long been a hallmark of Minangkabau culture, is now

formally organised through legal entities, statutes and bylaws (AD/ART), as well as transparent and accountable fund and program management mechanisms. This aligns with institutional theory, which emphasises the importance of formal structures and rules as a basis for organisational legitimacy in changing social contexts (Scott, 2014). This modern gotong royong institutionalisation facilitates more effective coordination and collaboration among members, while also ensuring the sustainability and continuity of social and development programs. As stated by a chairman during an interview:

"We establish clear rules and reporting mechanisms so that gotong royong is not just a spirit, but also measurable and accountable." (Interview, 2023)

This mechanism enables the organisation to manage resources efficiently and implement programs with broad impact in their hometowns, such as the construction of public facilities, education, and healthcare. The combination of gotong royong values with modern management systems strengthens the organisation's capacity to face contemporary challenges while preserving cultural roots as a source of moral strength. Putnam's (2000) social capital theory is particularly relevant here, as it highlights how social networks bound by norms and trust can enhance coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In Minang diaspora organisations, this social capital is manifested in the form of solidarity and social responsibility realised through organised and planned gotong royong activities. Overall, the modern institutionalisation of gotong royong in Minang diaspora organisations represents a creative adaptation between tradition and modernity, which reinforces social resilience and organisational capacity to drive sustainable community development and empowerment.

4.3 Minang Diaspora as a Preservation Vehicle in Historical Context

The Minang diaspora is not merely a community of migrants managing economic and social capital but also serves as a crucial agent in the preservation and dissemination of Islamic values as an integral part of Minangkabau civilisation. Since the early phases of Minang migration, which is strongly rooted in the integration of Islam and adat (customs based on Islamic law, Islamic law based on the Qur'an), the diaspora has functioned as an important means for reinforcing religious identity alongside cultural civilisation. Historically, Minang migration, which began in the 17th century and expanded significantly during the Dutch colonial era, carried the mission of spreading Islamic teachings while preserving Minang traditions in the diaspora (Azra, 2004). This is evident in the roles played by Minang migrant figures who became ulama (Islamic scholars), educators, and community leaders across various regions, while also establishing Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren and madrasahs. In the modern context, diaspora organisations such as IKSP and PKDP continue this legacy by actively supporting the construction of tahfiz houses, Qur'an dissemination, and strengthening religious education in the nagari. As stated by the IKSP Secretary:

"Our role is not only to build physical and economic infrastructure but also to maintain and spread Islamic values through education and religious activities both in the diaspora and in the homeland" (Interview, January 10, 2023).

This contribution reflects the historical continuity of Minangkabau Islamic civilisation that positions the diaspora as a key actor in preserving religious identity and values, which simultaneously become a cohesive socio-cultural force. From a civilisational theory perspective, Huntington (1996) argues that civilisations are formed not only by social structures but also by religious and cultural values that are inherited and adapted across various social contexts. The Minang diaspora exemplifies this theory, where Islam intertwined with Minang adat serves as both a moral foundation and a cultural resource that strengthens the migrant community in facing social and economic dynamics in the diaspora. Thus, the Minang diaspora functions as a historical and contemporary vehicle connecting Islamic tradition and Minangkabau civilisation, not only preserving ancestral heritage but also adapting these values to meet the challenges of the modern era. The strengthening of religious and cultural networks enhances social cohesion and legitimises the diaspora socially as a living and evolving subject of civilisation.

5 CONCLUSION

This article asserts that Minang diaspora organisations are not merely cultural diaspora entities but also key local development actors playing strategic roles in empowering their nagari (traditional villages). Through decentralised yet interconnected institutional structures, organisations such as IKSP, PKDP, and S3 successfully manage and accumulate collective capital—economic, social, and cultural—to drive sustainable development in their hometowns. Their empowerment strategies are grounded in nagari deliberation, active participation, and modern gotong royong that blends customary and Islamic values. The programs they implement address not only infrastructure but also social institutional strengthening, education, cultural preservation, and community-based productive economies. In the context of fiscal constraints faced by nagari governments, diaspora organisations emerge as adaptive, resilient, and socially legitimate alternative development partners. Therefore, partnerships between Minang diaspora organisations and local governments should be strengthened as a form of synergy between local and global forces in sustainably developing Ranah Minang.

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