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THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITIES IN SUNGAI AUR DISTRICT, WEST PASAMAN REGENCY

AULIA RAHMI PUTRI¹, AZMI FITRISIA², PAUS ISKARNI³, FADILLA
SYAHRIANI⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Padang State University

CONTACT

Correspondence Email:
aularahmi.putri2001@gmail.com

Address: Jalan Prof. Dr.
Hamka, Air Tawar, Kota
Padang, Kode Pos: 25171

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to analyze the socioeconomic dynamics of the community in Sungai Aur District, West Pasaman Regency, from a historical perspective. A qualitative research method was employed, utilizing interviews, observation and documentation. The findings indicate that in the initial stages of the transmigration program, the community received agricultural land for cultivation to improve economic well-being. However, many residents planted oil palm without adequate knowledge, influenced by the economic success of surrounding areas. Recognizing the geographical unsuitability, some community leaders encouraged the cultivation of more appropriate crops like coffee. Conversely, a portion of the community chose to sell their land to newcomers, thereby losing their primary assets and transitioning to agricultural laborers. This highlights the importance of land management strategies and human resource capacity building in supporting the success of transmigration programs.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the Pasaman Barat Regency Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2025, Pasaman Barat Regency is astronomically located between 0°33' North Latitude and 0°11' South Latitude, and between 99°10' and 100°04' East Longitude. It is notably traversed by the equator (0° latitude). The total land area of Pasaman Barat Regency is approximately 3,887.77 km², with an additional maritime area of 800.47 km² and a coastline stretching 152 km (Hayani dkk., 2022). According to the Pasaman Barat Regency Statistics Agency (BPS) for 2025, Pasaman Barat Regency is situated

astronomically between 0°33' North Latitude and 0°11' South Latitude, and between 99°10' and 100°04' East Longitude. It's noteworthy that the equator (0° latitude) passes through this region. The regency encompasses a total land area of approximately 3,887.77 km², supplemented by a maritime area of 800.47 km² and a coastline extending 152 km (Munir dkk., 2022)

Sungai Aur District in Pasaman Barat Regency has been a designated destination for the government's transmigration program since the New Order era (Bahar dkk., 2020). During the New Order era, the transmigration program underwent a significant paradigm shift. It was no longer solely viewed as an effort to achieve population redistribution. Instead, transmigration became regarded as a strategic government policy aimed at addressing national demographic challenges (Chalid, 2024). Through Law No. 3 of 1972, the transmigration program was directed towards several key objectives: improving the welfare of transmigrants and surrounding communities, accelerating and equalizing regional development, and strengthening national unity and cohesion (Adam, 2021). As social dynamics and national policies evolved, Law No. 3 of 1972 was subsequently refined by Republic of Indonesia Law No. 29 of 2009 concerning Transmigration. Under this new regulation, the objectives of transmigration remained consistent: to improve the welfare of both transmigrants and local communities, to achieve equitable development across regions, and to strengthen national integration. This regulatory shift demonstrates that transmigration is no longer solely viewed as a form of population redistribution, but also as a comprehensive and sustainable instrument for development (Legiani dkk., 2018).

Consistent with its objectives, the transmigration program remains relevant in the current era of regional autonomy. Republic of Indonesia Law No. 29 of 2009 emphasizes that transmigration, as a form of population mobility, fosters interaction between cultural groups. Therefore, social guidance is essential to accelerate community integration and acculturation. This process contributes to strengthening national unity, accelerating equitable development, improving community welfare and solidifying national resilience, all based on the principles of the archipelagic outlook (*wawasan nusantara*) (Legiani dkk., 2018). The transmigration program in this region aims to achieve population distribution, regional development and improve community welfare by utilizing new lands, previously consisting of forests or empty plots (Chalid, 2024). According to the Pasaman Barat Regency Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2025, Sungai Aur District spans an area of approximately 420.16 km² with a population of around 38,396 people. The district is divided into several *nagari* (traditional villages), including Nagari Sungai Aua, which served as the parent *nagari* before its expansion into several provisional *nagari*. This region also encompasses two areas of traditional land, Ranah Minang and Mandailing, both located near the interior of the Malintang Mountains.

Sungai Aur District in Pasaman Barat Regency possesses a unique and dynamic socio-economic landscape. As a region where the majority of residents rely on agriculture and local trade, Sungai Aur has undergone various significant social and economic transformations over time. These changes have been influenced not only by internal community factors but also by government policies, infrastructure development and interactions with other regions. The socio-economic dynamics of this community reflect a complex process of adaptation and transformation, encompassing shifts in livelihood patterns, social structures, and inter-group relationships. A study of these dynamics is crucial for understanding how the people of Sungai Aur District manage resources, confront economic challenges and maintain their social identity within the context of evolving times. This research will comprehensively examine the socio-economic dynamics of the Sungai Aur District community from a historical perspective.

The objective of this research is to examine the socio-economic dynamics of the community in Sungai Aur District, Pasaman Barat Regency, using a historical approach. This study aims to comprehend the changes that have occurred in the community's social and economic structures over time, as well as to identify the historical factors influencing these processes. By tracing government policies, such as the transmigration program, this research also seeks to explain how policy interventions have impacted the patterns of life, livelihoods and welfare levels of the local community. Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to contribute academically to understanding the processes of socio-economic change in local communities and to serve as a foundation for formulating more contextual and sustainable development policies.

II. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach. Qualitative research aims to holistically understand phenomena experienced by research subjects—such as their behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions. It achieves this through descriptions in words and language, within a natural, specific context and by utilizing various natural methods (Noor, 2020). This qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the Socio-Economic Dynamics of the Community in Sungai Aur District, Pasaman Barat Regency. The research was conducted in Sungai Aur District, Pasaman Barat Regency. According to Fiantika et al (2022) In qualitative research, data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participant observation and documentary studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected informants, including oil palm farmers, community leaders, and *nagari* officials, to gather in-depth and contextual data. Observation involved directly observing the community's social and economic activities in daily life to understand the real-world situation. Documentation was used to obtain secondary data from archives, *nagari* reports and other official documents related to the history and development of oil palm plantations in the area. The data analysis technique employed in this research follows the

interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman. This model consists of four primary, simultaneous and continuous stages throughout the research process: data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing or verification (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024)

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Early Life of Transmigrant Communities in Sungai Aur District

To ensure development is maximized and equitable, one effective strategy is to systematically manage population growth and distribution. Population distribution acts as a balancing mechanism, relocating people from less viable locations to areas with greater potential for utilization (Putra, 2019). Thus, the transmigration program is an effort to address imbalances in population distribution and development. Transmigration serves as a national program aimed at equalizing population distribution across Indonesia and supporting overall development. It offers a potential solution to mitigate population growth in Java, Bali and Lombok by relocating individuals to new, government-funded agricultural regions outside Java (Swasono & Singarimbun, 1986). This transmigration program forms a crucial part of population policy, closely linked with national economic policy. Transmigration plays a significant role in supporting efforts towards equitable development. During the New Order era, this program was prioritized as a strategy to achieve successful foundational national development, subsequently aligned with the general pattern of long-term development. The ultimate goal was to foster regional balance and enhance the overall welfare of the community (Putra, 2019)

Transmigration held a critically important and decisive role, leading the New Order government to prioritize it as a means of achieving successful foundational national development. Subsequently, its implementation was integrated into the New Order's Five-Year Development Plans (Repelita) and aligned with the general pattern of long-term development (Putra, 2019). The transmigration program is primarily designated for areas with high population density, specifically those exceeding 1,000 people per km². It also targets regions affected by reforestation development projects, crisis zones, and areas prone to natural disasters and floods. In these designated areas, information and outreach programs regarding transmigration are conducted (Putra, 2019). The primary goals of this program are to reduce population density in Java, increase agricultural production in destination areas, and strengthen national integration through the cross-regional distribution of people (Hasan dkk., 2023). In West Sumatra, Pasaman Regency was designated as one of the transmigration areas. Upon assessing the ground conditions, the local government ultimately decided to relocate the transmigrants. The western part of Pasaman was deemed highly suitable due to its extensive forests and relatively sparse population. Considering these factors, the transmigrants were moved to this region to settle and live. To this day, the Javanese community remains a prominent presence in western Pasaman (Undri, 2018)

The transmigration program primarily targets densely populated areas with over 1,000 residents per square kilometer, as well as regions impacted by reforestation projects, crisis areas, and those affected by natural disasters and floods (Putra, 2019). One of the transmigration areas in Pasaman Barat is Sungai Aua, located in Sungai Aur District, Pasaman Barat Regency, West Sumatra. During the New Order era, specifically from Pelita IV to VI (1986-1997), the government opened new transmigration sites in Sungai Aur, Parit, Parilontiang, and Bukit Malintang. This was part of a national program aimed at population redistribution and regional development. In Sungai Aur, the transmigration program began around 1982 with the establishment of Desa Karya Makmur, which was previously rubber forest and grasslands owned by the local community (then Desa Karang Putih, now Kasik Putih).

Before implementing the transmigration process, the government conducted surveys and selected thousands of hectares of land in Kenagarian Air Gadang, much of which was still forest. The government also collaborated with local traditional leaders to officially obtain consent for land surrender in 1953, although more intensive arrangements occurred during the New Order era.

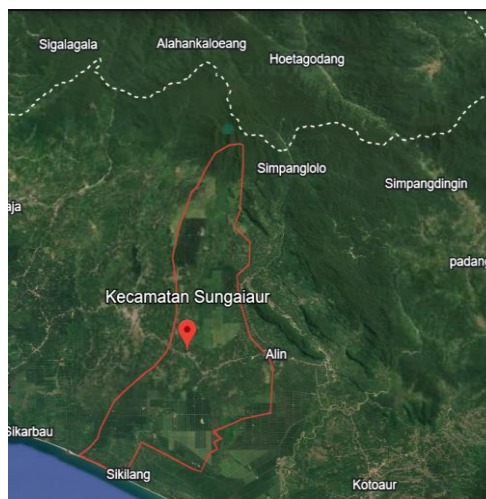


Image 1. Map of Sungai Aua area, Sungai Aur District, West Pasaman Regency, West Sumatra

The communities participating in the transmigration program in Sungai Aur District, Pasaman Barat, can be observed in Table 1 below:

Origin Region	Number of Households
Communities in Simpang Olo	120
Communities in Javanese	80
Total	200

Tabel 1. Number of people participating in the transmigration program in Sungai Aur Subdistrict

Initially, a total of 200 households (KK) were involved. Of these, 120 households originated from Simpang Olo, and were relocated to Sungai Aur District due to a landslide disaster in their home region. The remaining 80 households were Javanese communities who were also moved to Sungai Aur District.

Individuals chose to participate in the transmigration program for several distinct reasons. Primarily, the motive of prosperity was a key driver, as it promised tangible benefits such as 2 hectares of land, a Type 36 transmigrant house, and guaranteed living assistance, including both food and non-food provisions, along with other free government aid. Secondly, the motive of independence drew participants seeking greater self-reliance through the provision of business capital, employment opportunities, economic stability and agricultural and cultural training at the transmigration sites. A third factor was the motive of comfort, reflecting a desire for an improved quality of life through relocation. Lastly, an affiliation motive played a role, aiming to foster closer bonds and strengthen brotherhood among transmigrants from diverse backgrounds, thereby upholding national unity and cohesion (Hasan dkk., 2023)

According to Article 7 of Law No. 3 of 1972, concerning land acquisition for transmigrants, it is stipulated that transmigrants are entitled to obtain land rights in accordance with prevailing regulations. Further implementation of this provision is detailed in Article 28 of Government Regulation No. 42 of 1973, which states the following:

1. Agricultural transmigrants are entitled to acquire a minimum of 2 hectares of land, with its usage allocated as follows:
 - a. A quarter hectare is designated for the house and yard.
 - b. One and three-quarters hectares are designated for dry fields and/or wet rice paddies.
2. Non-agricultural transmigrants are entitled to acquire a minimum of a quarter hectare of land to be used for a house and yard.

In practice, besides acquiring land, transmigrants also received government assistance in the form of capital and living allowances for two years. During 1996-1997, transmigrant communities were given "Jadup" (jaminan hidup) assistance, which included staple foods, agricultural tools, and kitchen utensils, distributed monthly (Epa Fitro, interview, April 23, 2025). This aid aimed to support their survival in the new areas. Throughout this period, the government directed land management, including determining the types of crops to be cultivated, specifically promoting oil palm planting. This management aimed to ensure optimal utilization of the provided land. After the two-year support period concluded, the rights to manage and utilize the land were fully transferred to the transmigrant communities, allowing them to independently manage their land according to their needs and the region's potential.

Socio-Economic Dynamics of Sungai Aur District

For the initial two years of their relocation to the transmigration area, the government provided living allowance (Jadup) to transmigrant communities. This aid, delivered monthly, included staple foods, agricultural equipment and kitchen utensils (Hasan dkk., 2023). This assistance aims to support the survival and economic adaptation of transmigrants in the new region. The primary purpose of Jadup is to help transmigrant communities achieve economic and

social independence after relocating, preventing them from facing severe hardship during the initial period of new settlement. Jadup is provided for a specific duration until transmigrants are capable of managing resources in their new location independently. This policy is a crucial component of the national transmigration program, contributing to equitable development and an improved standard of living for residents in transmigration destination areas.

In the implementation of the transmigration program, the agricultural land acquired by transmigrant communities was managed by a third party, PT Bakhri, based on a mutual agreement for oil palm cultivation. After the government's assistance program to transmigrant communities ended, they no longer received regular Living Allowances (Jadup). However, the previously allocated agricultural land remained the property of the transmigrant communities, and its use was unrestricted, allowing them to plant various types of crops according to each family's wishes and needs. This freedom provided an opportunity for the community to manage resources independently and develop agricultural ventures more suited to local conditions.

After the government's Living Allowance (Jadup) program for transmigrant communities in Sungai Aur District concluded, most of the 80 Javanese households (KK) who participated in the transmigration program faced economic hardship. The deteriorating economic conditions made it difficult for many to sustain their livelihoods in the area. Consequently, the majority of these transmigrant communities opted to sell the land previously provided by the government to local residents and return to their areas of origin. Based on interviews with the head of the *lorong* (a sub-village administrative unit), only about 10 Javanese households from the total number of transmigrant participants decided to remain and try to persevere in the transmigration area.

Once the land was no longer subject to government regulations, the majority of the community chose to continue cultivating oil palm. This decision was influenced by the observation that households with oil palm plantations generally enjoyed better economic conditions compared to those without, largely due to the consistently rising price of palm oil. The price of oil palm experienced a significant increase starting in the early 21st century, particularly between 2001 and 2021, a period when the trend of Crude Palm Oil (CPO) prices in Indonesia showed a substantial positive surge (Haikal dkk., 2023). This price surge was primarily driven by a significant increase in global demand for palm oil, coupled with the expansion of oil palm cultivation areas in Indonesia, which collectively contributed to a rise in both production and exports (Erwinsyah, 2024)

Geographically, Sungai Aur District is a highland area, making it less suitable for oil palm cultivation. Oil palm thrives best in lowland regions for optimal production. Despite this, the community was heavily influenced to plant oil palm due to the promising economic prospects observed in surrounding areas, such as Paraman Ampalu, which successfully cultivated the commodity. These surrounding areas are indeed lowlands, making them ideal for oil palm. In fact, oil palm yields in lowland areas can be twice as high compared to those in Sungai Aur District.

Consequently, one of the community leaders in Sungai Aur District began planting coffee and other crops more suitable for highland regions. The goal is that if coffee and other high-altitude crops prove successful, the community will shift towards cultivating plants that are genuinely suitable and yield optimal results for their highland environment. This situation stems from the community's limited knowledge regarding oil palm cultivation itself. Furthermore, the suboptimal oil palm yields in Sungai Aur District are also a result of the community's insufficient understanding of proper oil palm maintenance, such as regular fertilization.

Fertilization is a crucial and continuous aspect of oil palm cultivation, from the nursery stage through the productive phase. In the nursery stage, fertilization is applied frequently with adjusted dosages to support optimal initial seedling growth. The frequency of fertilization at this stage typically aligns with soil moisture and pH requirements, and is done regularly, either daily or several times a week, using liquid fertilizers or other suitable formulations (Naldi, 2023). Once seedlings are planted in the field and enter their vegetative to early generative phases, fertilization is carried out on a scheduled basis throughout the year. Typically, fertilizer is applied three to four times annually, utilizing a combination of various types, including Urea, TSP, KCl, Dolomite, and other macro and micronutrients, as dictated by the plant's physiological requirements (Safitri dkk., 2024). The implementation of the "4 Exacts" principles—which include the right type, right dose, right time, and right place—is highly recommended to enhance fertilizer use efficiency and support optimal plant productivity (Ngapiyatun dkk., 2023). Thus, the fertilization patterns for oil palm, from the nursery stage to the early fruiting period, demonstrate variations in the intensity and types of fertilizers used. However, all practices adhere to the principles of sustainable and measurable nutrient management (Naldi, 2023). Regular and periodic fertilization of oil palm is crucial for ensuring optimal plant growth and maximum harvest yields. Consistent fertilization helps to continuously meet the plant's nutritional needs, allowing it to develop well from the seedling stage through to fruit production (Yawahar dkk., 2022).

Beyond cultivating oil palm, some community members also engage in other farming ventures, albeit on a smaller scale, such as planting patchouli. Despite Sungai Aur District's significant agricultural potential, particularly with extensive oil palm plantations and the currently high price of palm oil (around Rp 2,400 per kilogram), the local community's economic condition hasn't shown significant improvement. This is primarily because most of the transmigrant communities who initially received oil palm land have since sold their plots to newcomers. This observation is consistent with interviews conducted with Risnaldi and Yeni Herlina, teachers at SMP N 4 Sungai Aur, who stated that a significant portion of the community sold the land acquired through the transmigration program for other purposes. However, due to the inability to manage the proceeds from these land sales effectively, many residents have resorted to working as agricultural laborers to sustain their daily lives.

The shift in status of transmigrant communities from landowners to laborers indicates a significant decline in their economic independence. This phenomenon highlights that land ownership alone is insufficient to guarantee the success of a transmigration program without a strategy for sustainable asset management. The inability to maintain and productively manage their land, ultimately leading to the sale of assets, has been a primary factor in weakening the economic position of these transmigrant communities. Therefore, long-term economic assistance from the government and relevant stakeholders is crucial. This support should aim to enable transmigrant communities to develop entrepreneurial skills, strengthen their access to markets, and increase their production capacity. Such an approach is essential to ensure that the transmigration program not only succeeds in population relocation but also in creating sustainable economic well-being for participants in the destination areas.

IV. CONCLUSION

Initially, when the transmigration program began, transmigrant communities were granted agricultural land to manage independently, aiming to improve their economic well-being. However, in practice, most chose to plant oil palm on their land, influenced by the economic success of neighboring areas that relied on this commodity. This decision was made despite their lack of adequate knowledge regarding oil palm cultivation. Recognizing this situation, some local community leaders have started cultivating crops better suited to the geographical characteristics of Sungai Aur District, which is a highland area, such as coffee. This effort is driven by the hope of encouraging the community to shift towards planting more suitable commodities that have the potential for optimal yields. On the other hand, a significant portion of the community who received agricultural land in the region opted to sell it to newcomers. Consequently, many transmigrants lost their primary asset and transitioned into agricultural laborers. This change in status, from landowners to workers, reflects a considerable decline in their economic independence. This phenomenon underscores that mere land ownership is insufficient to guarantee the transmigration program's success without a strategy for sustainable asset management and an increase in human resource capacity for productive land management.

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