

Strengthening Reintegration through Social Capital: Learning from Aceh, Indonesia

Nirzalin¹, Naufal Bachri², Fakhurrazi³, Rizki Yunanda⁴, Iromi Ilham⁵, Muchlis⁶

¹Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Malikussaleh, Indonesia. (email: nirzalin@unimal.ac.id)

²Management Department, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Malikussaleh, Indonesia.

³Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Malikussaleh, Indonesia.

⁴Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Malikussaleh, Indonesia.

⁵Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Malikussaleh, Indonesia.

⁶Department of Political Science and Communication, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Malikussaleh, Indonesia

Abstract

Following the conflict that prevailed from 1976 to 2005, a state of social disintegration persisted between former combatants of the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka - GAM (Free Aceh Movement) and the civil society in Aceh. This disintegration was typically fueled by the former GAM combatants' militaristic and pragmatic mindsets, instability, and low economic well-being. Interestingly, former GAM combatants in Nisam Antara Subdistrict, North Aceh Regency, have managed to collaborate and coexist with local communities, exemplifying successful social reintegration that distinguishes them from their counterparts in other regions of Aceh. This article delves into the reality of social reintegration between former GAM combatants and the local populace, with a specific focus on the oil palm plantations managed by former GAM combatants. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, and data was gathered through a combination of observations, in-depth interviews, document analyses, and focus group discussions. Key informants for this study included former GAM combatants, community and traditional leaders, plantation workers, and members of civil society. The study reveals that moral obligations within communities are guided by local wisdom, which acts as a form of social capital that fosters economic and social collaborations. Local wisdom serves as a social capital that nurtures the development of fraternity, mutual trust, cooperation, and solidarity. Moreover, it has the capacity to minimize differences and resentments, thereby promoting unity between former GAM combatants and local communities. This unity significantly contributes to the sustainability of peace in Aceh, Indonesia.

Keywords:

former GAM combatant; local wisdom; social reintegration; Aceh

Introduction

In conflict-affected communities, reintegration is an essential and complex matter that demands thorough and comprehensive measures (Bhandari, 2019; Kaplan & Nussio, 2018; Torjesen, 2013). It extends beyond addressing issues such as disarmament, the demobilization of former combatants, and the provision of post-war economic support;

rather, it is a holistic and perpetual process. Reintegration encompasses a broader spectrum, involving the roles that former fighters can assume, their integration into social, political, and economic structures, and their management of associated challenges (Torjesen, 2013). Without supported reintegration, former GAM combatants may risk being involved in criminal and subversive political activities (Nirzalin &

Yogi Febriandi, 2022), which can lead to the emergence of new, more destructive conflicts (Lee, 2020). The failed reintegration attempt in Burundi serves as a significant lesson in this regard. The process of reintegrating former combatants in Burundi highlights how economic and social reintegration are closely linked. These programs encompass more than just disarmament; they also encompass the broader development context. Without effective reconciliation support, social reintegration could potentially jeopardize the peace (Willems & van Leeuwen, 2015).

Not all former GAM combatants and members of civil society have the capacity to facilitate post-conflict reintegration by capitalizing on social resources. Areas with a history of violence and leveraged social resources are more likely to succeed in establishing sustainable peace. In contrast, regions with limited social resources or an inability to leverage them may encounter difficulties in promoting reintegration and may become trapped in a prevailing cycle of violence that is challenging to break (Osborne et al., 2018; Pena & Dorussen, 2021). This research contributes to the existing body of work on post-conflict reintegration and social capital, building upon previous studies conducted by experts such as Subedi and Jenkins (2017) in Nepal and Kilroy and SA Basini (2018) in Liberia. In Nepal, former combatants lacking social capital struggled to reintegrate, while in Liberia, former combatants harnessed their social capital to navigate the challenges in the reintegration process (Kilroy & S. A. Basini, 2018; Subedi & Jenkins, 2017).

This article explores the role of local knowledge as a form of social capital in facilitating the reintegration of former GAM combatants and civil society in Nisam Antara following a prolonged conflict. It also delves into how social capital is leveraged within an oil palm plantation company led by former GAM combatants. The article highlights the

successful post-conflict social reintegration process in Aceh spanning over three decades (1976-2005) between the GAM and the Indonesian government. This conflict, driven by grievances related to welfare and injustice, concluded peacefully with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on August 15, 2005, in Helsinki, mediated by Martti Ahtisaari, the former President of Finland (Candelaria, 2020). Nisam Antara Subdistrict, situated in North Aceh Regency, was the most conflict-affected area due to its close association with GAM.

The valuable insights gained from Nisam Antara can serve as a model that can be replicated in reintegration efforts, both within Indonesia and other places. This is particularly pertinent when considering the reintegration of former GAM combatants, with a specific focus on how local wisdom contributes to the formation of social capital, as exemplified in the operation of the oil palm plantation business. Furthermore, this study aims to enrich the academic discourse on reintegration. The established social reintegration framework holds the potential to sustain and stabilize peace. Mitigating the risk of dissatisfied private groups disrupting peacebuilding can help prevent the emergence of more devastating conflicts.

Reintegration has been the subject of research by several scholars. Firstly, a study conducted by Suarez and Baines in 2022 focuses on the families of former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) militants in Northern Uganda. According to their findings, the family and social networks of the former combatants played a significant role in social reintegration. The families often influenced the decisions regarding defection, demobilization, and reintegration processes, while the networks of former combatants assisted in reuniting families. Both factors could impact whether the conflict transitioned to a peaceful resolution (Suarez & Baines, 2022). Secondly, Bhandari's

research in 2019 explored the Nepal conflict, which lasted for a decade from 1996 to 2006. This study revealed that social dialogue can be effectively employed to foster social reintegration and peace between former combatants and the communities hosting them. Structured dialogues can help build trust between former GAM combatants and community members, ultimately leading to a shift in their perceptions of the opposition (Bhandari, 2019).

Meanwhile, various reintegration studies have explored the Aceh region, such as by Rahman in 2022, focusing on multi-ethnic communities in Langsa City, Aceh. According to this study, the local knowledge played a crucial role in promoting social cohesion in the multiethnic societies. The reconciliation of various disparities was shaped by a sense of solidarity, *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), and tolerance expressed through the observance of traditional customs (Rahman, 2022). Another study on the social reintegration of former GAM combatants was conducted by Aspinall in 2009. In this context, the transition of the former GAM combatants into professional roles facilitates social reintegration. Aspinall argued that the economic activities of post-conflict former GAM combatants were influenced by four factors: 1) engagement in solely economic pursuits; 2) receiving direct government assistance; 3) participation in government projects; 4) payment of *pajak nanggroe* (security tax); and 5) leveraging the elite network of GAM for accessing economic resources (Aspinall, 2009).

However, studies related to social reintegration generally pay less attention to local wisdom, which can be a social capital that binds the reintegration of former combatants in a post-conflict civil society. This role has been observed in previous studies, such as that conducted by Aspinall, which primarily center on the elite level of reintegration within the GAM organization. However, that study

may have overlooked the dynamics and challenges at the grassroots level. The current study's primary objective is to investigate the reintegration process as experienced by the subordinate factions of the GAM organization, typically excluded from negotiations and peace agreements between GAM and the State.

The following section of this article delves into the mechanics of the reintegration process and what factors contribute to its effectiveness. The territorial aspect (Aceh as a former conflict zone) has not been much explored in reintegration research. In addition, the paradigmatic aspect in previous research predominantly emphasized economic and social approaches. Reintegration that solely focuses on the economic dimension is considered insufficient for sustaining lasting peace. Hence, a more comprehensive social reintegration is required, incorporating social capital through the activation of local wisdom values. Furthermore, studies on the reintegration model of former GAM combatants in the context of the oil palm industry, with a focus on exploring and building social capital, are still ongoing.

Social Capital and Strengthening Reintegration: A Theoretical Perspective

This study employs a social capital framework to analyze the issue. Social capital is rooted in norms, networking, and trusting relationships (Coleman, 1999; Endris et al., 2020; Hemminger, 2019; Putnam, 1994). Trust and community collaboration are pivotal elements in the reintegration of former combatants, as they contribute to the formation of social cohesion (Bowd, 2008). Trust and mutual benefits resulting from reciprocity also play a role in nurturing the social capital (Darmenova, Yuliya, and Koo, 2021). Social capital is constructed on an individual's ability to effectively influence groups of people or individuals. The strength of an individual's social capital increases with

frequent interactions in public settings, as these interactions build trust, support, and closeness (Häuberer, 2011; Sánchez-Arrieta et al., 2021).

Putnam, as cited by Häuberer (2011), describes social capital as a "civic virtue" that acts as a bridge connecting individuals with the shared objectives of society. In other words, a key indicator of vibrant social capital is the formation of mutually beneficial relationships. Putnam's research underscores that, in terms of promoting stability, social capital carries more significance than physical and economic assets (Putnam, 1994).

Local wisdom serves as the foundation for establishing norms of mutual responsibility, reinforcing interpersonal connections within the community, and cultivating an environment of mutual trust. These elements collectively constitute social capital, which plays a pivotal role in facilitating and strengthening the social reintegration process between former GAM combatants and civil society. Social capital can be harnessed to mend community relationships that were fractured during the conflict, thus facilitating the social reintegration. Reintegration is an integral facet of all rehabilitation initiatives (Okoye et al., 2019). Simultaneously, each agent involved in empowerment can attain post-conflict reintegration and normalization objectives by embracing the values of local wisdom (Leff, 2008).

Post-conflict, programs encompassing disarmament, the demobilization of former GAM combatants, and economic support in the aftermath of war all contribute to the reintegration process. This process involves the transition of former GAM combatants from being identified as "combatants" to "civilians" and entails changes in their behavior. They no longer pursue their social, political, or economic goals through violent means. They enhance their social interactions with the communities in which they reside and reduce their reliance on militia networks. Politically, they abandon violent approaches to achieve their objectives.

Similarly, they achieve economic sustainability by engaging in legitimate businesses or working in both formal and informal sectors (Torjesen, 2013).

Achieving sustainable shared economic prosperity can only happen when former GAM combatants and post-conflict civil society have strong social integration after being disconnected by the conflict. Therefore, conflict transformation is an incremental journey that necessitates the engagement of all involved parties to address the root causes of conflict. It evolves from minor adjustments to more significant ones (Miall, 2007). Its effectiveness relies on its capacity to appreciate and encourage the existing culture and human assets within the community. The process of shaping a community should be mindful of local norms, culture, and identity (Nafissa, 2020). Consequently, the way community members perceive themselves transforms, leading to a shift in their perspective on life (Chandler, 2021).

Methods

This study was conducted in Nisam Antara Subdistrict, North Aceh, employing a qualitative approach. The selection of this location was purposive, as Nisam Antara residents possess the indigenous knowledge of *meutingkue tijiek*, a valuable social asset that expedites the development of harmonious relationships among former GAM combatants and civil society. This social capital forms the foundational values that foster a strong cooperative bond, promoting shared economic prosperity through the oil palm plantation enterprise and providing opportunities for socio-economic reintegration. Conversely, this phenomenon is not evident in other former GAM combatant enclaves in Aceh, like Pante Bidari, East Aceh. In such areas, the low social capital often leads to internal conflicts, the oil palm plantation ventures achieve favorable outcomes (Field Observation, 2022).

This study spanned a duration of twelve months, commencing from August 2021 to August 2022. This study is a case study about how local wisdom becomes social capital that binds social reintegration between former GAM combatants and post-conflict civil society in Nisam Antara Subdistrict, North Aceh, Aceh Province, Indonesia. Data was collected using various methodologies, namely focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observational techniques. Employing a participatory approach, the direct observations involved researchers immersing themselves (live-in) within the research subjects' environment. This approach aims to gain sociological insight into the reintegration practices that transpire among former combatants and civil society members (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The indicators in analyzing and comprehending the integration between former GAM combatants and post-conflict civil society were: the former GAM combatants' perceptions, expectations, appreciation, subjective awareness of the actors involved, motivation, attitudes, local wisdom, and social capita. These were captured by the researchers through observations of the relationship that was built between the former GAM combatants and the local community.

Throughout the research project, in-depth interviews were employed as one of the data collection methods. The interviewees were selected based on their knowledge and information relevant to the research topic, resulting in ten former GAM combatants as key informants. Among these key informants were Rando, a former leader of the Rawoen troop who also happens to own an oil palm plantation, Teungku Nie, the former GAM Commander for the Pasee area, Mukim Yan, Pudin Awoe, and Saiful, along with other former GAM combatants actively engaged in interactions with the community. Other key informants include community leaders, i.e., officials from Gampong Alue Papeun,

traditional leaders from Nisam Antara, youth leaders, and individuals recognized as experts in local culture.

In addition to observations and interviews, the research team organized FGDs, which involved the participation of former GAM combatants employed in the oil palm plantation, individuals who had experienced the conflict, local community members engaged in oil palm plantation works, community leaders, and youth leaders from areas around the oil palm plantations. Furthermore, the researchers conducted a review of documents and literature related to the research themes and local cultural practices. This secondary data was utilized to complement and reinforce the primary data.

The data collected underwent an interactive analysis process based on the framework proposed by Patton (2014). The analysis process involved pattern identification, theme aggregation and categorization, insight formation, finding interpretation, and the drawing of conclusions from the overall analysis procedure.

Results

Palm Oil Business; Social Capital, Economic Welfare and Reintegration Strengthening

The widespread adoption of oil palm as a significant source of income for rural communities in North Aceh Regency began to gain prominence following the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). In Nisam Antara Subdistrict, the community has notably increased their oil palm cultivation activities since 2008 as a government initiative aimed at economic empowerment (Suurmond et al., 2020). Prior to the subdivision of Nisam Subdistrict into Nisam Antara Subdistrict, individuals like Syaifuddin (Bang Udin), Safruddin, and Hamdani, who worked for a private company in Aceh Tamiang Regency, introduced oil palm cultivation to the people of Nisam Subdistrict. They were cognizant

of the suitability of the Nisam area's terrain for growing oil palm, as supported by laboratory test results from the 1990s (Bang Udin Interview, 2021). Since then, several palm oil entrepreneurs have started opening up their oil palm plantations in Nisam Antara Subdistrict. From them (especially Bang Udin), Rando gained knowledge about the oil palm plantation business.

Rando is a former GAM troop commander who currently owns oil palm plantations with an area of up to 600 hectares spread across several subdistricts in the North Aceh Regency, particularly in the Nisam and Nisam Antara Subdistricts. Rando's persistence in building a palm oil business is inseparable from the *seubeudoh* concept he trusts in.

As articulated by Traditional Leader named Husaini, *seubeudoh* encapsulates the notion of diligent effort or commencing a business from humble beginnings, nurturing its growth step by step until it attains a larger scale. A parallel sentiment was shared by Marliah, a community member affected by the conflict in the Nisam Antara region. To her:

“Rando initiated his entrepreneurial journey with personal funds, and through active involvement in business, he transformed the government-provided seed assistance into a thriving and successful trading venture.”

In line with the concept of *seubeudoh*, the path to success and recognition requires persistent dedication. The journey towards achievement commences with smaller objectives, gradually progressing to more significant ones. With a starting capital of IDR 1,000,000 (\$69.96) at the time, Rando could only afford to purchase land in the remote and hilly region of Lhok Drien, situated far from residential areas in North Aceh. Through the support of the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA), the government provided him with oil palm seeds. Remarkably, he expanded his oil palm land from just 1 hectare to an impressive 600 hectares.

Currently, he employs 60 workers consisting of former GAM combatants and civil society. Rando must employ a substantial workforce to maintain operations on his plantations. These workers are responsible for tasks such as land clearance, hole digging, seed planting, fertilizer application, grass and branch clearing, harvest picking, and transportation. Among these laborers, there are former combatants who served alongside him in the same military group, as well as widows of those who died in the conflict. The subsequent graph illustrates the breakdown of workers based on the specific tasks they perform:

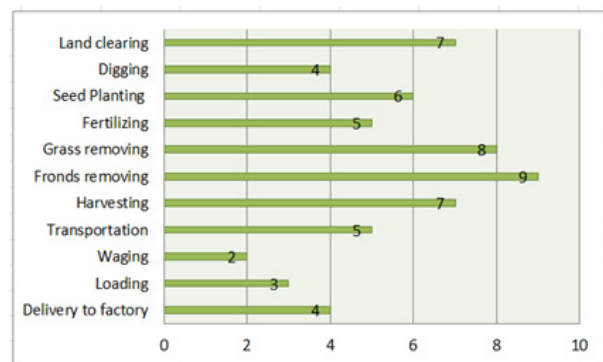


Figure 1. Number of Workers by Type of Work Performed

Source: Field Observation, 2022

The compensation provided to laborers varies depending on the nature of their work. Workers engaged in tasks such as land clearance, oil palm seed planting, land fertilization, and grass mowing receive daily wages. Those responsible for digging holes are compensated based on the number of holes they excavate. The frond removal compensation is determined by the quantity of fronds removed. Meanwhile, payment for tasks such as harvesting, transferring produce from the farm to the warehouse, weighing, and loading onto larger trucks is calculated based on the weight of the fruit (per kilogram).

Regarding the transportation of goods to larger factories, there are two distinct wage models: 1) a monthly payment system for bunches of palm fruit shipped to factories in

urban areas (such as palm oil factories within the same district); and 2) a per-trip system applied when palm oil products are transported outside the city, specifically to the North Sumatra region.

The amount of wages received by workers can be seen in Table 1.

The presence of oil palm plantations offers benefits to former GAM combatants and the local community. According to Tengku Nie (former Pasee Region GAM Commander, 2021):

“The presence of oil palm has created employment for former GAM combatants as well as for local residents. Palm oil now serves as a stable economic foundation for both former GAM combatants and communities recovering from conflict.”

Similarly, Teungku Hasan (Community Leader of Nisam Antara) concurred that oil palm plantations overseen by former GAM combatants played a pivotal role in upholding peace. This is particularly significant because former GAM combatants have struggled to secure jobs due to their limited knowledge, skills, and social connections.

Palm oil offers economic relief to former GAM combatants. As highlighted by Anwar Cage (Chairman of the Aceh Reintegration Agency for North Aceh District, 2022), "In the past, many former GAM combatants engaged in criminal actions due to the absence of employment opportunities."

Rando enjoys a strong rapport with his staff and the individuals in his vicinity, primarily owing to his generosity and strong sense of community. Several factors underlie their inclination to sell to Rando, including a) the convenience of proximity; b) the assurance of receiving equitable market prices; c) the opportunity to secure loans from Rando, which can be reimbursed using the earnings from palm oil sales (Zulfikar Interview, 2022).

Rando's consistent practice of purchasing fresh fruits from the community members at prevailing market rates provides a sense of security. This mutual trust forms the basis for offering financial loans to community members, which are later repaid using the earnings generated from palm oil sales. Moreover, Rando demonstrates adept communication skills with individuals of varying age groups, effectively engaging both older and younger community members. He maintains open, transparent, and firm communication with his employees. The workers are well aware that Rando is a person who *kiban crah, meunan beukah* (says things as they are).

The informants' assessment of Rando's compliance with religious, state, and *gampong* (village) laws in running his plantation business demonstrates the construction of values and norms. There are two distinct applicable norms: 1) the rules that are applicable to society, such

Table 1.
Wages for Workers in the Rando Palm Oil Business

No	Type of Work	Amount of Wage (IDR)	Amount of Wage (USD)
1	Land Clearing	IDR. 80,000 / Day	\$ 5.60 / Day
2	Digging	IDR. 35,000 / Hole	\$ 2.45 / Hole
3	Seed Planting	IDR. 80,000 / Day	\$ 5.60 / Day
4	Fertilizing	IDR. 80,000 / Day	\$ 5.60 / Day
5	Grass Removing	IDR. 150,000 / Day	\$ 10.49 / Day
6	Fronds Removing	IDR. 3,000 / Frond	\$ 0.21 / Frond
7	Harvesting	IDR. 200 / Kg	\$ 0.01 / Kg
8	Transportation/Waging/ Loading	IDR. 200-300 / Kg	\$ 0.01-0.02 / Kg
9	Delivery to Factory	Two types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monthly (IDR. 4,000,000 to IDR. 7,000,000) ● Per trip (IDR. 1,000,000) 	Two types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monthly (\$ 279.83 to \$ 489.70) ● Per trip (\$ 69.96)

Source: An interview with Kamaruddin and Munawir, the workers, 2021



as religious, state, and village rules, are the sources of norms; 2) cooperation fosters the development of norms within its dynamics, and these established norms serve as a benchmark for managing social interactions, encompassing both quality and quantity (Kim, 2018).

The concrete evidence of Rando establishing connections with partners while expanding his business endeavors highlights the importance of networks in the formation of social capital. Rando actively participates in palm oil entrepreneurs' associations at both local and national levels. These connections and interactions among various individuals are commonly referred to as social networks (Suurmond et al., 2020). It is worth noting that this capacity to mobilize the social capital of individuals and society as a whole underscores this reality (Laurence & Kim, 2021). Oil palm plantations play a pivotal role in fostering the growth of social capital and social cohesion, two critical elements in the process of building and maintaining peace.

Rando's palm oil business serves as a platform for individuals to establish trust, uphold high standards, and create a network of cooperation. The groups involved in the conflict, as well as external entities with significant capabilities, play a complementary role in mobilizing all available resources to contribute to the establishment of long-term peace.

Meutinkue Tijiek: Local Wisdom as Social Capital

The communal spirit built in Nisam Antara is deeply rooted in the principles of their local wisdom, *meutinkue tijiek*, which essentially means mutual assistance and the cultivation of values that lead to collective prosperity. This concept can be defined as a concerted effort to aid or support those in need with the aim of enhancing the recipient's quality of life. *Meutinkue tijiek* embodies the practice of *ta'awun*, a fundamental principle in

Islamic teachings, particularly when it comes to establishing and pursuing shared prosperity in business endeavors. It encompasses various forms of support, including offering employment opportunities, financial aid, and assistance with business capital. Additionally, *meutinkue tijiek* is manifested through direct involvement in communal events such as weddings, marriages, funerals, and other gatherings (Interview with Tgk. Husaini, traditional leader, 2022). This local wisdom, *meutinkue tijiek* is a tradition passed down through generations within the Nisam Antara community.

The social practice of the local wisdom of *meutinkue tijiek* as social capital is illustrated in Table 2.

The practice of *meutinkue tijiek* finds its origins not only in the aforementioned religious teachings but also in other local wisdom values encapsulated in the *hadih maja* (local proverb). To begin, the proverb "*Sion kaphan, saboeh keureunda, sang seunisab, meu-adoe-a*" conveys the idea that a shroud and a coffin can be shared, given that we are like one big family. Similarly, the saying "*Udep bek lagee ban joek lam uteun; Asai ka glah pucoek droe*" advises against living like a palm tree (*Arenga pinnata*) in a forest where your sole focus is on your own growth. This emphasizes that, as inherently social beings, the interests of community and kinship must take precedence. Essentially, it underscores the need to uphold a commitment to mutual assistance and mutual benefit, where the party being *ditingkue* (carried) must, in turn, respect and uphold the trust of the party acting as *meutinkue* (carrying) (Rando interview, 2021).

This practice of mutual support, locally known as the *meuseuraya* or *meu-urup* concept, becomes evident during celebratory events, where the community collaboratively ensures the successful conduct of these festivities (as described by Abu Badruddin, Community Leader of Nisam Antara, 2022). Furthermore,

Table 2.
Local Wisdom of Meutingkue Tijek As Social Capital

Local Wisdom	Social Capital	Social Practice
Meutingku Tijek	Norm <i>Seubeudoh</i> (Rising business step by step until success)	Working hard
	Trust <i>Meu'urup</i> (Mutual cooperation)	Mutual Assistance
	Network If you wish to gain trust, it is essential to maintain the trust given to you	Working seriously and committed Being honest Having integrity
	Expanding cooperation	Building a network with the community and business relations

Source: Authors' Analysis, 2022

the spirit of mutual assistance within the Nisam Antara community is reinforced by the adage, "*Kajeut keu sifuet ureung Aceh, kureung leubeh hana dikira; asai ate bek tapeuteupeh, adak boh kreh pih jeut Taraba.*" In essence, the act of helping one another thrives as long as no actions lead to causing hurtful feelings (as expressed in an interview with Jailani, Community Leader, 2021).

Indeed, the interactions between former GAM combatants and civil society are profoundly influenced by these local wisdom values. As per the findings from the field research, the Nisam Antara community holds a favorable opinion of the former GAM combatants currently residing in the area, as articulated by Hasan, a community leader:

"... GAM has seamlessly integrated into civil society, actively engaging with community members during village events and activities. Additionally, the village has benefited from the considerable social support provided by GAM, including a generous donation of IDR 40,000,000 (\$2798.28) from Rando for the construction of the Meunasah's roof in Geudong Ringet Hamlet, Gampong Seumirah."

On the contrary, local wisdom serves as a bridge for social integration by fostering cooperation, solidarity, and tolerance, thereby fortifying social resilience and preventing social crises within post-conflict Acehese society (Rahman, 2022). As stated by Kumsap and Indanon (2016), the attitudes and behaviors prevalent within a community are rooted

in local wisdom, an intriguing revelation given that the Nisam Antara community has effectively transformed the value of local wisdom into social capital, fostering harmony between former GAM combatants and civil society following a conflict. This is significant because, during the ongoing conflict, former GAM combatants and numerous civil society groups experienced disintegration and polarization in various areas (Grayman, 2016).

Utilizing the social capital of "meutingku tijek," former GAM combatants and civil society can collaborate to build shared economic prosperity. This motivated Rando, a former commander of local combatants, to bring former GAM combatants and members of civil society together in Nisam Antara to establish an oil palm plantation business in the region. Rando and other former GAM combatants successfully transitioned from their military roles to become integral members of civil society. Rando is highly regarded as a unifying figure among the people of Nisam Antara. According to Condor & Gibson (2007), the community in which individuals reside significantly shapes their roles as social actors. In the Nisam area, other former GAM combatants continue to share his perspective, and he consistently invites former GAM combatants to participate in the community's social activities.

Discussion

Mobilization of Social Capital to Strengthen

Reintegration

The following are significant findings from the reintegration study that was carried out on the oil palm plantation company owned by former combatants: 1) the oil palm plantation business owned by former GAM combatants serves as a 'venue' for the reintegration process; 2) the local wisdom serves as a catalyst for the development of both individual and collective social capital that aids the reintegration. Both factors support the conclusion that mobilization of social capital can facilitate reintegration in regions with a history of conflict. The transformation of former GAM combatants' identities, shifting from "combatants" to "civilians," and their behavioral adjustments in social, political, and economic domains serve as indicators of successful reintegration, in line with the insights of Torjesen (2013).

The development of former GAM combatants' awareness of their integration into the broader social community has changed their social identity. They now adhere to accepted norms and laws and actively participate in various social activities. The principle of equality plays a crucial role in this transformation, as it has been successful in tempering the group's ego, formerly characterized by a "formerly military combatant" identity. Most importantly, their active engagement in societal roles helps them gain recognition as part of civil society (López et al., 2015). Acting on their social responsibilities can also enhance their prestige, reflecting a rational evaluation of their skills and significance within the community (Wu, 2018). According to (Özerdem, 2012), former combatants tend to achieve social integration when they, along with their families, are embraced as integral members of civil society. This acceptance contributes to the development of social capital, which becomes a critical resource in peacebuilding (Darmenova, Yuliya and Koo, 2021; Kaplan & Nussio, 2018).

Former GAM combatants are concerned that they might face rejection from civil society.

Therefore, they must work to create a positive identity and image, refraining from presenting themselves as former GAM combatants with exceptional status (López et al., 2015). Hence, a range of adaptation strategies need to be employed, including participating in social activities, volunteering, becoming part of a community, and joining various organizations (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011).

Effective reintegration starts with shifts in behavior within the social, economic, and political spheres, accompanied by alterations in identity. Former GAM combatants can reduce their social dependency on armed groups as a part of this process (Torjesen, 2013). They can also foster interaction with the residents in their local communities, particularly with their families. Furthermore, they can assimilate into various aspects of civil society life, including social, economic, and political dimensions (Suarez & Baines, 2022). On one side, the successful reintegration in the case of Nisam Antara is facilitated by the strong emotional bonds between former combatants and the civilian population since the beginning of the conflict. The former GAM combatants viewed the civil society as part of the community that either actively participated or supported their logistical requirements during the ongoing conflict. The former GAM combatants considered civil society as an integral part of the collective striving for shared goals and aspirations.

The ability of former combatants to meet their basic needs by operating legal businesses or working in both the formal and informal sectors is facilitated by changes in the economic environment (Torjesen, 2013). The presence of an oil palm plantation owned by former combatants is of particular significance for this study because it offers employment opportunities not only for their own group but also for the broader local community, assisting them in overcoming poverty and improving their standard of living.

In Rando's plantations, there is a transfer of knowledge about oil palm management practices and the oil palm trading system. Many former employees who were previously dependent on Rando have now become independent palm oil business owners. It is evident that some former combatants and members of civil society have established their own plantations after gaining valuable knowledge from Rando's hard work and dedication in growing his business from a small investment to hundreds of hectares of plantations with a substantial workforce. In line with this, a study by Willems and van Leeuwen (2015) found that in regions where reconciliation has taken place, economic recovery and development are essential for achieving long-term peace and reintegration.

Rando was motivated by a number of factors, including 1) providing protection against undesirable behavior stemming from financial pressure; 2) the belief that if one helps others, God will also make it easier for the person to survive; 3) ensuring that the children of GAM combatants have access to education; 4) recognizing the duty of caring for others as a fundamental human obligation; and 5) fulfilling a coaching and social responsibility role in line with the philosophy of *meutingkue tijeek*, local wisdom deeply ingrained in the Nisam Antara

community. The oil palm plantation industry has evolved into a platform for engaging in business dialogues, exchanging experiences, and fostering discussions between civil society and former combatants. Former GAM combatants have moved away from exerting violence to attain their goals, including financial gains. This transformation leads to increased social cohesion, a point substantiated by numerous scholarly investigations. For instance, research by Suarez and Baines (2022) highlights that effective reintegration and social cohesion can be realized through networking, support systems, economic and social empowerment, and the reinforcement of family bonds. In addition, Shehu and Abba (2020) emphasize that incorporating humanitarian efforts into the broader development agenda and programs significantly enhances reintegration outcomes.

Rando's utilization of social capital represents an initiative aimed at empowering the community by raising awareness and reinforcing institutions that motivate individuals to harness their abilities and resources for resolving challenges (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018). Recognizing the significance of local norms, culture, and identity is vital in any social construct, as the capacity to value and encourage existing human and cultural assets plays a critical role in a successful reintegration

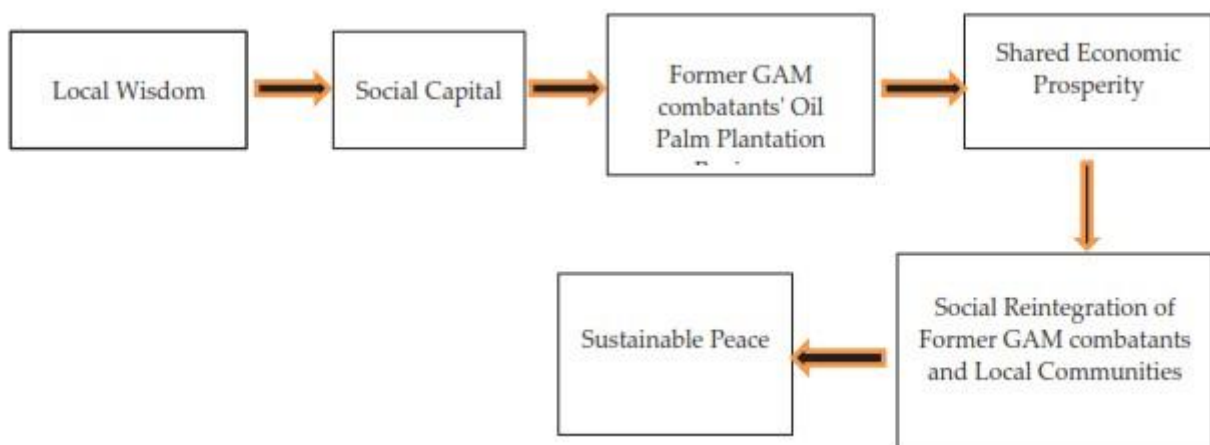


Figure 2. Scheme for local wisdom to promote sustainable peace

Source: Authors' Analysis, 2022

(Nafissa, 2020).

The presence of an oil palm plantation business does not only create shared economic prosperity between former GAM combatants and the surrounding civil society but also promotes social reintegration. As per the research findings, local wisdom values serve as the cornerstone for the actual integration of former GAM combatants and civil society. The collaborative economic success driven by local wisdom is a vital tool in mending previous social ruptures and constructing a brighter future for Aceh through sustainable peace (Manan et al., 2021).

The significance of local wisdom, which underpins the creation of collective social capital, facilitates the reintegration of former GAM combatants and civil society. Over time, individual and collective social capital have brought about structural and cultural integration between GAM and civil society. As noted by Häuberer (2011), this integration has the potential to reshape the social structure and yield various benefits. Consequently, in line with Häuberer and Putnam, social capital is regarded as a "civil virtue" whose presence is more vital than physical and economic capital for accomplishing shared objectives and maintaining societal stability. Once former combatants achieve a sense of belonging, their resilience is bolstered (Petrova & Korosteleva, 2021).

Past studies have provided evidence that the active involvement of former combatants in offering economic and social advantages expedites their reintegration into civilian society and contributes to the establishment of enduring peace. According to Leff (2008), social capital plays a pivotal role in facilitating reintegration and the achievement of normalcy in the aftermath of a conflict. Leff's study in Sierra Leone, West Africa, illustrates this phenomenon in the findings, stating that a community-oriented reintegration initiative creates social capital and builds trust between

former combatants and community members. According to Wu (2018), the development of shared social capital is further facilitated by the accrual of individual trust, which then transforms into group trust.

The findings of this study can provide a model for reintegration in other conflict-affected regions. Local wisdom values and local cultural norms can be explored to discover recommendations that foster collective social capital. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Rahman (2022) in the ethnically diverse communities of Langsa City. His study has unveiled that the value of local wisdom promotes social integration in a multiethnic society. In post-conflict Acehese society, the spirit of unity, mutual cooperation, and tolerance, as demonstrated during traditional ceremonies, contributes to the unification of diverse elements, fortifying social resilience and averting social crises.

This reality supports the theoretical view that social capital is an essential tool for post-conflict reintegration and social normalization (Bowd, 2008; Darmenova, Yuliya and Koo, 2021; Endris et al., 2020; Kaplan & Nussio, 2018; Kilroy & S. A. Basini, 2018; Leff, 2008; López et al., 2015). Emotional connections and social capital that form attachments have a significant impact on reintegration (Mpanje et al., 2018; Sánchez-Arrieta et al., 2021; Wheatley & Buglass, 2019). Local wisdom values foster emotional connections among community members, which develop into shared social capital that paves the way for reintegration. As a result, collective efforts can be made by former combatants and civil society in the commercial sector, such as the oil palm plantation industry. In other words, strong post-conflict social integration in Nisam Antara is framed by the interplay of social capital, social reintegration, and shared welfare.

Conclusion

This research has revealed that the local wisdom principles encapsulated in *meutingku tijiek*, which encompass norms like

the responsibility of economically privileged parties to assist those with less, the imperative of mutual trust, and the duty to collaborate within the community of Nisam Antara, have evolved into social capital that fosters cooperation within the palm oil industry. The link between the oil palm plantation sector, local wisdom, and social capital has benefitted former GAM combatants and members of the local civil society.

Therefore, oil palm plantations have effectively positioned themselves as a platform for social reintegration and the enhancement of sustainable collective economic well-being in Nisam Antara. Furthermore, the dialectical relationship between former GAM combatants and the broader community has successfully established social and emotional bonds. A sense of unity among Nisam Antara community members has dispelled the wounds and resentments from the past. The potential for former GAM combatants to become involved in questionable activities such as becoming "political thugs," engaging in criminal behavior, participating in drug dealing, and other unlawful endeavors can be diminished through the successful social reintegration of former GAM combatants and the local community. Ultimately, the oil palm plantation business, underpinned by local wisdom serving as social capital, contributes to collective economic prosperity, fortifies reintegration efforts, and paves the way for enduring peace in Aceh, Indonesia.

This study suggests the importance of leveraging local wisdom values in building social capital to strengthen social reintegration in regions with a history of conflict. These findings can provide a foundation for future research on the role of local wisdom as social capital in the reintegration of post-conflict communities, particularly in the case of reintegration between former GAM combatants and local communities. The social approach implemented in Nisam Antara serves as a

valuable lesson for enhancing the post-conflict reintegration process and can be replicated to foster enduring peace in other similar areas.

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