

Villages in the Shadow of Village Administration: Local Wisdom Losing Its Role

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Abstract

Background Mukim is a customary governance institution that holds a strategic position in Aceh's local government system and functions as a guardian of local wisdom. However, in the context of contemporary village governance, its role has increasingly weakened. This study aims to examine the implementation of Mukim's functions as a local wisdom institution and to analyze the structural constraints that limit its effectiveness in Teluk Dalam District, Simeulue Regency.

Methods Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving Imum Mukim, village heads, customary leaders, religious figures, community representatives, and local government officials. Data were analyzed using data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing techniques.

Results The findings reveal that Mukim's functions, as mandated by Simeulue Regency Qanun No. 5 of 2010, have not been optimally implemented. Mukim tends to operate symbolically and ceremonially, while its substantive roles in customary governance, development coordination, religious guidance, dispute resolution, and natural resource oversight remain marginal. The dominance of village government following the Village Fund policy has repositioned Mukim from an intermediate institution to a peripheral actor with limited authority. Using Robert K. Merton's structural-functional perspective, the study identifies an imbalance between manifest and latent functions, resulting in institutional dysfunction.

Conclusions The study concludes that strengthening Mukim requires not only normative recognition but also operational and structural reconstruction through clearer authority, capacity building, and institutional integration within local governance frameworks to restore its relevance as a living institution of local wisdom.

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Keywords

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Introduction

Indonesia is an archipelagic nation with complex geographical, social, and cultural characteristics. With a total land area of 1,904,569 km² and a population of 281,603,000 as of 2024, Indonesia ranks as the fourth most populous country in the world (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). This situation means that governance, particularly at the local level, must not only address administrative issues but also be capable of accommodating the social, cultural, and value systems that exist and evolve within society. In this context, institutions rooted in local wisdom play a crucial role as pillars of social stability, mechanisms for conflict resolution, and bridges between the state and society ([Mardhiah et al., 2023](#); [Syahroni et al., 2024](#)). Aceh is one of the regions in Indonesia that, historically and legally, provides ample space for the recognition and strengthening of customary institutions within the governance system ([Zulkifli et al., 2021](#)).

One of the local wisdom institutions that plays a strategic role in Aceh is the Mukim. Historically, the Mukim has existed and functioned actively since the era of the Aceh Sultanate, long before the formation of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia ([Muzakir & Ibrahim, 2017](#)). During that period, Aceh was a kingdom led by a king, with the Mukim serving as a governmental unit at the front lines that interacted directly with the community. The Mukim is led by an Imeum Mukim, whose position is subordinate to the leadership of the ulee balang and superior to the gampong administration, and who performs important functions in the political, social, and administrative spheres at the grassroots level ([Nazaruddin et al., 2022](#)). This fact indicates that the Mukim has long been regarded as a vital institution in the governance of Acehnese society.

Throughout its history, the Mukim institution has been preserved and recognized by various ruling regimes. During the Dutch colonial period, despite Aceh experiencing a prolonged armed conflict since 1873, the colonial government continued to pay special attention to the Mukim. The Imeum Mukim were involved in the administration of customary justice with the aim of establishing order and security, as stipulated in the Staatblad No. 432 of 1916 and the Staatblad No. 8 of 1932. This formal recognition was subsequently reinforced through the Decree of the Governor of the Dutch East Indies No. 8 of 1937 on Village Administration, which explicitly acknowledged the existence of the Mukim within the local government structure ([Alianur & Putra, 2020](#); [Zainuddin, 2019](#)). Fakta ini menunjukkan bahwa Mukim telah lama dipandang sebagai institusi penting dalam pengelolaan masyarakat Aceh.

Functionally, the Mukim is an institution overseeing a cluster of several gampongs and possesses authority beyond the administrative boundaries of the village. These functions include regulating relations between gampongs, relations with external parties, and resolving issues or disputes that cannot be resolved at the village level ([Benyei et al., 2022](#); [Sulaiman et al., 2024](#)). With these functions, the Mukim serves as a space for the integration of customary, religious, and formal governmental values, while also acting as a social mechanism to maintain balance and order in community life.

Following independence, the existence of the Mukim continued to be recognized and strengthened within Aceh's governance system through various regulations, ultimately being comprehensively enshrined in Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Government of Aceh (UUPA). In Article 1, point 19 of the UUPA, the Mukim is defined as a legal community unit under the sub-district consisting of a combination of several villages with specific territorial boundaries

and led by an Imeum Mukim who reports directly to the sub-district head. Provisions regarding the organization, duties, and functions of the Mukim are further regulated through district/city qanuns, including Simeulue District Qanun No. 5 of 2010, which establishes the role of the Mukim in the administration of government, development, the implementation of Islamic Sharia, socio-cultural development, the resolution of customary disputes, as well as the oversight of ecological functions and the management of natural resources.

Various previous studies indicate that, normatively, the Mukim holds a broad and strategic position and function within Acehnese society. Several studies position the Mukim as both an administrative implementer and a governance actor playing a role in maintaining social order and local democracy ([Azmi et al., 2019](#); [Mansur et al., 2024](#); [Sulaiman et al., 2024](#)). Other research emphasizes the historical and cultural role of the Imeum Mukim as a central figure possessing social and religious legitimacy, thereby functioning as a reference group in shaping societal behavior, values, and norms ([Alianur & Putra, 2020](#); [Nurhaliza et al., 2024](#); [Zulkifli et al., 2021](#)). These studies highlight the importance of the Mukim as a customary institution; however, most remain focused on normative, historical, and regulatory aspects.

To examine the relationship between the institutional structure of the Mukim and the roles it performs in community social life, this study draws upon Robert K. Merton's structural-functional theory ([Merton, 1968](#)). From this perspective, the Mukim is understood as part of the social structure that possesses manifest and latent functions in maintaining social order, stability, and integration. When these functions do not operate optimally, this condition can be understood as a form of dysfunction that affects the effectiveness of the Mukim's role within the governance system and the social life of the community.

In practice, the implementation of the Mukim's functions exhibits diverse dynamics at the local level. In several regions, including Teluk Dalam Subdistrict in Simeulue Regency, the Mukim formally holds authority in resolving inter-village disputes and managing community social life. However, the Mukim's involvement in day-to-day governance practices has not yet functioned optimally. This situation is influenced by various factors, including weak coordination between village governments and the Imeum Mukim, limited supporting facilities and infrastructure, a lack of training and institutional capacity building, as well as changes in the qualification standards for Mukim leadership under modern regulations, which have implications for the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Mukim's role within the community.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to examine the actual practices of Mukim functions as institutions of local wisdom, focusing on the context of Teluk Dalam Subdistrict, Simeulue Regency. This study aims to analyze how Mukims carry out their functions and to identify various obstacles faced in the implementation of these roles in two Mukims in Teluk Dalam Subdistrict, Simeulue Regency, so that it is hoped to provide an empirical contribution to strengthening the study of customary institutions and to serve as a basis for practical recommendations in strengthening the role of Mukims in a local government system based on local wisdom.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Mukim's functions as an institution of local wisdom within the context of governance and community life ([Creswell & Poth, 2019](#)).

The research location was set in Teluk Dalam Subdistrict, Simeulue Regency, focusing on two Mukims selected purposively because they were deemed to represent the dynamics of the implementation of the Mukim's functions as regulated in Simeulue Regency Qanun No. 5 of 2010. This approach allows the researcher to explore the meanings, practices, and social relations underpinning the role of the Mukim, while also examining the relationship between normative provisions and empirical realities at the Mukim level.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Research informants were selected through purposive sampling, involving nine key informants, comprising the Mukim Imeum, Mukim officials, village chiefs, as well as traditional leaders, religious leaders, community leaders, women leaders, and local government representatives. The data obtained were analyzed qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and thematic conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, this study applied source and method triangulation, so that the analysis results are expected to comprehensively describe the actual practices of the Mukim's functions along with the various challenges faced in carrying out its role as an institution of local wisdom within the local government system in Aceh.

Results and Discussion

This discussion stems from an effort to explore how the Mukim functions in the day-to-day administration of Teluk Dalam Subdistrict, Simeulue Regency. The Mukim is understood not merely as a customary institution as defined in Simeulue Regency Regulation No. 5 of 2010, but as a living part of the ever-changing dynamics of local governance. In practice, the functions of the Mukim are directly confronted with the strengthening of village governance and the increasing bureaucratization of governance, which in turn affect the position and role of the Mukim itself. To analyze these dynamics, this discussion employs Robert K. Merton's structural-functional perspective, particularly the concepts of manifest functions, latent functions, and institutional dysfunctions, as a means to examine the gap between the Mukim's role as envisioned in legal norms and the reality on the ground.

1. The Role of the Mukim in the Administration of Customary-Based Governance

The Mukim occupies a key position within Aceh's governmental structure as a customary institution that bridges village (*gampong*) and sub-district (*kecamatan*) governments ([Saraan et al., 2023](#)). Simeulue Regency Regulation No. 5 of 2010 reaffirms the Mukim's role in coordinating village governance, fostering inter-village relations, and preserving the continuity of customary values in local governance practices. Within this framework, the Mukim is positioned as an intermediate institution tasked with maintaining the coherence of the governance system and social stability at the sub-district level.

However, the dynamics of governance in Teluk Dalam Subdistrict indicate that this role has not yet been fully realized in practice. While Mukims are formally recognized as part of the local governance structure, this recognition has not been accompanied by meaningful involvement in day-to-day governance processes. The Mukim's involvement is more often limited to ceremonial activities, such as attending meetings or official events, without adequate space in cross-village coordination, policy planning, or strategic decision-making at the village level.

This situation reflects a gap between the normative construction of the Mukim's role and the empirical reality of customary governance. The Mukim has not functioned as a hub for inter-village coordination as mandated by the qanun, but rather serves primarily as a symbolic representation of customary authority within the formal governance structure. Consequently, the Mukim lacks sufficient bargaining power to guide or correct the course of village governance, particularly regarding cross-village issues that require coordination and traditional leadership.

From Robert K. Merton's functional-structural perspective, the Mukim's role in traditional governance constitutes a manifest function designed to maintain the order and stability of the local governance system. These functions include coordination, normative oversight, and the channelling of community aspirations to the sub-district level. When these functions are not carried out effectively, the Mukim institution experiences dysfunction, which in turn impacts the fragmentation of governance at the Mukim level.

This dysfunction has broader implications for the local governance system. The absence of an effective liaison institution causes village governance to operate in a sectoral manner, with weak coordination across hamlets. In such a situation, the potential for inter-village conflicts of interest is not managed optimally, making social stability at the mukim level vulnerable.

2. The Role of the Mukim in Enhancing Development Quality and Democratic Life

In addition to its governance role, the Mukim is also envisioned as a key actor in enhancing development quality and strengthening local democratic life ([Samsuddin et al., 2021](#)). The Simeulue Regency Regulation positions the Mukim as a conduit for inter-village aspirations, a guardian of the balance of village interests, and a facilitator of development processes grounded in deliberation, justice, and local wisdom. Thus, the Mukim should function as a deliberative space that strengthens democracy at the mukim level.

In practice, this role has not been optimally fulfilled in Teluk Dalam Subdistrict. The presence of Mukims in development planning forums, such as Village Consultations and Village Development Planning Meetings (Musrenbangdes), tends to be merely administrative. Mukims participate as forum attendees but lack significant authority in determining development priorities, formulating programs, or overseeing their implementation.

One factor limiting the Mukim's role is the dominance of the village government in managing the Village Fund. While this policy does strengthen village autonomy in planning and implementing development, it has not been accompanied by a restructuring of the Mukim's position within the local development framework. Consequently, the Mukim remains outside the technical development system and loses its influence in the decision-making process.

Within Merton's functional-structural framework, this situation indicates a shift of the Mukim's manifest functions into latent functions. The Mukim's presence in development forums retains symbolic significance as a representation of customary traditions and social legitimacy, but does not yield substantive impacts on the

direction and quality of development. This shift diminishes the Mukim's effectiveness as a guardian of the balance of interests among villages.

The subsequent impact of this condition is evident in the quality of local democratic life. When the Mukim lacks a strong role in development forums, the democratic space at the village level becomes limited. Cross-village aspirations are not adequately articulated, while development tends to be oriented toward the interests of individual villages. In the long term, this situation has the potential to erode the tradition of deliberative democracy that has long been part of traditional governance in Aceh.

3. The Role of the Mukim in Strengthening Islamic Sharia and Religious Life

Historically and culturally, the Mukim has held a central position in fostering the religious life of Acehnese society. The Mukim serves not only as an administrative leader but also as a religious figure with moral authority in maintaining the integration of local customs and Islamic Sharia. This position makes the Mukim one of the key pillars of Acehnese social life.

In Teluk Dalam Subdistrict, this function shows signs of weakening. The Mukim's involvement in religious activities is generally incidental and ceremonial, such as attending celebrations of major Islamic holidays. Meanwhile, sustained religious guidance is primarily carried out by village governments and religious institutions at the gampong level.

This situation indicates that the Mukim is no longer the primary actor in fostering religious life. The absence of structural authority and institutional support limits the Mukim's ability to initiate or coordinate inter-village religious programs ([Wance et al., 2025](#)). Consequently, the integration of adat and Islamic Sharia is not managed optimally at the Mukim level.

From a functional-structural perspective, the religious role of the Mukim has shifted from a manifest function to a latent one. The Mukim remains present in religious activities, but more as a symbol of social legitimacy than as the primary driver of religious development. This shift has led to a weakening of customary-based moral control in community life.

4. The Role of the Mukim in Community Development and the Resolution of Customary Disputes

In Aceh's customary governance system, community development and the resolution of customary disputes occupy a central position in the construction of the Mukim's role as a customary institution ([Diras et al., 2024](#)). These functions position the Mukim not merely as a guardian of social order, but also as a mediator and buffer against conflict in the lives of communities across villages. Through the customary authority inherent to the Mukim, they are expected to strengthen social cohesion, prevent the escalation of conflicts, and ensure that every dispute is resolved based on customary values, deliberation, and the principles of social justice deeply rooted in Acehnese society.

The significance of this role is further underscored by the fact that social conflicts at the local level cannot always be resolved through formal administrative or legal

mechanisms. Various inter-community disputes whether concerning territorial boundaries, natural resource management, or other social issues often require resolution mechanisms that possess cultural and social legitimacy. In this context, the Mukim, as a customary institution overseeing several gampongs, holds a strategic position to bridge diverse interests while maintaining the balance of social relations among village territories.

In practice in Teluk Dalam Subdistrict, the Mukim is still viewed as a figure possessing social legitimacy and moral authority, particularly in resolving conflicts involving more than one village. This social recognition indicates that the Mukim continues to hold strong symbolic capital within the community's social structure. However, this legitimacy has not yet been fully accompanied by institutional strengthening of their role, so that the functions of community guidance and resolution of customary disputes have not been systematically institutionalized in government practices and daily social life.

The Mukim's involvement in resolving customary disputes tends to be selective and situational. Mukims are generally only involved when conflicts cannot be resolved at the gampong level, while smaller-scale conflicts are mostly handled by village officials and local traditional leaders. This pattern indicates that the role of the Mukim is more reactive than preventive. The absence of standard mechanisms, fixed procedures, and a clear division of authority means that the Mukim's functions in social guidance and conflict management have not been carried out in a sustainable and structured manner.

Within the framework of Robert K. Merton's functional-structural theory, these conditions reflect that the Mukim's manifest function in community development is only partially fulfilled. Normatively, the Mukim is designed as an institution that plays an active role in maintaining social harmony and preventing conflict at an early stage. However, limitations in the supporting structure and weak institutional integration hinder the optimal fulfillment of these functions. Consequently, the Mukim has not been able to act as a preventive actor that systematically manages potential conflicts in the lives of communities across villages. These limitations in the Mukim's role directly impact the weakening of customary-based social control at the sub-district level. The Mukim lacks sufficient capacity to establish regular cross-village communication, proactively mediate potential conflicts, and systematically strengthen the values of community and social solidarity.

5. Challenges in the Implementation of the Mukim's Functions from a Functional-Structural Perspective

Various structural constraints intertwine to weaken the role of the Mukim in Teluk Dalam Subdistrict. The lack of technical guidance and institutional training, limited facilities and infrastructure, the vast area of the Mukim with challenging geographical conditions, as well as the dominance of village and subdistrict government authority create systemic barriers to strengthening the functions of the Mukim.

From [Merton \(1968\)](#), functional-structural perspective, social institutions can only optimally perform their manifest functions if supported by adequate structures, resources, and operational mechanisms. The mismatch between the Mukim's

normative role and empirical conditions leads to sustained institutional dysfunction.

The lack of training and institutional support causes the Mukim to carry out its role based more on experience than on a systematic understanding of its authority and operational procedures. Limited resources, such as the absence of a secretariat and operational vehicles, further weaken the Mukim's capacity to perform cross-village coordination and guidance functions. The dominance of village governments following the Village Fund policy has further narrowed the scope of the Mukim's role within the governance and development system. While the Mukim is recognized normatively, it is not operationally integrated into the decision-making structure. Consequently, the Mukim functions more as a symbol of customary tradition than as an active and effective institution of customary governance.

Within Merton's framework, this situation reflects institutional dysfunction which, if not addressed through structural strengthening and comprehensive policies, has the potential to further marginalize the role of the Mukim within the local governance system. Therefore, the realignment of authority, institutional capacity building, and the integration of the Mukim into the regional governance system are essential prerequisites for restoring the Mukim's strategic role as a guardian of social balance and customary governance at the village level.

Conclusion

The implications of these findings underscore that strengthening the Mukim cannot be achieved through normative recognition alone but requires operational and structural reconstruction of its role. Without clarity on authority, enhanced human resource capacity, and binding coordination mechanisms between the Mukim, village governments, and local governments, the Mukim will remain in the shadow of village governments and lose its relevance as an institution of local wisdom. Therefore, policies to strengthen the Mukim must be directed toward restructuring institutional relationships, integrating the Mukim into the development planning and oversight system, and ensuring tangible functional recognition in the practice of local governance.

This study has several limitations. First, the study focuses on a single subdistrict, so the findings cannot yet be generalized to the entire province of Aceh, which has diverse social and institutional characteristics of the Mukim. Second, this study employs a descriptive qualitative approach and therefore has not quantitatively measured the impact of the Mukim's existence on village governance performance and local development. Third, the dynamics of power relations between the Mukim and other government actors have been explored only to a limited extent.

Given these limitations, future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across Mukim regions, combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, and delve deeper into the political and economic relationships that influence the institutionalization of the Mukim within the context of decentralization. Further research is also important to explore models of Mukim institutional integration that are adaptive to the village governance system without losing their local wisdom, so that the Mukim not only survives as a symbol of custom but also functions once again as a vibrant and effective traditional governance institution.

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