# COMMUNITY-BASED DA'WAH IN ISOLATED AREAS:
# THE ROLE OF LOCAL FIGURES IN SUSTAINING RELIGIOUS LIFE IN
# TANJUNG GELUMPANG VILLAGE, ACEH TAMIANG

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**ABSTRACT :**

This This study aims to analyze the challenges of da'wah and the dynamics of socio-religious change in remote rural areas, using a case study of Tanjung Gelumpang Village, Sekerak District, Aceh Tamiang Regency. This village is classified as an isolated area characterized by limited infrastructure access, the minimal presence of professional da'is, and increasingly difficult geographical conditions due to recurrent flooding that has cut off land access and made river routes the only means of transportation. These conditions objectively constitute structural barriers to formal da'wah activities. Nevertheless, this study reveals an interesting phenomenon in the form of a high level of religious practice and the sustainability of the village's socio-religious life. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with local religious leaders and customary figures, and documentation of community religious activities. The findings indicate that local actors-such as mosque imams, customary elders, and santri who have completed their pesantren education play a key role in sustaining community-based da'wah. Da'wah in this village does not rely on formal institutions but instead develops through social relations, exemplary conduct, and local wisdom that is internalized in the community's everyday life. These findings emphasize that da'wah in remote rural areas has distinct characteristics compared to urban da'wah and requires a contextual approach that is adaptive to the social, cultural, and geographical conditions of the community. This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of community-based da'wah concepts in marginal and isolated regions.

**Keywords** : Da'wah, Social Change, Remote Village, Local Figures, Aceh Tamiang

## Introduction

Da'wah constitutes a fundamental dimension of Islamic life that extends beyond the transmission of religious doctrines to encompass social transformation, moral development, and community empowerment. As a form of religious communication, da'wah functions to shape religious awareness, ethical behavior, and social responsibility within Muslim communities, enabling them to respond constructively to changing social realities.[1] In this sense, da'wah is not merely a normative preaching activity, but a dynamic social process embedded within specific cultural, structural, and geographical contexts.

In contemporary society, processes of social change driven by modernization, globalization, technological development, and environmental challenges have significantly influenced patterns of religious life and da'wah practices. Berger argues that modern societies are characterized by increasing pluralism and fragmentation of religious authority, which require religious actors to continuously adapt their approaches.[2] In the Indonesian context, Azra emphasizes that Islamic traditions have historically interacted with social and cultural transformations, producing diverse forms of religious expression.[3] Consequently, da'wah actors are required to develop contextual and adaptive strategies in order to remain relevant and effective.

From the perspective of sociology of religion, the effectiveness of da'wah is closely related to social structures, power relations, and cultural capital within communities. Bourdieu highlights that social capital and symbolic authority play a crucial role in shaping social influence.[4] Similarly, Putnam explains that strong bonding social capital enhances community resilience and collective action.[5] In religious communities, these forms of capital determine the legitimacy and sustainability of religious leadership and practices. Without sufficient understanding of local social dynamics, da'wah risks becoming detached from the lived experiences of its target communities.

Previous studies on da'wah have largely focused on urban environments characterized by high social mobility, digital media penetration, and cultural pluralism.[6] While these studies provide important insights, they tend to marginalize rural and remote contexts where social relations, access to information, and institutional support differ significantly. Research on da'wah in isolated and marginalized villages remains limited, despite the fact that such areas

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[1] Kuntowijoyo. 2006. *Islam sebagai Ilmu*. Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana. And Amran, Ali. 2012. "Dakwah dan Perubahan Sosial." *Jurnal Dakwah* 13 (1): 69–84.

[2] Berger, Peter L. 2014. *The Many Altars of Modernity*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

[3] Azra, Azyumardi. 2012. *Islam Indonesia: Tradisi dan Modernisasi*. Jakarta: Kencana.

[4] Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson, 241–258. New York: Greenwood.

[5] Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

[6] Shofia, A. A., J. Subando, and A. Effendi. 2023. "Peran Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Peningkatan Kecerdasan Emosional dan Spiritual pada Siswa di Sekolah Menengah Atas Majlis Tafsir Al-Qur'an Surakarta Tahun Ajaran 2022/2023." *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7 (3): 1053–1065. And Rodhiyana, M. (2023). Transformation of Islamic Religious Education in the Era of Society 5.0. *Al-Risalah: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam*, *14*(2), 555-568.

often face structural constraints related to infrastructure, transportation, and public services.[7] These conditions necessitate distinctive and locally grounded da'wah approaches.

Tanjung Gelumpang Village, located in Sekerak District, Aceh Tamiang Regency, represents a typical example of an isolated rural community. The village suffers from inadequate road infrastructure and recurrent flooding, which frequently disrupt land access and render river transportation the primary means of mobility. These geographical constraints constitute significant structural barriers to the presence of professional preachers (da'i) and formal religious institutions.[8] From a conventional da'wah perspective, such limitations are often perceived as inhibiting factors for the continuity of religious activities.

However, empirical realities in Tanjung Gelumpang Village reveal a contrasting phenomenon. Despite its isolated condition, the religious life of the community remains active and sustainable. Qur'anic study circles, congregational prayers, religious celebrations, and socially embedded religious practices are consistently maintained in daily life. This condition reflects what Ammerman describes as *lived religion*, in which religious values are experienced and negotiated through everyday practices rather than formal institutions.[9] The sustainability of religious life in this village indicates the presence of internal social mechanisms that compensate for the absence of external institutional support.

Central to this phenomenon is the strategic role of local figures, including village imams, customary elders, and former pesantren students, who possess strong moral credibility and social legitimacy. These actors function not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as moral exemplars, social mediators, and guardians of local religious values.[10] Their authority is grounded in long-term community engagement and shared social experiences rather than bureaucratic appointment.

Furthermore, community-based da'wah in isolated areas contributes significantly to social resilience. Norris et al. argue that resilient communities are characterized by strong social networks, shared values, and collective problem-solving capacities.[11] In Tanjung Gelumpang Village, religious networks function as informal systems of social support, particularly during periods of environmental crisis such as flooding. Through mutual assistance and religious solidarity, the community is able to maintain social stability and moral cohesion.

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[7] Iskandar, M. S. 2024. "Kajian Sosial dan Implikasi Sosiologi Pembagian Jalan Lingkar Berbasis Pantai Tanjung Laut Indah, Kota Bontang, Kalimantan Timur." *Economica* 24 (3): 594–615. And Hadi, A., P. Alan, D. Wibowo, and S. Sunarti. 2024. "A Needs-Based Approach to Sustainable Energy Use: Case Studies of Four Remote Villages in Indonesia." *Energy for Sustainable Development* 78: 101–112.

[8] Harahap, R. M. 2018. "Narasi Pendidikan dari Tanah Betawi: Pemikiran Sayyid Usman tentang Etika Akademik." *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2 (2): 174–199. And Yati, A. M. (2018). Metode komunikasi Da'i perbatasan Aceh Singkil dalam menjawabtantangan Dakwah. *Jurnal Al-Bayan: Media Kajian Dan Pengembangan Ilmu Dakwah*, *24*(2).

[9] Ammerman, Nancy T. 2016. "Lived Religion as an Emerging Field." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55 (4): 679–695.

[10] Hendra, T., S. A. N. Adzani, and Kori Lilie Muslim. 2023. "Dakwah Islam dan Kearifan Budaya Lokal: Konsep dan Strategi Menyebarkan Ajaran Islam." *Jurnal Komunikasi Islam* 2 (1): 65–82. And Riyadi, A., Sulistio, and A. Karim. 2024. "Social Harmony through Local Wisdom: Da'wah in the Kalang Obong Tradition." *Jurnal Dakwah Risalah* 35 (1): 68–86.

[11] Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness. *American journal of community psychology*, *41*(1), 127-150.

Despite the importance of local religious leadership and community-based da'wah, empirical studies that systematically examine their roles in highly isolated rural contexts remain limited. Most existing research focuses on institutional or urban-based da'wah models, leaving grassroots religious governance underexplored. This gap indicates the need for in-depth qualitative studies that capture the dynamics of informal religious authority, social capital, and contextual communication in marginalized settings.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of local figures in sustaining community-based da'wah in Tanjung Gelumpang Village, Aceh Tamiang. Specifically, it seeks to examine how social capital, informal authority, and lived religious practices contribute to the continuity of religious life under conditions of geographical isolation. By doing so, this research is expected to contribute to the development of contextual da'wah theories and provide practical insights for religious development programs in remote and marginalized regions.

## Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive case study approach to explore community-based da'wah practices in geographically isolated rural settings. The research was conducted in Tanjung Gelumpang Village, Sekerak District, Aceh Tamiang Regency, which is characterized by limited transportation access, recurrent flooding, and minimal institutional religious infrastructure. These conditions make the village a relevant setting for examining how religious life is sustained through community-based mechanisms. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of social interactions, religious meanings, and lived experiences embedded in everyday community life.

The selection of research participants was carried out using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who actively contribute to religious activities and community leadership. Informants included village imams, customary elders, former pesantren students, youth leaders, and community members involved in religious programs. These participants were selected based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in da'wah practices. This strategy ensured that the collected data reflected diverse perspectives on local religious leadership, community participation, and adaptive strategies in response to geographical and structural constraints.

Data collection was conducted through multiple qualitative techniques to enhance depth and credibility. In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and roles in sustaining religious life. Participant observation was also employed by attending congregational prayers, Qur'anic study circles, religious celebrations, and community meetings, allowing the researcher to document religious practices and social interactions in their natural context. In addition, relevant documents, such as village records, mosque activity reports, community announcements, photographs, and personal notes of religious leaders, were collected to complement interview and observational data.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis through an iterative and reflective process. Interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were systematically organized and coded to identify recurring patterns related to local leadership, social capital, da'wah methods, and community resilience. These themes were then interpreted in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks, including social capital theory, lived religion, and community

resilience. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was applied by comparing data from different sources, and member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected informants. Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process through informed consent, confidentiality, and responsible data management.

**Results and Discussion**

**1. Geographical Isolation and Socio-Religious Context of Tanjung Gelumpang Village**

Tanjung Gelumpang Village is geographically located in a flood-prone area within Sekerak District, Aceh Tamiang Regency. According to Sekerak District in Figures (2024), the district covers approximately 257.95 km² and is dominated by rural landscapes and river networks. Seasonal flooding frequently disrupts land transportation, making river routes the primary means of access to the village.

This geographical isolation has significant implications for the community's socio-religious life. Limited infrastructure restricts the mobility of external religious actors and reduces the frequency of formal da'wah programs organized by governmental or religious institutions. As a result, the community experiences minimal exposure to institutionalized religious services.

However, these limitations have also contributed to the formation of strong internal social bonds and relatively homogeneous religious practices. The village community demonstrates high levels of social cohesion, mutual trust, and collective responsibility in maintaining religious traditions. This finding supports Putnam's (2000) concept of bonding social capital, in which close-knit social networks function as a source of resilience in marginalized communities. Geographical isolation, therefore, does not merely represent structural constraints but also creates a social environment that encourages community self-reliance in religious life.

**2. The Role of Local Figures in Sustaining Community-Based Da'wah**

The findings indicate that local religious and customary figures play a central role in sustaining da'wah activities in Tanjung Gelumpang Village. These figures include village imams, customary elders, and former pesantren students who have returned to the village after completing their religious education.

These local actors possess strong social legitimacy derived from moral integrity, long-term community engagement, and cultural embeddedness. Their authority is not based on formal institutional positions but on trust and recognition from community members. As one informant stated: "*We follow our imam not because he was sent by an institution, but because he lives with us and understands our struggles.*"This form of authority reflects Weber's concept of traditional and charismatic authority, where leadership emerges from social recognition rather than bureaucratic appointment.

Local figures function simultaneously as religious educators, moral exemplars, and social mediators. They organize Qur'anic study circles, lead congregational prayers, provide informal counseling, and mediate social conflicts. Through these roles, they ensure the continuity of religious practices despite limited external support. This finding aligns with previous studies

emphasizing the importance of informal religious leadership in rural communities (Riyadi et al., 2024; Hendra et al., 2023), while extending them by demonstrating how such leadership operates in highly isolated contexts.

## 3. Community-Based Da'wah Practices and Institutional Adaptation

In the absence of strong institutional support, da'wah in Tanjung Gelumpang Village develops primarily through community-based mechanisms. Religious activities are organized collectively, relying on voluntary participation and mutual cooperation.

Regular activities include daily congregational prayers, weekly Qur'anic recitations, religious discussions after evening prayers, and the collective celebration of Islamic holy days. These activities are integrated into everyday social life, blurring the boundary between religious and social spheres.

Rather than adopting formalized organizational structures, the community employs flexible and adaptive arrangements. Leadership roles rotate informally, and decision-making processes are based on deliberation (musyawarah). This adaptive structure enables da'wah activities to continue even during periods of severe flooding or transportation disruption.

From an institutional perspective, this model represents a form of grassroots religious governance, in which authority and responsibility are distributed among community members. Such arrangements enhance sustainability and reduce dependency on external actors. This finding challenges conventional assumptions that effective da'wah requires formal institutional infrastructure. Instead, it demonstrates that social embeddedness and collective commitment can function as alternative sources of organizational capacity.

## 4. Contextual and Exemplary Da'wah Methods (Da'wah bil Ḥāl)

The dominant da'wah method in Tanjung Gelumpang Village is da'wah bil ḥāl, namely the transmission of Islamic values through exemplary conduct and daily social practices. Local figures emphasize moral behavior, social responsibility, and religious discipline in their interactions with community members.

Rather than delivering frequent formal sermons, religious messages are conveyed through everyday encounters, collective labor, mutual assistance, and consistent participation in worship. For example, religious leaders actively participate in community farming activities and disaster response efforts, thereby reinforcing Islamic values of solidarity and compassion.

This approach enhances the credibility of da'wah messages, as religious teachings are embodied in observable behavior. Community members perceive religious leaders as role models rather than distant authorities. Such practices correspond with the concept of lived religion, which emphasizes how religious values are experienced and negotiated in daily life. In rural contexts with limited formal education, da'wah bil ḥāl proves particularly effective in facilitating internalization of religious norms.

## 5. Socio-Religious Impact of Community-Based Da'wah

The transformation toward a community-based da'wah model has generated significant socio-religious impacts in Tanjung Gelumpang Village. One major outcome is the

strengthening of religious self-reliance. Community members no longer depend primarily on external preachers but actively sustain religious activities through internal resources.

Participation in religious programs has increased, particularly among youth and women, who engage in Qur'anic learning, collective prayers, and social-religious events. These activities function as platforms for intergenerational knowledge transmission and moral socialization.

Moreover, community-based da'wah contributes to social cohesion and informal social control. Religious norms guide conflict resolution, encourage mutual assistance, and promote collective responsibility. In times of crisis, such as flooding, religious networks facilitate rapid mobilization of social support.

From the perspective of social change, this model enhances community resilience against external cultural influences and modernization pressures. Religious values operate as moral filters that enable selective adaptation rather than passive acceptance of change. These findings suggest that community-based da'wah functions not only as a religious practice but also as a mechanism of social integration and cultural sustainability.

**6. Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The findings of this study contribute to the theoretical understanding of da'wah in marginalized contexts by highlighting the interplay between social capital, informal authority, and contextual communication. Community-based da'wah in isolated areas represents a hybrid model that combines traditional leadership with adaptive grassroots governance.

Practically, the study suggests that da'wah development programs in rural areas should prioritize capacity-building for local figures rather than relying solely on external intervention. Training initiatives, resource support, and policy frameworks should recognize and strengthen existing community structures. Furthermore, governmental and religious institutions may adopt collaborative approaches that respect local autonomy while providing strategic assistance. Such partnerships can enhance sustainability without undermining community ownership.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This study has examined the dynamics of community-based da'wah in Tanjung Gelumpang Village, an isolated and flood-prone rural area in Aceh Tamiang Regency. The findings demonstrate that geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and minimal institutional support do not necessarily hinder the sustainability of religious life. Instead, these structural constraints have encouraged the development of strong social cohesion, informal leadership, and adaptive religious practices rooted in local contexts.

The study reveals that local religious and customary figures play a pivotal role in sustaining da'wah activities through moral authority, cultural embeddedness, and long-term community engagement. Their leadership is characterized not by formal institutional legitimacy but by trust and social recognition. Supported by strong bonding social capital, these local actors function as religious educators, mediators, and role models who ensure the continuity of Islamic values within the community.

Furthermore, da'wah practices in Tanjung Gelumpang Village are predominantly organized through flexible, participatory, and community-driven mechanisms. The absence of rigid institutional structures enables the community to adapt religious activities to environmental challenges, particularly seasonal flooding. The dominance of da'wah bil ḥāl strengthens the internalization of religious values by integrating religious teachings into everyday social interactions and collective activities. This approach enhances credibility and fosters deeper moral commitment among community members.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the development of da'wah studies by highlighting the interplay between social capital, informal authority, and contextual communication in marginalized settings. The findings support the notion that effective da'wah does not exclusively depend on formal institutions but can also emerge from grassroots governance and lived religious practices. This study extends existing literature by demonstrating how community-based da'wah operates under conditions of geographical isolation and environmental vulnerability.

Practically, the study suggests that da'wah development programs in rural and marginalized areas should prioritize strengthening local capacities rather than imposing external models. Governmental and religious institutions are encouraged to adopt collaborative approaches that empower local leaders through training, resource provision, and policy support while respecting community autonomy. Such partnerships can enhance the sustainability of da'wah activities without undermining existing social structures.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research focuses on a single village, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies are encouraged to conduct comparative research across different geographical and cultural settings to explore variations in community-based da'wah models. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine the long-term sustainability of informal leadership and its implications for intergenerational religious transmission.

In conclusion, community-based da'wah in Tanjung Gelumpang Village functions not only as a religious practice but also as a mechanism of social integration, resilience, and cultural preservation. By combining local leadership, social solidarity, and contextual communication, this model offers valuable insights for the development of inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable da'wah strategies in marginalized communities.

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