



State Policy and Local Resistance: The History of Marijuana Prohibition in Lamteuba, Aceh (1976-2020)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the impact of the prohibition of marijuana cultivation after the implementation of the top-down policy on the local community in Lamteuba. This research applies the four stages of historical methods. The first method, heuristics, involves collecting written sources and oral sources. The second stage is source criticism. A thorough verification and evaluation were done on the collected data, followed by interpretation of the verified sources. The final stage is historiography. The study discovers that the locals of Lamteuba traditionally used marijuana for local needs. However, these practices conflicted with the law established by the central government starting in 1976, which prohibits the use of marijuana. The policy is contrary to local customs. This research is expected to contribute to research in the fields of political history and cultural history, particularly in understanding the cultural impacts of legal prohibitions imposed by authorities.

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INTRODUCTION

Marijuana, or *Cannabis sativa*, has long been familiar to the people of Aceh, particularly the residents of Lamteuba. In this region, cannabis has been used for various daily purposes, including medicinal treatment (Muttaqien, 2024), culinary seasoning (Pohan, 2022), and recreational consumption (Amin, 2023). The plant thrives naturally in Lamteuba's climate, which historically encouraged its integration into everyday practices. However, this long-standing tradition began to conflict with the national marijuana prohibition law enacted in 1976.

The policies implemented by the Indonesian central government represent a top-down model that does not take local cultural wisdom into account (Anggara, 2018). Before the prohibition, the people of Lamteuba treated cannabis much like any other household spice. The ban, however, significantly altered their lifestyle. Fear of criminal sanctions forced a shift from open use to discreet, concealed practices.

The situation became more complicated when the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) acknowledged its use of cannabis as a source of financial support for guerrilla operations (Liputan6, 2002). In response, the government introduced various policy measures, including preventive programs such as the Grand Design Alternative Development (GDAD) (Dayamas, 2019) and repressive actions like the Nila Operation (Tempo, 1989). These top-down interventions proved incompatible with the lived cultural habits of the Lamteuba community.

Top-down policies, by nature, prioritize central government objectives while neglecting the specific needs and cultural characteristics of local communities. In Lamteuba, such neglect threatens the erosion of long-held cultural values related to cannabis use. Moreover, the negative stigma attached to Lamteuba as a so-called "black area" has hindered residents from participating fully in broader social environments.

In response, the community has demonstrated subtle forms of resistance by maintaining cannabis use despite surveillance and restrictions. Cannabis remains embedded as a latent cultural value that cannot be easily eradicated. This persistence reflects the emergence of bottom-up policy dynamics. The proposal to legalize marijuana in 2020 indicates a bottom-up approach rooted in community perspectives and lived experiences (Arafat, 2023).

This study situates itself within the context of cultural and political history. While numerous previous studies have examined marijuana prohibition, they primarily adopt legal research approaches. In contrast, this research employs a historical method, offering perspectives that have not been addressed in earlier works. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative analysis of top-down and bottom-up policy frameworks in the context of cannabis



prohibition, as well as in exploring how these contrasting approaches shape local responses and socio-cultural dynamics.

METHOD

This research employs historical methods in accordance with the standards of the discipline of history. These methods comprise four sequential stages: source collection (utilizing heuristics), source criticism, source interpretation, and historical writing (historiography). As explained by Sjamsudin (2012), heuristics refers to the activity of locating sources to obtain data, historical materials, or historical evidence.

The first step in historical research is to search for primary sources—evidence produced at the same time as the events being studied. In this study, primary sources comprise archival materials relevant to the topic, including contemporary newspapers (e.g., *Tempo*, *Kompas*, *Liputan6*), personal documents, and official government records. Secondary sources were gathered through a literature review focusing on cannabis, narcotics regulation, Acehese cultural practices, and the legal framework surrounding cannabis prohibition.

To complement written materials, oral history interviews were conducted to obtain firsthand empirical information. Interviews were carried out with members of the Mukim Lamteuba community, experts, and practitioners. The community members interviewed include Bahron, Muksal Mina, Inong, and Sulthan Adam Maulana, all of whom are direct witnesses whose testimonies are supported by personal archives. Additionally, an interview was conducted with an expert, Tarmidzi Abdul Hamid, who is able to read ancient manuscripts. These interviews play a crucial role in strengthening the contextual and cultural dimensions of the study.

After the collection stage, the next step is source criticism, which assesses the reliability and credibility of the materials obtained. Source criticism involves two components: external criticism, which examines authenticity, and internal criticism, which evaluates the accuracy and credibility of the content. Once the sources have been critically examined, the interpretation stage begins. At this point, historical sources are analyzed, compared, and connected to construct logical conclusions about historical facts through analytical synthesis.

The final stage of the historical method is historiography. During this stage, the interpreted historical facts are written in a descriptive-analytical narrative that explains the dynamics of the historical processes investigated in this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

General Condition of Mukim Lamteuba

Mukim Lamteuba features a natural landscape comprising plains, hills, and mountains. The area of Lamteuba spans 194.23 km² (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Aceh Besar, 2024). It is the largest village in Seulimeum District, covering 48% of the district's total area of 404.35 km². The size of this region is influenced by the presence of Mount Seulawah Agam, which falls within the Lamteuba administrative area. Mount Seulawah Agam extends across both Seulimeum and Seulawah Districts (Weriantoni et al., 2018).

Mukim Lamteuba borders at least six other mukims or two different sub-districts, each connected through the ridge of Mount Seulawah Agam (Badan Registrasi Wilayah Adat, 2025). These natural conditions create a range of altitudes. Overall, Lamteuba is classified as a highland area, with elevations ranging from 50 meters above sea level to 1,810 meters at the peak of Mount Seulawah Agam and situated at the foot of this volcano—marking the northern end of the Bukit Barisan and part of the Indonesian Ring of Fire—mountainous and hilly formations dominate Lamteuba's landscape.

Lamteuba is considered one of the more secluded mukims in Seulimeum District (Riska, 2022). Access to the area is via a main road that winds through steep hills for approximately 20–30 km from Blang Bintang Street. Most residents rely on private vehicles to reach the provincial capital or use public transportation, such as labi-labi. However, labi-labi are not always available due to the challenging road conditions. Along the road stretch rows of plantations—known as *lampoh* in Acehese—containing a variety of crops. Its fertile soil and favorable climate support agricultural and livestock activities among the local population.

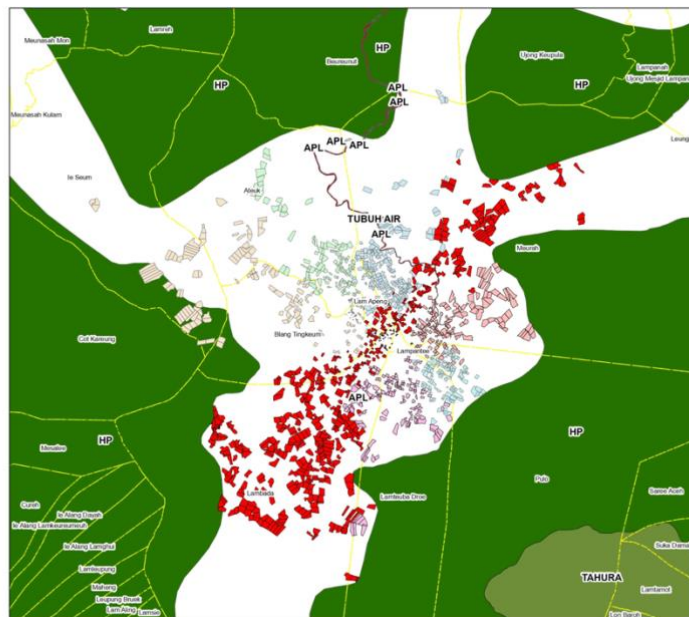


Figure 1. Map of Lamteuba, Seulimeum District, Aceh Besar Regency

Source: Badan Pertanahan Nasional Kantor Pemerintahan Kabupaten Aceh Besar, *Peta Pendaftaran Tanah Mukim Lamteuba Kecamatan Seulimeum Kabupaten Aceh Besar*, 2024.

Lamteuba has a warm climate with sufficient rainfall throughout the year, which supports agriculture. Although rainfall is relatively evenly distributed, residents can still distinguish between the rainy season (December–March), marked by westerly winds, and the dry season (July–September), characterized by southeasterly winds from the Australian mainland. Daily temperatures may reach 32°C, with an average of 23°C in August, and the lowest temperatures during the rainy season range from 19 °C to 20°C (Koentjaraningrat & Syamsudin, [1984](#)). The local community utilizes these climatic conditions.

The climate of Lamteuba also supports the growth of marijuana, a plant banned by the Indonesian government since 1976. Cannabis grows optimally at altitudes between 300 and 1,800 meters above sea level and requires temperatures of 21–30°C, typical of warm tropical regions. Lamteuba's environmental conditions precisely meet these requirements. Extreme temperatures—either excessively hot or cold—can inhibit its growth. Cannabis cultivated in Lamteuba is known to be of "Grade A" quality, considered superior to cannabis grown elsewhere (Kholiq, [2014](#)).

1976 Pre-Prohibition Marijuana Crops

Cannabis has long been a common plant in Aceh, especially in Lamteuba, where it thrives naturally. Because of its environmental suitability, local communities—who maintain a cultural respect for nature—integrated cannabis into daily life for culinary, medicinal, and recreational purposes.

Spices

Syardani M. Syarif, popularly known as "Tengku Jamaica," notes that the tradition of using cannabis as a culinary spice in Acehnese cuisine has been in existence for centuries (CNN Indonesia, [2020](#)). Cannabis was known as early as the Aceh Sultanate period in the 18th century. The idea that Acehnese cuisine contains marijuana was widely publicized by former Governor of Aceh and former MUI Chair, Prof. Ali Hasjmy, in the 1980s–1990s (Kholiq, [2014](#)). His statements, recorded in *Dustur Da'wah Menurut Al-Qur'an* (Hasjmy, [1974](#)), sparked public debate because they suggested that cannabis might be present in traditional Acehnese dishes despite Aceh's strong religious identity.

In practice, Acehnese cuisine does not always contain marijuana. The assumption arises from its use as a spice known as *kaskas*—dried cannabis seeds ground into powder and sprinkled onto dishes to enhance flavor and stimulate appetite.

Much earlier, Snouck Hurgronje also noted the traditional use of narcotics in Aceh, including cannabis:

"A moderate use of various narcotics is prescribed for sundry purposes, for example, the smoking of marijuana to excite the appetite, and the eating of opium to render the body thickset or to prolong sexual enjoyment (Hurgronje, [1904](#), p. XX).

In Lamteuba, cannabis is also used as an ingredient in traditional dishes such as *kari sie itek* (duck curry), *ie bu peudah* (spicy vegetable porridge), and *kuah beulangong*. In these soupy dishes, cannabis reportedly extends shelf life (Muttaqien, [2024](#)).

Medicine

Cannabis has been used in both modern and traditional Acehnese medicine. Two traditional manuscripts—*Tajul Muluk* and *Ar-Rahmah fi al-Tibb al-Hikmah*—contain references to the medicinal use of cannabis, dating back to the Aceh Sultanate.

Tarmidzi Abdul Hamid (Cek Midi), an Acehnese manuscript expert, explains that Lamteuba residents still practice healing traditions described in *Tajul Muluk*. Cannabis roots, sap, and leaves are used respectively to treat diabetes, stomach ailments, blood circulation, and wounds such as gunshot injuries (Setiyadi, [2022](#)). All parts of the plant—roots, stems, leaves, sap, and seeds—may be used after being processed into *majun*, a traditional herbal concoction prepared under the guidance of a healer.

Recreational

Recreational use of cannabis in Lamteuba traditionally takes place in social settings, especially coffee shops, which serve as communal spaces for discussion, meetings, and local transactions (Salamun, [2018](#)). Before the 2005 Aceh peace agreement, young people in Lamteuba commonly smoked cannabis in such venues. According to Bahron, the *Keuchik* of Lamteuba Droe, young people used cannabis "just to enjoy it," not out of dependency.

W. G. Broersma also documented cannabis use in the Dutch East Indies in 1918, who described various effects depending on the type of leaf used to wrap the cannabis. In Lamteuba, wrapping cannabis in ripe *Raja Pulut* leaves—commonly found in the area—was known to produce the most substantial intoxicating effect, causing smokers to lose consciousness after 8–10 inhalations.

1976 Marijuana Ban

Before 1976, the Lamteuba community regarded marijuana plants much like other common household spices such as pepper, turmeric, ginger, and similar crops. In the 1970s, cannabis was often grown in pots in home gardens, sometimes alongside tomatoes and chilies, due to its natural pesticide properties, which help repel pests from surrounding plants (Putra, [2014](#)). The presence of cannabis in residential yards indicates that the Lamteuba community did not use it in large quantities, but rather in small, controlled amounts. In culinary practices, for instance, cannabis was only used in limited portions—typically equivalent to the length of a finger joint. Nevertheless, large-scale cannabis cultivation was also practiced in certain parts of Lamteuba.

The cultivation and use of cannabis were officially prohibited on 26 July 1976, with the enactment of Law No. 9 of 1976 concerning Narcotics. This law banned the use of all parts of the cannabis plant—including its leaves, flowers, seeds, and other components. In addition to cannabis, the law also prohibits two other plants: the papaver (*Papaver somniferum*) and the coca plant (*Erythroxylum coca*). National concerns over drug abuse and pressure from the international community drove the issuance of this prohibition. Three main factors influenced the ban: (1) Indonesia's commitment to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs; (2) the rise in drug abuse during the 1970s, which reached approximately 130,000 cases—most of them related to cannabis; and (3) the MUI statement issued on 10 February 1976, declaring cannabis to be *haram*.

In the early period following the ban, residents of Lamteuba continued to grow and use cannabis. At that time, they mostly heard news about disturbances occurring in Banda Aceh related to cannabis control. Cannabis was still commonly sold at Peunayong Market in Banda Aceh (Redaksi, [2008](#)). Hoengeng, the Chief of the Indonesian National Police from 1968 to 1971, had conducted a surprise inspection of the Aceh region after attending the Interpol Conference in 1971. He found the cannabis situation in Aceh to be alarming and believed it required urgent action (Yusra & Santoso, [1993](#)). Hoengeng was one of the officials who supported accelerating the legalization of the cannabis prohibition law.

Police operations intensified after the ban. On 26 September 1979, authorities arrested a marijuana seller carrying 800 grams of dried cannabis. The seller, named Bunyamin, transported the marijuana from Aceh Besar—known to originate from Lamteuba—and was apprehended in Banda Aceh. The arrest drew widespread attention at the time, as cases of marijuana-related arrests were still relatively rare. However, following this incident, police enforcement became inconsistent, with officers becoming less assertive in conducting raids across the city. Many believed that Bunyamin had merely been unlucky, arrested at a moment when the police needed someone to

prosecute. Meanwhile, Lamteuba residents continued their customary practices, hearing news about these developments only after they occurred.

Marijuana Plants Under the Influence of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)

The Indonesian government's ban on marijuana in 1976 coincided with the emergence of a political movement known as the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Law No. 9 of 1976 on Narcotics was enacted on 26 July 1976, and six months later, on 4 December 1976, GAM was declared by Hasan Tiro (Dharma & Eda, [1999](#)). These two developments cannot be separated from Aceh's long-standing tensions with the central government.

The Free Aceh Movement (GAM) positioned itself as an organization fighting for Aceh's independence from Jakarta (Maissarah & Hasan, [2019](#)). GAM's emergence was rooted in long-term grievances regarding economic inequality, social injustice, and cultural marginalization (Awaludin, [2008](#)). Frictions intensified when Aceh's attempts to implement Islamic law as a political foundation were rejected by the central government. Consequently, GAM was designated as the *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM), or Free Aceh Movement, because it was considered a rebellion against the central authority.

GAM operated through an organized and efficient structure, spreading from coastal areas—such as Banda Aceh—to the interior regions, including Lhokseumawe, East Aceh, Southeast Aceh, and Aceh Rayeuk (Aceh Besar), a mountainous area with strategic defensive advantages. Aceh Rayeuk had four regional commands. One of them, Regional Command 26, oversaw Lampulo, Darussalam, Cot Keueng, Siron, Blang Bintang, and Lamteuba. This command was divided into three camps: Camp Pinto Raya, led by Ramli (Pak Cha); Camp Tameh Teungeuh, led by Teungku Li; and Camp Pinto Angen, led by Irwansyah (Tengku Muksalmina) (Kini, [2019](#)).

Camp Pinto Angen, located at the center of the command area, played a crucial role in sustaining GAM's resistance. Its position in the Seulawah Agam valley enabled it to guard Blang Bintang Street and control the movements of the military and police. One of its additional tasks was to restrict police access to the Lamteuba hamlet, where marijuana plantations had expanded. These plantations were used to support GAM's war financing, even though combatants were not always directly involved in cultivation.

Marijuana became one of the most widely recognized sources of funding for GAM. Government reports indicate that GAM's financial resources came from three main channels: *pajak nanggroe* (The Aceh Post, [2020](#)), donations from the Acehnese diaspora, and the marijuana trade (Schulze, [2004](#)). Cannabis-related financing occurred in two ways: (1) trade of cannabis produced from local plantations, and (2) taxing cannabis fields—distinct from the *nanggroe* tax. Although this funding system was widely rumored, many GAM members denied or refused to confirm it.

Residents of Lamteuba recalled that GAM had its own internal rules regarding cannabis. Combatants neither openly admitted nor rejected the accusation that the marijuana trade financed their struggle, to avoid damaging GAM's legitimacy. Public acknowledgment of such funding would have led to a broad rejection of the movement. In a 1981 interview, Colonel T. Ali Hasyim openly accused GAM of being funded by a marijuana mafia whose plantations were threatened by police operations (Tempo, [1981](#)). GAM's silence on the issue was thus seen as a strategic protective stance.

Although the involvement of cannabis in GAM's financing was never explicitly stated, Lamteuba became one of the centers of the cannabis trade during the period of escalating conflict. Residents referred to the period as "the golden rains." Large-scale cannabis cultivation began around 1980. From 1980 to 1981, dried cannabis from Lamteuba was valued at approximately Rp3,000 per kilogram—a modest price at the time.

The price was determined by collectors known to locals as "Jakarta People." Their identities were unclear, yet their close connections with GAM and their freedom to enter and exit Lamteuba during the conflict strengthened suspicions that GAM networks brought them in. Prices increased significantly once the goods were transported to Banda Aceh, Medan, or Jakarta, and overseas shipments were routed through Pulo Aceh, where foreign-flagged ships were waiting.

Between 1992 and 2005, cannabis prices reached their peak as tensions between GAM and the central government intensified. During the "golden rain" period, each household in Lamteuba reportedly kept four to five sacks of cannabis, each containing 10–12 kilograms. By 2002, one kilogram of fresh cannabis was valued at Rp1,500,000—several times higher than its value in 1981.

Cannabis cultivation involved not only adults but also elementary-school-aged children. After school, children gathered with sickles and sacks to help plant or harvest cannabis. Fields were located around *uteun* (forests) and *blang* (open land). Cultivation required no special treatment. A 1999 *Tempo* report highlighted the scale of cultivation:

"After the seeds are scattered throughout the forest, pots are prepared for the remaining seeds. These pots serve as a benchmark... Anyone who dares to approach will be rebuked as a member of the GPK... Even without the terrifying label, their lives are already bitter." (Tempo, [1999](#))

The rise of the cannabis trade during this period transformed Lamteuba's economic patterns. Before this, cannabis had been viewed primarily as a cultural commodity; afterward, it became a high-value economic commodity. The use of cannabis to finance GAM's war effort further justified the national prohibition policy. Consequently, two key policies were implemented: Nila Operation as a repressive measure and the Grand Design Alternative Development (GDAD) program as a preventive strategy.

1. Nila Operation as a Repressive Act

Nila Operation—an annual marijuana eradication initiative—was a routine government program conducted regularly until 2020. It was implemented once or twice a year and targeted all forms of illegal drugs, including heroin, methamphetamine, and ecstasy. According to the Jakarta Metropolitan Police, "Nila Operation is carried out to eradicate all forms of illicit drug trafficking and suppress violations" (Sabilillah, [2022](#)).

The operation was conducted in coordination with the military, relevant agencies, including the National Narcotics Board (BNN), and local communities. It was first launched on 20 February 1989, under Brigadier General Koesparmono Irsan (Lubis et al., [1989](#)). The implementation of Nila Operation aligned with Aceh's designation as a *Daerah Operasi Militer* (DOM) and the enforcement of Operation Rencong. While Nila Operations were carried out across Indonesia, this research focuses specifically on those conducted in Lamteuba, Aceh.

Table 1. Initial Stage of Nila Operation

No	Operation	Year	Result
1	Nila Operation I	1989	1,171,127 trees from 8 locations; 3 locations from Lamteuba
2	Nila Operation II	24 April-16 Mei 1990.	An unowned marijuana plantation in Lamteuba and a drug lord were killed in Trenggon, Southeast Aceh
3	Nila Operation	1991	26 kg of marijuana that has been harvested in Lamteuba

Nila Operation, in its initial phase, was implemented only from 1989 to 1991. The program could not continue after 1991 because Lamteuba became increasingly isolated due to military operations. During this period, neither the police nor the military were able to enter the village.

In 1997, the Indonesian government revised the narcotics legislation. Law No. 9 of 1976 on Narcotics was replaced by Law No. 22 of 1997. This revision had a far-reaching impact, as marijuana was classified under the first cluster of narcotics—meaning it was prohibited without exception. This legal framework conflicted sharply with the socio-cultural realities of Lamteuba, where cannabis had long been integrated into daily life as a spice, medicinal ingredient, and recreational substance. Alongside this revision, the government also mapped "black zones," areas identified as high-priority targets for the eradication of narcotics. Lamteuba was categorized as a top-priority black area due to the density of its cannabis plantations (Metropolis, [2020](#)).

Nila Operation was reinstated in 2006, following the peace agreement between the Aceh regional government and the central government signed in Helsinki on 15 August 2005. When revived, the operation was assigned a new name—Nila Rencong Operation—to emphasize that it was designed explicitly for the Aceh region. From 2006 onwards, the program consisted of two components: the national Nila Operation and the region-specific Nila Rencong Operation. Nila Rencong Operation became the first major agenda item following the peace agreement, illustrating the central government's heightened determination to eradicate cannabis fields in Aceh.

This determination was reflected in the statement of National Police Chief General Police Susanto, who told *DetikNews*:

"The eradication of marijuana plants in Aceh was planned after the Helsinki process. There were extensive fields. Finally, we destroyed them in Aceh Besar." (DetikNews, [2005](#))

Aceh Besar Regency—which includes Lamteuba—was identified as the top priority in the Nila Rencong Operation. General Susanto's statement reflects long-standing governmental frustration and the renewed commitment to harsher enforcement. Compared to earlier periods, the Nila Rencong Operation adopted a more structured strategy.

Under the Nila Rencong Operation, various areas in Aceh were designated as operation priorities and received specific guidance from the central government. Lamteuba was placed on the official blacklist due to being home to the largest cannabis plantation in Aceh (Badan Narkotika Nasional, [2017](#)). Unlike other areas categorized as black zones because of high numbers of drug users, Lamteuba's classification was based on extensive cultivation.

Nila Rencong Operation represents a form of repressive state policy implemented to curb narcotics abuse. The central government considered repressive action essential to suppress both small-scale and large-scale cannabis cultivation in Lamteuba. These measures included stigmatization, arrests, and direct raids conducted by security authorities against the local community.

Table 2. Operation Nila After Aceh Peace

No	Operation	Year	Result
1	Nila Rencong Operation	2006	A discovery of marijuana fields in Lamteuba
2	Nila Rencong Operation	July 2007	17 kg of dried marijuana in <i>Gampong Pulo</i> , Lamteuba
3	Nila Rencong Operation	5 February 2008	10 hectares of marijuana fields in <i>Gampong Lamteuba Droë</i>
4	Nila Rencong Operation	November 2009	900 kg of dried marijuana from Lamteuba to Jakarta, and the arrest of the truck driver named Karimun (47 years old) and Edi Sipena (41 years old)
5	Nila Rencong Operation	2010	11 hectares of marijuana fields in the Seulawah Agam mountains, 10 km from residential areas
6	Nila Rencong Operation	10-31 June 2011	A 157-hectare and 222-ton marijuana plantation in the Lamteuba settlement
7	Nila Rencong Operation	July 2012	22-hectare marijuana field in <i>Gampong Lampanah</i>
8	Nila Rencong Operation	May 2013	22 hectares from 18 points in Lamteuba
9	Nila Rencong Operation	2014	59 kg of dried marijuana
10	Nila Rencong Operation	2015	13 marijuana fields and one of the 34 hectares of marijuana seedlings that have been planted in various pots
11	Nila Rencong Operation	2016	9 hectares of marijuana fields in <i>Gampong Pulo</i> , Lamteuba
12	Nila Rencong Operation	2017	1 hectare of marijuana fields
13	Nila Rencong Operation	Mei-September 2018	3 points of wet marijuana fields where the plants reach 1.5-2 meters in height
14	Nila Rencong Operation	2019	1.1 hectares in <i>Gampong Pulo</i>
15	Nila Rencong Operation	2020	10 hectares of marijuana fields from 2 points in Lamteuba, with the destruction of 30,000 marijuana trees and 48 tons of dried marijuana

Operation Nila, carried out in Lamteuba both during the initial phase and after the Aceh peace process in 2006, succeeded in uncovering marijuana fields, dried cannabis, and marijuana seedlings. However, the operation consistently failed to identify the perpetrators or owners of these fields. Police typically found only empty field huts with no individuals present. According to Mardira ([2012](#)), cannabis farmers rarely guard their plantations continuously because the plants can grow with minimal care. Moreover, local farmers have long been accustomed to cultivating cannabis discreetly, avoiding the detection of security forces.

During the continuation of the Nila Operation, the narcotics law was revised in 2009, resulting in significant alterations to its enforcement. Under Law No. 35 of 2009, marijuana remained classified as a Class I narcotic, prohibited from being used, cultivated, or distributed except for limited scientific and medical purposes. The law emphasized marijuana as a priority concern due to its high prevalence among drug-related cases. Marijuana accounted for the highest proportion of narcotics distribution (61%) and the largest share of drug users (65.5%) in 2008 (Tuba et al., [2023](#)).

Following the enactment of the 2009 law, cannabis eradication became a top priority in Indonesia's national drug control agenda. The government strengthened its institutional framework by establishing the National Narcotics Board (Badan Narkotika Nasional, BNN) as an independent body responsible for overseeing the distribution and prevention of narcotics. The law also highlighted the importance of human-centered approaches by expanding

rehabilitation services for drug users. Individuals convicted of drug abuse are required not only to serve prison sentences and pay fines but also to undergo rehabilitation programs.

Drug eradication efforts extend beyond punitive measures and target broader community engagement through guidance, counseling, and preventive programs. Lamteuba became one of the priority communities receiving intensive mentoring and educational outreach from various institutions.

Irwandi Yusuf—a former GAM combatant and Governor of Aceh (2007–2012; 2017–2020)—was among the political leaders who frequently visited Lamteuba to monitor training activities and oversee the destruction of cannabis plantations in compliance with the law. Irwandi Yusuf openly criticized the presence of cannabis in Lamteuba. As reported by Humas Pemerintah Aceh (2017), he insisted that Aceh, known as the "Veranda of Mecca," must not be transformed into the "Veranda of Marijuana." Consequently, he initiated the eradication of cannabis plantations that had reached a state of emergency.

By the time the prohibition law was reinforced in 2009, cannabis cultivation within the socio-cultural life of Lamteuba was no longer practiced openly. The community became increasingly cautious, concealing its practices entirely. Cannabis use and cultivation were no longer visible in public spaces. This shift was also reflected in planting patterns: in the 1970s, cannabis was grown in household yards, whereas by 2009 it was found only in mountainous areas far from settlements.

2. Grand Design Alternative Development (GDAD) as a Preventive Act

Nila Operation and Nila Rencong Operation, implemented by the central government, represent repressive top-down policy strategies. Alongside these enforcement measures, the government also adopted preventive approaches through the Grand Design Alternative Development (GDAD) program. GDAD serves as a long-term initiative aimed at improving community welfare so that residents no longer rely on marijuana cultivation or become vulnerable to drug-related practices.

The prohibition of marijuana cultivation gradually led to the decline of cannabis farming in Lamteuba. Farmers who had practiced cannabis cultivation for generations began shifting to safer and more economically viable alternative crops. This transition required government support, primarily through land allocation and agricultural training, to empower former cannabis farmers in developing new livelihoods.

The Indonesian government has played a crucial role in restructuring agricultural patterns from cannabis to more productive commercial crops. Since 2016, the government has expanded the GDAD program (Humas BNN, 2017), aligning its policies with the 2016 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Convention, which emphasized that: "Reform of cannabis cultivation is necessary to eradicate narcotics."

UNODC further defines Alternative Development as:

"A process to prevent and eradicate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotics and psychotropics through special actions in rural development within the framework of sustainable national economic growth, taking into account the unique socio-economic characteristics of target communities." (UNODC, 2016)

Based on presidential directives, GDAD was designed with multiple objectives, including replacing marijuana as a regional commodity, converting cannabis farmers into cultivators of superior crops, improving community welfare and character, strengthening local economies, increasing household income, enhancing health and legal awareness, and mobilizing community potential through partnerships and cooperative networks. Through these efforts, the government aims to cultivate a productive and law-abiding community in Lamteuba.

A significant priority of GDAD is reducing economic vulnerability. Lamteuba has the highest number of underprivileged households in Seulimeum District. In 2020, 594 of the district's 2,331 households were categorized as underprivileged and resided in Lamteuba (Badan Pusat Statistik Aceh Besar, 2021). GDAD therefore seeks to alleviate poverty as a key step toward eliminating cannabis dependency.

GDAD is implemented collaboratively by the Indonesian National Police, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), the National Narcotics Board (BNN), the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Village Affairs. The Ministry of Village Affairs is involved because the discovery of cannabis fields follows a recurring pattern each year, concentrated in similar sub-districts and villages.

Program activities include land clearing, seed distribution, and agricultural development. In Lamteuba, the flagship GDAD crop is turmeric (*Curcuma longa*). Lamteuba turmeric is known for its high curcuminoid content and substantial commercial value. Its cultivation became the most successful GDAD initiative. Farmers later established a

local agribusiness enterprise, CV Aslam Atjeh, chaired by Muhammad Sulaiman. Initially, GDAD allocated five hectares of land to him, which eventually expanded to one hundred hectares across eight gampong in Lamteuba (Kholisdinuka, [2019](#)). Although empowerment efforts continue, the exact number of former cannabis farmers involved is unknown because cultivation often occurs on privately owned family land.

Another major GDAD component involves the development of secondary crops. The program opened a 98-hectare field for soybean cultivation in Gampong Lambada, which was previously used for cannabis cultivation (Zulkarnaini, [2018](#)). In addition to soybeans, farmers grow corn, peanuts, cassava, sweet potatoes, and mung beans; however, specific locations are difficult to trace due to the reliance on family plots. Secondary crops employ the largest workforce and provide essential income opportunities for former cannabis farmers.

GDAD also introduced patchouli cultivation in Gampong Blang Tikeum. Patchouli thrives in Lamteuba's tropical climate and is processed into essential oils used for perfumes, incense, aromatherapy, and cosmetics. However, Lamteuba farmers currently lack access to oil-refining facilities, so they sell patchouli only as raw essential oil. GDAD also supports the development of coffee plantations: BNN cleared seven hectares for coffee farming to match community interest and provide crops that can be harvested year-round (Arifianto, [2013](#)).

Despite these efforts, the income generated from GDAD crops remains insufficient for many households. Economic hardship continues to compel some Lamteuba residents to cultivate cannabis in secret as a means of survival.

Legalization of Marijuana as a Form of Bottom-Up Policy

The discourse on marijuana legalization reflects a bottom-up policy model, in which aspirations originate from the community and are then channeled to the central government. This model stands in contrast to the top-down approach of prior state policies, particularly the marijuana prohibition law, which imposed uniform behavioral standards on local communities regardless of cultural context. The legalization discourse emerging from Lamteuba is expected to inspire amendments to narcotics legislation that incorporate local wisdom. However, the prohibition law enacted in 1976 has long shaped social values in Lamteuba, making the acceptance of alternative approaches difficult.

Since the revision of the narcotics law in 2009, the number of marijuana farmers and users in Lamteuba has declined sharply. This shift resulted not only from legal enforcement but also from the stigmatizing labels associated with Lamteuba. The phrase "*Kah lagee aneuk Lamteuba!*"—meaning "You're just like a Lamteuba kid!"—became a popular expression in Aceh for young people considered naughty or mischievous (Randa, [2015](#)). For Lamteuba residents, this label is deeply offensive, as it reduces their identity to a stereotype linked to cannabis cultivation.

According to Bahron, this external labeling has weakened community self-confidence and reinforced the association between Lamteuba and cannabis. While it is true that cannabis was historically used culturally and that many residents became cannabis farmers during the *hujan emas* ("golden rain") period, such practices cannot justify the negative stigma directed at the entire community.

As a result, residents tend to be defensive when outsiders inquire about cannabis. Many refuse to discuss it to protect their reputation. The community rejects the stereotype that equates Lamteuba with marijuana, distancing itself from such associations.

Currently, cannabis is no longer used as a cultural crop. Instead, it is perceived as an economic commodity—or even as an illicit substance. Cannabis, once valued for its medicinal uses, is no longer utilized traditionally; residents now rely on modern medical treatments following intensified eradication operations and arrests. Use of cannabis as a cooking ingredient has also largely ceased. Although a small minority still uses it as a spice, such practices occur secretly. Recreational use is often viewed as a form of social deviance. This aligns with the observation of Tarmidzi Abdul Hamid, who noted that communities will abandon cannabis if viable alternatives are available.

Individuals who continue to use cannabis often face social sanctions. Bullying or ridicule may occur if someone is caught using the plant. Older residents, however, struggle to abandon cannabis entirely because it holds personal and cultural meaning rooted in their upbringing. Even so, many wish to erase the stigma attached to cannabis in Lamteuba. Such pressures drive behavioral change within the community.

Religious values also play a significant role in reshaping community attitudes. As marijuana came to be classified as *haram* (forbidden) in Islam, Lamteuba's entirely Muslim population became religiously obligated to avoid it. This labeling has contributed significantly to the community's reluctance to use cannabis. Religious leaders frequently address the dangers of marijuana during Friday sermons at the Lamteuba Jamik Mosque. Habib, a resident,

noted that avoiding marijuana is now a recurring theme in religious guidance. Still, some community members continue to use cannabis discreetly.

These shifts—from traditional to modern medicine, from cannabis to alternative spices, and from open use to concealed practices—mark a broader transformation in community habits. This transformation explains why the Lamteuba community generally aligns itself with the government's stance, even though a segment of the population continues to advocate for a bottom-up policy approach emphasizing local participation and traditional knowledge. Despite these efforts, the results have been limited: marijuana remains classified as an illegal drug in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Lamteuba, located in Seulimeum District, Aceh Besar Regency, possesses a long-standing tradition of using cannabis for culinary, medicinal, and recreational purposes. This local wisdom, however, entered into direct conflict with the national narcotics regime established through Law No. 9 of 1976, a top-down policy that prohibited all forms of cannabis use. The prohibition initially had little impact on community practices because, in the same year, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) was declared in Aceh, including in Lamteuba. Within this context of conflict, cannabis shifted from being merely a cultural crop to becoming an economic commodity capable of financing the GAM struggle.

The prolonged conflict between GAM and the central government intensified the state's determination to suppress cannabis cultivation, particularly because it served as a source of insurgent funding. In response, the government implemented two major strategies: the Nila Operation as a repressive eradication effort and the Grand Design Alternative Development (GDAD) program as a preventive measure aimed at promoting alternative livelihoods.

Nila Operation (1989–1992) sought to destroy cannabis fields, followed by the revision of narcotics legislation in 1997, which categorized cannabis as a Schedule I narcotic with the strictest legal restrictions. During this period, Lamteuba became increasingly isolated due to military operations, allowing cannabis cultivation to expand significantly until the Aceh peace agreement in 2005.

After peace was established, the eradication program resumed in 2006 under the name Nila Rencong Operation, continuing annually until 2020. Cannabis prohibition was further strengthened under Law No. 35 of 2009, which introduced harsher penalties and emphasized rehabilitation. Following this development, the Lamteuba community ceased openly using cannabis in everyday life. Only a small minority continued to use it, and they did so exclusively in secret.

The cannabis prohibition law—misaligned with Lamteuba's historical practices and cultural patterns—sparked the emergence of a legalization discourse within the community. This discourse reflects a form of bottom-up resistance, rooted in local aspirations and traditional knowledge, standing in contrast to the centralized, top-down narcotics policy imposed by the state. Although these community-driven efforts have not yet resulted in policy change, they highlight an ongoing tension between national regulation and local cultural identity.

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