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Household Livelihood Strategies of Ex-Baduy Female Converts in Ciater Village, Lebak

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Abstract
The ex-Baduy converts are a group of people who left the Baduy customary community and embraced Islam. Leaving the community has made it harder for their households to earn a living and to improve their quality of life. In this setting, livelihood is not only an economic matter; it is also woven into social relations. This study maps the livelihood strategies of ex-Baduy convert households, with particular attention to how women help diversify household income. Using a qualitative approach, we interviewed eight informants and carried out social mapping of the surrounding community through transect walks. Ex-Baduy women follow a dual livelihood strategy: alongside their domestic work, they make and sell *koja*, a traditional bark-fibre bag. This income acts as a financial cushion that steadies household earnings when the men's informal wage work is irregular. Drawing on social, human, and spiritual capital within the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA), the study shows that women's economic agency is central to keeping households resilient through cultural and social transition. The findings point toward gender-responsive community empowerment in indigenous communities undergoing similar transitions.

Keywords: *Dual Livelihood; Ex-Baduy Community; Livelihood Strategies; Social Capital; Women's Role*

Abstrak
Masyarakat mualaf eks-Baduy adalah kelompok yang keluar dari komunitas adat Baduy dan memeluk agama Islam. Perpindahan ini membuat rumah tangga mereka menghadapi berbagai kesulitan dalam mencari nafkah dan memperbaiki kualitas hidup. Dalam konteks ini, penghidupan bukan semata urusan ekonomi, melainkan juga bagian dari relasi sosial di masyarakat. Penelitian ini memetakan strategi penghidupan rumah tangga mualaf eks-Baduy, khususnya peran perempuan dalam menganekaragamkan sumber nafkah keluarga. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan wawancara terhadap delapan informan dan pemetaan sosial masyarakat sekitar melalui transek wilayah. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa perempuan eks-Baduy menjalankan strategi nafkah ganda: di samping mengurus rumah tangga, mereka membuat dan menjual kerajinan tradisional *koja*. Penghasilan dari *koja* menjadi bantalan keuangan yang menstabilkan pendapatan rumah tangga ketika upah suami di sektor informal tidak menentu. Dengan memadukan kapital sosial, manusia, dan spiritual dalam kerangka *Sustainable Livelihood Approach* (SLA), studi ini menunjukkan bahwa agensi ekonomi perempuan menjadi kunci ketahanan rumah tangga di tengah transisi budaya dan sosial. Temuan ini memberi arah bagi pemberdayaan berbasis gender pada komunitas adat yang mengalami transisi serupa.

Kata Kunci: *Kapital Sosial; Masyarakat Eks-Baduy; Peran Perempuan; Nafkah Ganda; Strategi Penghidupan Rumah Tangga*

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Introduction

The Baduy are known as an indigenous community with a tightly ordered social system, strong cultural values, and livelihoods grounded in customary law and tradition (Saepudin, 2018). Their economic life is bound up with customary rules, kinship networks, the management of living space, and farming that relies on local resources in ways meant to keep the environment intact (Krisnawaty et al., 2025). Livelihood here is part of the social order that governs how members relate to one another, not just a way of earning money. Over time, however, some Baduy have converted to Islam and now form a group usually called ex-Baduy converts (*muallaf*). Conversion means more than a change of faith. It reshapes social identity and relationships within the community and forces people to adopt new ways of making a living (Diningsih, 2024). The experience of ex-Baduy converts can therefore be read as a livelihood transition, in which households change how they reach resources, rebuild their social networks, and work out new economic strategies in an unfamiliar social setting.

About 30 ex-Baduy convert households live in Kampung Ciater, Cibungur Village, Ciboleger District, Lebak Regency, which is the setting of this study. Our preliminary field mapping shows that 11 of them rely on handicraft production as one of their main sources of income. Most husbands work in the informal sector as casual or construction labourers, and what they earn depends on whether there is work that day. These households are economically vulnerable: formal jobs are out of reach, income is insecure, and much depends on small home-based activities. Baduy converts also have limited access to wider economic and social resources, which keeps them on the margins of the modern economy, narrows their social networks, and leaves few chances to learn new skills (Abdurahman et al., 2024). This slows both economic progress and social adjustment within the wider community. Families meet daily needs not from one source of income but from several activities carried out by different household members (Dalil & Ghani, 2026). Uncertainty is a constant, and households have to keep adapting and managing whatever resources they have.

When money is tight, women often hold the household together (Vemilia et al., 2026). In Ciater, ex-Baduy women make handicrafts at home and sell them, and this has become one of the family's main sources of income. The home is thus both a place of social reproduction and a place of production. Craftwork lets women look after the household and earn at the same time. In households with few resources, women's paid work is an essential part of the livelihood strategy (Pattimahu et al., 2023), which makes them economic actors in their own right, not only managers of domestic tasks.

By combining the husbands' casual wages with the women's home-based *koja* production, ex-Baduy households spread their economic risk and manage to cover daily needs. Nissa' et al. (2026) note that this kind of livelihood change reshapes social structures and strengthens households' ability to adapt to ongoing uncertainty. Women's work on *koja* adds to household income, but it also marks a change in women's economic standing within the family and the community.

Institutions matter as well. Baitulmaal Hidayatullah (BMH) supports households through mentoring, motivation, help with small businesses, and wider social networks. In livelihood terms, this support is a form of social and institutional capital that helps households reach resources and find new economic opportunities.

Most earlier studies of the Baduy have dealt with customary livelihoods, ecological wisdom, and adaptation to social change. Sukaesih et al. (2025), for example, looked at traditional economic practices that have survived modernisation, and Nurfalah et al. (2023) analysed how the Outer Baduy adapt using local wisdom. These studies tend to treat indigenous households as single economic units and pay little attention to the gendered side of livelihood change after religious conversion. Research that treats ex-Baduy women converts as the main economic actors in their households is still scarce.

To address this gap, we use the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) developed by Scoones (1998). The SLA shows how households draw on different assets (social, human, physical, natural, and, in our reading, spiritual capital) to build multiple livelihood

strategies and become more resilient. Using this framework, the study looks at how ex-Baduy women use *koja* production to diversify household income, cope with a socio-religious transition, and reduce long-standing economic vulnerability. The aim is to analyse how ex-Baduy female converts build household livelihood strategies under economic pressure, and how women's work, their contribution to the household, and institutional support sustain household well-being.

Method

We used a qualitative, descriptive design. A qualitative approach suited our aim of understanding the experiences, actions, and meanings that ex-Baduy women attach to their livelihood strategies. Such research tries to see social reality from the participants' point of view by exploring the meanings, experiences, and contexts behind what they do (Neuman, 2014). Fieldwork took place over one week in March 2026 in Kampung Ciater, Cibungur Village, Ciboleger District, Lebak Regency. We chose this site because it is home to an ex-Baduy convert community that produces handicrafts at home and receives support from Baitulmaal Hidayatullah. Initial mapping showed about 30 ex-Baduy convert households in the area, 11 of which are actively involved in handicraft production as a main source of livelihood.

Informants were chosen through purposive sampling, that is, on the basis of their knowledge of, experience with, and involvement in the issues under study, so that they could provide rich information (Patton, 2002). The primary informants were three ex-Baduy women who make *koja*, coded P1, P2, and P3. To understand household livelihoods and the wider community context, we also interviewed five supporting informants: IP1, a community leader and religious mentor (*ustad*); IP2, a community leader; IP3, the neighbourhood head (*RT*); IP4, the programme person-in-charge (PIC) from Baitulmaal Hidayatullah; and IP5, a representative of Impact+. Including these different perspectives gave us a fuller picture of household livelihoods, women's economic roles, and the institutional support available to the community. The informants are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Informants

Code	Role	Informant Category
P1	Koja artisan and housewife	Primary
P2	Koja artisan and housewife	Primary
P3	Koja artisan and housewife	Primary
IP1	Religious mentor (*ustad*)	Supporting
IP2	Local community leader	Supporting
IP3	Neighbourhood head (*RT*)	Supporting
IP4	Programme person-in-charge (PIC), BMH	Supporting
IP5	Impact+ representative	Supporting

Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, direct observation, participatory transect walks, and document analysis. The researcher carried out the transect walks and physical social mapping together with local residents to observe housing, infrastructure, and environmental resources. Social mapping reports and assessment documents from Impact+ were used as secondary data to complement and cross-check our observations of settlement conditions, social cohesion, and local institutional capacity.

To ensure trustworthiness, we used source and method triangulation. Accounts were compared across informant groups (artisans, community leaders, and institutional representatives), and interview statements were checked against field notes and secondary documents.

All participants gave verbal and written informed consent before data collection, and participation was voluntary. Informants were told the purpose of the research, assured of confidentiality, and informed that they would be

identified only by alphanumeric codes in any publication.

The data were analysed with Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Results and Discussion

Household Economic Vulnerability

Ex-Baduy households face several problems that leave them economically vulnerable, and the transition to modern life is the most serious of them. In assessments and interviews, residents spoke openly about how hard this transition has been. Living outside the customary legal system, leaving their former beliefs behind, and adjusting to new norms and ways of life have all produced social friction. The Baduy traditionally held an animistic belief system, but growing contact with the outside world led some members to convert to Islam.

> *This transition began around 1985, when housing was first established for Baduy converts to Islam. Initially, land conflicts emerged. Those who embraced Islam had to leave the Inner Baduy community and build their own settlements, but the available land was very limited.*
>
> (IP1, religious mentor (*ustad*), March 2026)

Many ex-Baduy households now live in settlements with poor housing and limited infrastructure, which lowers their quality of life and adds to their vulnerability. They have also had to look for other ways to earn a living. Population growth has made matters worse by gradually reducing the land available for housing and farming, pushing households to search for new places to live and work. Former members of the Baduy community find this adjustment particularly hard, because customary law still shapes their lives and their economic situation has been unstable since they left (Setiawan et al., 2023).

Population growth has also sped up land degradation, and the small amount of land set aside for ex-Baduy settlements has put more pressure on local natural resources. Field observations and interviews with a community leader (IP2) indicate that converting land for housing and intensive farming has gradually reduced soil fertility. Residents have turned to conventional farming, including chemical fertilisers, to keep yields up. Sukaesih et al. (2025) observe that moving away from customary farming methods often causes local land degradation, threatening the environment and lowering productivity. With farm income squeezed, ex-Baduy households look for non-agricultural income such as handicrafts and informal labour.

Farming has long been the main livelihood of the Baduy, handed down through generations, and their close relationship with nature shows in many aspects of their culture. One example is *koja*, a traditional craft made from the bark of the *teureup* tree (*Artocarpus elasticus*). It stands for simplicity, self-reliance, and local wisdom in caring for the environment. Today, *koja* has become an important supplementary source of income for many ex-Baduy families.

Koja are handmade bags that come in a range of designs but keep the natural brown colour of the bark fibre. In the past, they were used in farming, to carry tools, harvested crops, and items for customary rituals (Sri Hardiyati & Ismadi, 2017). Every bag is woven by hand and can take several days to finish, depending on the design and pattern. The slow, patient work reflects the Baduy way of life. Made from biodegradable materials and decorated with traditional motifs, *koja* is both a distinctive handicraft and a cultural symbol of a community whose identity remains tied to nature.

> *The material comes from the bark of the teureup tree. There are many trees around here, but sometimes it is difficult to obtain the bark because we have to carefully select which trees can be harvested. We usually purchase the bark before processing it.*
>
> (P1, *koja* artisan, March 2026)

P1, an artisan and housewife in the ex-Baduy settlement, explained that choosing and processing *teureup* bark follows traditional rules. This careful harvesting reflects the customary norms through which the Baduy protect their natural environment (Krisnawaty et al., 2025). The Baduy still hold to *pikukuh*, a customary principle that treats forest protection as a way to prevent environmental damage and natural disasters. Although ex-Baduy households have gone through deep social, economic, and cultural change, they keep these values alive through *koja*

production. Their principles of environmental care and sustainable resource use remain part of how they make a living.

Koja is also a sign of women's independence and of their part in supporting the family. This fits the structural-functionalist argument that when a household faces social or economic difficulty, roles are redistributed among family members to keep things in balance (Adibah, 2017). In ex-Baduy households, women keep the craft alive both to protect their cultural heritage and to support the family. The bags are sold to buyers in nearby towns, bringing in extra income.

> *The women here enjoy making handicrafts and weaving. They produce many different kinds of bags, which are usually sent to Cengal or Cibudulega. They are sold for around IDR 30,000 to 50,000 each.*
>
> (P2, *koja* artisan, March 2026)

All three artisans said that *koja* lets them do work they enjoy while adding substantially to household income. On average, each woman makes five to ten bags a month, sold at IDR 30,000 to IDR 50,000 apiece, which brings in an extra IDR 250,000 to IDR 400,000 a month. Set against the average income of the ex-Baduy community, around IDR 199,468 per capita per month, *koja* weaving accounts for roughly 30% of total monthly household earnings. Since most husbands work irregular informal jobs with daily wages that rise and fall, the women's earnings act as a financial buffer that lifts household purchasing power above bare subsistence. This matches what Scoones (1998) calls multiple livelihood strategies, in which household members other than the main breadwinner take up income-generating work to make the household more resilient.

Women's Role in Household Economic Functioning

Ex-Baduy women play a strategic part in keeping their households afloat. They make and sell handicrafts diligently and do so almost every day, and this steady effort strengthens household resilience. Sunarti (2013) defines family resilience as a household's ability to recover from difficulties while managing its resources to achieve well-being. The women we met clearly have this capacity to adapt and recover. What holds them back is limited innovation, weak market development, and the absence of sustained empowerment programmes. Studies of women-led empowerment in other villages likewise show that family resilience grows when women's groups receive regular, structured support (Elanda et al., 2025).

> *I believe that the women here actually have the greatest potential to strengthen household economies. They make handicrafts almost every day. You can speak with some of them yourself. This is a strong foundation for community empowerment.*
>
> (IP1, religious mentor (*ustad*), March 2026)

The women also have strong social capital, which supports household resilience. This was confirmed by a community leader who has accompanied the community through its social and religious transition since conversion. Women have long been responsible for domestic work and, more recently, have taken on a second role as earners. Their participation could grow into wider community empowerment, strengthening household economies and the local economy at the same time. From the SLA perspective, individual capabilities widen what people are able to do and be, allowing them to secure livelihoods that are both sustainable and meaningful (Morse, 2025).

> *We often gather together to make handicrafts with the other women here. We support one another because most of the men only have irregular jobs.*
>
> (P3, *koja* artisan, March 2026)

Putnam (2000) distinguishes three linked forms of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) that build trust, strengthen networks, and encourage cooperation within and beyond communities. Seen this way, ex-Baduy women have strong bonding social capital, visible in how they help one another when making *koja*. Their human capital is also fairly strong, given their traditional weaving skills. What they need is more innovation in design, marketing, and business development, so that their products can compete and contribute more to household income.

Spiritual capital also emerged as an important asset for livelihoods and well-being. The standard SLA framework covers five types of assets (human, social, natural, physical, and financial). Following Adi's (2020) community development framework, our analysis

concentrates on human, social, and spiritual capital, because these intangible assets are what mainly carry ex-Baduy converts through their socio-religious transition. Physical and financial assets in Kampung Ciater remain structurally constrained, whereas spiritual capital supplies motivation, cohesion, and shared values that help households adapt. Human development perspectives likewise hold that quality of life involves cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions as well as material ones (UNDP, 1990). Among ex-Baduy converts, spiritual capital takes shape in three related relationships: with God, with other people, and with the natural environment. Table 2 summarises these assets.

Table 2. Livelihood Assets of the Ex-Baduy Community Based on the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)

Social Capital	Human Capital	Spiritual Capital
Strong relationships among *koja* artisans (bonding)	Quality of life remains relatively low because of limited income (income and health)	Individuals are able to practise their religious beliefs freely (relationship with God)
Limited interaction between community members and external groups (bridging)	Educational attainment is relatively low because many people left school at the elementary level (knowledge and skills)	Community members generally support and help one another (relationship with other people)
Limited community participation in policy-making (linking)	Limited access to resources such as education, employment, and technology (access to resources)	The community continues to uphold local wisdom on environmental conservation, although gradual changes have begun to appear (relationship with nature)

Role of Institutional Assistance

The Role of Baitulmaal Hidayatullah (BMH) in Establishing the Inspirational Village Programme

The Ex-Baduy Inspirational Village (*Kampung Inspirasi Eks-Baduy*) is a community development programme run by Laznas Baitulmaal Hidayatullah (BMH), a philanthropic organisation that supports and empowers Muslim convert (*muallaf*) communities in remote areas across Indonesia. One of its main sites is the Baduy community in Lebak Regency, Banten Province. The programme seeks to improve the spiritual life, economic well-being, and overall quality of life of ex-Baduy converts through long-term, community-based assistance. It has been running since the 1980s and has accompanied the community through its social, economic, and religious transitions.

> *Initially, the organization built housing for the converts. Around 150 households converted to Islam and dispersed into several villages, while another 33 embraced Christianity. Land conflicts also emerged at that time and were temporarily eased through the distribution of basic food assistance.*
>
> (IP2, community leader, March 2026)

BMH's assistance has two main strands: economic empowerment and spiritual development. On the economic side, it encourages sustainable income-generating activities that improve family welfare. A central intervention is small business loans combined with ongoing mentoring for entrepreneurs in ex-Baduy households.

> *We encourage entrepreneurship because farming is also affected by seasonal challenges. Some residents sell traditional snacks such as papeda, while others are planning to start rice businesses.*
>
> (IP2, community leader, March 2026)

> *Most people here work as casual laborers. Some run small businesses, while others work as construction workers. The women occasionally sell their woven koja handicrafts in the nearby towns.*
>
> (IP3, neighbourhood head (*RT*), March 2026)

Business capital, together with mentoring by local religious leaders (*ustad*) appointed by BMH, is an important step toward household self-reliance. Our findings suggest, however, that how well it works depends largely on monitoring and evaluation. Regular supervision is needed to make sure loans are used as intended and actually produce lasting income.

Past experience shows why oversight matters. According to the BMH programme

representative (IP4), an earlier goat-rearing programme failed because many recipients could not look after the animals, which were then neglected or sold. Financial assistance alone, in other words, does not produce sustainable livelihoods. Interventions work better when they are participatory and non-directive, involving residents in planning, carrying out, and evaluating programmes. Community development grounded in residents' own initiative tends to last longer than programmes delivered from outside (Sair, 2015). Ex-Baduy women, with their proven skills, strong social ties, and active role in the household economy, are well placed to lead such efforts locally.

BMH also provides spiritual support through religious mentors who live in the community. This matters because many converts are still adjusting to their new religious identity, and some are still learning Islamic practice, which shows how complex the move from customary belief to a new faith can be. Strengthening religious understanding therefore remains part of the programme. By combining economic empowerment with ongoing spiritual guidance, BMH aims to improve not only livelihood security but also social cohesion, self-reliance, and the long-term resilience of the community.

Social Mapping Conducted by Impact+

Impact+ carried out a social mapping exercise that produced several findings relevant to empowering ex-Baduy households. The researcher acted as an independent evaluator and had no financial ties to, or conflict of interest with, BMH or Impact+. We do not present these secondary findings as an institutional report; instead, we read them critically to see how institutional mapping relates to the livelihood strategies of ex-Baduy women.

The first finding concerns the need to develop local leaders who can organise collective action and sustain community development. Some residents are still reluctant to engage fully with facilitators from outside, so local leadership is crucial if empowerment efforts are to work. Local leaders can act as trusted intermediaries who mobilise participation, strengthen cohesion, and guide development activities. The women artisans, whose daily *koja* weaving circles reflect strong bonding social capital, are an obvious pool of potential leaders for building household livelihood resilience.

> *We encountered several issues during the community transect, such as many poorly maintained houses. Some residents were unemployed because they did not have permanent jobs. Relationships among community members also appeared relatively weak. Therefore, local actors are needed to mobilize the community so that empowerment programs can be implemented more effectively.*
>
> (IP5, Impact+, March 2026)

> *At present, there are no local community leaders apart from the facilitators assigned by the institution. Many residents still do not fully perceive these facilitators as part of their own community.*
>
> (IP4, zakat institution representative, March 2026)

The second finding points to the need for new livelihood opportunities. The community has plentiful natural resources, but little business innovation or product diversification. Its distinctive social transition and enduring local wisdom also give it real potential for community-based tourism and the creative economy. *Koja* and the cultural identity of the ex-Baduy community could draw visitors and create other sources of income. Better marketing and easier access to the village would help creative industries grow, from traditional food and handicrafts to cultural performances and other local enterprises. Experience in other villages shows that mapping local resources together with residents is a practical first step toward this kind of community-based development (Elanda et al., 2023).

Women's groups could become the main drivers of this diversification. The assessment identified two gaps that need attention. Women's human capital needs to be built up through continuous capacity-building, entrepreneurship training, and product development. The community also needs stronger digital capital, especially in digital marketing, e-commerce, and the use of technology to create value-added products from local resources. Closing these gaps would make local products more competitive and open markets beyond the immediate area.

The third finding concerns rebranding the Inspirational Village around the Baduy's core value of environmental conservation. A

sustainability-based identity would also lend weight to women's *koja* production as an eco-friendly craft. For this to happen, the village needs a more structured and functional institutional arrangement that involves residents, especially women, in planning, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. Participatory governance of this kind would give people a stronger sense of ownership of and responsibility for community programmes. A shared commitment to the village's core values (environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, social solidarity, and economic self-reliance) would give future empowerment efforts a firm footing. Local leadership, more varied livelihoods, and participatory institutions together can strengthen both household resilience and long-term community development among ex-Baduy households.

Conclusion

This study examined how ex-Baduy female converts build household livelihood strategies under economic pressure, focusing on women's productive work, their contribution to the household, and institutional support. Ex-Baduy convert households diversify their livelihoods to cope with the financial instability caused by men's irregular informal work. Women play a strategic role through a dual livelihood strategy: making and selling traditional *koja*, which provides an essential income buffer and keeps local ecological wisdom alive. Assistance from Baitulmaal Hidayatullah and the social mapping by Impact+ reinforce households' economic and spiritual resilience, although local leadership remains essential for empowerment to last.

Theoretically, the study adds to the literature on socio-religious transition in indigenous communities by showing how gendered economic agency, social capital, and spiritual capital work together within the SLA to strengthen household resilience. Its scope is limited to qualitative data from a single settlement in Kampung Ciater, Lebak Regency. Future research could cover a wider area and measure income stabilisation among indigenous convert communities quantitatively. In practical terms, institutional programmes should invest in product innovation, digital marketing, and local leadership so that the community can become self-reliant in the long run.

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