

The Role of the Church as a Faith-Based Organization in Bringing About Social Change: A Case Study of GMIT in the Kampung Berseri CSR Program of PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, Kupang City

Nur Laili Zaihandini¹, Setyo Ariwibowo², Wikra Saputra³, Daud Daffa Harkansas⁴

¹Community Development Officer PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, Indonesia

²Sr. Spv RSD PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, Indonesia

³Spv Maintenance PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, Indonesia

⁴Jr. Spv HSSE & GA PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, Indonesia

Email: aviation.koe@pertamina.com

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Abstract. This study examines the role of the Gereja Masehi Injili in Timor (GMIT) as a Faith-Based Organization (FBO) in bringing about social change in the Kupang community through the Kampung Berseri Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program implemented by PT Pertamina Patra Niaga (AFT) El Tari. While previous studies have emphasized how GMIT's socio-spiritual legitimacy contributes to the effectiveness of inclusive circular economy initiatives, this study shifts the analytical focus to role theory and social change theory to explain how GMIT's institutional position generates measurable social transformation. This qualitative study employed a case study approach. Data were collected through interviews, internal CSR documents, and relevant literature, and were analyzed descriptively through source triangulation. The findings indicate that GMIT performs four interconnected roles: theological educator, moral communicator, institutional facilitator, and cross-congregational advocacy mobilizer. These roles are manifested through environmental training for church councils, the dissemination of ecological values through sermons, the establishment of waste bank units in churches and schools, and community-based climate change advocacy activities within religious communities. These four roles contribute sequentially to three levels of social change: cognitive change, reflected in the reinterpretation of waste and climate issues as forms of spiritual stewardship; behavioral change, reflected in waste-sorting practices and economic participation, as evidenced by 269 active customers, outreach to 3,304 households, and the management of 99,947.6 kg of waste; and institutional change, reflected in the establishment of 29 waste bank units across 18 urban villages, the integration of environmental education into cross-class congregational development, and increases in waste bank revenues ranging from 20% to 180%. The study further demonstrates that GMIT does not merely function as a legitimacy-granting partner for the Kampung Berseri CSR program, but rather serves as an agent of social change that transforms religious authority into enduring civic infrastructure for environmentally responsible behavior.

Keywords: CSR, Faith-Based Organization (FBO), Social Change.

A. INTRODUCTION

The global waste problem shows no signs of improvement. The Global Waste Management Outlook 2024, jointly published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Solid Waste Association, reports that global municipal solid waste generation reached approximately 2.3 billion tons in 2023 and is projected to increase to 3.8 billion tons by 2050. Of this amount, only 19 percent is currently recycled, while 38 percent is disposed of through open dumping or uncontrolled burning. The direct costs of waste management are also projected to rise substantially, from USD 252 billion in 2020 to USD 640.3 billion by 2050 (UNEP, 2024). Indonesia contributes significantly to this global trend. Minister of Home Affairs Tito Karnavian has stated that Indonesia remains the world's fifth-largest waste generator (Kompas.com, 2026), consistent with World Bank data indicating that

Indonesia generated 65.2 million tons of waste in 2020 (World Bank, 2023). Data from the National Waste Management Information System (SIPSN) recorded national waste generation of 56.63 million tons in 2023, of which only 39.01 percent was properly managed (Ministry of Environment/Environmental Control Agency [KLH/BPLH], 2025). Meanwhile, an artificial intelligence-based modeling study published in *Nature* ranked Indonesia as the world's third-largest contributor to plastic pollution (Cottom et al., 2024). Indonesia's Environmental Performance Index score was also only 26.7 out of 100, the lowest in Southeast Asia (Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy, 2024).

Kupang City, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara, provides a concrete illustration of this governance gap. The city was named one of Indonesia's dirtiest cities by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry in 2019 and 2022 (Tulle, 2025). Waste generation continued to increase from 79,382.39 tons in 2020 to 83,192.63 tons in 2022, in line with population growth (Lobo et al., 2024). This situation has been further exacerbated by the open-dumping system at the landfill and the limited adoption of waste separation practices at the source among local residents (Sayrani & Tamunu, 2020; Chalik et al., 2011). Addressing a problem of this magnitude clearly cannot rely solely on government intervention; rather, it requires active collaboration among the state, civil society, and the private sector.

PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari has responded to this need through the Kampung Berseri (Clean, Healthy, and Beautiful El Tari) CSR program, which combines an inclusive circular economy through its supported partner, Bank Sampah Mutiara Timor, with a faith-based approach facilitated by the Synod of the Gereja Masehi Injili in Timor (GMIT), the largest religious network in East Nusa Tenggara. Previous descriptive studies of the program (PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, 2024, 2025) have documented how GMIT's socio-spiritual legitimacy strengthens the operational effectiveness of Bank Sampah Mutiara Timor. However, by positioning the church primarily as a legitimacy-granting partner for an intervention that is substantively economic in nature, these studies do not fully explain how the religious institution actually transforms social behavior across different levels, or to what extent such transformations can be regarded as social change in the sociological sense. The literature on Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) likewise tends to position religious institutions as providers of social services (Göçmen, 2013) or sources of moral legitimacy for development programs (Marshall & Keough, 2004; Hefner, 2016), while studies that conceptualize FBOs as agents of social change through the lens of role theory remain limited (Carino, 2015). Similar practices in Manado, for example, have remained largely informal and have not involved structured CSR partnerships (Nelwan et al., 2021).

Recent developments in the Kampung Berseri CSR program in 2026 further underscore the importance of examining GMIT's role more specifically. In a faith-based community climate change advocacy initiative, representatives from 10 GMIT churches within the Kota Kupang Classis received education on environmentally responsible practices, ranging from household waste management to the reuse of inorganic waste. The activity was accompanied by the provision of waste bins by PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari as an initial step toward establishing an integrated waste management system within church communities. This initiative demonstrates that GMIT's role has expanded from the local congregational level to the classis level, or an inter-church network, reinforcing the argument that GMIT functions as an agent of social change operating across multiple levels rather than merely as a legitimacy-granting partner at a single point in the program (PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, 2026).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to address the question of how GMIT, as a Faith-Based Organization, contributes to social change among the people of Kupang through the Kampung Berseri CSR program. The study employs role theory (Biddle, 1986) to identify the specific behavioral roles performed by GMIT and social change theory

(Sztompka, 1993) to trace how these role behaviors develop into cognitive, behavioral, and institutional transformations. Accordingly, this study makes a theoretical contribution by positioning GMIT not merely as a legitimacy-granting partner, but as a structured agent of social change. It also offers an analytical and practical framework that can be replicated in other regions seeking to develop faith-based approaches to waste governance.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach, as this approach enables an in-depth and contextual understanding of a specific social phenomenon (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case examined was the Kampung Berseri CSR program in Maulafa District, Kupang City, with particular emphasis on the role played by GMIT as an FBO partner. Primary data were obtained through interviews with program stakeholders, while secondary data were drawn from the internal CSR documents of PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari (2024, 2025, 2026), as well as relevant academic and institutional literature. The data were analyzed descriptively by classifying and categorizing GMIT's activities according to the role positions they represented and the corresponding levels of social change, following Nazir's (2014) descriptive-analytical approach. Data credibility was enhanced through data and source triangulation by cross-checking interview findings against CSR reports and published literature before using them as key evidence in the analysis.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Theoretical Repositioning: From Legitimacy to Roles and Social Change

Role theory posits that individuals and institutions occupying particular social positions are associated with a set of expected behaviors, referred to as roles, and that such positions are manifested through the enactment of these roles (Biddle, 1986). Applied to an FBO, GMIT's contribution to the Kampung Berseri program should therefore not be understood merely as a source of moral authority, but rather as a set of concrete behaviors that are both expected and enacted as part of its position as a dominant religious institution in the region.

Meanwhile, social change theory views change as a process occurring within a social system that differentiates the condition of that system over time and generally unfolds through sequential layers, beginning with changes in ideas and consciousness, followed by changes in behavior, and ultimately changes in social institutions themselves (Sztompka, 1993). Read together, these two frameworks enable the case to be analyzed as a causal chain: GMIT's role behaviors constitute the mechanisms, while the documented cognitive, behavioral, and institutional shifts within the Kampung Berseri program constitute the outcomes. This interpretation differs from, while also extending, the legitimacy-based reading of the same case, which tends to position GMIT's contribution as a supporting condition for the effectiveness of an economic intervention (Bank Sampah Mutiara Timor), rather than as an independent role that generates social change.

2. The Configuration of GMIT's Roles in the Kampung Berseri Program

Within the Kampung Berseri program, GMIT performs four interconnected roles. Drawing on Biddle's (1986) conceptualization of roles as patterns of behavior that are both expected and enacted, these roles can function as mechanisms for generating social change. First, GMIT serves as a theological educator through environmental training for church councils. This training draws on White's (1967) argument concerning the relationship between the ecological crisis and religious worldviews and is further developed in scholarship on Christian environmental theology (Nelwan et al., 2021). Through this training, church leaders are equipped with knowledge of environmental regulations and management, including the

waste situation in Kupang City, effective waste management practices, and recycling. In terms of role theory, this represents a process through which GMIT converts a general moral mandate into specific and teachable competencies, thereby establishing a prerequisite for subsequent behavioral change among congregants.

Second, GMIT performs the role of a moral communicator through the dissemination of information from the church pulpit. Sermons repeatedly connect ecological stewardship with core theological commitments, particularly the mandate in Genesis 1:28 for humans to care for creation, as well as the broader Christian teaching that the natural world possesses intrinsic value and deserves respect as an expression of reverence for the Creator (Londo & Selanno, 2025; Kurniawaty et al., 2024). This role transforms waste management from merely a civic obligation into a practice of lived faith. Such reframing is crucial to explaining why the message can reach segments of society that are difficult to engage through purely administrative or economic approaches.

Third, GMIT performs the role of an institutional facilitator through the establishment of waste bank units within churches and schools, comprising 29 units distributed across 18 urban villages in Kupang City. The establishment of these waste bank units is the result of collaboration with Bank Sampah Mutiara Timor, which serves as the central waste bank and a CSR-supported partner of AFT El Tari. In school settings, GMIT's role is manifested through a structured sequence of activities: an opening worship service, waste-sorting practices, waste weighing and savings, waste management and utilization, the use of generated funds, integration with religious and spiritual education, as well as appreciation and evaluation (Telaumbanua, 2020). This sequence demonstrates that GMIT does not merely legitimize a program designed by other parties, but also contributes to structuring how the program is delivered. Consequently, target groups, particularly congregants and schoolchildren, experience the intervention repeatedly and in a more meaningful and sustained manner.

Fourth, GMIT performs the role of a cross-congregational advocacy mobilizer, most clearly demonstrated through the faith-based community climate change advocacy initiative. Unlike the previous three roles, which operate at the level of individual congregations or schools, this initiative simultaneously engages representatives from 10 GMIT churches within the Kota Kupang Classis. Its educational content also expands beyond waste-related issues to address climate change more broadly, including household waste management, the reuse of inorganic waste, and the strengthening of churches' roles as drivers of environmentally responsible behavioral change among their congregations. As a concrete expression of support for this role, PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari provided waste bins to all 10 participating churches and offered a waste collection partnership managed by Bank Sampah Mutiara. This support was intended to establish the initial infrastructure for an integrated waste management system within church communities. This fourth role marks a significant shift: GMIT no longer operates merely as a single institution implementing a program within its own organizational environment, but rather functions as a mobilization hub that simultaneously activates an inter-church network (classis). This demonstrates GMIT's institutional capacity to replicate its role across other church units without requiring the company to initiate the process from scratch in each location.

3. From Roles to Change: Three Layers of Social Transformation

Viewed through Sztompka's (1993) conception of layered social change, the four roles performed by GMIT correspond to three sequential outcomes. Cognitive change constitutes the first layer, generated primarily through the roles of theological educator, moral communicator, and cross-congregational mobilizer. Waste and climate change, initially understood merely as technical issues to be addressed by the municipal government, are reframed through repeated

theological teaching as matters of spiritual stewardship. Congregants, including representatives from the 10 churches participating in the climate change advocacy initiative, come to understand environmental stewardship as part of what it means to be stewards of God's creation. This reframing represents a critical first step toward sustained behavioral change because it shifts the motivation for action from external enforcement to internalized conviction. This is consistent with role theory's emphasis on role enactment, rather than merely role expectations, as the unit of analysis operating in actual social practice (Biddle, 1986).

Behavioral change constitutes the second layer and represents the point at which program outcomes become measurable. Following the establishment of waste bank units, the program reached 3,304 households and managed 99,947.6 kg of sorted inorganic waste, with 269 active customers regularly participating in the waste savings scheme, as well as hundreds of residents participating in various roadshow cycles (PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, 2024, 2025). The production of eco-enzymes (300 liters, including 100 bottles ready for sale) further demonstrates that behavioral change did not stop at passive waste sorting but extended to skill-based active participation in circular economy practices. Waste bank revenues increased by 20–180% within one year, providing evidence that these behavioral changes were sustainable rather than temporary.

Institutional change constitutes the third and most consequential layer because it is at this point that behavioral change becomes structurally embedded and no longer depends on continuous persuasion. The establishment of 29 waste bank units across 18 urban villages represents physical and organizational infrastructure for waste governance that had previously been unavailable in these areas. Equally important, waste education has become integrated into spiritual development activities in GMIT-affiliated schools, allowing the next generation to experience ecological stewardship as a routine component of faith formation rather than as an occasional CSR activity. The expansion of GMIT's role to the classis level through the faith-based community climate change advocacy initiative, which simultaneously reached 10 churches and was accompanied by the provision of waste-bin infrastructure, further strengthens the evidence of institutional change. This development demonstrates that the church institution has not merely adopted a single program at a single point, but has replicated its own mechanisms of change across a broader church network. This provides the clearest evidence that GMIT's role has generated institutional rather than merely individual attitudinal change, a dimension that was not emphasized in previous interpretations focusing primarily on legitimacy.

4. GMIT as an “Intermediary Actor” between CSR and Grassroots Communities

Another contribution of this reinterpretation is that it clarifies the structural position of GMIT between two actors that, if operating independently, would face difficulties in directly reaching grassroots communities in Kupang City. These two actors are the private corporation PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari and the technical implementing partner, Bank Sampah Mutiara Timor. Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) often occupy such a position in the literature because of their pre-existing social trust, dense community networks, and capacity to reach marginalized groups that are difficult for formal institutions to engage directly (Hefner, 2016; Göçmen, 2013). In the context of Kupang City, GMIT's role makes the intermediary mechanism more explicit: it does not merely generate diffuse forms of trust, but serves as a key actor within the Kampung Berseri CSR program by introducing a concrete sequence of activities, ranging from training and institution-building to cross-congregational mobilization. These activities operationalize the trust embedded in the church network and transform it into civic practices that can be sustained, repeated, and replicated. This is consistent with Carino's (2015) distinction between FBOs as mere service providers and FBOs as genuine agents of

social change. GMIT's role in Kampung Berseri is more closely aligned with the latter category because its activities restructure ongoing community practices rather than merely distributing a religious service.

5. Positioning the Kupang Case among Comparable Practices

Comparable faith-based environmental education practices can be found elsewhere in Indonesia, such as at GMIM Nazareth Tingkulu in Manado, where the congregation has likewise been educated about waste management (Nelwan et al., 2021). The Kupang case, however, is distinguished by its degree of institutionalization. Rather than constituting an internally initiated and informally implemented church program, PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari, through the Kampung Berseri CSR program, has positioned GMIT within a structured multi-year CSR partnership (2024–2028) that integrates a faith-based approach with inclusive circular economy mechanisms and measurable performance targets.

The expansion of GMIT's role to the classis level, demonstrated through the faith-based community climate change advocacy initiative, further reinforces this distinctive feature by showing that the resulting change does not stop at a single pilot congregation but is designed to be systematically replicated across a broader church network. It is this institutionalized integration, rather than the religious or economic approaches operating independently, that constitutes the principal novelty of the case and explains why its social change outcomes can be traced and measured, unlike those of less structured cases.

6. Risks to the Sustainability of Change

The waste problem in Kupang City requires social actors who possess both legitimacy and emotional proximity to residents so that changes in everyday habits can become institutionalized. This premise underlies PT Pertamina Patra Niaga AFT El Tari's development of the Kampung Berseri (Clean, Healthy, and Beautiful El Tari) Program as an implementation of its Social and Environmental Responsibility (TJSL) commitment. By positioning GMIT as a strategic partner in building a community-based waste management ecosystem, the program seeks to strengthen the social foundations necessary for sustained behavioral change (Antara News Kupang, 2026; Timex Kupang, 2026). This collaboration has been further expanded through environmental outreach and waste-sorting activities at GMIT Moria Liliba Church, Liliba Urban Village, the Kupang Green and Clean (KGC) Liliba Forum, and Bank Sampah Mutiara Timor. The activities were attended directly by the Head of the Kupang City Environmental and Forestry Agency, the Head of Liliba Urban Village, and the Chairperson of the GMIT Moria Liliba Congregational Council (Tribun Kupang, 2026; Tribun Flores, 2026).

The collaboration has not remained at the discursive level but has been institutionalized through the inauguration of the RW 14 Liliba Waste Bank Unit, managed by the Kupang Green and Clean Liliba Forum. The unit is designed to serve as a community-based waste management center as well as a model that can be replicated in other areas (Tribun Kupang, 2026; Tribun Flores, 2026). This collaboration also illustrates the institutional relationship established among GMIT congregations across different urban villages, the private sector, and government institutions. Through this network, household-level waste-sorting practices have greater potential to become institutionalized as sustained community practices rather than remaining limited to temporary environmental awareness campaigns (Antara News Kupang, 2026; Tribun Kupang, 2026; Timex Kupang, 2026).

However, the authors identify two risks that should be considered in assessing these positive outcomes. First, waste-processing infrastructure in Kupang City remains limited, creating a potential mismatch between the behavioral outcomes generated through GMIT's mobilization and the city's downstream capacity to process sorted waste. Second, local

government policy support for waste governance remains relatively weak. Although socially motivated change driven by religious values has demonstrated its capacity to persist at the level of household practices, the institutional gains documented here, particularly the network of waste banks and the cross-classis network, remain vulnerable to erosion once the CSR funding cycle comes to an end unless they are reinforced by stronger regulations and sustained public investment. This indicates that faith-based social change and public policy are complementary rather than substitutive. GMIT's role can shift community values and everyday practices, but transforming these shifts into permanent features of Kupang City's waste governance system requires sustained joint investment from the government, whose role and support can still be further strengthened.

D. CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that GMIT performs four roles: theological educator, moral communicator, institutional facilitator, and cross-congregational advocacy mobilizer. These four roles generate a sequential chain of social change: (1) the cognitive reframing of waste and climate issues as forms of spiritual stewardship; (2) the adoption of measurable behavioral changes through waste-sorting and waste-saving practices, involving 269 active customers, 3,304 households, 99,947.6 kg of managed waste, and a 20–180% increase in waste bank revenues; and (3) the institutionalization of change through the establishment of 29 waste bank units across 18 urban villages and the expansion of GMIT's role to 10 GMIT churches within the Kota Kupang Classis through faith-based community climate change advocacy activities accompanied by the provision of waste-bin infrastructure. Compared with less structured faith-based environmental initiatives elsewhere in Indonesia, the Kupang case is distinguished by the institutionalized integration of religious mobilization and inclusive circular economy mechanisms within a structured CSR program, making its social change outcomes traceable rather than merely anecdotal.

Theoretically, this study extends the literature on FBOs by demonstrating, through a concrete empirical sequence, how the socio-spiritual legitimacy of a religious institution can be converted into role enactment that generates sustained social change. In doing so, it reinforces Carino's (2015) argument that FBOs, represented here by GMIT, can function as genuine agents of change rather than merely as service intermediaries or legitimacy-granting actors. Practically, this model suggests that replication in other regions requires attention to the same sequence, from education and communication to institution-building and cross-network religious mobilization, rather than merely establishing symbolic partnerships with religious institutions. At the same time, the sustainability of these outcomes depends on stronger local government policy support and adequate waste-processing infrastructure. Without such reinforcement, social change driven by religious actors or institutions risks remaining fragile once external CSR support is reduced. Future research should further examine how value changes cultivated through faith-based mobilization can be operationalized within inclusive circular economy strategies over longer periods, as well as the extent to which religious institutions can drive behavioral change across diverse social groups amid continuing limitations in waste-management infrastructure.

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