

PROMOTING RELIGIOUS MODERATION VILLAGES ROOTED IN LOCAL WISDOM TO STRENGTHEN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PLURALISTIC COMMUNITIES IN BENGKULU

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the promotion of religious moderation villages based on local wisdom as a strategy for fostering religious cosmopolitanism in the pluralistic society of Bengkulu. This program leverages the values of tolerance, cooperation, and respect for diversity through an approach rooted in local wisdom that is rich in culture and customs. This approach is considered effective in reducing religion-based conflicts and fostering social harmony. The study employs qualitative methods, including literature review, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation. The findings indicate that the implementation of local wisdom values through the Religious Moderation Village program can enhance public awareness of the importance of diversity and strengthen religious education in building a cosmopolitan way of life. Strategic recommendations are also provided to support the expansion and sustainability of this program. Keywords: Kampung Moderasi, local wisdom, religious cosmopolitanism, pluralistic society, Bengkulu.

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INTRODUCTION

As a large and pluralistic nation, Indonesia is rich in culture, customs and traditions, ethnic groups, languages, and religions. This cultural richness encompassing customs, traditions, ethnic groups, languages, and religions can serve as a foundation for shaping the character of its democratic society and embodying local wisdom (Mustofa et al., 2022). On the other hand, a pluralistic society (Muhammad & Zuhdi, n.d.) does not always coexist harmoniously. Religious conflict within a pluralistic society is a common occurrence because religions possess distinct characteristics and differences. One such example is the dark period experienced by Ambon for approximately four years (1999–2003).

A pluralistic society, compounded by the narrow religious understanding of its adherents, can serve as a trigger for potential instability and the threat of division. (Abidin, 2021) Fundamentally, all religions teach their adherents peace and do not tolerate violence, under any circumstances. However, in reality, there are individuals who

plan, carry out, or support acts of violence in the name of religion. Consequently, the image of a religion is tarnished and destroyed. (Faisal et al., 2022).

Religious moderation is important as a form of social capital, which has been legally established as a supporting factor for national development in Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2020 on the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan. Religious moderation rooted in local wisdom embodies simplicity and certainty. (Zainal, 2020) Religious moderation is expected to serve as a platform for mediation to resolve various issues whether related to religion, customs, culture, or other societal matters. (Abidin, 2021)

Therefore, as a concrete effort to build a societal paradigm regarding awareness of religious moderation, the mainstreaming of “religious moderation villages” is necessary. A religious moderation village is a model of a village that prioritizes collaboration across various elements, institutions, and layers of society. The mainstreaming of Religious Moderation Villages in Bengkulu is crucial because Bengkulu is one of the most pluralistic provinces, characterized by diverse cultures, races, ethnic groups, languages, and, of course, local wisdom. Among the local wisdom traditions in Bengkulu are, for example, Sibak in North Bengkulu Regency, the Adat Cuci Kampung ritual, the Hukum Sumber Cayo legal system, and the traditional farming practices of the Rejang people. (<https://www.antonsutrisno.com/2017/11/kearifan-lokal-di-bengkulu.html>) In Bengkulu Province itself, there are already several pilot Religious Moderation Villages, including those in the villages of Rama Agung, Parada Suka, Talang Benuang, Air Petai, Lubuk Mukti, Pondok Baru, and Sumur Meleleh. Deputy Minister of Religion (Wamenag) Saiful Rahmat Dasuki stated that the establishment of the Religious Moderation Villages (KMB) is a step toward fostering peace amidst diversity. The creation of these villages is a positive initiative to promote peace, tolerance, and uphold harmony and diversity within the community. (kemenag.go.id)

The Religious Moderation Village program is a practical commitment by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in collaboration with local governments to realize religious moderation. A moderate perspective, attitude, and behavior toward religion cannot be achieved solely through massive narratives but must be practiced empirically. The Religious Moderation Village is not a one-time program but a well-planned initiative with a mature, measurable strategy, followed by continuous implementation and evaluation. Therefore, the prioritization of the Religious Moderation Village program in Bengkulu Province is essential for fostering religious pluralism within Bengkulu’s diverse society. This serves to uphold interfaith tolerance, actualize the values of harmony, and prevent the cognitive biases of radical groups which act as the seeds or precursors to radical movements, extremism, and even terrorism.

TESEARCH METHOD

This study is a qualitative research project on the promotion of religious moderation villages in Bengkulu Province, which is essential for fostering religious

cosmopolitanism within Bengkulu's pluralistic society. Data collection methods included interviews, observation, and documentation. Informants were selected using a purposeful sampling method, comprising 20 individuals representing government agencies including the Provincial Government, District/Municipal Governments, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs educational institutions, religious leaders, and the general public,

while an additional informant was selected from the government sector, specifically the Religious Affairs Office (Bimas) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs at the district/city level in Bengkulu Province. The focus of the interviews was on mainstreaming the "Local Wisdom-Based Religious Moderation Village" initiative to foster religious cosmopolitanism within Bengkulu's pluralistic society, as well as the forms of collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, religious leaders, and the general public that provide strength and sustainability in achieving the program's objectives. Meanwhile, the two-day observation focused on interaction activities occurring in several Religious Moderation Villages in Bengkulu Province. Documentation included data on the community, photos of activities fostering religious tolerance, and collaborative activities involving government agencies, educational institutions, religious leaders, and the public, spanning from February to May 2024. The tools used for data collection included: writing materials, a smartphone for recording interviews and taking photos, and a laptop for data entry. Data analysis employed the interactive technique described by Miles and Huberman, following the steps of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Socio-Religious Conditions of the Pluralistic Community in Bengkulu

Religious moderation is an approach that emphasizes balance in understanding and practicing religious teachings. Religious moderation does not diminish one's faith in their religion, but rather encourages tolerance and respect for differences (Muhajir, 2018). In a pluralistic society, religious moderation plays a vital role in fostering harmonious social life. A moderate attitude toward religion allows people from diverse religious backgrounds to live together peacefully (Ali, 2020).

The Religious Moderation Village Program serves as one strategy to embed the values of religious moderation at the community level. This program fosters spaces for interfaith dialogue as well as social activities involving various community groups. Bengkulu Province is a region characterized by a pluralistic society with ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. This diversity is one of the defining features of Indonesia's multicultural society. In a pluralistic society, differences in religious and cultural identities can serve as a source of social strength if managed effectively through tolerance and respect for differences (Setia & Rahman, 2022).

In the Indonesian context, religious diversity often requires an approach that balances commitment to religious beliefs with an inclusive attitude toward other groups.

The concept of religious moderation has emerged as a strategic approach to maintaining this balance, enabling society to coexist peacefully without falling into extremism or excessive liberalism (Arif, 2020).

Observations indicate that the people of Bengkulu generally possess strong social traditions such as mutual aid, traditional deliberation, and community solidarity. These traditions serve as social capital that strengthens relationships among community members. Strong social capital is a key factor in fostering social harmony within a diverse society.

However, the development of information technology and social media also presents new challenges for social life. The spread of unverified information often fuels narratives of intolerance and identity conflicts. Therefore, strengthening religious moderation at the community level is crucial for maintaining social stability.

2. Implementation of the Kampung Moderasi Beragama Initiative to Strengthen Religious Education at the Community Level

The Religious Moderation Village is one of the programs developed to embed the values of religious moderation at the community level. This program emphasizes the importance of dialogue, social cooperation, and community participation in building a harmonious society.

Several studies indicate that the Religious Moderation Village program is effective in strengthening tolerance and raising public awareness of the importance of living together peacefully. Through a participatory approach, the community can be directly involved in activities that encourage interfaith and intercultural interaction (Siswanto et al., 2024).

a. Interfaith Dialogue

One way to promote religious moderation is through interfaith dialogue. This dialogue serves as a means of fostering a shared understanding of the importance of tolerance and harmony in a pluralistic society.

Interfaith dialogue also functions as a space for communication that allows people to better understand each other's religious traditions and practices. Through open communication, the potential for conflict arising from misunderstandings can be minimized.

b. Interfaith Social Activities

The implementation of religious moderation is also reflected in various social activities involving people from diverse religious backgrounds. These activities include community service, humanitarian efforts, and social assistance programs for those in need.

These joint activities can strengthen social solidarity and foster a sense of community among the people. Research indicates that community participation in interfaith social activities can strengthen social bonds and enhance mutual trust among different community groups (Ahmad et al., 2024).

c. Tolerance Education for the Younger Generation

The younger generation plays a crucial role in upholding the values of religious moderation. An education that instills tolerance and respect for diversity can help foster a generation that is open to differences.

In the context of education, religious moderation can be integrated through a curriculum that emphasizes a contextual understanding of religion and fosters mutual respect in social life (Arifin & Huda, 2023).

3. The Role of Local Wisdom in Strengthening Religious Moderation

Local wisdom refers to cultural values that have developed within a community and have been passed down from generation to generation. These values serve as a guide for social life within the community (Mustofa et al., 2022).

Local wisdom consists of cultural values that have developed within a community and are passed down from generation to generation. These values serve as a guide in social life and reflect the collective experience of the community in dealing with various life challenges.

In Bengkulu, various local traditions reflect the values of community and social solidarity. The traditions of customary deliberation, mutual cooperation, and respect for traditional and religious leaders are an important part of community life.

These values align with the principles of religious moderation, which emphasize tolerance and respect for differences. Therefore, integrating local wisdom into the Religious Moderation Village program can strengthen the community's acceptance of the values of moderation.

In many communities across Indonesia, local wisdom often embodies values that align with the principles of religious moderation. Research indicates that local cultural values such as deliberation, social solidarity, and respect for traditions can serve as a crucial foundation for fostering a moderate approach in religious life (Gamau & Pranyoto, 2023).

In Bengkulu, various traditional customs still play an important role in community life. The values of mutual cooperation and consensus-building serve as effective social mechanisms for peacefully resolving various social issues.

Integrating religious moderation with local wisdom can strengthen community acceptance of the Religious Moderation Village program. A culture-based approach makes the message of religious moderation easier to understand because it is conveyed through values that are already familiar in people's daily lives.

4. The Village of Religious Moderation as a Space for Religious Cosmopolitanism

Religious cosmopolitanism refers to an open-minded approach to religious life that enables individuals to coexist harmoniously with followers of other religions (Abidin, 2021).

The implementation of the Religious Moderation Village initiative can foster the creation of an inclusive social space where people from diverse religious backgrounds can interact positively.

Some forms of implementation of the Religious Moderation Village initiative include:

1. interfaith dialogue
2. interfaith social activities
3. tolerance education for the younger generation
4. strengthening the role of religious and traditional leaders

Through these activities, the community can foster a collective awareness of the importance of tolerance and harmony. Religious cosmopolitanism refers to an open-minded approach to religious life that allows individuals to coexist harmoniously with followers of other religions without losing their religious identity.

The concept of cosmopolitanism within religious moderation emphasizes the importance of openness to differences and respect for universal human values. From the perspective of religious moderation in Indonesia, cosmopolitan values are reflected in an inclusive attitude that respects cultural and religious pluralism (Islamy & Susilo, 2022).

The implementation of the Religious Moderation Village can create a social space that supports the development of religious cosmopolitanism. This is evident in the increasing social interaction among interfaith communities and the formation of a culture of tolerance in daily life.

With the existence of an inclusive social space, communities can build a collective identity based not only on religious differences but also on the values of togetherness and social solidarity.

5. Challenges in Promoting Religious Moderation in Villages

Although it holds great potential for strengthening social harmony, the promotion of the “Kampung Moderasi Beragama” initiative also faces various challenges. One of the main challenges is the spread of narratives of intolerance and extremism, which often emerge through social media.

Furthermore, there are still some members of the public who view the concept of religious moderation as a form of compromise with religious teachings. In fact, religious moderation aims to maintain a balance between religious commitment and a harmonious social life within a pluralistic society (Haitomi et al., 2022).

Therefore, sustained efforts are needed to strengthen religious moderation literacy through education, interfaith dialogue, and the empowerment of religious and community leaders.

6. The Role of the Community in Promoting Religious Moderation in Bengkulu

The promotion of Religious Moderation Villages does not rely solely on government policies or formal religious institutions, but is also significantly influenced by the role of local communities in society. Communities occupy a strategic position

because they are directly embedded in the social fabric of society, enabling them to serve as agents of change in fostering a culture of tolerance and interfaith harmony.

In the context of a pluralistic society such as that in Bengkulu, local communities serve as spaces for social interaction that bring together individuals from diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. The interactions within these communities foster more open communication and strengthen social bonds among different community groups. According to research by Setia and Rahman, social communities play a crucial role in disseminating the values of religious moderation, as these values are more readily accepted when conveyed through social networks that have already gained the trust of the community (Setia & Rahman, 2022).

a. Communities as Agents of Religious Moderation

One of the community's primary roles is as an agent for promoting the values of religious moderation. Communities such as youth organizations, community groups, religious study groups, and interfaith communities can serve as platforms for conveying messages of tolerance and harmony.

Through discussions, seminars, and joint social activities, communities can help the public understand the importance of living peacefully side by side despite differences. Socialization efforts led by communities tend to be more effective because they employ a participatory approach that directly involves the community (Haitomi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, a community-based approach also facilitates a more natural process of social learning, as it occurs within the daily lives of the community.

b. Communities as Drivers of Social Capital

In the promotion of the Religious Moderation Village initiative, the community also serves as a source of social capital. Social capital—in the form of trust, solidarity, and strong social networks—can help create a social environment conducive to harmonious living.

Research indicates that the success of the Religious Moderation Village program is significantly influenced by the strength of the community's social capital. Communities with strong social networks are able to facilitate interfaith cooperation and encourage community participation in various social activities (Siswanto et al., 2024).

In Bengkulu, the strong value of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) within the community serves as a form of social capital that can be leveraged in the development of the Religious Moderation Village. Through mutual cooperation activities, people from diverse religious backgrounds can collaborate to build a harmonious social environment.

c. Communities as Mediators of Religious Social Conflicts

Another equally important role is the community's function as a mediator in resolving potential social conflicts related to religious issues. In a pluralistic society, differences in religious views can sometimes lead to misunderstandings that have the potential to escalate into conflict.

Local communities composed of religious leaders, traditional leaders, and community leaders can serve as mediators who help resolve conflicts through dialogue. A consultative approach rooted in local wisdom often proves effective in resolving conflicts without causing prolonged social tension (Arif, 2020).

With the community serving as a mediator, potential conflicts can be better managed so they do not escalate into larger conflicts.

d. Communities as Drivers of Interfaith Social Activities

Communities also play a vital role in initiating various social activities that involve people of different faiths. These social activities may include community service, humanitarian efforts, social assistance, or joint cultural events.

Community participation in interfaith social activities can strengthen interpersonal relationships among different community groups. Intensive social interaction during joint activities can reduce negative stereotypes and foster mutual trust among community members (Ahmad et al., 2024).

In the context of the Kampung Moderasi Beragama in Bengkulu, interfaith social activities can serve as an effective means to reinforce the value of tolerance while building social solidarity within a diverse community.

e. Communities as Drivers of Religious Moderation Literacy in the Digital Age

In the digital age, communities can also play a role in spreading narratives of religious moderation through social media and other digital platforms. The dissemination of positive information about tolerance and harmony can help counter narratives of intolerance and radicalism that frequently emerge in the digital space.

Several youth communities and civil society organizations have begun leveraging digital media to spread messages of religious moderation through educational content, social campaigns, and online discussions. These efforts are crucial given that young people are the most active group in social media usage (Islamy & Susilo, 2022).

By leveraging digital technology, communities can expand the reach of their religious moderation campaigns so that messages of tolerance can be received by a broader audience.

CONCLUSION

Promoting Religious Moderation Villages based on local wisdom is a key strategy for building a harmonious community amidst diversity. Local wisdom values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and social solidarity can serve as a foundation for strengthening religious moderation.

The implementation of Religious Moderation Villages can create inclusive spaces for interfaith interaction and raise public awareness of the importance of tolerance. Through the integration of religious moderation and local wisdom, communities can foster a religious cosmopolitanism that values differences as a source of social richness.

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