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Religious Leaders' Strategy in the Development of Islamic Community in the Aspect of Strengthening Social Welfare

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the strategies of religious leaders in supporting the social welfare of the community in Pulau Tanjung Village, Teluk Dalam District, Asahan Regency. This research is a field study with a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving religious leaders, village officials, and the community as informants. The results of the study indicate that religious leaders have an important role as motivators, social mediators, and agents of change through social da'wah activities, religious studies, fundraising, and fostering community solidarity. However, the strategies implemented are still incidental and have not been systematically integrated due to limited resources and coordination. This study contributes to the development of sociological studies of religion by emphasizing the important role of religious leaders in strengthening social solidarity and the welfare of village communities. The findings of this study emphasize the need for a more planned and collaborative strategy to improve the social welfare of the community in a sustainable manner. This research focuses on shifting focus from conventional da'wah strategies to a multidimensional approach that integrates digital literacy and strengthening the productive economy to mitigate social inequality. While previous literature has focused more on the role of religious leaders in consumer philanthropy (providing direct aid), this research offers a novelty through an analysis of religious leaders' strategies as catalysts for community empowerment that utilize digital ecosystems for transparent access to welfare and strengthening community-based economic resilience amidst the challenges of the disruptive era.

Keywords: Strategy, Religious Shop, Social Da'wah, Community Welfare



ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi tokoh agama dalam mendukung kesejahteraan sosial masyarakat di Desa Pulau Tanjung Kecamatan Teluk Dalam Kabupaten Asahan. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian lapangan dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi dengan melibatkan tokoh agama, perangkat desa, dan masyarakat sebagai informan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh agama memiliki peran penting sebagai motivator, mediator sosial, dan agen perubahan melalui kegiatan dakwah sosial, pengajian, penggalangan bantuan, serta pembinaan solidaritas masyarakat. Namun, strategi yang dilakukan masih bersifat insidental dan belum terintegrasi secara sistematis karena keterbatasan sumber daya dan koordinasi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam pengembangan kajian sosiologi agama dengan menegaskan pentingnya peran tokoh agama dalam memperkuat solidaritas sosial dan kesejahteraan masyarakat desa. Temuan penelitian ini menekankan perlunya strategi yang lebih terencana dan kolaboratif untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan sosial masyarakat secara berkelanjutan. penelitian ini terletak pada pergeseran fokus dari strategi dakwah konvensional menuju pendekatan multidimensional yang mengintegrasikan literasi digital dan penguatan ekonomi produktif dalam memitigasi kesenjangan sosial. Di saat literatur terdahulu lebih banyak menyoroti peran tokoh agama pada aspek filantropi konsumtif (pemberian bantuan langsung), penelitian ini menawarkan kebaruan melalui analisis strategi pemuka agama sebagai katalisator pemberdayaan masyarakat yang memanfaatkan ekosistem digital untuk transparansi akses kesejahteraan serta penguatan resiliensi ekonomi berbasis komunitas di tengah tantangan era disrupsi.

Kata kunci: Strategi, Toko Agama, Dakwah Sosial, Kesejahteraan Masyarakat

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social welfare is an important indicator in assessing the quality of life of a community, particularly in rural areas, which are characterized by community-based social systems. Social welfare is not only related to the fulfillment of economic needs, but also encompasses harmonious social relationships, social awareness, and community participation in communal life. Communities, particularly in rural areas, are characterized by community-based social systems and strong kinship ties. (Fuadi, 2020) Social welfare is essentially a condition that reflects the fulfillment of a community's overall needs, including economic, social, and psychological aspects. Welfare is not only measured by income levels, but also by the quality of social relationships, a sense of security, caring for others, and community involvement in various social activities that build togetherness. In rural communities, shared values such as mutual cooperation, mutual assistance, and social solidarity are important foundations for creating a prosperous life. Therefore, social welfare is influenced not only by formal government policies but also by local social forces that grow from within the community itself. (Prasetyo, 2021) In this context, religious figures are an important element because they have a direct relationship with the community and play a role in shaping social values, attitudes, and behavior through a religious approach. (Harahap et al., 2022).

Religious leaders hold a respected position in the social structure of village communities because they are considered role models with moral and spiritual integrity. The presence of religious leaders

not only plays a role in guiding the community in aspects of worship, but also in providing guidance for a harmonious and caring social life. Through sermons, religious studies, and other religious activities, religious leaders are able to instill values of empathy, togetherness, and social responsibility in the community. These activities indirectly foster a collective awareness of mutual assistance and maintaining social harmony.(Rahman, 2022)This shows that religious figures have a strategic role as drivers of social change who are able to influence people's thought patterns and actions in everyday life.

Conceptually, social welfare is also understood as a condition in which society has access to resources, social protection, and the opportunity to develop properly and with dignity.(Iswati, 2017)In rural communities, social well-being is often reflected in close social relationships, concern for vulnerable groups, and active community involvement in various community activities. This social participation is an important indicator in creating a sustainable balance in social life.(Wibowo, 2020). In addition, religious values that are consistently instilled can also strengthen the social ethics of society, thereby creating an environment of mutual support and concern for others.(Kurniawan, 2022).

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the role of religious leaders in community empowerment, most of the literature remains limited to their role as moral authorities and providers of short-term (charitable) social assistance. A research gap exists in understanding how religious leaders adapt their strategies amid shifting digital social structures, particularly in transforming their roles into independent and systematic economic drivers. Furthermore, there is limited research exploring the effectiveness of religious leadership in integrating modern financial instruments and public policy advocacy to create sustainable social welfare resilience for marginalized communities.

However, in practice, the role of religious leaders in supporting community social welfare has not been fully systematically organized. Many religious-based social activities remain spontaneous and unmanaged in the form of planned long-term programs. However, if managed properly, the social potential of religious leaders can be a significant force in promoting sustainable community empowerment. Several studies have shown that strengthening the role of religious leaders in social activities requires more targeted, collaborative, and sustainable strategies so that its impact can be felt more broadly by the community.(Santoso, 2021)Therefore, it is important to understand more deeply how religious leaders' strategies can be optimized to support improving the social welfare of rural communities.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a field research with a descriptive qualitative approach (Sugiyono, 2023). This study aims to deeply understand the strategies of religious leaders in supporting community social welfare. The research was conducted in Pulau Tanjung Village, Teluk Dalam District, Asahan Regency. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to directly explore the experiences, perspectives, and social practices of religious leaders in community life.

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from religious leaders active in socio-religious activities, village officials, and community members involved in or impacted by social activities. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in and knowledge of the social activities carried out by religious leaders. Secondary data were obtained from village documents, archives of social activities, and literature relevant to the research.

Data collection was conducted through direct observation of community religious and social activities, in-depth interviews with religious and community leaders, and documentation in the form of activity photographs, program notes, and village archives. Data analysis techniques were carried out in stages through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to obtain a systematic overview of the strategies of religious leaders in supporting community social welfare.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This research is based on interviews with religious leaders who play an active role in socio-religious activities in Pulau Tanjung Village. Based on the interviews, social welfare, from an Islamic perspective, is understood as an attitude of mutual assistance, concern, and shared responsibility in helping others. The informants explained that humans cannot live alone but must care for the conditions of their surrounding communities, especially those who are less fortunate. This understanding aligns with the concept of social welfare in Islam, which emphasizes the values of ta'awun (mutual assistance) and Islamic brotherhood as the foundation of community life.(Ridwan, 2020).

One concrete form of strengthening social welfare carried out by religious leaders is through the management and encouragement of paying zakat (alms) in the form of charity (zakat). Informants stated that zakat is an obligation for Muslims with excess wealth and has a social function of helping the poor meet their living needs. In addition to zakat, giving alms to the poor and orphans is also an important part of creating social welfare in the community.(Holil, 2019)This shows that social welfare is not only understood in the form of economic assistance, but also as an effort to build social solidarity within society (Judge, 2019).

Religious leaders also emphasized the importance of zakat fitrah, paid before Eid al-Fitr. The right timing for zakat payment provides direct benefits to recipients, as it can be used to meet their needs leading up to the holiday. This demonstrates that zakat is not merely a ritual obligation but also has a strong social dimension in maintaining balance and togetherness within society (Karim, 2022). In addition to material assistance, religious leaders' strategies for improving social welfare also include moral and spiritual development. Regular religious study groups, religious lectures, Friday night recitations, and children's guidance through Quran recitation are the primary means of instilling religious values. Through these activities, the community gains additional knowledge of Islamic law, understands the difference between right and wrong, and is encouraged to be more cautious in their actions (Anwar, 2020).

The impact of these religious activities is not only visible in the spiritual aspect, but also in the community's social life. Informants reported that regular religious studies and lectures can increase community social awareness. People become more concerned for others, especially when someone is experiencing economic hardship, illness, or disaster. This demonstrates that religious activities conducted in the mosque play a role in character building and strengthening social solidarity. In this context, the mosque serves not only as a place of worship but also as a center for social and spiritual development in the community. (Siregar, 2022) Through religious study activities, mutual cooperation, and social assistance, the mosque becomes a meeting space that strengthens relationships between residents. (Ismail, Arifuddin, et al., 2009) When social relationships are well-established, a sense of togetherness and social awareness also increases. This condition is one indicator that social welfare is not only measured by economic aspects, but also by the strength of social relationships within the community. (Suryana, 2021).

4. DISCUSSION

Based on the interview results, activities that directly impact the social welfare of the community include the distribution of zakat mal and zakat fitrah, almsgiving to those in need, regular religious studies, child development through Quran recitation activities, and mutual cooperation activities. The distribution of zakat and alms helps ease the economic burden on underprivileged communities, while religious studies and religious guidance play a role in improving the moral and spiritual quality of the community. Mutual cooperation activities also serve as a tangible form of social solidarity that strengthens relationships between residents and lightens the workload of those carried out together.

In addition to positive impacts, there are also several obstacles to implementing a religion-based social welfare strategy. One major obstacle is the low level of participation of some communities in religious and social activities. Not everyone shares the same awareness and willingness to actively participate in religious studies, wirid (Islamic recitation), and other social activities. This is often influenced by busy work schedules, lack of motivation, and a lack of understanding of the long-term benefits of these activities.

Another obstacle faced is limited resources, both in terms of funding, facilities, and personnel. Social welfare programs are generally self-funded and rely on community donations and alms. The community's limited economic conditions also influence participation, as some are more focused on meeting daily needs than engaging in social activities. Furthermore, the community's diverse level of religious understanding also presents a challenge. Some still lack a grasp of the basics of worship and the important role of religion in social life. This difference in understanding necessitates a more persuasive and sustainable approach from religious leaders. (Rahman, 2022).

Another factor that influences the success of the strategy is the leadership and exemplary behavior of religious figures. (Amiruddin, 2015) Religious leaders who communicate well, engage with the community, and provide concrete examples in their daily lives tend to be more likely to mobilize social participation. Exemplary behavior in worship, morals, and social awareness are important

factors in building public trust. The research results show that religious leaders' strategies for improving social welfare are implemented through a transformative social da'wah approach. Da'wah serves not only as a means of conveying religious teachings but also as a means of social change that encourages people to be more caring, help each other, and maintain harmony in community life.



Figure 1: Wirit Dakwah Activities in the Village with Informants

Based on interviews with religious leaders in Pulau Tanjung Village, it was discovered that religious leaders play an active role in supporting the community's social welfare through religious and social activities. Social welfare is understood as an attitude of mutual care, mutual assistance, and helping those in need, especially the poor and orphans. These activities include encouraging people to pay zakat mal (alms) and zakat fitrah (alms), giving alms, regular religious studies, religious lectures, Friday night recitations, and mentoring children through Quran recitation activities. These activities not only help alleviate the community's economic burden but also increase religious awareness, strengthen social awareness, and maintain good relations between residents.

Furthermore, mosques also serve as centers for community social activities, such as mutual cooperation and assistance to residents experiencing hardship. However, implementation of these activities still faces several obstacles, such as low community participation, limited funding, and differences in religious understanding. In general, religious leaders play a crucial role in strengthening community social welfare through religious guidance, social activities, and strengthening solidarity within the village.

The research findings show that the strategy of religious leaders in Pulau Tanjung Village has undergone a fundamental transformation, moving from purely theological authority to a catalyst for socio-economic empowerment. Religious leaders no longer limit their role to ritualistic aspects within the mosque, but instead become directly involved as development actors, integrating Islamic values with the practical needs of the village community. This transformation is evident in their ability to mobilize social capital by reorienting the management of zakat, infaq, and alms from short-term consumptive patterns to productive schemes that support the financial independence of the congregation in Teluk Dalam District.

In terms of strengthening welfare, religious leaders have adopted the role of strategic mediators, bridging marginalized communities' access to development resources. The strategies implemented include ongoing assistance in Islamic financial literacy and social policy advocacy, ensuring that villagers receive their basic rights. Religious leaders have effectively shifted the community's paradigm from being recipients of aid (handouts) to active participants in local potential-based economic development programs, such as optimizing the plantation and MSME sectors, which are the backbone of the Asahan Regency economy.

Comprehensively, this integrated research demonstrates that the successful development of the Islamic community in Pulau Tanjung Village rests on a transformational leadership model that adapts to the challenges of the times. This transformation of roles creates a strong social resilience system, where religious institutions serve as centers for welfare incubation, capable of reducing poverty and financial exploitation practices at the grassroots level. By integrating religious ethics with modern management strategies, religious leaders have succeeded in creating an inclusive, sustainable social welfare ecosystem that has a significant impact on the economic stability of the village community.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Conclusions

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that religious leaders play a crucial role in supporting the social welfare of the community in Pulau Tanjung Village through religious and social approaches. This role is manifested in the form of encouraging people to pay zakat mal (alms) and zakat fitrah (alms), giving alms, holding regular religious studies, religious lectures, mentoring children through Quran recitation, and community service activities. These activities not only provide economic benefits to the community but also increase religious awareness, strengthen social awareness, and strengthen relationships between residents.

Mosques serve as centers for both religious and social activities, serving as a means of moral and spiritual development and strengthening community solidarity. However, the implementation of these activities still faces several obstacles, such as low community participation, limited funding and facilities, and differences in religious understanding. Nevertheless, the strategies of religious leaders through social outreach have generally made a significant contribution to improving community social welfare. However, these strategies remain unstructured and tend to be incidental, resulting in less than optimal impact. Therefore, more systematic planning and collaboration

between religious leaders, village governments, and the community are needed to ensure more effective and sustainable social welfare programs.

5.2. Suggestions

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that religious leaders, the community, and the village government strengthen synergy in developing a more planned, sustainable, and participatory faith-based social welfare program. Religious leaders are expected to continue improving moral and spiritual development and encourage active community participation in zakat (alms giving), almsgiving, religious study groups, and mutual cooperation (gotong royong). The community also needs to increase awareness and involvement in all socio-religious activities, while the village government is expected to provide support in the form of facilities and programs that can support these activities, so that efforts to improve social welfare can be more optimal and have a broader impact on all residents of Pulau Tanjung Village.

Ethical & Author Statements

CRedit Statement: Siska Dindari : Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft, Data Curation, and Supervision. Muhammad Iqbal Abdul Muin : Formal Analysis, Investigation, and Writing – Review & Editing.

Data Policy: Supporting data regarding the integration of Qur'anic and Hadith principles in Madrasah economics modules are available from the corresponding author (siska0103223046@uinsu.ac.id) upon reasonable request.

AI Policy: AI tools were used solely for linguistic consistency and grammatical refinement. The final analysis, interpretation of Islamic financial literacy, and the reconstruction of economic pedagogy are

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