


## Empowering women and advancing peace: A study of wahid foundation's initiatives for inclusive social transformation in Indonesia

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Article information	Abstract
Submitted: 2024-10-24 Revised: 2025-06-10 Published: 2025-06-25	The main issue addressed in this study is the low participation of women in community-level development and peacebuilding, as well as the need for effective strategies to promote inclusive social transformation through women's economic, social, and leadership empowerment in Indonesia. This research aims to explore the role of the Wahid Foundation in empowering women through the <i>Desa Damai</i> (Peace Village) program, examining how women contribute to development processes and peacebuilding in the program's target communities. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study analyzes the activities of the Wahid Foundation and their impact on women's participation in development and conflict prevention, illustrating how its programs intervene in women's empowerment and peace promotion across various communities. The findings indicate that women's empowerment programs not only enhance leadership capacity and policy advocacy among women but also contribute to fostering social cohesion and strengthening peace at the local level. The <i>Koperasi Wahid Cinta Damai</i> (KCD) program has successfully empowered women through entrepreneurship training and financial literacy, creating an inclusive and cooperative environment among community members. This empowerment not only increases women's economic independence but also contributes to preventing social conflict and radicalization. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on community-based women's empowerment by demonstrating that improving women's economic and social capacities through the Wahid Foundation's programs effectively strengthens social cohesion, promotes local peace, and prevents potential conflict and radicalization.
<b>Keywords:</b> Wahid Foundation, Women, Empowerment, Peaceful Village	

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## INTRODUCTION

Although women play an important role in families and society, their participation in the public sphere particularly in peacebuilding and policymaking remains limited. Lwamba et al. (2022) highlight that women's involvement is often constrained by social structures that are not yet inclusive. These barriers stem from patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and unequal access to education and resources (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021; Khan et al., 2024). Vujko et al. (2024) emphasize that women's empowerment is a crucial strategy to strengthen their capacities in economic, social, political, and cultural domains, enabling them to contribute to solving social problems and enhancing community resilience. Anderson (2022) and Torok et al. (2023) argue that empowerment does not mean competing with men but creating equitable conditions where both can develop and lead together. According to De la Torre-Castro et al. (2017), gender is a social construct that shapes dynamic relationships between men and women. In the Indonesian context, Bräuchler (2022) asserts that women often face a dual reality as both victims and agents of change in peacebuilding processes.

Several studies emphasize that women's empowerment plays a strategic role in fostering peace at the community level. Carthy et al. (2018) and Lafrarchi (2021) argue that through education, economic initiatives, and advocacy, women can be equipped to counter radical narratives, prevent violence, and promote interfaith dialogue. However, Wolff (2024) notes that limited academic attention has been given to examining women's specific roles and the tangible impacts of empowerment on social cohesion and community transformation. Krause et al. (2018) and Cardenas & Olivius (2021) further highlight that women's involvement in peacebuilding is often discussed without analyzing local, community-based approaches such as those implemented by the Wahid Foundation. Therefore, this study seeks to critically examine how empowered women contribute to fostering tolerance, inclusion, and sustainable peace. Moreover, as emphasized by Shata & Seelig (2021) and Dushkova & Ivlieva (2024), this research explores how women's empowerment initiatives drive broader social transformation and serve as a strategic model for inclusive and gender-equitable development.

Based on several preliminary studies, although the importance of women's empowerment in peacebuilding and community development has been widely discussed, most research still focuses on general frameworks and macro-level analyses. Empirical studies that specifically explore how community-based initiatives empower women as peace agents within local and cultural contexts remain limited. Furthermore, little attention has been given to assessing the actual impact of empowerment programs on social cohesion, inclusivity, and community transformation. Existing literature also tends to overlook the mechanisms through which empowerment translates into leadership, resilience, and active participation at the grassroots level. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the strategies and programs implemented by the Wahid Foundation to empower women, promote inclusive social transformation, and evaluate their effectiveness in fostering peace and advancing gender-responsive development.

This research aims to analyze the strategies and programs implemented by the Wahid Foundation to empower women and foster inclusive social transformation in Indonesia. It seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives in promoting peace, strengthening social cohesion, and enhancing women's leadership at the grassroots level. Additionally, the study will identify key challenges and enabling factors in implementing gender-responsive peacebuilding programs across diverse local contexts. The findings of this study are expected to provide empirical insights into effective practices that integrate women's empowerment with peacebuilding efforts. These insights can serve as valuable references for policymakers, development practitioners, and civil society organizations in designing and scaling inclusive models of social transformation. Furthermore, this research will contribute to academic discourse on gender, peace, and development by offering a

contextualized case study of the Wahid Foundation's approach. Ultimately, it aims to support the advancement of gender-equitable and sustainable peace strategies in Indonesia and beyond.

This study concludes that the Wahid Foundation's initiatives serve as a catalyst for women's empowerment and sustainable peace in Indonesia. Through a community-based and gender-inclusive approach, its programs strengthen women's leadership, expand participation in decision-making, and build social cohesion and community resilience against conflict, radicalization, and social inequality. Thus, the Wahid Foundation's strategies can be regarded as an effective model for achieving inclusive and gender-equitable social transformation across diverse local contexts in Indonesia. The community-based empowerment approach implemented by the Wahid Foundation effectively increases women's active participation in leadership and peacebuilding at the local level. This progress contributes to stronger social cohesion, the creation of harmonious interfaith relations, and the reinforcement of social resilience within Indonesia's diverse communities.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the Wahid Foundation's implementation of women's empowerment and peacebuilding programs in selected villages or sub-districts. As noted by Tazkianida (2025), this method is well-suited for analyzing grassroots-level social interventions. The study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how women participate, contribute, and exercise agency in community development and conflict resolution efforts supported by the foundation. In line with Wolff's (2024) perspective, understanding women's agency is essential to appreciating their role in fostering inclusive social change and resilience. Through this approach, the research seeks to uncover the lived experiences of women as central actors in peacebuilding and local governance initiatives.

Furthermore, the study explores the broader social impacts of these programs on community dynamics, particularly in fostering inclusivity and conflict prevention. As noted by Gangrade et al. (2023), qualitative descriptive methods are well-suited for capturing the complexity of social phenomena and local realities as they unfold. In line with this, the research pays particular attention to how community-based interventions are experienced, interpreted, and responded to by local women, which reflects the perspective of Alasuutari (2009) on understanding social meaning through local narratives. The focus is not only on program implementation but also on the everyday practices through which women engage in leadership and peace processes. In doing so, this study aims to document lived experiences and uncover how empowerment is negotiated within diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Data collection in this study employs two complementary qualitative methods: document analysis and participatory observation. Lim (2024) suggests that combining multiple methods enhances both the depth and validity of qualitative findings. The document analysis involves reviewing relevant materials such as Wahid Foundation program reports, village policy documents, local development plans, official statistics, and secondary literature on gender empowerment and conflict resolution. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is valuable for tracing institutional frameworks and uncovering the narratives that shape policy and program implementation. Meanwhile, participatory observation is conducted to directly observe activities related to the foundation's initiatives, including training sessions, peace forums, economic empowerment projects, and community gatherings. As Mackellar (2013) notes, participatory observation allows researchers to capture contextual data and non-verbal interactions often missed in document-based studies. By integrating these two methods, the study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of how empowerment initiatives unfold in real time within Indonesia's socio-political context.

The unit of analysis in this study is the village or sub-district where the Wahid Foundation has actively implemented women’s empowerment and peacebuilding initiatives. According to Campbell et al. (2020), selecting such units enables researchers to meaningfully examine the interaction between local contexts and program outcomes. The study employs purposive selection based on specific criteria, including the continuity and sustainability of program implementation, the extent of women’s participation, and the availability of relevant documentation and data. As Razia and Abu-Bakar (2023) argue, this approach ensures that the selected sites provide sufficient empirical grounding for evaluating the real impact of empowerment programs. Similarly, Åhlfeldt et al. (2023) highlight that purposive selection guided by these criteria strengthens the analytical depth and contextual relevance of case-based qualitative research.

This purposive strategy ensures that the selected cases offer rich empirical evidence for understanding how empowerment dynamics unfold in practice. Palinkas et al. (2015) assert that purposive sampling is effective in identifying information-rich cases that capture the complexity of social phenomena. This study focuses on three main dimensions: the strategic approaches implemented by the Wahid Foundation, the forms and levels of women’s participation, and the social transformations resulting from these initiatives. Thomson et al. (2021) emphasize that analyzing these aspects provides a comprehensive view of empowerment at both practical and symbolic levels. Likewise, Merino et al. (2024) highlight that such analysis reveals the interconnection between empowerment practices and their wider societal impacts. As Rashid et al. (2019) argue, assessing both short-term outcomes and long-term effects strengthens understanding of program sustainability. In line with Blomqvist et al. (2021), this approach enables a grounded examination of how local contexts influence and are simultaneously shaped by gender-responsive peacebuilding efforts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Ideological commitment to gender mainstreaming at the Wahid Foundation

The Wahid Foundation’s ideological commitment to gender equality is rooted in President Abdurrahman Wahid’s vision, who introduced gender mainstreaming as a moral imperative through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000. Founded in 2004, the Foundation adopted this progressive agenda within a post-9/11 landscape, promoting pluralism, peace, and human rights grounded in Islamic humanism. Under Yenny Wahid’s leadership, it continues to advocate for gender justice. However, challenges remain, including entrenched patriarchal norms, inconsistent political will, and reliance on external donors. These factors hinder the full realization of gender ideals and raise concerns about the depth of their impact at the community level.

Table 1  
*Gender Mainstreaming and the Wahid Foundation*

No.	Finding	Description
1	Gender mainstreaming as a core principle of Gus Dur’s leadership	Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 embodies Gus Dur’s view of gender mainstreaming as essential to social justice, not bureaucracy (Rijaal, 2021).
2	Gender-Aware Public Policy as a Fundamental Requirement	Gus Dur urged gender-responsive policies that actively include women in decision-making.
3	Structural Barriers to Gender Mainstreaming Implementation	The institutionalization of gender mainstreaming continues to face challenges such as entrenched patriarchal culture and inconsistent political commitment across ministries (Topan, 2023).

4	Wahid Foundation as Gus Dur's ethical legacy in a post-conflict, global era	Founded in 2004, the Wahid Foundation advances Gus Dur's vision of pluralism, human rights, and peace amid rising extremism (Susilawati, 2019).
5	Limits of Transformation amid Funding and Political Instability	The Foundation's systemic impact is limited by donor dependence and inconsistent state support (Susilawati, 2019).

Although the Wahid Foundation is ideologically committed to gender justice and inclusive governance, its practical impact remains limited. Gus Dur's vision of gender mainstreaming as a moral duty has yet to be fully implemented due to persistent patriarchal norms and inconsistent political support. The Foundation's reliance on external funding and elite-led leadership may also hinder grassroots involvement and responsiveness to local women's needs. While Yenny Wahid's global influence is significant, more mechanisms are needed to ensure inclusive, context-sensitive programs. Without strong community-level evaluations, initiatives like the Peaceful Village risk lacking transformative power. Greater grassroots engagement and sustainable integration are key to realizing gender justice.

### Access and impact of programs for grassroots women's empowerment

Yenny Wahid's leadership marks a pivotal phase for the Wahid Foundation, merging elite-level access with progressive gender and peacebuilding agendas. Her global recognition has enhanced the Foundation's visibility, yet inclusivity concerns persist regarding grassroots women's participation. Programs like Peaceful Village align with Sustainable Development Goal 5 but face cultural resistance, donor influence, and limited empirical evaluation. Moreover, while emphasizing "feminine" values such as empathy and collaboration supports peace narratives, it risks reinforcing essentialist gender views if not accompanied by structural reforms that promote genuine empowerment. Thus, the Foundation's challenge lies in translating advocacy into sustainable, inclusive change that strengthens women's agency at all levels.

**Table 2**

*Leadership, Programs, and Challenges in the Wahid Foundation*

No.	Finding	Description
1	Leadership Legitimacy and Global Recognition of Yenny Wahid	Yenny Wahid's leadership and diverse experience have enhanced the Foundation's visibility and influence ().
2	Elite Access vs. Grassroots Representation	Despite her global platform, concerns persist regarding whether grassroots women's voices are meaningfully integrated into Wahid Foundation's programs ().
3	Symbolic Recognition and Essentialist Framing of Women's Roles	Yenny's speech highlighted empathy and collaboration but risked reinforcing gender stereotypes without addressing structural aspects of empowerment (Barton, Vergani, & Wahid, 2021).
4	Alignment with Global Development Goals (SDG 5)	Wahid Foundation supports SDG 5 on gender equality, though challenges remain in conservative areas.
5	Barriers from Local Norms and Donor-Driven Agendas	The Foundation faces resistance to gender initiatives in certain localities and must navigate external donor expectations that may influence programming priorities (Barton, Vergani, & Wahid, 2021).
6	Lack of Empirical Evidence on Community-Level Impact	There is limited research on how Wahid Foundation's Peaceful Village programs impact rural or conservative communities.
7	Need for Deeper, Structural Transformations Beyond Project Cycles	The Foundation's peace and gender efforts must move beyond discourse toward lasting, systemic change through long-term strategies and evaluation.

Despite its progressive vision, the Wahid Foundation faces significant challenges in achieving transformative gender equality at the grassroots. Yenny Wahid's leadership brings visibility and influence, yet elite-driven advocacy must be matched with participatory approaches that reflect local women's realities. Emphasizing women's roles through traits like empathy or collaboration risks reducing empowerment to personality rather than systemic rights. The Foundation's dependence on donor agendas and the absence of thorough impact evaluations particularly in conservative or rural areas limit its responsiveness and adaptability. To avoid superficial or temporary results, the Foundation must prioritize inclusive program design, long-term community engagement, and rigorous, context-sensitive evaluation. Only then can its initiatives foster lasting cultural change and advance true gender justice.

### **Removing domestic barriers to women's participation for community peace**

Traditional gender roles continue to limit women's participation in community peacebuilding across Indonesia. Women's contributions are often confined to domestic tasks caring for the home, children, and supporting male relatives while their voices in public decision-making are marginalized. This imbalance reinforces structural gender inequality. Although domestic roles are important, they should not be seen as solely women's responsibility. Achieving true gender equality requires men to share these duties, enabling women to engage in civic and peace-related efforts. Historical figures like Cut Nyak Dien and Kartini, along with modern female leaders, demonstrate women's enduring capacity to contribute to governance, resilience, and inclusive social development.

**Table 3**

*Increasing Women's Participation in Peacebuilding*

No.	Finding	Description
1	Persistence of Traditional Domestic Roles	In many communities, women remain confined to domestic roles, limiting their civic and political participation.
2	Unequal Gender Role Distribution in Households	Women's exclusive burden of domestic work reinforces gender inequality and limits their community involvement.
3	Need for Active, Not Symbolic, Female Participation	Women's roles in peacebuilding must extend beyond tokenism to include active engagement in critical thinking, decision-making, and conflict resolution.
4	Historical Legitimacy of Female Leadership in Indonesia	Figures like Cut Nyak Dien and Kartini highlight a legacy of women's leadership that supports greater female roles in today's peace efforts.
5	Contemporary Evidence of Women's Leadership Capacity	Indonesian women now lead at all levels, proving their capacity for meaningful governance.

Despite evidence of women's leadership, entrenched gender norms still confine women to domestic roles, limiting their public participation in village-level peacebuilding. This culturally framed division of labor hinders both gender equality and community resilience. Symbolic inclusion is insufficient; women must be empowered to think critically, express views, and engage in decision-making. Although Indonesia has seen progress in elevating women to leadership, these gains must be reflected in everyday grassroots realities. Without shifting cultural perceptions and sharing domestic responsibilities, policies risk falling short. To achieve truly inclusive and sustainable Peaceful Villages, it is essential to challenge stereotypes and create platforms for active, substantive female involvement.

### **The strategic role of women in the governance and social response of peaceful villages**

Women hold a strategic position in realizing the goals of Peaceful Villages, not only through representation but through substantive engagement in governance and social response systems. Their participation must be guaranteed by local regulations, accompanied by capacity strengthening



to ensure meaningful contributions in policymaking. Moreover, women actively transmit values of peace, justice, and tolerance within families and communities. Their social sensitivity allows them to detect early signs of conflict, a potential often overlooked due to gender bias. For peacebuilding to be effective, women's roles must be institutionalized across all governance levels.

**Table 4**

*Women's Strategic Role in Peaceful Village Governance and Social Response*

No.	Finding	Description
1	Mandating Women's Participation in Decision-Making	Local regulations must go beyond symbolic inclusion and explicitly require women's active roles in policymaking, with efforts to strengthen their capacity and influence on governance outcomes.
2	Women as Agents of Value-Based Education	Women play a critical role in instilling values like peace, human rights, tolerance, and gender equality, not just through parenting but also by confronting discriminatory cultural norms.
3	Recognition of Women's Observational and Social Sensitivity Skills	Women can identify early signs of social tension or conflict. However, these insights are often dismissed due to stereotypes. Gender sensitivity training for village actors is needed to validate and act on women's community observations.
4	Inclusion in Early Response and Policy Processes	Women should be involved in all stages of early response systems from data collection to analysis, recommendation drafting, and decision-making ensuring policies consider all community members' needs, including the vulnerable (e.g., elderly, pregnant women).
5	Expanded Role in Monitoring Village Governance	Beyond representation, women must be empowered with authority and access to monitor, evaluate, and ensure the accountability of village governance, particularly regarding the quality of public service delivery.

The success of Peaceful Villages hinges on the full and equitable inclusion of women in governance and conflict response mechanisms. While many policies acknowledge women's participation, implementation often remains symbolic, failing to empower them with actual authority. This limits both the effectiveness of governance and the potential for early conflict prevention. Recognizing women's unique contributions particularly in promoting social values and community vigilance demands a shift from token inclusion to structural integration. Furthermore, gender sensitivity training for officials is essential to dismantle stereotypes that hinder women's influence. A sustainable peace model requires not only women's presence but their active, respected voice in decision-making, monitoring, and public service oversight ensuring that peacebuilding becomes inclusive, just, and community-driven.

## Discussion

### **Peaceful village as an alternative medium for peace by women**

The Desa Damai (Peaceful Village) program by the Wahid Foundation aims to foster harmonious and inclusive communities by promoting peace, tolerance, and women's empowerment in Indonesian villages. Muhammad and Hiariej (2021) interpret the program as a proactive response to rising intolerance and radicalism, particularly in rural areas vulnerable to social fragmentation. According to Rrustemi and Kelly (2025), strengthening community capacity through conflict mediation, interfaith dialogue, and radicalism prevention is essential for sustaining local peace, demonstrating the program's alignment with effective resilience strategies. Women's economic empowerment, as noted by Puh et al. (2022), serves as a critical tool to address structural inequalities that can exacerbate social tensions. Kusuma and Susilo (2020) further highlight that promoting interfaith and cultural dialogue enhances social cohesion and tolerance. Khosa and Abdulkareem (2023) emphasize that empowering local leaders as mediators ensures that conflict resolution remains community-driven and sustainable. Together, Desa Damai represents a holistic

grassroots approach integrating economic, social, and cultural strategies to build resilient, peaceful communities.

The Desa Damai program is designed not only to prevent conflict but also to establish model villages that demonstrate how diverse communities can live peacefully. Susanto et al. (2025) interpret these villages as prototypes, offering practical examples of how grassroots peace and tolerance can be cultivated, while Susanto et al. (2022) argue that such models have the potential to inspire replication in other socially fragmented regions. The Wahid Foundation frames its approach as a multi-dimensional empowerment strategy economic, social, and cultural to foster a just, prosperous, and peaceful society, a perspective supported by Badaruddin et al. (2020), who emphasize the linkage between equity and sustainable peace. Rooted in Gus Dur's legacy, the Foundation upholds pluralism and inclusive nationalism. Jubba et al. (2022) further analyze Desa Damai as more than a program; it functions as a broader social movement, illustrating how community-based initiatives can advance inclusion and cohesion, enabling citizens of diverse religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds to coexist harmoniously, and offering insights into scalable models for peacebuilding in Indonesia.

The Desa Damai initiative, launched by the Wahid Foundation with Japan Tobacco International (JTI) Indonesia in 2017, is interpreted as a strategic effort to empower women as agents of sustainable peace, reflecting Gus Dur's vision of community-centered development. Sen et al. (2024) note that around 70% of participants are women from villages such as Grajagan and Bangsring, highlighting the program's focus on female leadership. Built on four pillars women's participation, economic empowerment, peace promotion, and environmental sustainability the program strengthens women's confidence, bargaining power, and leadership in local peacebuilding (Niner et al., 2023). By 2020, Desa Damai had expanded to 30 villages across Java, with partnerships with UN Women and UIMSIA enhancing its reach. Jeevanasai et al. (2023) observe that fourteen villages have formally declared themselves Peaceful Villages/Wards, committing to gender justice and inclusive peace. Community-based action plans prioritize protection of vulnerable groups and address gender-based violence to ensure lasting social transformation.

The Wahid Foundation views gender inequality as a key driver of radicalism and intolerance, noting that disparities between men and women in everyday interactions and decision-making perpetuate social tensions (Gurieva et al., 2022). Recognizing women's potential as peacebuilders, the Foundation highlights a 2016 survey showing that women are generally more tolerant and supportive of religious freedom (Krampe et al., 2021). Rooted in Gus Dur's nine core values, the program promotes inclusive peace, human rights, and universal compassion, translating these principles into community-based interventions. The Peaceful Villages/Wards action plan aligns with national frameworks such as the National Action Plan for the Protection and Empowerment of Women and Children in Social Conflict (RAN P3AKS) and the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (RAN PE), which are adapted to local conditions to enhance effectiveness (Kellard et al., 2024). Smeer et al. (2022; 2024) argue that this approach fosters equitable participation, strengthens early violence prevention, and cultivates secure, just, and harmonious local communities.

### **Active participation of women in empowerment and the realization of peaceful villages**

Findings indicate that women's active participation is central to the success of the Wahid Foundation's Peace Village Program. This supports Rong et al. (2023), who argue that peace initiatives are most sustainable when women act as decision-makers and leaders. In 22 Peace Villages, women's leadership in fostering social cohesion reflects this participatory model. The WISE initiative with UN Women strengthens Meagher et al.'s (2023) view that targeted leadership programs can transform women's agency into tangible peace outcomes. Local collaborations, such



as La Rimpu in Bima, illustrate the integration of governance and economic empowerment. The involvement of 1,785 women entrepreneurs in BUMDes and the OVOP model affirms the link between economic agency and stability. Consistent with Koca (2022), these findings highlight that women's economic independence and leadership are transformative forces in building inclusive, resilient communities and advancing gender-responsive peacebuilding frameworks.

The Peace Village initiative in Bima Regency, implemented by the Wahid Foundation and La Rimpu with support from UN Women and the Netherlands Embassy, exemplifies the expanding role of women in grassroots peacebuilding. As Oktari et al. (2021) suggest, gender-responsive training in disaster preparedness and conflict prevention enhances women's leadership capacities and community resilience. However, consistent with Muluh et al. (2019), the program's dependence on external funding raises concerns about sustainability and local ownership once donor support ceases. While the initiative advances women's agency, Bryan et al. (2024) argue that structural barriers such as restricted access to decision-making and inconsistent policy enforcement continue to impede transformative change. Leca and Cruz (2021) further caution that international recognition may create symbolic legitimacy without embedding gender equality into institutional frameworks. In line with Porter's (2013) perspective, enduring peacebuilding requires systemic reform, multi-level collaboration, and long-term commitment beyond project cycles.

The expansion of the Peace Village program to Central Sulawesi and West Nusa Tenggara in 2024 demonstrates Wahid Foundation and UN Women's strategic effort to link women's empowerment with peacebuilding and climate resilience. This finding supports Scheyvens and van der Watt's (2021) view that economic empowerment is central to sustainable social transformation, positioning women as peace agents through economic independence. The One Village One Product (OVOP) approach reflects Lopera-Arbeláez and Richter's (2024) idea of a solidarity economy that fosters social cohesion, aligning with Joseph et al.'s (2022) concept of women's agency in promoting social stability. However, as noted by Offiah and Ní Gabhann-Dromgoole (2024), the initiative's success depends on institutional support and equitable market access. Yanou et al. (2023) emphasize the need to decolonize knowledge to prevent top-down empowerment. Thus, peacebuilding through women's economic agency requires structural integration and long-term partnerships to ensure sustainable impact.

### **Empowering women through *koperasi cinta damai wahid***

Indonesia, as a nation rich in ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity, bears a moral responsibility to transform this pluralism into a social strength that fosters justice, peace, and national prosperity. As Mullin et al. (2021) argue, diversity must not remain a symbolic ideal but should be actively managed as a structural foundation for inclusive development. This perspective underscores that acknowledging diversity alone is insufficient without institutional mechanisms that ensure equity and participation across groups. Yet, as highlighted by Acim et al. (2023), Indonesia continues to grapple with deep-rooted social and economic disparities, particularly in access to resources and opportunities for marginalized communities. Within this context, Jeevanasai et al. (2023) emphasize that women who play a pivotal role in nation-building remain constrained by structural barriers, gender-based discrimination, and limited access to leadership and public participation, revealing a persistent gap between equality discourse and lived realities.

The Wahid Peace Cooperative (Koperasi Cinta Damai Wahid or KCD Wahid), founded by the Wahid Foundation in 2013, exemplifies how microfinance can serve as a transformative tool for women's empowerment. As Pattnaik et al. (2024) argue, microfinance models that integrate social organization enhance women's collective agency and long-term resilience. Consistent with Abebe and Kegne (2023), KCD Wahid provides financial inclusion for women excluded from formal banking, enabling small-scale entrepreneurship and local economic growth. Beyond income generation, the

cooperative advances social cohesion and tolerance, reflecting Ziaesaeidi and Farsangi's (2024) view that economic empowerment can reinforce peacebuilding. With over 1,700 members and IDR 3.6 billion in distributed loans, KCD Wahid operates in West, Central, and East Java, achieving 73-75% membership growth. As noted by Rahmawati et al. (2023), participants also gain financial literacy and social entrepreneurship skills, demonstrating that women's economic agency can foster inclusive and sustainable community peace.

Koperasi Cinta Damai (KCD) Wahid exemplifies how economic empowerment can be integrated with social value promotion to foster transformative community change. As Lange et al. (2024) argue, microcredit initiatives targeting marginalized and low-income groups are most effective when addressing both economic and social inequalities. In line with this, KCD Wahid not only provides financial access but also promotes tolerance and interreligious harmony, resonating with Dowd's (2016) view that inclusive economic models strengthen plural coexistence. Distinct from conventional cooperatives, KCD Wahid collaborates with rural women's groups to enhance economic independence and social cohesion, reflecting Haley and Marsh's (2021) emphasis on gendered community empowerment. Consistent with Purwanto et al. (2023), integrating peace values within economic programs enhances grassroots resilience. Through its strategic pillars microfinance, community organization, and social entrepreneurship KCD Wahid embodies what Calo et al. (2024) describe as inclusive development, balancing economic justice with social harmony and intercultural resilience.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the Wahid Foundation's initiatives in empowering women and promoting peace in Indonesia within its broader mission of inclusive social transformation. The findings indicate that the Foundation plays a pivotal role in bridging Islamic values with democratic and human rights principles through the promotion of moderate religious interpretations, gender equality, and tolerance. Programs such as the Peace Village initiative illustrate how women are positioned not as passive beneficiaries but as active agents of change in countering radicalism, fostering social cohesion, and engaging in community decision-making. By integrating empowerment, peacebuilding, and religious moderation, the Foundation contributes to shaping an inclusive civil society grounded in pluralism and mutual respect. Overall, these initiatives demonstrate that sustainable peace in Indonesia requires gender-inclusive participation and the harmonization of faith-based values with democratic ideal.

The research also identifies limitations and structural challenges that hinder the Foundation's full impact, including entrenched patriarchal norms, donor-driven programming constraints, and an overreliance on elite figures in leadership and representation. These challenges underscore the need for deeper grassroots engagement and sustainable program frameworks that prioritize local ownership and cultural context. Despite these limitations, the Foundation's model demonstrates the potential of religious-based civil society organizations to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding and gender justice. This study contributes to the scholarly discourse on gender, peace, and religious pluralism in Southeast Asia by offering empirical insights into how local initiatives intersect with global agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). It affirms the importance of contextualized, inclusive strategies that engage women as key stakeholders in peace efforts.

Future research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of Wahid Foundation programs using longitudinal and participatory approaches, to explore comparative frameworks with similar organizations across the Muslim world, and to amplify the voices of grassroots women often underrepresented in policy narratives. Further inquiry into the integration of religious discourse

with feminist practice would also enhance understanding of how such approaches can be scaled and sustained. Through these efforts, the potential of faith-based institutions as catalysts for inclusive and peaceful transformation can be more fully realized.

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