



The Role of Muhammadiyah Mosques in Community Empowerment: A Case Study in South Sulawesi

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Keywords:

Community
Empowerment
Based on
Muhammadiyah
Mosques in
South Sulawesi

Abstract

Mosques play a pivotal role in the social, cultural, and religious life of Muslim communities in South Sulawesi. Beyond functioning as places of worship, they also serve as centers for education, social engagement, and economic empowerment. Muhammadiyah mosques, in particular, adopt a holistic approach to community development by integrating religious values with social and economic advancement. This study investigates the community empowerment programs initiated by Muhammadiyah mosques in South Sulawesi and evaluates their impact on local communities. Employing a qualitative approach, the research explores various initiatives, including entrepreneurship training, educational support, and mosque-based economic activities. The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah mosques serve as catalysts for promoting community self-reliance and economic resilience through structured programs grounded in Islamic principles. However, challenges persist, such as limited resources, managerial capacity, and community involvement. Strengthening institutional partnerships and improving financial and organizational management are essential to optimizing the role of mosques in sustainable community development. This study highlights the strategic potential of mosques as transformative agents beyond their religious function—positioning them as vital hubs for holistic societal progress.

1. Introduction

In Indonesia, mosques represent the largest number of worship places among the five officially recognized religions, particularly in South Sulawesi, where the majority of the population is Muslim. Within Muslim communities, mosques serve not only as places of worship but also as vital institutions that shape religious, social, and cultural life.

Historically, the mosque has played a central role in Islamic civilization. One of the first actions undertaken by Prophet Muhammad SAW upon migrating from Mecca to Medina was the construction of a mosque. Surrounding this mosque, key institutions such as universities, hospitals, and public facilities emerged—laying the foundation for a thriving Islamic civilization. Many prominent Islamic scholars, linguists, and jurists received their early education in mosques (Suarni & Wahyuni, 2018).

In South Sulawesi, mosques continue to serve important roles beyond religious functions. Among them, Muhammadiyah mosques are particularly notable.

Muhammadiyah, established in 1912 by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta, is one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia. It aims to reform Islamic practice while promoting the advancement of Muslim communities in areas such as education, health, and the economy.

Muhammadiyah mosques function not only as religious spaces but also as centers for education, social outreach, and economic empowerment. With a vision rooted in renewal (*tajdid*) and community development, these mosques introduce moderate and rational Islamic teachings and contribute significantly to societal progress in Indonesia. The number of Muhammadiyah mosques continues to grow annually (Bara, 2021), especially in South Sulawesi, which consists of 21 regencies and 3 cities, where Muhammadiyah's grassroots movement has shown remarkable development.

In this context, a mosque that empowers its surrounding community is one that strengthens and supports the people in achieving social, educational, and economic



advancement. More broadly, community empowerment refers to a process by which individuals and groups—especially those who are underprivileged, including women and marginalized populations—are supported in enhancing their capacity to improve their welfare independently.

2. Literature Review

Community Empowerment is a process aimed at enhancing the ability of individuals and groups to access resources, make decisions, and participate in development. Empowerment can be defined as an effort to give power to underprivileged communities, so that they can manage their potential to improve their quality of life. This process involves education, training, and strengthening the capacity of community organizations.

According to Gunawan Sumodingrat, he explains that the term empowerment comes from the word "power," which means ability, energy, or authority. Therefore, literally, empowerment is defined as the enhancement of ability, energy, strength, or power.

The main goal of empowerment is to strengthen the power of society, especially vulnerable groups who feel powerless, whether due to internal conditions (their own perceptions). Community empowerment based on Muhammadiyah Mosque is a process to make the community independent through various empowerment programs and by taking the center of activities through the mosque.

Mosque-based community empowerment essentially falls into the category of mosque function empowerment. Whereas, mosque-based community empowerment falls under the aspect of mosque management empowerment. Empowerment through social and economic activities, this mosque has become a center of community activities measured by the level of congregation participation, the number of empowerment activities in social activities and economic strengthening, as well as the mosque's role in terms of empowerment.

Mosques as places for social and political activities, like the Prophet's Mosque, which the Prophet Muhammad used as a center for social activities such as providing donations in the form of money and food to orphans and the poor, serving as a venue for weddings, peace treaties, and also as a place to resolve community disputes. Community empowerment can be realized in the form of developing economic and social aspects based on mosques. The mosque is an instrument of community empowerment that plays a very strategic role in efforts to improve the quality of society. However, this must be supported by good and integrated mosque development management. The strategy for community empowerment based on Muhammadiyah mosques refers to an approach that integrates the role and potential of mosques in efforts to improve community welfare.

The prosperity of the mosque can be felt and seen in the activities of the mosque that are able to understand the needs of the local residents, so that the residents' activities are centered around the mosque. Therefore, the prosperity of the mosque does not lie in the grandeur and size of the building.

Based on this phenomenon, mosques must have a strategy so that they are not only used as places for prayer or worship but also for empowering the surrounding community, just as mosques functioned during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The concept of empowerment is very useful because it can share a positive perspective on the resources utilized with the empowerment of mosques for the welfare of the Muslim community.

2.1 Agency Theory (Agency Theory)

According to Jawahir and Uyuni (2019), the Muhammadiyah mosque has great potential in empowering the community through programs that involve congregants in resource management and decision-making. This includes activities such as skills training, micro-business development, and health programs.

According to Zahermanto (2023), mosques can be an important instrument in the development of economic and social aspects by organizing activities that encourage community participation in social and economic programs.

2.2 Signal Theory

The concept of empowerment is very useful because it can provide a positive perspective on the resources utilized through the empowerment of mosques for the welfare of Muslims, hopefully breaking the cycle of poverty present in society (Utomo, 2023).

3. Research Methods

Research Methods

Research Type This study aims to understand Community Empowerment in Mosques, specifically its Opportunities and Challenges. Therefore, the researcher employs a Qualitative approach. By using this method, the research is expected to be more targeted. Qualitative research is a type of study intended to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors of individuals or groups within society. The data obtained is then analyzed to provide insights into emerging new issues.

Research Focus The focus of this research includes:

1. Analyzing how Muhammadiyah Mosques in South Sulawesi contribute to community empowerment.
2. Identifying various obstacles encountered in the effort to empower communities through Muhammadiyah Mosques.
3. Listing the Muhammadiyah Mosques in South Sulawesi.

Research Site and Time

1. **Research Site** The research site includes Muhammadiyah Mosques located in South Sulawesi.
2. **Research Time** The research will be conducted from December to February 2025.

Types and Sources of Data The sources of data used in this research are:

1. **Primary Data**, which consists of empirical data obtained from research informants and observations made by the researcher on the research object.
2. **Secondary Data**, which is acquired from literature reviews related to the study as well as government-provided data that is closely related to the research object.

Data Collection Techniques Data collection is a crucial step in research since the main objective is to obtain data. Without knowledge of data collection techniques, researchers cannot acquire data that meet established standards. The data collection techniques employed in this study include interviews, observations, and documentation. The details of these techniques are as follows:

- a. **Observation** Observation as a data collection method has a unique advantage compared to other methods as it does not limit information to individuals. The objective is to provide an overview of the subject matter and serve as a guideline, direction, and reference during research. The observational data collection technique enhances survey results, offering more comprehensive information about people and other natural objects. It allows researchers to better understand the situation and gather more samples from Muhammadiyah Mosques in South Sulawesi.
- b. **Interview** Interviews are used as a data collection technique when researchers aim for long-term research to identify issues that need further investigation. An interview is a negotiation process between two parties with a shared goal: the interviewer (who poses questions) and the interviewee (who provides insights on the questions). The informants in this study are mosque treasurers.
- c. **Documentation** Documentation is a data collection technique involving records, transcripts, books, letters, newspapers, magazines, inscriptions, meeting minutes,



agendas, etc. This method has the advantage of being time and effort-efficient.

Data Analysis Methods Data analysis methodology in qualitative research is conducted from the beginning of the study until the research conclusion. Regarding this, Nasution (1988) states that "analysis is carried out using hypotheses and data before proceeding to the next step and continues smoothly until research findings can be interpreted." In qualitative research, data analysis is more comprehensive, focusing on processes and data collection. Data analysis techniques involve classifying and processing data into information to facilitate comprehension and assist in answering research questions and drawing conclusions. According to Sugiyono, several methods facilitate data processing, including:

- a. Collecting various data for selection and analysis.
- b. Selecting data relevant to the research.
- c. Analyzing (discussing) and drawing conclusions.

Thus, this research is conducted through investigation, selection, decision-making, analysis, application, and conclusion drawing.

Informants

N	Mosque Name	Regency/City	Position
1	Masjid Muhammadiyah Babul Jannah Bongki	Gowa Regency	Chairman
2	Masjid Hayatul Iman Muhammadiyah Kampung Daeng	Gowa Regency	Chairman
3	Masjid Muhammadiyah Babul Firdaus Datarang	Gowa Regency	Chairman

(This table includes a list of Muhammadiyah Mosques in South Sulawesi along with the positions of key informants).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

a. Community Empowerment Roles

Muhammadiyah mosques in South Sulawesi serve as more than places of worship; they act as local hubs for social, economic, educational, and health initiatives. Three themes emerged from interviews and observations:

- **Social-Economic Activities:** Several mosques organize regular markets and small-business support. As one mosque chair noted, "The mosque...serves as a means of livelihood for the community—for example, during the Friday market we organize."
- **Educational Programs:** Many mosques run Qur'an classes, literacy courses, and early-childhood education. One imam shared, "This year, we are building a kindergarten next to the mosque."
- **Health and Welfare Services:** Some mosques host free health screenings and coordinate zakat distribution to vulnerable families, reinforcing their role in community welfare.

5.2 Challenges in Empowerment Efforts

Despite these positive roles, four main obstacles limit effectiveness:

- **Succession and Management Capacity Constraints** Many longstanding administrators have retired or passed away, leaving a gap in leadership: "The issue is regeneration of management...we lack sufficient administrators."
- **Funding Constraints** Reliance on infaq and sadaqah yields unpredictable budgets. One mosque leader lamented, "Due to financial shortages, many parts of the mosque still need improvement."
- **Low Congregational Participation** While evening services draw crowds, daytime programs struggle for attendance, reducing the impact of empowerment activities.



- **Limited External Collaboration**
 Few mosques have formal partnerships with local government or NGOs, restricting access to training, mentoring, and additional funding.

Table 5.1 Number of Muhammadiyah Mosques in South Sulawesi

No	District/City	Total Mosques
1	Gowa Regency	37
2	Makassar City	48
3	Bulukumba Regency	4
4	Selayar Regency	18
5	Wajo Regency	26
6	Bantaeng Regency	35
7	Jeneponto Regency	3
8	Takalar Regency	2
9	Bone Regency	2
10	Enrekang Regency	5
11	Sinjai Regency	6
12	Sidrap Regency	24
13	Pangkep Regency	8
14	Maros Regency	4
15	Barru Regency	5
16	Pinrang Regency	10
17	Pare-Pare City	23
18	Luwu Regency	4
19	Soppeng Regency	6
20	Palopo City	13
Total		283

4.2 Discussion

a. Interpreting Mosque-Led Empowerment

The diverse programs observed align with community-driven development frameworks (e.g., Kabeer’s empowerment model), demonstrating that mosques can foster agency, resources, and achievements among marginalized groups. By integrating economic activities with education and welfare services, Muhammadiyah mosques effectively cultivate social capital and local resilience.

b. Addressing Management and Succession

The lack of trained administrators undermines program sustainability. Consistent

with Fikriyah (2021), capacity-building workshops in financial management and leadership should be mandatory for mosque committees, ensuring smooth leadership transitions and professionalized operations.

c. Securing Sustainable Funding

Financial constraints echo findings from similar studies in other Indonesian provinces. To overcome this, mosques might establish dedicated business units (e.g., waqf-funded microenterprises) and formalize partnerships with Islamic philanthropic organizations or local government agencies to diversify income streams.

d. Enhancing Congregational Engagement

Low daytime attendance suggests a need for flexible program scheduling and targeted outreach. Leveraging social media and local radio to promote midday activities could improve participation, as demonstrated in successful mosque programs elsewhere (Ramlayanti et al., 2019).

e. Expanding External Collaborations

Formal MOUs with universities, NGOs, and government bodies can facilitate technical assistance, grant access, and mentoring. Such collaborations have been shown to amplify mosque-based initiatives by providing expertise and external credibility.

f. Summary of Key Recommendations:

1. Implement leadership training and succession planning.
2. Diversify funding through waqf enterprises and formal partnerships.
3. Optimize program timing and communication to boost participation.
4. Establish institutional collaborations for technical and financial support.

5. Closing

5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the opportunities and challenges of community empowerment through Muhammadiyah



mosques in South Sulawesi. The findings demonstrate that, beyond their spiritual function, these mosques have become strategic hubs for education, economic activity, health services, and social welfare—activities that have measurably improved community self-reliance, economic well-being, and social cohesion. Entrepreneurship training, skills workshops, and regular markets have driven real increases in household income and confidence among congregants.

However, optimal impact is constrained by three key factors:

- **Financial limitations**, which restrict the scale and continuity of programs;
- **Inadequate management capacity**, marked by poor succession planning and a lack of trained administrators;
- **Low daytime participation** and insufficient coordination with local government and NGOs, which undermines sustainability.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

- **Scope:** This qualitative study focused on a select sample of mosques in South Sulawesi and may not capture the full regional variation.
- **Methodology:** Reliance on interviews and observations limits the ability to quantify impact.

Future research should incorporate larger samples and mixed methods—combining surveys to measure program outcomes statistically with in-depth case studies—to validate and extend these findings across Indonesia.

5.3 Recommendations

To strengthen mosque-led empowerment, we propose that Muhammadiyah and local stakeholders:

1. **Enhance Administrator Capacity**
Provide regular training and mentorship in financial management, program design, and leadership to ensure professionalized, sustainable operations.

2. **Foster Strategic Partnerships**

Cultivate formal collaborations with local governments, universities, NGOs, and Islamic philanthropic bodies to access technical assistance, co-funding, and mentoring.

3. **Develop Adaptive Programs**

Design context-specific initiatives—such as mobile training units for rural areas or modular courses for working adults—to respond flexibly to community needs.

4. **Increase Community Participation**

Launch inclusive outreach campaigns (via social media, local media, and community forums) that actively involve youth, women, and marginalized groups in program planning and implementation.

5. **Establish Robust Monitoring & Evaluation**

Implement a structured M&E framework with clear indicators (e.g., numbers trained, income increases, participation rates) to track progress, inform iterative improvements, and demonstrate impact to funders.

6. **Inform Policy and Funding Decisions**

Share these findings with policy-makers to embed mosque-based empowerment in regional development plans and budget allocations, positioning mosques as recognized partners in community development.

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