

**FAITH-BASED LEADERSHIP AND MULTIPLIER EFFECTS
ON SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A CASE
STUDY OF KIAI LEADERSHIP AT AL UTSMANI
PESANTREN, BONDOWOSO, INDONESIA**

Ubaidillah^{1*}

*ubed21072011@lecturer.uinkhas.ac.id

¹ UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia

Abstract

Faith-based institutions are increasingly recognized as strategic actors in grassroots sustainable development; however, limited empirical research explains how religious leadership generates cross-sectoral and cumulative social impacts at the community level. This study investigates the multiplier effects of kiai leadership in fostering sustainable community development at Al Utsmani Pesantren, Bondowoso, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving pesantren leaders, teachers, students, alumni, and surrounding community members. Thematic analysis reveals that the kiai's religious authority, moral legitimacy, and socially embedded trust function as catalytic mechanisms that translate Islamic ethical values into collective practices across education, economic empowerment, social cohesion, and environmental awareness. These interconnected domains reinforce one another, producing cascading and sustainable impacts that extend beyond the institutional boundaries of the pesantren. The findings demonstrate that faith-based leadership operates not merely as symbolic guidance but as an enabling structure for mobilizing social capital and local resources. This study contributes to the literature on faith-based development and educational leadership by conceptualizing kiai leadership as a multiplier mechanism that localizes the Sustainable Development Goals within culturally grounded community practices.

Keywords: *Faith-based leadership; Kiai leadership; Pesantren; Multiplier effects; Sustainable community development; SDGs*

Introduction

Islamic boarding schools, commonly known as *pesantren*, constitute one of the most enduring socio-religious institutions in Indonesia, sustaining their relevance across shifting historical, political, and economic landscapes. For centuries, pesantren have functioned not only as centers of Islamic learning, moral education, and spiritual formation but also as spaces where religious knowledge is embedded in everyday social life. Beyond their educational mandate, pesantren have historically operated as community-based institutions that shape values, norms, and collective identities, particularly within rural and semi-rural societies where formal state services are often limited (Musaddad, 2023). In this sense, pesantren represent more

than educational establishments; they function as socio-cultural ecosystems that integrate learning, morality, and communal responsibility.

Unlike modern educational institutions that typically operate within rigid bureaucratic and administrative systems, pesantren are deeply embedded in local cultural and social structures. This embeddedness enables them to engage directly with the lived realities of surrounding communities and to respond flexibly to local challenges. Consequently, pesantren frequently act as informal social safety nets by providing moral guidance, mediating conflicts, and offering practical assistance to marginalized groups (Rahtikawatie et al., 2021). Their relational and community-oriented character allows them to maintain close ties with society, fostering forms of trust and solidarity that are often difficult to cultivate within formal institutional settings.

In contemporary global discourse, development is increasingly conceptualized as a multidimensional process that extends beyond economic growth to include social justice, environmental sustainability, and institutional resilience. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, reflect this holistic understanding by addressing interconnected challenges such as poverty alleviation, quality education, inequality reduction, environmental protection, and peace-building (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs emphasize that sustainable development must be participatory, inclusive, and locally grounded rather than imposed through top-down technocratic interventions.

Despite the comprehensiveness of this framework, the implementation of the SDGs at the grassroots level remains uneven. Many development initiatives fail to resonate with local cultural values, belief systems, and social norms, resulting in limited community ownership and weak sustainability. Such disconnects highlight a persistent gap between global development agendas and local realities. Addressing this gap requires locally rooted institutions that possess not only organizational capacity but also cultural legitimacy and moral authority to translate universal goals into meaningful everyday practices.

Faith-based institutions have increasingly been recognized as strategic actors capable of bridging this divide. Possessing moral credibility, social legitimacy, and dense networks of trust, religious organizations often mobilize collective action more effectively than formal agencies. The World Bank (2020) underscores the significant contribution of faith-based organizations to community-driven development, particularly in societies where religion shapes social behavior and public life. Their embeddedness enables them to align development initiatives with locally accepted ethical frameworks, thereby enhancing participation and sustainability.

Within the Indonesian context, pesantren represent a distinctive form of faith-based institution whose normative foundations align closely with the ethical principles underpinning the SDGs. Core Islamic values such as justice

(*'adl*), responsibility (*amanah*), solidarity (*ukhuwwah*), and stewardship of the earth (*khalifah*) resonate strongly with contemporary development priorities. These values are deeply institutionalized within pesantren traditions, allowing development-oriented practices to emerge organically rather than through external imposition (Efendi, 2025). As a result, pesantren often integrate educational, social, and environmental initiatives in ways that are culturally coherent and morally persuasive.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of pesantren in fostering community development cannot be separated from the role of leadership. At the center of pesantren life stands the *kiai*, whose authority extends beyond formal administrative responsibilities. The *kiai* embodies religious scholarship, moral integrity, and cultural legitimacy, positioning him as both a spiritual guide and a community leader (Hidayati & Mamlukhah, 2023). His influence permeates institutional governance as well as everyday social relations, shaping not only organizational decisions but also collective behavior.

Kiai leadership differs fundamentally from bureaucratic or managerial leadership models commonly observed in modern organizations. Rather than relying on formal rules or hierarchical control, it operates through relational and value-based mechanisms. Ethical consistency, spiritual guidance, and personal example constitute the primary sources of authority, cultivating deep loyalty and trust among *santri*, alumni, and community members (Puspita, 2024). This form of leadership emphasizes moral persuasion over coercion and social bonds over procedural compliance.

In many rural Indonesian settings, trust in religious leaders frequently surpasses trust in formal state institutions. This social reality enables the *kiai* to function as a mediator between religious norms and everyday practices. Through sermons, informal counseling, and symbolic actions, the *kiai* shapes collective attitudes and moral orientations while influencing community responses to social and economic challenges (Rahtikawatie et al., 2021). Consequently, leadership within pesantren extends beyond institutional management into broader processes of social transformation.

The *kiai*'s influence is not confined to the pesantren compound but radiates outward through networks of students, alumni, and local residents. These networks facilitate the intergenerational transmission of values and practices that shape social behavior across diverse settings (Musaddad, 2025). Such diffusion suggests that leadership within pesantren may generate impacts that exceed the boundaries of the institution itself, producing broader community-level consequences.

This phenomenon can be theoretically understood through the concept of multiplier effects, a notion frequently employed in development studies to explain how a single intervention triggers cascading outcomes across multiple sectors. Within the pesantren context, leadership-driven initiatives often produce interconnected improvements in education, economic activity, social cohesion, and environmental awareness. These domains reinforce one another

over time, creating cumulative and self-sustaining patterns of change rather than isolated outcomes.

In this process, the kiai functions as a catalytic agent who translates Islamic ethical teachings into concrete daily practices. Educational values that emphasize discipline and social responsibility shape economic behavior, while economic empowerment strengthens solidarity and cooperation. These reciprocal relationships illustrate how leadership generates cumulative impacts that surpass the original scope of intervention, thereby producing multiplier effects across community life.

Salafiyah Al Utsmani Islamic Boarding School in Bondowoso provides a compelling context for examining these dynamics. As a traditional pesantren that maintains classical Islamic scholarship while actively engaging with contemporary social issues, Al Utsmani exemplifies the adaptive capacity of pesantren institutions in responding to modern development challenges. Bondowoso, located in East Java, continues to face structural constraints, including economic vulnerability, limited educational access, and environmental pressures. In such circumstances, pesantren serve not only as educational providers but also as moral anchors and sources of social resilience.

Notably, the integration of development principles within pesantren activities often occurs implicitly rather than through explicit alignment with global policy frameworks. Initiatives related to education, economic empowerment, environmental stewardship, and social harmony are framed within Islamic ethical teachings, making them culturally resonant and socially legitimate (Firdaus et al., 2026). This implicit localization demonstrates that global development goals can be effectively internalized when mediated through trusted religious leadership.

Despite the increasing recognition of pesantren in development discourse, empirical studies that explicitly analyze the multiplier effects of kiai leadership remain limited. Existing scholarship tends to focus on educational management, historical trajectories, or institutional characteristics, leaving insufficient attention to how leadership operates as a mechanism that connects multiple development domains. Consequently, the processes through which faith-based leadership generates interconnected and cumulative community impacts remain underexplored.

Addressing this gap is particularly important in contexts where formal development mechanisms have limited reach. Understanding how culturally embedded leadership mobilizes social capital and local resources offers valuable insights for designing inclusive, participatory, and sustainable development strategies.

This article seeks to contribute to this discussion by examining the multiplier effects of kiai leadership at Salafiyah Al Utsmani Islamic Boarding School in Bondowoso, Indonesia. By positioning pesantren as active agents of development rather than passive recipients of external programs, the study

conceptualizes leadership as a central mechanism that links religious values with sustainable community transformation. Ultimately, this study situates kiai leadership within broader debates on faith-based development, social capital, and sustainability, underscoring the importance of culturally grounded leadership in translating universal development aspirations into locally meaningful and enduring social change.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the multiplier effects of kiai leadership on sustainable community development at Al Utsmani Islamic Boarding School in Bondowoso, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to understand leadership practices, value formation, and social processes that are context-dependent, relational, and embedded in everyday life. Such phenomena cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone but require in-depth interpretation of meanings, experiences, and interactions.

The case study strategy was considered particularly appropriate, as it allows for a holistic and contextualized examination of complex social dynamics within a bounded system. By focusing on a single pesantren, the study aimed to generate rich empirical insights into how religious authority, moral legitimacy, and social trust operate as mechanisms that produce interconnected educational, economic, and social outcomes. Al Utsmani Pesantren was purposively selected due to its strong community engagement, its reputation for integrating religious education with social empowerment initiatives, and the central role of the kiai in shaping both institutional governance and community-based activities. These characteristics make the site information-rich and suitable for examining leadership-driven multiplier effects.

Data were collected through multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and comprehensiveness. The primary method consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants who were directly involved in or affected by pesantren activities. Participants included the kiai, pesantren administrators, teachers, students (santri), alumni, and members of the surrounding community. This diverse composition enabled the study to capture multiple perspectives on leadership influence across institutional and community contexts.

Informants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling strategies. Initial participants were selected based on their formal roles within the pesantren, while subsequent participants were identified through recommendations to ensure the inclusion of individuals with relevant experiences and insights. Interviews explored themes such as leadership practices, value internalization, decision-making processes, community engagement, and perceived social, economic, and educational impacts. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes and was conducted in a natural

setting familiar to participants to encourage openness and authenticity. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

To complement interview data, non-participant observations were conducted to document daily pesantren routines, educational activities, religious gatherings, and community interactions. Observations enabled the researcher to capture behavioral patterns and social dynamics that might not be fully articulated in interviews, thereby providing contextual understanding of how leadership values are enacted in practice. In addition, document analysis was undertaken, including institutional reports, program records, curriculum materials, and archival documents, to trace the historical development of pesantren initiatives and corroborate participants' accounts.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach aimed at identifying recurring patterns and relationships across data sources. The analysis proceeded through several stages. First, all transcripts and field notes were read repeatedly to achieve familiarization with the data. Second, open coding was conducted to label significant statements related to leadership practices, value transmission, and community impacts. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories and themes that reflected interconnected processes across educational transformation, economic empowerment, social cohesion, and environmental awareness. Finally, themes were interpreted in relation to the concept of multiplier effects to explain how leadership actions generated cascading and cumulative outcomes across multiple domains.

This iterative process involved continuous comparison between interviews, observations, and documents to refine interpretations and ensure analytical coherence. The goal was not merely to describe activities but to develop an explanatory understanding of how kiai leadership operates as a catalytic mechanism within the pesantren ecosystem.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence was used to cross-check information and reduce single-source bias. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm accuracy and clarify ambiguities. Prolonged engagement in the field allowed the researcher to build rapport and gain a deeper understanding of the social context, thereby strengthening interpretive validity. An audit trail documenting data collection and analytical decisions was also maintained to ensure transparency and methodological rigor.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were free to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used in reporting to protect participants' identities, and all data were stored securely for research purposes only.

Results and Discussion

Educational Transformation and Value Internalization

Educational transformation within pesantren is not limited to curricular reform or institutional expansion. Instead, it is fundamentally rooted in the process of value internalization shaped by kiai leadership. Evidence from Al Utsmani Islamic Boarding School shows that education is conceived as a holistic endeavor integrating intellectual development, moral formation, and social responsibility. This orientation reflects the classical pesantren philosophy, which emphasizes the unity of knowledge (*'ilm*), ethics (*akhlaq*), and practice (*'amal*) as inseparable foundations of meaningful education (Musaddad, 2025). Learning is therefore directed toward character formation and social accountability rather than the simple accumulation of information.

The kiai occupies a pivotal position in guiding this transformative process. Rather than functioning solely as an administrator or instructor, the kiai serves as a living embodiment of the values promoted within the pesantren. Daily interactions, religious instruction, and personal conduct become pedagogical instruments through which discipline, humility, responsibility, and sincerity are demonstrated in practice. Such leadership facilitates internalization because values are absorbed through lived experience and continuous socialization rather than imposed through formal regulation (Hidayati and Mamlukhah, 2023). Authority operates relationally and morally, generating voluntary commitment grounded in trust.

Value internalization takes place across both formal and informal learning spaces. Formal instruction occurs through classrooms, study circles, and religious lectures that connect Islamic teachings with contemporary realities. Informal environments often exert deeper influence. Daily routines, communal prayers, collective work, and interpersonal exchanges transform abstract principles into habitual practices, reinforcing ethical behavior in everyday life (Puspita, 2024). Through repetition and shared experience, values gradually become embedded within the collective culture of the pesantren.

This integrated environment contributes to the formation of socially conscious individuals. Santri are encouraged to view knowledge as a responsibility that must benefit others. This perspective nurtures empathy, cooperation, and collective obligation, which form the basis of active citizenship grounded in religious ethics (Firdaus et al., 2026). From a development perspective, this stage represents the initial mechanism through which multiplier effects begin to emerge, since ethical dispositions cultivated in education later shape actions in economic and social spheres.

The long-term impact of this transformation becomes visible through alumni trajectories. Former santri frequently assume roles as teachers, religious leaders, entrepreneurs, and community activists. Their professional and social practices reflect the ethical foundations acquired during their education, indicating that pesantren-based learning produces sustained

influence beyond institutional boundaries (Rahtikawatie et al., 2021). Alumni networks further amplify these effects. Through religious gatherings, local initiatives, and community-based enterprises, they disseminate pesantren values across diverse settings, thereby reproducing ethical norms across generations and creating broader social regeneration (Musaddad, 2023).

Educational transformation at Al Utsmani is also characterized by inclusivity and adaptability. While maintaining classical Islamic scholarship, the pesantren incorporates contextual knowledge and practical competencies relevant to contemporary challenges. This balance enables santri to engage modern social and economic realities without losing moral grounding, which directly supports the objectives of quality and inclusive education outlined in SDG 4 (United Nations, 2015). Importantly, the kiai frames such transformation as a moral obligation rather than an external policy requirement. Development-oriented values including social justice, cooperation, and environmental responsibility are embedded within Islamic teachings, thereby enhancing legitimacy and encouraging voluntary participation (Efendi, 2025). Education thus becomes the foundational source from which broader multiplier effects originate.

Economic Empowerment and Community Resilience

The internalization of values cultivated through education does not remain confined to personal morality. Instead, it shapes patterns of economic behavior and collective livelihood strategies. At Al Utsmani, educational transformation functions as the ethical foundation upon which economic empowerment is constructed. Santri who are trained in responsibility, discipline, and cooperation tend to translate these principles into productive activities that prioritize communal welfare alongside individual benefit.

Values such as honesty (*sidq*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), cooperation (*ta'awun*), and self-reliance (*kemandirian*) influence how economic practices are organized and interpreted. Interviews with alumni and community members indicate that economic activity is perceived as a form of ethical engagement rather than solely a pursuit of profit. This orientation distinguishes pesantren-based initiatives from conventional market rationality and aligns them with principles of social justice and mutual benefit (Efendi, 2025). Economic practices therefore function as expressions of moral commitment.

The kiai's leadership plays a mediating role in translating ethical dispositions into collective action. Through religious guidance and moral persuasion, the kiai frames entrepreneurship, cooperative work, and resource management as religious responsibilities. His endorsement provides normative legitimacy and reduces resistance to participation. As a trusted authority figure, the kiai mobilizes social capital that enables collaborative ventures to operate effectively (Puspita, 2024).

This continuity between education and economic engagement illustrates that pesantren operate as integrated systems of social transformation.

Educational processes cultivate ethical orientations, while economic initiatives provide practical arenas for enacting those orientations. Economic empowerment at Al Utsmani should therefore be understood as an extension of value-based education rather than an isolated program.

Multiplier effects become increasingly visible at this stage. Ethical education strengthens trust. Trust encourages cooperation. Cooperation sustains collective enterprises. These reinforcing mechanisms enhance household resilience, stimulate local economic circulation, and reduce vulnerability to external shocks. Economic empowerment thus contributes not only to material improvement but also to social stability and long-term sustainability.

Social Cohesion and Institutional Trust

Economic initiatives rooted in pesantren values depend on the presence of social cohesion and institutional trust. At Al Utsmani, strong interpersonal bonds fostered through kiai leadership create an enabling environment for collective action. Cooperation, mutual assistance, and shared responsibility become normalized social practices.

Social cohesion is cultivated through shared religious commitments and frequent communal activities. Rituals, educational sessions, and social gatherings bring together santri, alumni, teachers, and local residents, reinforcing a sense of belonging and collective identity (Rahtikawatie et al., 2021). The pesantren therefore functions as a social hub that continuously reproduces networks of solidarity.

The kiai remains central to maintaining this cohesion. As a respected moral authority, he provides guidance that transcends social and economic differences. His presence offers a stable reference point for conflict resolution and collective decision-making, which is particularly important in rural contexts where formal mechanisms may be limited (Hidayati and Mamlukhah, 2023). Leadership thus contributes directly to social order and shared purpose.

Institutional trust emerges as a key outcome of this environment. Community members willingly participate in pesantren initiatives because leadership is perceived as ethical and transparent. Programs endorsed by the kiai are regarded as morally credible, which reduces uncertainty and facilitates cooperation (World Bank, 2020). Trust also lowers transaction costs and allows collective initiatives to operate effectively despite limited material resources (Rahtikawatie et al., 2021).

Inclusive religious and social activities further prevent marginalization by providing spaces for participation across generational and economic boundaries. These practices strengthen solidarity and reduce social fragmentation (Supandi and Aini, 2025). Ethical norms internalized through education, including honesty, responsibility, and mutual respect, reinforce

stable interpersonal relations and enhance institutional legitimacy (Puspita, 2024).

Alumni networks extend these cohesive dynamics beyond the pesantren environment. Former santri maintain strong emotional and moral ties to the institution and act as bridges connecting pesantren values with broader society. Through these networks, norms of cooperation and trust are reproduced across communities and generations (Musaddad, 2023).

Taken together, the interaction between social cohesion and institutional trust illustrates another dimension of multiplier effects generated by kiai leadership. Strong bonds reinforce trust, while trust further deepens cohesion. This reciprocal process creates a resilient social structure capable of sustaining educational and economic initiatives over time. Such outcomes align with SDG 16, which emphasizes peaceful societies and strong institutions (United Nations, 2015). Pesantren-based leadership therefore demonstrates how culturally grounded institutions can foster durable social order and collective resilience without relying solely on formal governance structures.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that kiai leadership at Al Utsmani Islamic Boarding School in Bondowoso plays a decisive role in generating multiplier effects that extend across educational, economic, and social domains of community life. Leadership grounded in moral authority, religious legitimacy, and long-standing social trust enables the pesantren to operate not merely as a religious educational institution but as an active agent of sustainable community transformation. The findings confirm that faith-based leadership functions as a practical mechanism through which ethical values are translated into tangible social outcomes.

Educational transformation constitutes the foundation of this process. Through holistic learning and continuous value internalization, the kiai cultivates ethical dispositions among santri that emphasize responsibility, discipline, social awareness, and collective obligation. These internalized values extend beyond the pesantren setting through alumni networks and community engagement, producing long-term and intergenerational impacts. Education therefore serves not only as human capital formation but also as moral and social capital formation that shapes broader patterns of community behavior.

The study further reveals that these educational values provide the ethical infrastructure for economic empowerment. Economic initiatives at Al Utsmani are framed as moral practices rooted in Islamic principles such as honesty, trustworthiness, cooperation, and social justice. This ethical orientation encourages participation, reduces social risk, and enhances the sustainability of community-based enterprises. As a result, economic

activities contribute to household resilience and strengthen local economic circulation rather than generating purely individual gains.

Social cohesion and institutional trust represent an additional outcome of kiai leadership. The pesantren functions as a space for integration, mediation, and collective action, where trust in leadership reinforces cooperation and mutual assistance. This trust-based environment lowers barriers to collaboration and strengthens local institutions, allowing educational and economic initiatives to operate effectively even in contexts with limited formal governance capacity. Cohesion and trust thus serve as enabling conditions that sustain the long-term success of development efforts.

Taken together, these interconnected dimensions illustrate how multiplier effects emerge from a single source of moral and religious leadership. Educational transformation shapes ethical behavior, ethical behavior supports economic cooperation, and economic cooperation reinforces social solidarity and institutional stability. These mutually reinforcing processes explain how pesantren-based leadership produces cumulative and sustainable impacts that exceed the scope of isolated interventions.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing literature on faith-based development and educational leadership by conceptualizing kiai leadership as a multiplier mechanism that mobilizes social capital and local resources across sectors. Empirically, it provides evidence that religious authority can function not only symbolically but also operationally in organizing community-driven development. The case of Al Utsmani demonstrates that global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals can be effectively localized when mediated through culturally embedded and trusted religious institutions.

Practically, these findings offer important implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and educational leaders. Engaging faith-based institutions and religious leadership structures may enhance the legitimacy, participation, and sustainability of development programs, particularly in rural and religiously oriented communities. Pesantren, through value-based leadership and dense networks of trust, illustrate the potential of locally grounded institutions to serve as enduring pillars of inclusive and sustainable development.

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