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Islamic Value-Based Community Empowerment through Da'wah and Religious Education: A Participatory Case Study in Rural South Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT
This research addresses the need for a contextual rural community empowerment model rooted in Islamic religious values to strengthen social and spiritual dimensions. The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the implementation of community empowerment based on Islamic religious values through da'wah and education programs in Darat Sawah Village, South Bengkulu Regency. The method used is a participatory-based community service approach, which begins with environmental mapping and problem identification, followed by religious and educational assistance through recitation activities, learning the Qur'an and Iqra', providing religious facilities, and social and environmental programs. The results of the study show an increase in understanding and practice of Islamic values in people's lives, greater awareness of sustainable worship, stronger social concern, a spirit of cooperation, and increased youth participation in religious and social activities. This research contributes by presenting an integrative, religion-based community empowerment model that links da'wah, education, and social strengthening. The study's findings indicate that participatory, sustainable religious approaches are effectively used in community service programs to build independence, solidarity, and social resilience among village communities

INTRODUCTION

Community empowerment is a key concept in social development that places people as active subjects in the process of increasing their capacity, independence, and quality of life. In contemporary academic perspectives, empowerment is understood not only as an economically based, technocratic intervention but also as a process of social transformation that emphasizes capacity building, collective control over decisions, and justice- and sustainability-oriented change (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024; Heaton et al., 2024). In the context of rural Muslim communities in Indonesia, Islamic religious values play a strategic role, serving as a source of moral legitimacy, social and behavioral orientation, and an ethical framework for collective life (Fahmi & Panorama, 2025; Sinulingga et al., 2024). Therefore, Islamic community empowerment can be understood as a systematic effort to integrate da'wah, religious education, and social strengthening to holistically build community capacity across spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions.

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The urgency of this study arises from two main problems. Theoretically, the study of community empowerment in the mainstream of development discourse still tends to move within the framework of "religion-neutral" policies and governance, so that the religious dimension is often positioned as a secondary cultural factor and is not read as a social infrastructure that forms power relations, legitimacy, and access to resources in empowerment practices (Communities, 2022; Jens Koehrsen & Burchardt, 2023; Sabates-Wheeler & Barker, 2024). In fact, in many Muslim communities, religion has become a medium for social mobilization and the internalization of collective values through moral authority, networks of local institutions, and solidarity practices that can strengthen program ownership and consistency of impact at the grassroots level (Coley et al., 2023; Deif (أحمد ضيف) et al., 2022; Jennings et al., 2021). In practice, community service programs in rural areas are still often partial, fragmented, and less sustainable because they have not fully departed from a living value system and have not sufficiently strengthened the capacity and governance of communities to maintain sustainability after the program cycle has ended (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024; Sambodo et al., 2023). In the latest discourse on community development, values-based development and faith-based community empowerment approaches are increasingly seen as relevant because they help link development goals with community value frameworks while utilizing religious institutions as social anchors to strengthen participation, social accountability, and sustainability impacts (Communities, 2022; Deif (أحمد ضيف) et al., 2022; Owusu & Agyemang, 2025).

Some previous research on faith-based community empowerment has shown that these approaches have significant potential to increase social participation, community cohesion, and the internalization of moral values at the local level. Studies have confirmed that faith-based organizations and programs can build social trust and mobilize community participation more effectively than technocratic approaches to development, as religion serves as a source of ethical legitimacy and collective identity (J. Koehrsen & Ives, 2025; Tomalin, 2020). In the context of Islamic education and da'wah, several studies also reveal that recitation activities, Qur'an education, and community da'wah contribute to increasing religious awareness, prosocial behavior, and strengthening the social solidarity of rural communities (Rahman, 2022; Sahin, 2021). However, some studies have criticized religion-based empowerment programs for being normative, ritual-focused, and not integrated into a systematic and sustainable empowerment framework (Hickey & Mohan, 2022; Frame, 2023). In addition, some studies still place religion as a supporting cultural variable, rather than as the main operational framework in community empowerment design, and tend to ignore local dynamics, implementation challenges, and structural limitations at the village level (D'Agostino et al., 2021; D'Agostino & Asadullah, 2025). This condition shows that although the literature has emphasized the importance of religion in social development, there remains a need for more contextual, integrative empirical studies to understand how da'wah and religious education can be operationalized simultaneously as a strategy for rural community empowerment.

Based on the mapping of the previous research, there is a clear research gap. Conceptually, there are still a few studies that treat da'wah and Islamic religious education simultaneously as instruments of community empowerment, rather than merely as normative religious activities. Contextually, research on religious-based empowerment in rural areas of South Bengkulu is relatively minimal, so local dynamics, structural constraints, and community responses to service programs have not been adequately documented in reputable literature. Methodologically, many previous studies have not explicitly linked community service, citizen participation, and the resulting social-spiritual changes. This gap underscores the need for more integrative, contextual, and practice-based field research.

Based on previous studies, this research identifies a clear gap in Islamic community empowerment literature. Most existing studies discuss da'wah, Qur'anic education, community participation, and faith-based empowerment as separate themes. However, few studies have

integrated these elements into one operational framework for empowering rural Muslim communities. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in the formulation of a participatory Islamic community empowerment model that positions da'wah as moral and social mobilization, Qur'anic education as religious capacity building, and community participation as a mechanism for strengthening ownership and sustainability.

Building on this novelty, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Islamic religious-based community empowerment through da'wah and education programs in Darat Sawah Village, South Bengkulu. This study examines how da'wah activities, Qur'anic learning, religious mentoring, and community participation contribute to religious understanding, worship practices, social engagement, and village-level community dynamics. Thus, the main contribution of this research is an empirically grounded model of Islamic community empowerment that integrates da'wah strategy, Qur'anic education, and participatory community development in a rural Muslim context.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine Islamic community empowerment through da'wah and religious education programs in Darat Sawah Village, Seginim District, South Bengkulu Regency. A qualitative approach was used because the study focuses on processes, meanings, social interaction, and socio-spiritual dynamics within a specific community context rather than on the quantitative measurement of variables (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Denzin & Giardina, 2024). he case study design was chosen because it enables an in-depth and holistic exploration of the relationships among religious actors, community participation, local institutions, and empowerment practices. The participatory community service program was therefore not treated as a separate research method, but as the empirical case and research setting through which Islamic-based community empowerment was observed and analyzed.

The research was conducted from May to July 2025 during the implementation of da'wah, Qur'anic learning, religious mentoring, and community-based educational activities. Darat Sawah Village was selected because it represents a rural Muslim community with active religious traditions, while also facing structural limitations related to educational access, program sustainability, and community participation. Therefore, this site provided a relevant context for analyzing how da'wah and religious education function as instruments of community empowerment.

The informants consisted of 15 participants who were directly involved in or affected by the program. They included two village officials, two religious leaders, two mosque administrators, two Qur'an/Iqra' teachers, three youth representatives, and four community members who participated in religious learning activities. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: direct involvement in the empowerment program, knowledge of the village's socio-religious context, and willingness to provide reflective information about the implementation and impact of the program. The number of informants was determined by considering the depth of information and data saturation in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2020).

Table 1. Research Informants

Informant Category	Number of Informants	Role in the Study
Village officials	2	Providing information on village support, local governance, and program coordination
Religious leaders	2	Explaining da'wah activities, religious authority, and community religious needs
Mosque administrators	2	Providing information on mosque-based activities and community participation
Qur'an/Iqra' teachers	2	Explaining Qur'anic learning processes and religious education practices
Youth representatives	3	Describing youth participation and response to the program
Community members	4	Providing information on religious learning, worship practices, and perceived program benefits
Total	15	

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, informal discussions, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with village officials, religious leaders, mosque administrators, Qur'an/Iqra' teachers, youth, and community members. Participatory observation was carried out during religious learning activities, da'wah sessions, Qur'anic recitation, and community gatherings. Secondary data were obtained from program documents, activity reports, village archives, field notes, and photo documentation. Triangulation of sources and techniques was conducted by comparing interview data, observation findings, and documentation to strengthen the accuracy and depth of the findings (Flick, 2022).

The research instruments consisted of semi-structured interview guidelines and observation sheets developed based on the research objectives and the conceptual framework of Islamic community empowerment. The instruments focused on five main aspects: da'wah and religious formation, Qur'anic education, social participation, community response, and program sustainability. Instrument development was conducted through a methodological literature review and research team discussion, followed by a limited expert review to ensure content feasibility and the clarity of indicators (Kallio et al., 2016; Sánchez-Guardiola Paredes et al., 2021).

Table 2. Research Instrument Grid

Focus on Empowerment	Aspects Studied	Indicator	Data Collection Techniques	Instruments
Religious Empowerment	Da'wah and religious formation	Intensity of study, congregation participation, and da'wah materials	Interviews, observations	Interview Guidelines, Observation Sheet
Religious Education	Learning the Qur'an and Iqra'	Attendance, reading ability, and the role of the teacher	Observation, documentation	Observation sheets, field notes
Social Empowerment	Partisipasi dan gotong royong	Citizen involvement, social cooperation, and environmental concern	Interviews, observations	Interview Guidelines

Local Dynamics	Community response and acceptance	Residents' attitudes, support from village leaders, and program obstacles	In-depth interviews	Interview Guidelines
Program Sustainability	Dampak dan rencana tindak lanjut	Citizen commitment, sustainability of activities	Interviews, documentation	Interview guidelines, documents

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The analysis involved data organization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, and interpretive meaning-making. Coding was directed toward patterns related to da'wah strategy, Qur'anic education, community participation, religious understanding, worship practices, and program sustainability. The analysis was carried out iteratively during and after data collection, allowing the researcher to refine categories and verify emerging findings. This approach was considered appropriate because thematic analysis enables researchers to identify patterns of meaning, social practices, and value relations within qualitative data (Ahmed et al., 2025).

The trustworthiness of the data was maintained through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted with selected informants to confirm the accuracy of key findings. Transferability was supported by providing a detailed description of the research context, participants, and program activities. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through systematic field notes, documentation records, and an audit trail of the research process (Ahmed, 2024; Arslan, 2025).

This study followed ethical principles in qualitative social research. All informants received an explanation of the research objectives and provided informed consent before data collection. Their identities were anonymized to protect confidentiality. The research was conducted with the permission and coordination of village officials and relevant community actors to ensure that all research activities respected local norms, minimized social risk, and aligned with academic responsibility in community service.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in Darat Sawah Village, Seginim District, South Bengkulu Regency, from May-July 2025, focusing on the implementation of Islamic-based community empowerment through da'wah and education programs. The data obtained during the study showed that service activities occurred within the social context of rural communities with a strong religious attachment. The program is implemented through initial coordination with village officials and local communities to ensure activities are suitable for residents' conditions and needs. This coordination process includes collecting community data, adjusting the activity schedule, and setting the program implementation location, which generally occurs in an atmosphere of cooperation and open communication between the program implementer and the village.



Figure 1. The process of coordinating and collecting initial program data with village officials.

The implementation of da'wah programs and community religious development is carried out through routine recitation and coaching activities involving adult residents, especially women's groups. This activity took place in residents' homes and community meeting rooms, with an orderly, participatory atmosphere. During the activity, residents attended in groups, participated in religious activities, and engaged in social interactions before and after. Observational results show that recitation activities serve as a gathering space that brings residents together for religious activities while strengthening social relations among community members.



Figure 2. Community recitation activities are part of residents' religious development.

In addition to religious guidance for adults, children's religious education programs are carried out through learning the Qur'an and Iqra. This activity was attended by village children and was held regularly in study rooms and mosques, using simple facilities. The learning process takes place in small groups, with children sitting at a low table or in a lesehan. Mentoring is conducted in turns, so that each participant receives reading guidance at their ability level. During the activity, children are actively involved in reading and follow the supervisor's directions.



Figure 3. The learning of the Qur'an and Iqra' of the village children in the study room is simple.

Learning assistance is provided not only in groups but also individually. In this process, the tutor accompanies each child individually as they read the Qur'an to ensure accurate, fluent reading. This individual mentoring activity occurs repeatedly and is part of the daily learning routine, which adjusts the child's free time and the community's social conditions.



Figure 4. Assistance in reading the Qur'an individually.

In addition to reading and learning, the program also includes habituation and worship practices. This activity involves children in worship exercises together. During the observation, the children formed an orderly line and followed the supervisor's directions during worship practice. This activity is repeated as part of a series of religious education sessions, aimed at familiarizing participants with worship procedures in a collective setting.



Figure 5. Habituation and practice of children's worship through congregational prayer practice.

Community empowerment programs also give rise to socio-religious activities that involve collective citizen participation. These social activities take place in the village and around places of worship, involving residents of all ages. Observations show that residents cooperate in implementing activities, including the division of roles and communication. This social activity is carried out alongside religious activities and is part of the village community's life.



Figure 6. Socio-religious activities and cooperation of the village community.

During the implementation of socio-religious activities, it was also found that food management was carried out jointly by residents. This activity takes place in a mosque or common room, with the process of measuring and packaging food ingredients carried out collectively. These activities demonstrate citizens' involvement in organized social activities and occur alongside other religious events.



Figure 7. Food management in the community's socio-religious activities.

Overall, the study shows that the empowerment of the Islamic religious community in Darat Sawah Village occurs through a series of da'wah activities, children's religious education, worship practices, and social activities that involve residents. All activities are adjusted to the community's social conditions and coordinated with the village. Interview, observation, and documentation data consistently show the integration between religious and social activities in people's lives during the study period.

Table 2. Results of Research on Islamic Religious-Based Community Empowerment

Focus of Activities	Findings Based on Interviews	Observational Findings	Findings Based on Documentation
Da'wah and Religious Formation	Recitation activities are understood as a means of routine religious development and a space for community.	The recitation took place in an orderly, participatory manner, with residents attending in groups.	Study schedule, photos of community recitation activities
Children's Religious Education	Learning the Qur'an and Iqra' helps children have a religious learning routine outside of school.	Children learn in small groups with the assistance of a supervisor	Photo of Al-Qur'an/Iqra' learning, list of attendees
Individual Assistance in Reading the Qur'an	Mentoring helps improve children's reading fluency	The supervisor accompanies the children one by one in turn	Photo of Qur'an reading assistance
Habituation and Practice of Worship	The practice of worship is understood as an important part of religious education.	Children participate in worship exercises in an orderly and repeated manner.	Photos of congregational worship practice activities
Community Social Participation	Social activities encourage citizen involvement and cooperation	Residents of all ages are involved in collective activities	Photos of cooperation activities and social activities
Religious Social Concern	Social activities are understood as part of the togetherness of residents	Food management activities are carried out jointly	Photos of food management social activities
Program Coordination and Implementation	Coordination with village officials is considered to help the	The data collection and communication process is carried out directly	Data collection, documents, and

	smooth running of the program.	coordination photos at the village office

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are consistent with several previous studies that affirm that religious-based community empowerment, especially through mosque spaces and taklim assemblies, serves as a social infrastructure that strengthens social capital, community cohesion, and citizen participation. Studies have shown that organizing mosque activities that combine da'wah and social services can be a relatively effective model of empowerment because it builds trust, mobilizes participation, and connects the spiritual agenda with the community's socio-economic needs. (Giyanti & Aisah, 2024; Othman & Abu Bakar, 2025). Other findings show that the variety and governance of da'wah, managed inclusively within the mosque space, contribute to social cohesion and the community's ability to maintain social attachment amid differentiation in the community's internal religious orientations. (Kushidayati & Rosyid, 2025). In the context of community-based religious education, recent research also confirms that Qur'anic learning activities and religious education traditions in rural areas do not end with increased religious understanding. Still, it can also serve as a medium for forming prosocial dispositions, strengthening solidarity, and increasing citizens' social involvement. (Pakuna et al., 2024; Wijayanti et al., 2024). In line with that, the findings of this study strengthen this argument by showing that the activities of recitation, learning the Qur'an, and the habit of worship play a role as a social space that facilitates interaction, coordination, and cooperation of citizens; In other words, da'wah and religious education at the village level work as an integrative mechanism that links the spiritual, educational, and social dimensions in daily empowerment practices.

Compared with previous research that emphasized the normative aspect of da'wah, or one-way religious counseling, this study's findings broaden understanding of da'wah as a social-educational practice that occurs in a participatory manner. (Jennings et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 2022). Some studies have shown that community-based da'wah or action approaches are more effective when they are linked to the community's real needs and implemented through sustainable activities, as the program's impact is strongly influenced by the local context and how the community perceives religious identity and practices. (Frame, 2023; Jennings et al., 2021). In this context, research in Darat Sawah Village shows that integrating da'wah with children's religious education and social activities facilitates the internalization of religious values in a more context-specific way, in contrast to the formal da'wah approach, which tends to focus solely on delivering religious messages. (bin Mislan Cokrohadisumarto & Sari, 2024; Giyanti & Aisah, 2024).

The findings of this study align with the discourse of community empowerment grounded in religious values, which positions children's religious education as the foundation for the formation of religious habitus and for social sustainability at the community level. Several studies show that non-formal Islamic education rooted in community institutions such as TPQ, taklim assemblies, and mosque-based programs contributes to the formation of worship habits, internalization of values, and social discipline from an early age, because the learning process does not stop at the cognitive aspect, but is routineized through practice, example, and repeated social reinforcement (Aziz, 2024; Darmawan, 2025; Murdan et al., 2022). In this context, non-formal education spaces also function as social network nodes that expand family participation, strengthen attachment between citizens, and build informal social support that underpins community cohesion (Abideen & Abbas, 2021; Ahdad et al., 2023; Karimullah, 2023). This research corroborates these findings by showing that learning the Qur'an and worship habits do not stand alone, but are connected to the social dynamics of society, where community religious institutions become a medium of learning as well as a channel of social

empowerment through strengthening values, collaboration, and asset-based community capacity (Asrin, 2024; Coley et al., 2023).

In terms of theoretical implications, this research contributes to the development of a perspective on community empowerment by emphasizing that Islamic religious values can serve as an integrative framework for da'wah, education, and social practices. These findings enrich the scientific discourse that has often separated da'wah studies, Islamic education, and community empowerment into separate domains. By showing the interconnectedness of the three within rural communities, this study provides a conceptual basis for developing a more holistic, context-based, religiously grounded community empowerment model.

Practically, the findings of this study have implications for the design of community service programs, village development policies, and da'wah practices at the local level. Da'wah and religious education programs designed in a participatory manner and adapted to the community's social conditions have proven effective in strengthening citizen involvement and sustaining activities. This aligns with previous research recommendations emphasizing the need for collaboration among universities, religious leaders, and village governments to design empowerment programs grounded in local and religious values.

However, this study has several limitations. The main limitation lies in the research scope: it focuses on a single village using a qualitative approach, so the findings cannot be generalized to other rural communities with different social characteristics. In addition, this study emphasizes the description and analysis of the empowerment process; therefore, it has not measured the program's long-term impact, either comparatively or quantitatively.

Given these limitations, further research is recommended to expand the context to several villages with different socio-cultural characteristics to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the variety of religious-based community empowerment models. Follow-up research can also combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess the impact of da'wah and religious education programs on social behavior change and the sustainability of community empowerment. In practice, the results of this study recommend that religious-based community empowerment programs be designed sustainably by involving local actors and strengthening synergy among da'wah, education, and social activities as a single program.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic community empowerment in Darat Sawah Village operates as an integrative process that connects da'wah, religious education, worship practices, and socio-religious activities within the community's everyday life. Rather than functioning solely as religious instruction, these activities serve as social-educational spaces that foster participation, strengthen social cohesion, and support the sustainability of community empowerment grounded in local religious values. The findings underscore the importance of participatory, context-sensitive, and value-based approaches to designing community empowerment initiatives, in which religious institutions and practices serve as a unifying framework for social interaction, collective responsibility, and community resilience, without reducing empowerment to short-term or purely instrumental outcomes.

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