

## Advancing Sustainable Economic Empowerment in *Pesantren* by Community-Based Development Theory

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### ABSTRACT

The sustainability of *Pesantren* is increasingly challenged by financial limitations, especially in rural areas where state support and institutional funding are minimal. This study examines the viability of ensuring pesantren sustainability through the empowerment of the people's economy, framed by Community-Based Development Theory. As globally, educational institutions grapple with socioeconomic inequality and resource scarcity, this research offers a contextually grounded yet globally relevant model for faith-based community empowerment. Drawing on a case study of Al Hasan I *Pesantren* in Jember, Indonesia, the study explores how economic self-reliance initiatives—such as micro-enterprises, agricultural development, and vocational training—are integrated with religious education to build institutional resilience and local economic capacity. The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining Islamic economics with grassroots development theory to address both educational sustainability and economic justice. Findings reveal that pesantren can function as effective agents of social transformation by mobilizing community participation, Islamic ethical values, and economic innovation. This paper contributes to global discussions on alternative development strategies and offers a replicable model for similar institutions in Muslim-majority countries seeking sustainable pathways rooted in religious and communal principles.

**Keywords:** economic empowerment, pesantren, community-based development theory.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the pursuit of sustainable development has become a global imperative in the face of growing economic inequality, rural poverty, and social exclusion. Despite substantial international efforts, millions continue to live without adequate access to education, employment, and financial resources. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), global inequality remains a critical challenge, particularly in rural areas where state

development programs often fail to address localized needs effectively.<sup>1</sup> As a result, development paradigms are increasingly shifting toward bottom-up, participatory approaches, with an emphasis on empowering local institutions and communities.

Community-Based Development Theory (CBDT) has gained attention as a practical response to these challenges. It emphasizes the role of grassroots organizations and local actors in designing and implementing development strategies. CBDT posits that sustainable outcomes are more likely when communities are empowered to manage their own economic and social resources.<sup>2</sup> In Muslim-majority contexts, Pesantren (pesantren) represent such grassroots institutions that can serve as strategic platforms for local development and empowerment, particularly through models rooted in Islamic economic principles such as justice ('adl), cooperation (ta'awun), and collective welfare (maslahah).

In Indonesia—the world's largest Muslim-majority country—pesantren have historically served not only as centers of religious education but also as community institutions with social, political, and increasingly economic functions. Thousands of pesantren are located in rural and semi-rural areas, where they maintain strong ties with local communities. However, the financial sustainability of pesantren remains a major challenge, especially for those not affiliated with large Islamic organizations or state sponsorship. In this context, integrating economic empowerment programs—such as agriculture, micro-enterprises, vocational training, and cooperative businesses—offers a viable model to ensure the long-term sustainability of Pesantren while uplifting the local economy.<sup>3</sup>

An overview of the economic empowerment development of Pesantren in Indonesia from 2023 to 2025 is presented in the table below:

**Tabel 1.** The economic empowerment development of Pesantren in Indonesia from 2023 to 2025

Year	Key Programs & Initiatives	Achievements & Impact
2023	One Pesantren One Product (OPOP)	- Implemented in West Java, involving ~1,300 pesantren and over 100,000 students. - 60% of participating pesantren developed superior products. - 75% reported significant income increases; 80% of students gained entrepreneurial motivation.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2021/2022: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives*. New York: UNDP, 2021. <https://hdr.undp.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Mansuri, Ghazala, and Vijayendra Rao. *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?* Washington, DC: World Bank, 2013. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/11859>.

<sup>3</sup> Obaidullah, Mohammed. "Islamic Microfinance Development: Challenges and Initiatives." *ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance* 3, no. 2 (2011): 135-158. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0005972>.

Year	Key Programs & Initiatives	Achievements & Impact
2024	Santripreneur Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoted by Bappenas to foster entrepreneurship among students.</li> <li>- Aims to position pesantren as business incubation hubs.</li> </ul>
	BLKK (Community-Based Vocational Training Centers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Established in regions like Blitar, Kediri, Tulungagung, and Trenggalek.</li> <li>- Facilitated vocational training and entrepreneurship development.</li> </ul>
	Sustainable Pesantren Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Danone Indonesia and the Islamic Boarding School Economic Union planted 5,000 trees with students across 50 pesantren in West Java, East Java, and Yogyakarta.</li> <li>- Aligned with National Santri Day celebrations.</li> </ul>
	HEBITREN & IKRA Indonesia Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HEBITREN reached 320 pesantren under 17 regional coordinators.</li> <li>- IKRA Indonesia, launched by Bank Indonesia, provided mentorship for MSMEs in halal fashion and food industries.</li> </ul>
	Triple Helix Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Baitul Arqom Islamic Boarding School developed economic programs through partnerships with universities, industry, and government.</li> <li>- Focused on curriculum development and economic innovation.</li> </ul>
2025	Economic Inclusion at Sidogiri Pesantren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opened economic access to the wider community.</li> <li>- Strengthened business networks and increased partner cooperation domestically and internationally.</li> <li>- Contributed to community income equality and economic growth.</li> </ul>
	Innovative Revenue Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ar-Risalah Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis developed businesses in agriculture, fisheries, mining, farming, and integrated waste management.</li> <li>- Promoted economic independence and community involvement.</li> </ul>
	Integration with National Development Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bappenas emphasized the role of pesantren in achieving the Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision.</li> <li>- Focused on enhancing education quality, facilities, and contributions to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).</li> </ul>

Source: Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025

Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, is home to more than 30,000 pesantren. Many of these institutions have evolved to meet contemporary challenges by integrating economic activities into their religious and educational missions. A notable example is *Pesantren Al Hasan I*, located in Serut Panti, Jember, Indonesia. This pesantren has implemented a variety of community-based economic initiatives—such as agricultural cooperatives, vocational training, and small-scale business units—that empower local communities while promoting Islamic ethical values.

This paper investigates the development of Al Hasan I as a model of pesantren-based economic empowerment. Through a qualitative case study approach, the research explores how the institution aligns Islamic teachings with practical economic strategies to uplift the people's economy. In doing so, the

study contributes to the broader discourse on how Pesantren can function as engines of local economic transformation—especially in regions where state-driven development policies have limited reach or effectiveness.

## Literature Review

### Development of Pesantren

By situating this case within global debates on Islamic economics and community development, the article underscores the potential of pesantren as integrated institutions capable of addressing spiritual, educational, and economic needs simultaneously. The findings offer insights into how faith-based models of empowerment can complement global efforts toward sustainable, inclusive economic development.

The pesantren, as an educational institution that has grown and developed in Indonesia, has a long history, one that predates the establishment of Indonesia as a nation. The existence of pesantren in the archipelago is believed to date back to the 13th century, specifically when Malik Ibrahim founded the first pesantren in 1399.<sup>4</sup> The long-standing presence of pesantren has its own significance in the birth of the Indonesian nation, as pesantren has not only played a role in religious education but, in its development, has also influenced various aspects of national life. These include politics, social affairs, culture, and even the economy.

The early establishment of pesantren focused on religious education with the aim of preparing a generation well-versed in Islamic knowledge (*tafaqquh fi al-din*) to continue the mission of introducing and teaching Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. Accordingly, instruction in the pesantren was limited to religious sciences, including theology (*aqidah*), Islamic law (*sharia*), ethics (*akhlaq*), and related fields. The sources of instruction were typically classical texts authored by early Islamic scholars, commonly referred to as *kitab kuning* (yellow books).<sup>5</sup> These texts covered all aspects of Islamic teachings as well as supporting sciences such as Arabic grammar (*nahwu*), morphology (*sarf*), hadith studies, Qur'anic sciences, and others.

Throughout its historical development, the pesantren has continually evolved, both in terms of infrastructure and in its educational goals and curriculum. Today, pesantren is not merely an educational institution but has officially become a provider of education, as stipulated in Chapter 3, Article 5 of Law No. 18/2019 concerning pesantren. The implementation of education within pesantren is significantly influenced by three key factors: management as the element of effort, organization as the means, and administration as the driving

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Smith, *Islamic Economic Institutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 60.

<sup>5</sup> Karel A. Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Modern*. (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986), 16.

force.<sup>6</sup> These three components collectively provide direction and guidance in formulating, implementing, and evaluating pesantren policies to ensure that their activities align with the intended educational objectives.

A pesantren is a religious-based educational institution that not only offers instruction but also plays a role in promoting and disseminating Islamic teachings. Fundamentally, a pondok pesantren serves as a traditional Islamic boarding school where students reside and learn under the supervision of one or more religious scholars, commonly referred to as *Kiai*.<sup>7</sup>

The goals of Pesantren are in line with or in accordance with the goals of National Education. Pesantren education is to shape the nation's civilization through learning *ta'lim muta'alim* or lectures that are usually given by *Kyai* as well as educating life and having noble character. In Pesantren there is also education that forms pious people, where students are expected to be able to live on their own and Pesantren produce students so that humans are independent. Potential students in Pesantren, commonly called *santri*, have the hope of becoming human beings who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become citizens of a democratic and responsible state.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Pesantrenpreneur***

*Pesantrenpreneur* exist in the midst of Indonesia's youth unemployment, which is increasing. The presence of this concept opens space for young people to take part in economic activities, in order to provide state revenue. Pesantren as educational institutions that have been understood as the front guard in *tafaqqih fiddin* efforts, also play a role as originators of the idea of strengthening the people's economy, with various types of businesses owned. One of the Pesantren that work on the preneur sector is the Sidogiri Pesantren, which can build its business strength to what it is today.<sup>9</sup>

*Pesantrenpreneur* is an educational institution that has developed with a combination of religious education and entrepreneurship. In Indonesia in particular, there are many Pesantren that equip their students with entrepreneurship education, including Al Hasan I Islamic Boarding School, located in Serut Panti, Jember, Indonesia. This has become a special attraction for the development of a pesantrenpreneur education model, including the Ummul Ayman Aceh Pesantren for its students. This combination is the first step in

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<sup>6</sup> Baharuddin and Makin, *Manajemen Pendidikan*. (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Kariyanto, H. "The Role of Pesantren in Modern Society," *Journal of Education Multicultural Education* 2, no. 2 (2020): 22-23.

<sup>8</sup> Sabil, NF, and Diantoro, F., "National Education System in Pesantren," *Al-Ishlah Journal of Islamic Education* 19, no. 2 (2021): 209-230.

<sup>9</sup> Masruroh, N., and Zahrah, F., "Branding Strategy in Implementing Pesantren Preneur," *Istinbath* 18, no. 1 (2019): 46-75.

creating a generation with an entrepreneurial spirit by prioritizing business morals and ethics so that this attitude is integrated into its business activities guided by the values contained in the Islamic economy.<sup>10</sup>

The pesantrenpreneur ecosystem requires optimization of all important systems and elements in the business world. Position each element proportionally and intertwined. However, in entrepreneurship that has a smaller scope and scale, this ecosystem can be simplified according to the core business in a business unit, such as a business unit that is in and managed by Pesantren, known as an institution or religious education institution that has its own uniqueness and peculiarity. One of the uniqueness of Pesantren is the entrepreneurial ecosystem they develop. By relying on the principle of self-reliance and developing the people's economy, Pesantren entrepreneurs emphasize three aspects of business development, namely [1] Human Resource Capacity, [2] Process and production management, and [3] Marketing strategy used. These three important elements are then referred to as the "Pesantrenpreneur Ecosystem".<sup>11</sup>

### Community-Based Development Theory

Community-Based Development (CBD) Theory emphasizes the role of local communities as central actors in the planning, execution, and management of development initiatives. This participatory model challenges traditional top-down approaches by advocating for bottom-up strategies that draw upon local knowledge, resources, and leadership to create more sustainable and context-specific outcomes.<sup>12</sup> The core principles of CBD—empowerment, participation, and capacity-building—align closely with the traditional functions of pesantren (Pesantren) in Indonesia, which have historically served not only as educational institutions but also as pillars of community development.

In the context of pesantren sustainability, CBD provides a theoretical framework for engaging the surrounding community in economic activities that both support the institution and uplift local livelihoods. Pesantren are uniquely positioned to implement community-based economic empowerment programs, such as small-scale enterprises, cooperative farming, vocational training, and halal industry initiatives. These efforts promote financial self-reliance for both the institution and the community while preserving cultural and religious values.

CBD Theory further emphasizes inclusivity and ownership through participatory planning, which fosters accountability, transparency, and stronger community ties. Chambers argues that effective development must be "by the

<sup>10</sup> Rahmati, Arinal, Husnurrosyidah, Husnurrosyidah, and Ruhamak, Muhammad, "Pesantrenpreneur: Entrepreneurship Strategy at Pesantren Through Satoimo Taro Commodities," *Equilibrium: Journal of Islamic Economics* 8, no. 2 (2020): 383.

<sup>11</sup> Adhim, F., and Ta'rif, "Local Potential Development-Based Pesantren Ecosystem," *Education: Journal of Religious and Religious Education Research* 19, no. 2 (2021): 127–140.

<sup>12</sup> Mansuri, Ghazala, and Vijayendra Rao. *Community-Based and -Driven Development: A Critical Review*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004.

people and for the people," meaning that solutions are most sustainable when they arise from within the community itself rather than being externally imposed.<sup>13</sup> For pesantren, this translates into collaborative governance models that involve local stakeholders—teachers, students, alumni, and village members—in designing and managing economic initiatives that align with both educational and social objectives.

Moreover, the Islamic concepts of shura (consultation) and maslahah (public interest) provide theological grounding for community-based approaches. The integration of CBD Theory with Islamic principles thus enables pesantren to evolve as sustainable educational and economic institutions that maintain their religious integrity while addressing modern socio-economic challenges.

## METHODS

The type of research method used qualitative research methods using the Community-Based Development Theory approach. The reason chose to use is also called local theory where Community-Based Development Theory must be directly involved with the world being studied to ensure "down to earth" results from the people being studied. The reason chose to use the Community-Based Development Theory approach is because s want to reveal a phenomenon that is expected in this analysis to produce a theory that can explain phenomena related to the implementation of Pesantren through Empowerment of the People's Economy.<sup>14</sup>

This research was conducted in several pesantren in East Java, especially at Al Hasan I Islamic Boarding School, Jember, Indonesia. Types and sources of data in this study using primary and secondary data. Primary data collection was obtained from informant interviews with the personnel of the Islamic boarding school management, while secondary data was obtained from data from the Indonesian Ministry of Religion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Economic Development of *Pesantren Al Hasan 1, Jember, Indonesia*

The strategy of Al Hasan 1 Islamic boarding school in empowering the community's economy is shaped by its natural surroundings, which consist of mountainous areas. Socially, most of the local population works as coffee farmers, and their robusta coffee is considered among the best in Indonesia.

Therefore, the empowerment efforts carried out by the pesantren include:

- (a) providing assistance and training in coffee planting and cultivation skills.

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<sup>13</sup> Chambers, Robert. *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Dewi, H. "Grounded Theory disertai Model Triple-C dalam Upaya Meminimalisir Prokrastinasi Akademik Belajar Fisika Berbasis Livezopadizdo. 7, no. 1 (2022): 61-69.

This is because, up until now, coffee farmers have relied solely on determination to manage state forest land under a community cooperation scheme, despite lacking the necessary expertise in planting and caring for coffee trees. As a result, coffee productivity remains very low, with only 2-3 quintals produced per hectare.

However, following the empowerment efforts by the pesantren, the productivity of coffee crops significantly increased within a few years – reaching up to 8 quintals per hectare, with some plots even yielding as much as 2 tons. (b) The pesantren also provided assistance in post-harvest coffee processing to enhance the coffee's market value, as processing methods greatly influence both quality and price. To meet the need for human resources in mentoring and teaching coffee processing skills, the pesantren collaborated with lecturers from several universities in Jember, Indonesia, as well as researchers from the Coffee and Cocoa Research Center in Jember. Today, both students (santri) and the surrounding community have acquired proper coffee processing skills, which has increased the value of their coffee and, consequently, improved their income and overall well-being. Moreover, the partnership between Al Hasan 1 Pesantren and local coffee farmers has resulted in a premium coffee product under the brand name '5758' (pronounced Maju Mapan, meaning 'Progressive and Prosperous').

The forms of guidance provided to the students (santri) and the surrounding community as part of efforts to improve the ummah's economy include:

First, increasing the human resources of santri and the community in managing coffee at the upstream level, which includes coffee care activities to produce good coffee, managing post-pan coffee products to get added value, and increasing human resources for coffee management at the downstream level, including roasting, grinding, and cupping skills to support activities to increase human resources for coffee management. The pesantren established a coffee management Vocational Training Center (BLK), where the learning process on coffee management from upstream to downstream is carried out.

Second, establishing coffee marketing networks. No matter how high the quality of the coffee produced by the students (santri) and the surrounding community of Al Hasan 1 Pesantren, if it is not absorbed by the market, it will not generate economic benefits. Therefore, the pesantren has built marketing networks at both local and national levels. In marketing, a product's brand plays a crucial role in its success. For this reason, the pesantren and the local community created a coffee brand now known as '5758' (pronounced Maju Mapan, meaning 'Progressive and Prosperous'). Additionally, the pesantren established the Jember Coffee Center (JCC), which serves as an educational hub where visitors and community members can learn firsthand about downstream coffee processing. JCC also functions as a marketing center for coffee products produced by the local community, targeting both local and national markets.

Furthermore, thanks to its beautiful and lush natural surroundings, JCC also serves as a culinary tourism destination, offering a variety of coffee-based products.

Al Hasan 1 Pesantren also strives to improve the quality of education to prepare highly capable students (santri). One way this is achieved is by equipping them with practical life skills, such as post-harvest coffee processing—including roasting, grinding, and coffee presentation (cupping). These skills enable the santri to become self-reliant and economically independent after completing their education at the pesantren.

The development of pesantren education requires substantial funding, as it involves improving infrastructure, facilities, and the learning process to meet the expected educational standards. At Al Hasan 1 Pesantren, this development is financially supported by the coffee business managed by the pesantren's vice caretakers. The income generated is used to expand land, improve teacher welfare, enhance the quality of instruction, and support other development needs.

### **Economic Empowerment Initiatives**

Three major initiatives were observed as part of the pesantren's strategy to sustain its operations and contribute to local economic development:

#### a. Micro-Enterprises

The pesantren has launched small-scale businesses, including a minimarket, tofu production unit, and a printing service managed by students and alumni. These enterprises not only provide revenue for the institution but also serve as practical training grounds for students. According to field interviews, 27% of the pesantren's operational expenses are now covered through these internal business units.

#### b. Agricultural Development

Utilizing surrounding land, Al Hasan I operates a community farming program involving students, staff, and local farmers. The produce—such as rice, chili, and vegetables—is used to support the pesantren's kitchen needs and is also sold in local markets. This effort reflects the CBDT emphasis on mobilizing local resources for community benefit.

#### c. Vocational and Skills Training

Vocational classes in tailoring, carpentry, and digital design are integrated into the pesantren curriculum. Graduates often apply these skills in launching micro-enterprises or gaining employment, thereby contributing to household income and reducing rural poverty.

### **Integration with Community-Based Development Theory**

Community-Based Development Theory underscores the significance of participatory, locally driven initiatives that foster ownership and sustainability.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Binswanger-Mkhize, Hans P., Jacomina P. de Regt, and Stephen Spector, eds. *Local and*

Al Hasan I demonstrates the theory in practice by involving stakeholders—students, alumni, villagers, and religious leaders—in planning and managing economic projects. The pesantren's governance model includes regular community consultations (shura), aligning both with Islamic values and the participatory ethos of CBDT.

The empowerment model employed by Al Hasan I is rooted in Islamic economic ethics, emphasizing justice (*adl*), cooperation (*ta'awun*), and prohibition of exploitative practices (*riba*). The pesantren operates its businesses according to sharia principles, ensuring ethical trade, fair wages, and transparent profit-sharing mechanisms.

This blending of Islamic economics with community development creates a holistic model where material and spiritual growth are pursued in tandem. Such integration demonstrates the potential of pesantren to not only address financial sustainability but also to become centers of economic justice and social reform.

Despite these innovations, the pesantren still faces several challenges: limited initial capital, insufficient market access, and lack of formal entrepreneurial training for staff. Furthermore, balancing business activities with core religious education remains a delicate task. However, the adaptability and community trust embedded in the pesantren's structure help mitigate these constraints.

The findings of this study suggest that Pesantren, when empowered through community-based frameworks and Islamic economic principles, can act as resilient, multi-functional institutions. The model developed by Al Hasan I is potentially replicable in other Muslim-majority regions facing similar socio-economic constraints. It provides an alternative, bottom-up development path that resonates with both local religious culture and global development discourses.

## CONCLUSION

The sustainability of Pesantren like Al Hasan I can be significantly enhanced through the empowerment of the local economy, guided by Community-Based Development Theory and grounded in Islamic values. This integrative approach not only ensures financial viability but also repositions pesantren as active agents of community transformation. As global education systems search for resilient, value-based models in the face of inequality and underfunding, the Indonesian pesantren offers a compelling example of how faith-based institutions can sustainably serve both educational and socio-economic functions.

This research has several limitations, including the research location that was taken only focused on one Pesantren. So the data produced was only the

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*Community Driven Development: Moving to Scale in Theory and Practice.* Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010.

smallest sample. Therefore, it is hoped that further research can be improved by adding research locations.

#### **Author's Contribution**

Abdul Muiz, Siti Quratul Aini: Contribute to formulating research ideas, collecting data, processing data, and interpreting data, writing systematics, and research methods.  
Mohd Shahid Bin Mohd Noh: Contributing to analyzing interpretation results, the language proofread.

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#### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

#### **Ethical Approval**

Ethical approval No patient-identifying parts in this paper were used or known to the authors. Therefore, no ethical approval was requested.

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