

Empowering Women and Advancing Peace: A Study of Wahid Foundation's Initiatives for Inclusive Social Transformation in Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the role of the Wahid Foundation in empowering women through the Peaceful Village program. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study examines various activities conducted by the Wahid Foundation and their impact on women's participation in development and efforts to prevent social conflict. The research uses a descriptive approach to illustrate how the Wahid Foundation intervenes in women's empowerment and peace through its programs. The goal of this study is to understand the role and contribution of women in the development and peace-building process in villages targeted by the Wahid Foundation's programs. The results show that women's empowerment programs not only enhance leadership capacity and policy advocacy among women but also contribute to fostering social cohesion and strengthening peace at the local level. The Wahid Love Peace Cooperative (KCD) program has successfully empowered women through entrepreneurship training and financial literacy, creating an inclusive and cooperative environment among community members. This empowerment not only increases women's economic independence but also contributes to efforts to prevent social conflict and radicalization. This research provides recommendations for further program development, emphasizing the importance of women's involvement in decision-making processes and local economic development as a strategy to create a prosperous and peaceful society.

Keywords:

Wahid Foundation,
Women, Empowerment,
Peaceful Village

INTRODUCTION

Although women have played vital roles within families and communities, their participation in public spheres—especially in peacebuilding and policy-making—remains limited (Lwamba et al., 2022). Structural barriers such as patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and unequal access to education and resources continue to hinder their involvement (Abidin, 2012; Aslichati, 2011; Barus, 2015). Women's empowerment is therefore essential to enhance their capacity in economic, political, social, and cultural domains, enabling them to contribute to solving social problems and strengthening community resilience (Butarbutar et al., 2020; Vujko et al., 2024). Empowerment does not mean women must imitate or compete with men, but rather seeks to create fair conditions where both have equal opportunities to grow and lead (Anderson, 2022; Torok et al., 2023). Gender, as a social construct, encompasses the dynamic roles and relationships between men and women within broader social systems (Ihsan, 2019). Empowerment is a transformative process that

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promotes critical awareness, leadership, and collective action (Hasanah, 2013; Abdurrahman & Tusianti, 2021; Kumalasari, 2022). In Indonesia, where issues like intolerance, radicalism, and gender-based violence persist, women often face dual realities—as victims and as agents of change in peacebuilding efforts (Karlita, 2023).

The Wahid Foundation is a prominent institution committed to promoting pluralism, democracy, and peace through Islamic values, inspired by the legacy of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). One of its key programs focuses on empowering women as peace agents within their communities. Through education, economic initiatives, and advocacy, these programs equip women to counter radical narratives, prevent violence, and foster interreligious dialogue (Achsin et al., 2020; K. A. Wahid, 2010). Despite the importance of these efforts, limited academic attention has been paid to examining women's specific roles and the tangible impact of such empowerment on community cohesion and transformation (Wolff, 2024). Existing literature often generalizes women's involvement in peacebuilding without analyzing localized, community-based approaches like those employed by the Wahid Foundation (Sutisna, 2021; Martin, 2021). This study aims to critically investigate how empowered women contribute to promoting tolerance, inclusion, and sustainable peace. It also explores how these efforts foster broader social change, offering valuable insights for academics, policymakers, NGOs, and civil society actors committed to gender-inclusive peace strategies (Dja'far & Nisa, 2021; Fatmawati, 2019).

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

The direction of this research focuses on exploring how the Wahid Foundation's initiatives serve as catalysts for both women's empowerment and sustainable peace in Indonesia. It aims to understand the mechanisms through which the Foundation's programs promote gender equity, enhance women's leadership capacities, and foster inclusive community engagement. Central to this inquiry is the examination of how local women, once empowered, contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts, conflict prevention, and the strengthening of social cohesion at the grassroots level. The hypothesis proposed is that the Wahid Foundation's community-based and gender-inclusive approach plays a significant role in increasing women's active participation in leadership and peacebuilding processes. This, in turn, contributes to greater social resilience and reduced vulnerability to conflict within diverse Indonesian communities. By centering local agency and inclusivity, the Foundation's model is expected to demonstrate how targeted empowerment strategies can generate long-term, transformative impacts on both gender relations and communal harmony.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the Wahid Foundation's implementation of women's empowerment and peacebuilding programs in selected villages or sub-districts. As noted by Tazkianida (2025), this method is well-suited for analyzing grassroots-level

social interventions. The study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how women participate, contribute, and exercise agency in community development and conflict resolution efforts supported by the foundation. In line with Wolff's (2024) perspective, understanding women's agency is essential to appreciating their role in fostering inclusive social change and resilience. Through this approach, the research seeks to uncover the lived experiences of women as central actors in peacebuilding and local governance initiatives.

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

Data collection for this research involves two primary methods: document analysis and participatory observation, both of which are considered to offer complementary insights. Lim (2024) suggests that combining multiple methods enriches the depth and validity of qualitative research findings. The document analysis focuses on examining relevant sources such as Wahid Foundation program reports, village-level policy documents, local development plans, official statistics, and secondary literature on gender empowerment and conflict resolution. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is valuable for tracing institutional frameworks and identifying the narratives that shape policy and program implementation. In parallel, participatory observation is employed to directly observe activities associated with the foundation's programs. These include training sessions, peace forums, economic empowerment initiatives, and community social gatherings. Mackellar (2013) argues that participatory observation enables researchers to access rich, contextual data by witnessing interactions and behaviors in their natural settings. This method also captures informal and non-verbal forms of participation, which are often overlooked in purely document-based research. By integrating these two methods, the study seeks to construct a holistic understanding of how empowerment efforts unfold in real time within the local socio-political fabric.

The unit of analysis in this study is the village or sub-district where the Wahid Foundation has actively implemented women's empowerment and peacebuilding programs. Campbell et al. (2020) emphasize that selecting such units allows researchers to explore the interplay between local context and intervention outcomes in a meaningful way. These locations are selected purposively based on several criteria: the continuity and sustainability of program implementation, the level of women's involvement, and the availability of supporting documents and data. According to Åhlfeldt et al. (2023), purposive selection based on these criteria enhances the relevance and depth of case-based analysis.

This purposive strategy ensures that the cases examined offer rich empirical evidence for understanding the dynamics of empowerment in practice. Palinkas et al. (2015) highlight that such sampling techniques are effective for identifying information-rich cases that can illuminate the phenomena under study. The analysis focuses on three core aspects: the strategic approaches adopted by the foundation, the forms and levels of women's participation, and the social transformations observed in the community as a result of these interventions. Merino et al. (2024) argue that analyzing these dimensions provides a comprehensive view of how empowerment initiatives function at both practical and symbolic levels. By concentrating on these aspects, the

research aims to capture not only the operational implementation of the programs but also their long-term social outcomes. Rashid et al. (2019) point out that a focus on both immediate actions and broader impacts is essential for evaluating the sustainability and significance of social programs. This unit of analysis thus enables a grounded investigation of how local contexts influence, and are simultaneously influenced by, gender-sensitive peacebuilding efforts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Ideological Commitment to Gender Mainstreaming at the Wahid Foundation

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

Table 1. Gender Mainstreaming and the Wahid Foundation

No.	Finding	Description
1	Gender Mainstreaming as a Normative Commitment under Gus Dur's Leadership	Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 reflects Gus Dur's progressive vision that gender mainstreaming is a normative imperative for achieving social justice—not merely a bureaucratic mechanism (Khaerun Rijaal, 2021; Mahmudah, 2018; Topan, 2023).
2	Gender-Aware Public Policy as a Fundamental Requirement	Gus Dur emphasized that public policies must account for gender-differentiated impacts to avoid unintended harm to women, requiring policies to not only be aware but to actively create participatory spaces for women (Y. Z. Wahid et al., 2023).
3	Structural Barriers to Gender Mainstreaming Implementation	The institutionalization of gender mainstreaming continues to face challenges such as entrenched patriarchal culture and inconsistent political commitment across ministries (Mahmudah, 2018; Topan, 2023).
4	Wahid Foundation as a Continuation of Gus Dur's Ethical Project in a Post-Conflict, Globalized Context	Founded in 2004, the Wahid Foundation continues Gus Dur's mission by promoting pluralism, human rights, and peace, rooted in Islamic humanism, particularly in response to post-9/11 extremism and local religious-ethnic tensions (Subchi, n.d.; Susilawati, 2019).
5	Limitations in Transformative Capacity Due to External Funding and Political Volatility	Despite its ideals, the Foundation's influence on systemic change is constrained by dependence on external donors and the state's inconsistent stance toward civil society, potentially shaping and limiting its program priorities (Susilawati, 2019).

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

Representation, Global Access, and the Limitations of Program Impact on Grassroots Women's Empowerment

The leadership of Yenny Wahid in the Wahid Foundation marks a significant phase in the organization's evolution, combining elite-level access with progressive gender and peacebuilding agendas. Her global recognition—ranging from a presidential advisory role to international awards—has elevated the Foundation's visibility on the world stage. However, this prominence also raises concerns about inclusivity, particularly in relation to how the voices of grassroots women are incorporated into programming. While initiatives such as the Peaceful Village program reflect the Foundation's alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 5, implementation is often challenged by local cultural resistance, donor influence, and limited empirical data. Furthermore, rhetorical emphasis on “feminine” traits like empathy and collaboration, though valuable, may risk reinforcing essentialist views of gender roles if not accompanied by structural reforms that empower women beyond symbolic narratives.

Table 2. Leadership, Programs, and Challenges in the Wahid Foundation

No.	Finding	Description
1	Leadership Legitimacy and Global Recognition of Yenny Wahid	Yenny Wahid's diverse background in journalism, policymaking, and international leadership—as evidenced by her role under President Yudhoyono and award as a Young Global Leader—has strengthened the Foundation's visibility and influence (Affan, 2023; Nurhadi, n.d.).
2	Elite Access vs. Grassroots Representation	Despite her global platform, concerns persist regarding whether grassroots women's voices are meaningfully integrated into Wahid Foundation's programs (Affan, 2023; Nurhadi, n.d.).
3	Symbolic Recognition and Essentialist Framing of Women's Roles	Yenny's speech during the Rising Women Empowerment Award emphasized traits like empathy and collaboration. While well-intentioned, such framing risks reinforcing gender stereotypes if not paired with a structural understanding of women's empowerment (Barton, Vergani, & Wahid, 2023).
4	Alignment with Global Development Goals (SDG 5)	Wahid Foundation explicitly aligns with SDG 5, promoting gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. However, local implementation challenges persist, particularly in conservative areas.
5	Barriers from Local Norms and Donor-Driven Agendas	The Foundation faces resistance to gender initiatives in certain localities and must navigate external donor expectations that may influence programming priorities (Barton, Vergani, & Wahid, 2023).
6	Lack of Empirical Evidence on Community-Level Impact	There is a noticeable gap in research and data on how Wahid Foundation programs—particularly Peaceful Village—impact rural or conservative communities, limiting assessments of actual empowerment outcomes.
7	Need for Deeper, Structural Transformations Beyond Project Cycles	While the Foundation serves as a civil society actor countering intolerance, its peace and gender initiatives must evolve from discourse into sustained, systemic changes to power relations, requiring long-term strategies and evaluative tools.

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

Removing Domestic Barriers to Women's Participation for Community Peace

Traditional gender roles continue to limit women's participation in community peacebuilding across Indonesia. Women's contributions are often confined to domestic tasks—caring for the

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

Table 3. Increasing Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

No.	Finding	Description
1	Persistence of Traditional Domestic Roles	In many communities, women are still primarily assigned to domestic tasks such as housekeeping, childcare, and supporting male relatives in public activities, limiting their civic and political participation (Masitoh et al., 2023; Nuryananda et al., 2022).
2	Unequal Gender Role Distribution in Households	Domestic responsibilities are often seen as women's sole duty, without equitable involvement from men. This reinforces gender inequality and constrains women's time and capacity for community engagement.
3	Need for Active, Not Symbolic, Female Participation	Women's roles in peacebuilding initiatives must go beyond tokenism. Real inclusion involves critical thinking, speaking up, decision-making, and participating in conflict resolution and social cohesion processes.
4	Historical Legitimacy of Female Leadership in Indonesia	Figures like Cut Nyak Dien and Kartini exemplify a longstanding legacy of women's leadership in national movements, providing cultural and historical justification for greater female involvement in current peace efforts (Rahayu & Lesmana, 2020).
5	Contemporary Evidence of Women's Leadership Capacity	Today, Indonesian women hold various leadership positions, from village heads to ministers and presidents, proving that women are capable of contributing meaningfully at all levels of governance (Ulfiyati, 2019).

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

The Strategic Role of Women in the Governance and Social Response of Peaceful Villages

Women hold a strategic position in realizing the goals of Peaceful Villages, not only through representation but through substantive engagement in governance and social response systems. Their participation must be guaranteed by local regulations, accompanied by capacity strengthening to ensure meaningful contributions in policymaking. Moreover, women actively transmit values of peace, justice, and tolerance within families and communities. Their social sensitivity allows them to detect early signs of conflict, a potential often overlooked due to gender bias. For peacebuilding to be effective, women's roles must be institutionalized across all governance levels.

Table 4. Women's Strategic Role in Peaceful Village Governance and Social Response

No.	Finding	Description
1	Mandating Women's Participation in Decision-Making	Local regulations must go beyond symbolic inclusion and explicitly require women's active roles in policymaking, with efforts to strengthen their capacity and influence on governance outcomes.

2	Women as Agents of Value-Based Education	Women play a critical role in instilling values like peace, human rights, tolerance, and gender equality, not just through parenting but also by confronting discriminatory cultural norms.
3	Recognition of Women's Observational and Social Sensitivity Skills	Women can identify early signs of social tension or conflict. However, these insights are often dismissed due to stereotypes. Gender sensitivity training for village actors is needed to validate and act on women's community observations.
4	Inclusion in Early Response and Policy Processes	Women should be involved in all stages of early response systems—from data collection to analysis, recommendation drafting, and decision-making—ensuring policies consider all community members' needs, including the vulnerable (e.g., elderly, pregnant women).
5	Expanded Role in Monitoring Village Governance	Beyond representation, women must be empowered with authority and access to monitor, evaluate, and ensure the accountability of village governance, particularly regarding the quality of public service delivery.

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

Discussion

Peaceful Village as an Alternative Medium for Peace by Women

The Desa Damai (Peaceful Village) program by the Wahid Foundation is designed to foster harmonious and inclusive communities by promoting peace, tolerance, and women's empowerment in various Indonesian villages. Initiated as a response to the increasing threat of intolerance and radicalism—particularly in rural areas vulnerable to social fragmentation—the program aims to build community resilience against divisions based on religion, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. According to Rrustemi and Kelly (2025), strengthening community capacity through conflict mediation, interfaith dialogue, and radicalism prevention is key to maintaining local peace. A central component of this program is women's economic empowerment, which, as emphasized by Puh et al. (2022), plays a critical role in mitigating structural inequalities that often fuel local unrest. Furthermore, Agung et al. (2024) argue that fostering interfaith and cultural dialogue is vital in enhancing religious tolerance and social cohesion. Khosa and Abdulkareem (2023) highlight that empowering local leaders as mediators ensures community-based conflict resolution remains effective and sustainable. Thus, Desa Damai represents a holistic grassroots approach to nurturing peaceful, resilient communities in Indonesia.

The program is not solely aimed at preventing conflict but also at establishing model villages capable of living peacefully amid diversity. As emphasized by Susanto et al. (2025), these villages serve as prototypes for other communities, demonstrating how peace and tolerance can be effectively nurtured at the grassroots level. In a similar vein, Susanto et al. (2022) argue that such examples have the potential to inspire replication in other regions facing social fragmentation. The Wahid Foundation envisions that by empowering communities economically, socially, and culturally, a more just, prosperous, and peaceful society can be achieved—a view supported by Badaruddin et al. (2020), who highlight the interconnection between equity and sustainable peace. Rooted in the legacy of Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid), the Foundation seeks to uphold his ideals

of pluralism and inclusive nationalism. As Karlita (2023) and Rumpakaadi (2024) contend, Desa Damai is not merely a program but a broader social movement to build an inclusive Indonesia where all citizens—regardless of religion, ethnicity, or social background—can coexist in harmony.

Table 5. Summary of the Desa Damai (Peaceful Village) Program by Wahid Foundation

Program Aspect	Description
Main Objective	To build harmonious and inclusive communities through peace, tolerance, and women's empowerment
Background	Rising intolerance and radicalism in rural areas vulnerable to social conflict
Number of Villages (as of 2021)	33 villages: 14 (West Java), 6 (Central Java), 10 (East Java), with expansion to Sidomulyo & Gunungsari
Percentage of Female Participants	70% of participants are women
Four Core Pillars	1) Women's participation, 2) Women's economic empowerment, 3) Peace through women, 4) Environmental sustainability
Key Activities	Conflict mediation training, interfaith dialogues, economic empowerment, policy advocacy at the village level
Implementing Partners	Wahid Foundation, JTI Indonesia, UN Women, UIMSAYA
Initial Pilot Areas	Grajan and Bangsring as early model villages
International Collaboration	Supported by UN Women and other international partners
Adapted Action Plans	Local adaptation of RAN P3AKS and RAN PE (National Action Plans on Social Conflict and Prevention of Violent Extremism)
Conflict Prevention Instruments	Community-based anti-violence manuals, local leader engagement, gender representation in governance
Initial Impact	14 villages/urban wards declared themselves as Peaceful Villages/Wards
Peace Village Indicators	9 Indicators of Peaceful Villages/Wards are integrated into village-level policies

The Desa Damai initiative, launched in collaboration with Japan Tobacco International (JTI) Indonesia, has been in development since 2013, with its official launch in 2017. The program targets economic actors in villages such as Grajan and Bangsring, where 70 percent of the participants are women. The main goal of this program is to empower women to play a role in creating sustainable peace. This aligns with the ideals of KH Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) to empower rural communities. Yenny Wahid has stated that the program has reached 33 villages across Indonesia, aiming to create justice and welfare in society, especially through women's participation (Karlita, 2023; Mursalat, 2023).

Yenny Wahid highlights that the Desa Damai initiative stands on four key pillars: enhancing women's participation, economic empowerment, promoting peace through women, and sustaining the environment. The program focuses on mentoring to empower women, boosting their confidence, bargaining power, and role as peacebuilders in their communities. Yudi Rizkiadi, Director of People and Culture at JTI Indonesia, expressed pride in JTI's involvement, having witnessed the program's positive impact. By 2020, Desa Damai had reached 14 villages in West Java, 6 in Central Java, and 10 in East Java, with further expansion in 2021 to areas like Sidomulyo and Gunungsari. The Wahid Foundation also partnered with UN Women to broaden the program's impact. Muhtaba Hamdi noted that the initiative fosters welfare, equality, and respect for diversity while empowering women as social connectors and agents of resilience (Gaffar, 2011; Husdinariyanto, 2023; Masduki, 2024). A MoU with UIMSAYA further strengthened collaboration in community-focused and conflict-prevention efforts, especially at the village level.

Currently, 14 villages or urban wards have declared themselves Peaceful Villages/Wards. This declaration marks an initial commitment to instilling the values of peace and gender justice as the foundation of communal life. The participation of women in decision-making at the village/ward level is necessary to create sustainable peace. Furthermore, efforts to create peaceful villages/wards require more than symbolic declarations. Peaceful Villages/Wards must demonstrate

real commitment to inclusive peace and gender equality by integrating the 9 Indicators of Peaceful Villages/Wards into village policies (Pasaribu & Silalahi, 20219; Rumpakaadi, 2024). To ensure the implementation of these principles, an action plan is needed that includes a work plan, targets, timeline, and involved parties. This action plan must also address issues that arise during crises, including those related to the pandemic. It is crucial that the plan does not marginalize vulnerable groups, such as religious and ethnic minorities, women, youth, and the elderly. In dealing with gender-based violence, the Wahid Foundation will provide community-based manuals to protect women and children from violence.

The Wahid Foundation identifies gender inequality as a key factor contributing to radicalism and intolerance. Disparities between men and women in everyday interactions and decision-making roles perpetuate this problem. Recognizing women's strong potential as peacebuilders, the Foundation cites a 2016 survey showing that women are generally more tolerant and supportive of religious freedom. The initiative draws from Gus Dur's nine core values, which promote inclusive peace, human rights, and universal compassion. The action plan for Peaceful Villages/Wards also aligns with national frameworks such as the National Action Plan for the Protection and Empowerment of Women and Children in Social Conflict (RAN P3AKS) and the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (RAN PE), adapting these strategies to the local context. These plans emphasize inclusive, community-based participation in the early identification and prevention of violence. All activities are designed to engage community members equally, aiming to build secure, just, and harmonious local environments (Pasaribu & Silalahi, 2021; Smeer et al., 2022; Smeer et al., 2024).

Active Participation of Women in Empowerment and the Realization of Peaceful Villages

Since 2017, the Wahid Foundation has implemented the Peace Village Program to reduce social conflict and counter radicalism through community-based empowerment, especially targeting women and youth. As of now, 22 villages across Indonesia have officially committed to becoming Peace Villages. In partnership with UN Women, the Foundation also launched the Women's Participation for Inclusive Society (WISE) initiative, which strengthens women's roles in building peace at the grassroots level in West, Central, and East Java. This program aims to prevent intolerance and violent extremism by positioning women as central agents of change within their communities (Chanan et al., 2017; Pasaribu & Silalahi, 2019). According to Siti Kholisoh, Acting Managing Director of the Wahid Foundation, local engagement efforts have been intensified through partnerships like La Rimpu in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, involving local governments and civil society. In 2020, the initiative marked key achievements, including the formation of 10 Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes) with assets totaling Rp4.9 billion and the empowerment of 1,785 women entrepreneurs. The One Village One Product (OVOP) model further fostered local innovation through entrepreneurship training and cooperative-based financing.

Moreover, the Peace Village has formed Working Groups (Pokja) that involve various community elements, such as village officials, religious leaders, youth, and women's groups. These Working Groups develop a Peace Village Action Plan aimed at promoting gender equality, protecting women, and preventing violent extremism. The program also emphasizes the importance of involving women in decision-making processes and increasing female representation in village governance structures. The Wahid Foundation program also includes studies based on Scoping and Baseline Studies conducted by UN Women in 2022, where Bima in West Nusa Tenggara was identified as a region at high risk of natural disasters and social conflicts. The Peace-Humanitarian Nexus Program, launched from 2023 to 2026, focuses on increasing community resilience to disasters and conflicts, particularly in Central Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara, and West Nusa

Tenggara. This program involves various strategic ministries and local organizations to optimize women's empowerment in sustainable village development ([UN Women, 2025](#)).

Seven target villages and sub-districts will receive various training on disaster preparedness, social conflict prevention, and peace promotion to address intolerance and violent extremism. Additionally, young women's groups are given opportunities to participate in capacity-building training, including leadership, policy advocacy, and participation in disaster and social conflict prevention. Village and sub-district officials are also trained in gender-responsive planning and budgeting, with the hope that these villages will develop inclusive disaster preparedness and conflict prevention policies.

On May 6-7, 2024, UN Women and the Embassy of the Netherlands to Indonesia visited a Peace Village in Bima Regency, NTB, a result of initiatives by Wahid Foundation and La Rimpu. The visit aimed to observe firsthand women's empowerment and peace efforts at the village level. During the visit, parties had the opportunity to share experiences regarding the implementation of the Peace Village, focusing on creating safe spaces, strengthening social cohesion, preventing conflicts, and promoting policy advocacy by women's groups. Sophie Van Huut from Political Affairs at the Netherlands Embassy expressed her admiration for the extraordinary dedication shown by women's groups in Bima. Despite facing limitations, these women's communities have become empowered and agents of change within society. Sophie also expressed gratitude for the cooperation of Wahid Foundation, La Rimpu, Bima Regency Government, and the women in the Peace Village in supporting the program's implementation. She hopes that this women-led initiative can serve as a model to promote more inclusive and equitable development for all parties. Sophie emphasized that the strength of women-led communities can be key in strengthening social cohesion and community resilience ([Pewarta, 2024](#)).

Xinyue Gu, Programme Analyst for Women Peace and Security at UN Women Indonesia, agreed with Sophie's views, emphasizing that women have great potential as agents of change in their communities. Therefore, full support for women's capacity development needs to be continuously provided so that these best practices can be implemented in other villages across Indonesia. Xinyue also emphasized that the success of women's empowerment programs can be achieved through collaboration and cooperation among the various parties involved. Similar support was echoed by Bima Regent, Indah Damayanti Putri, who acknowledged that women's empowerment programs through the Peace Village can improve community welfare and create a more inclusive environment in Bima.

Table 6. Overview of the Peace Village Program by Wahid Foundation

Key Aspect	Description
Program Name	Peace Village Program (Desa Damai) by Wahid Foundation
Year Initiated	2017
Main Goals	Prevent radicalism and social conflict through community-bases peacebuilding
Key Focus Areas	Women and youth engagement, local governance, economic resilience, peace promotion
Regions Involved	West Java, East Java, Central Java, West Nusa Tenggara, Central Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara
No. of Declared Peace Villages	22 Village
Partnerships	UN Women, La Rimpu, JTI Indonesia, Local Goverments
Women Empowerment	1,785 women entrepreneurs empowered, women in leadership and advocacy roles
Highlights	
Major Economic Impact (2020)	10 Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDES) with Rp 4.9 billion in assets
Core Activities	Dialogue, training, decision-making participation, peace advocacy, economic empowerment
Recent Expansions (2024)	Central Sulawesi & West Nusa Tenggara (Dadibou Village, Barurejo Village, etc.)

Training Areas	Disaster preparedness, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, leadership, gender-responsive planning
Field Visit Observations	Women's groups as agents of peace and resilience; endorsed by UN Women & Netherlands Embassy

During the visit, UN Women and the Netherlands Embassy attended various activities, including women's advocacy and leadership training at the Bima Regent's office and a visit to Dadibou Peace Village. In 2024, UN Women and Wahid Foundation expanded the Peace Village program to Central Sulawesi and West Nusa Tenggara. The program's main objective is to build community resilience against social conflicts, violent extremism, and the impacts of climate change. The program aims to empower women so that they become economically and intellectually stronger, enabling them to resist intolerance and violent extremism. As part of this effort, Wahid Foundation collaborated with People and Culture JTI Indonesia and PKK Desa Barurejo to declare a Peace Village. On July 11, 2024, Wahid Foundation and La Rimpu held a Participatory Discussion in Bima with the theme "Empowered Women for Sustainable Peace." This discussion aimed to engage strategic stakeholders in the program and discuss various issues related to women's empowerment, peace, humanitarian action, and the environment in Bima Regency (Smeer et al., 2024; Wahid, 2024).

Women's economic empowerment is a key component of the Peace Village program. The Wahid Foundation provides training in entrepreneurship, family literacy, financial management, and business skills tailored to local culture and resources. Women are viewed as "entrepreneurial peace agents," where economic capacity becomes a vehicle for promoting peace. Trained women are then organized into joint ventures under the One Village One Product (OVOP) initiative, which focuses on utilizing local resources to create unique, competitive products. OVOP emphasizes sustainability, quality, and local identity while encouraging collaboration among government bodies at various levels and non-governmental actors. The initiative is built on three main pillars: profitability, local value excellence, and social cohesion. It not only strengthens women's roles economically but also enhances their capacity to contribute to peacebuilding and community resilience through inclusive economic participation and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Empowering Women Through *Koperasi Cinta Damai Wahid*

Indonesia, as a country endowed with rich ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity, bears a moral responsibility to continuously nurture this plurality as a powerful unifying force toward achieving national goals of justice, peace, and prosperity. Suroyo et al. (2023) emphasize that such diversity should not merely be tolerated or symbolically recognized, but actively preserved and leveraged as a fundamental pillar of national identity. However, despite this aspirational ideal, Indonesia continues to grapple with deep-rooted societal challenges that hinder inclusive development. Acim et al. (2023) point out that one of the most pressing issues is the inequality in access to economic resources and opportunities, which limits the ability of many communities—especially marginalized groups—to participate fully in social and national life. These structural disparities obstruct the realization of a society that is truly inclusive, just, and dignified, calling for targeted efforts to bridge gaps and ensure equity for all citizens across regions and identities.

Among those most affected by these inequalities are women. Although their contributions to nation-building—ranging from the household to broader community levels—are significant, structural barriers continue to hinder their empowerment. Jeevanasai et al. (2023) point out that women frequently encounter discrimination, limited access to leadership roles, and minimal participation in public decision-making. Thelma and Ngulube (2024) further argue that addressing these issues requires innovative and inclusive strategies aimed at boosting women's economic

independence, fostering their leadership potential, and ensuring equal access to public resources and spaces.

Figure 1. Achievements of the Love Peace Cooperative (KCD) Program



Source: Wahid Love Peace Cooperative

Koperasi Cinta Damai Wahid (KCD Wahid), founded by the Wahid Foundation in 2013, aims to empower economically vulnerable women in Indonesia through microfinance and community organizing. Initiated by Yenny Wahid, the program supports women lacking access to formal banking by providing microcredit to start or expand small businesses. Beyond improving economic welfare, KCD Wahid promotes social cohesion, tolerance, and peace at the grassroots level. By combining economic empowerment with efforts to reduce intolerance and radicalism, the program fosters inclusive, harmonious communities and contributes to building a just and peaceful society.

Since its inception, KCD Wahid has engaged over 1,700 active members and disbursed more than IDR 3.6 billion in loans. The program operates in several provinces, including West Java, Central Java, and East Java, with a member growth rate of approximately 73-75%. Members benefit not only economically but also gain enhanced skills in financial management and social entrepreneurship. The program receives support from government agencies and civil society organizations to strengthen women's empowerment and conflict prevention efforts.

Table 7. Below is a summary table highlighting key information about Koperasi Cinta Damai Wahid

Aspect	Description
Name	<i>Koperasi Cinta Damai</i> Wahid (KCD Wahid)
Established	2013
Founder	Wahid Foundation, driven by Yenny Wahid
Purpose	Empower economically disadvantaged women and promote tolerance and peace
Operational Areas	West Java, Central Java, East Java, and other regions
Number of Members	Over 1,700 active members
Total Loan Amount	Over IDR 3.6 billion
Member Growth Rate	Approximately 73-75% since establishment
Program Focus	Microcredit, community organizing, social entrepreneurship
Social Impact	Economic improvement, social cohesion strengthening, intolerance prevention
Support	Government agencies, social organizations

Koperasi Cinta Damai (KCD) Wahid demonstrates how economic empowerment can be integrated with social value promotion to foster positive societal change. Operating across various regencies and cities in West Java, KCD Wahid targets marginalized and low-income groups through microcredit programs, aiming to help them break the poverty cycle. Beyond economic support, the cooperative also encourages respect for diversity and religious tolerance. More than two thousand people have benefited from its business units and capital access services. Unlike typical cooperatives, KCD Wahid uniquely collaborates with women's groups in rural areas, promoting both

economic independence and social cohesion. This dual focus enables the Wahid Foundation to embed values of peace and tolerance at the grassroots level. Its strategic pillars—microfinance, community organizing, and social entrepreneurship—are designed to build a society that is not only economically prosperous and equitable but also inclusive, tolerant, and resilient in the face of social and religious diversity.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the Wahid Foundation's initiatives in empowering women and promoting peace in Indonesia as part of its broader mission of inclusive social transformation. It finds that the Foundation plays a significant role in bridging Islamic values with democratic and human rights principles by advocating for moderate religious interpretations, gender equality, and tolerance. Through programs such as the *Peaceful Village* initiative, the Foundation empowers women not just as passive recipients but as active agents of change in preventing radicalism, fostering social cohesion, and participating in decision-making processes. These efforts have contributed to strengthening the foundation for a more inclusive and resilient civil society.

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

Future research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of Wahid Foundation programs using longitudinal and participatory approaches, to explore comparative frameworks with similar organizations across the Muslim world, and to amplify the voices of grassroots women often underrepresented in policy narratives. Further inquiry into the integration of religious discourse with feminist practice would also enhance understanding of how such approaches can be scaled and sustained. Through these efforts, the potential of faith-based institutions as catalysts for inclusive and peaceful transformation can be more fully realized.

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