

Pesantren SDGs: Leadership of Kiai at Salafiyah Al-Utsmani Islamic Boarding School, Bondowoso

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Abstract

This article examines the role of kiai leadership in promoting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through pesantren-based social, economic, and educational initiatives. Using Salafiyah Al-Utsmani Islamic Boarding School in Bondowoso as a case study, this research highlights how traditional Islamic leadership generates multiplier effects that extend beyond religious education into community empowerment, poverty reduction, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings demonstrate that the moral authority, cultural legitimacy, and social capital of the kiai function as key drivers in translating Islamic values into practical SDGs-oriented actions at the local level.

Keywords: Pesantren, SDGs, Kiai Leadership, Community Development

Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are among the oldest and most resilient socio-religious institutions in Indonesia. For centuries, pesantren have functioned as centers of Islamic learning, moral formation, and community guidance. Unlike modern educational institutions that are often detached from local social realities, pesantren are deeply embedded within the cultural, economic, and social structures of surrounding communities. This embeddedness positions pesantren as strategic actors in addressing contemporary development challenges at the grassroots level.

In the context of global development, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a comprehensive framework aimed at addressing poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and social injustice. While the SDGs are often discussed within the realm of state policies, international organizations, and secular development agencies, there is growing recognition that faith-based institutions play a critical role in translating global agendas into locally meaningful actions. Pesantren, as faith-based institutions with strong moral authority, offer unique pathways for internalizing SDGs values within everyday social practices.

The contribution of pesantren to development, however, cannot be separated from the role of leadership. Central to pesantren life is the figure of the kiai, whose authority transcends formal administrative functions. The kiai embodies religious knowledge, moral integrity, and cultural legitimacy, enabling him to influence attitudes, behaviors, and collective decision-making processes within and beyond the pesantren. This form of leadership is particularly significant in rural and semi-rural contexts, where trust in religious figures often surpasses trust in formal institutions.

Leadership in pesantren operates through a relational and value-based model rather than bureaucratic mechanisms. The kiai leads by example, ethical consistency, and spiritual guidance, creating a strong sense of loyalty among santri, alumni, and community members. This relational leadership allows pesantren initiatives to gain broad participation and long-term sustainability. Consequently, the developmental impact of pesantren is often amplified through social networks rooted in religious commitment and cultural bonds. Salafiyah Al-Utsmani Islamic Boarding School in Bondowoso represents a traditional pesantren that maintains classical Islamic scholarship while actively engaging with contemporary social issues. Situated within a community characterized by strong religious values and economic vulnerability, the pesantren has become an important reference point for education, social solidarity, and economic resilience. Its existence reflects how traditional institutions adapt to modern challenges without losing their cultural authenticity.

Bondowoso, as part of East Java, faces persistent development challenges, including poverty, limited access to quality education, and environmental pressures. In such a context, pesantren function not only as educational institutions but also as social safety nets and moral anchors. The leadership of the kiai at Salafiyah Al-Utsmani plays a decisive role in mobilizing community resources to respond to these challenges through faith-inspired initiatives.

The integration of SDGs principles within pesantren activities often occurs implicitly rather than through explicit policy alignment. Practices related to education, economic empowerment, environmental stewardship, and social harmony are framed within Islamic ethical teachings. This implicit integration demonstrates that global development goals can resonate with local religious values when mediated by trusted leaders.

One of the key concepts explored in this study is the notion of multiplier effects. In development studies, multiplier effects refer to the cascading impacts of a single intervention across multiple sectors and social layers. In the pesantren context, leadership-driven initiatives often produce interconnected outcomes in education, economy, social relations, and institutional sustainability. These outcomes reinforce one another, creating a cumulative impact that exceeds the initial scope of intervention.

The kiai's leadership acts as a catalyst for these multiplier effects. Through moral persuasion and symbolic authority, the kiai transforms religious teachings into practical actions that shape everyday life. Santri who internalize these values carry them into wider society, extending the influence of pesantren beyond its physical boundaries. Alumni networks further amplify this impact by sustaining pesantren-inspired practices across generations.

Despite the growing recognition of pesantren in development discourse, empirical studies that explicitly link pesantren leadership to the SDGs framework remain limited. Existing research often focuses on educational aspects or historical roles of pesantren, leaving a gap in understanding how traditional religious leadership contributes to contemporary sustainable development agendas. This gap is particularly evident in localized case studies that highlight grassroots dynamics.

This article seeks to address this gap by examining the multiplier effects of kiai leadership at Salafiyah Al-Utsmani Islamic Boarding School in relation to the SDGs. Rather than viewing pesantren as passive recipients of development programs, this study positions them as active agents capable of shaping locally grounded development pathways. The analysis emphasizes leadership as the key mechanism through which pesantren engage with broader societal transformation.

The focus on leadership is crucial because development outcomes are not solely determined by resources or policies but also by values, trust, and social legitimacy. In many rural Indonesian contexts, religious leaders possess the social capital necessary to mobilize collective action. Understanding how this capital operates within the SDGs framework provides valuable insights for inclusive and culturally sensitive development strategies.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on faith-based development by demonstrating how Islamic institutions can align with universal development goals without compromising their religious identity. The case of Salafiyah Al-Utsmani illustrates that Islamic values such as justice, stewardship, solidarity, and responsibility resonate strongly with the normative foundations of the SDGs.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative case study approach to capture the depth and complexity of leadership practices and their social impacts. By focusing on lived experiences and local narratives, the study highlights how global concepts like sustainable development are reinterpreted at the grassroots level through religious leadership.

Theoretically, the article engages with leadership theory, social capital theory, and community-based development perspectives. These frameworks help explain how kiai leadership generates multiplier effects that extend across institutional and social boundaries. The pesantren is thus understood not merely as an educational space but as a hub of social transformation.

Practically, the findings of this study are relevant for policymakers, development practitioners, and religious institutions seeking to collaborate in achieving the SDGs. Recognizing pesantren as strategic partners can enhance the effectiveness of development initiatives by leveraging existing social trust and moral authority.

In the Indonesian context, where religious institutions continue to shape public life, integrating pesantren into sustainable development strategies is both pragmatic and culturally appropriate. The leadership of the kiai serves as a bridge between global development aspirations and local moral economies. Ultimately, this introduction sets the stage for a deeper analysis of how kiai leadership at Salafiyah Al-Utsmani generates multiplier effects that contribute to SDGs achievement. By situating pesantren within the broader development discourse, this article underscores the importance of culturally rooted leadership in fostering sustainable and inclusive development.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the multiplier effects of kiai leadership in supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through pesantren-based initiatives. The research was conducted at Salafiyah Al-Utsmani Islamic Boarding School in Bondowoso, East Java, which was purposively selected due to its strong community engagement and the central role of the kiai in shaping educational, social, and economic activities. A qualitative case study is

appropriate for capturing the depth and complexity of leadership practices, value transmission, and community-based development processes embedded in religious and cultural contexts.

Data were collected primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants, including the kiai, pesantren administrators, ustadz (teachers), santri, alumni, and members of the surrounding community. Interviews were conducted in culturally appropriate settings, audio-recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to leadership practices and their social, educational, and economic impacts. Data triangulation and ethical research principles, including confidentiality and voluntary participation, were applied to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Results and Discussions

The findings of this study reveal that kiai leadership at Salafiyah Al-Utsmani Islamic Boarding School plays a central role in generating multiplier effects that extend across educational, economic, social, and environmental dimensions of community life. Leadership is not exercised through formal authority alone but is deeply rooted in moral legitimacy, religious knowledge, and long-standing trust between the pesantren and the surrounding community. This form of leadership enables the pesantren to function as a locally grounded institution that translates Islamic values into practical actions aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

One of the most prominent impacts of kiai leadership is observed in the transformation of educational practices. Education at Salafiyah Al-Utsmani is understood not merely as the transmission of religious knowledge but as a holistic process of character formation and social awareness. The kiai consistently emphasizes ethical responsibility, discipline, and community service as integral components of learning. As a result, santri develop a strong sense of social obligation that extends beyond the pesantren environment. This educational orientation contributes directly to the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive, value-based, and lifelong learning practices.

The multiplier effect of this educational model becomes evident when santri and alumni apply pesantren values in broader social contexts. Alumni interviews indicate that the ethical and leadership principles internalized during their education influence their roles as teachers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. Through these alumni networks, pesantren values are

reproduced and disseminated across generations, amplifying the long-term social impact of kiai leadership. This finding supports social capital theory, which emphasizes the role of trust and shared values in sustaining collective action.

Economic empowerment also emerges as a significant outcome of kiai-led initiatives. The pesantren facilitates small-scale economic activities, skills training, and cooperative practices that strengthen household resilience and local economic circulation. The kiai's endorsement is critical in encouraging community participation, as trust in religious leadership reduces uncertainty and fosters collective commitment. These initiatives contribute to SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by enhancing access to livelihood opportunities and promoting ethical economic behavior grounded in Islamic principles.

Social cohesion is another key dimension influenced by kiai leadership. The pesantren functions as a space for dialogue, conflict resolution, and mutual assistance, particularly in times of social or economic stress. Community members perceive the kiai as a moral mediator whose guidance carries both religious and social authority. This role strengthens local institutions and reinforces norms of cooperation, inclusivity, and justice, which are central to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Environmental awareness, although not formally framed as a development agenda, is integrated into pesantren life through Islamic ethical teachings on stewardship (khalifah) and responsibility toward nature. Practices such as waste management, resource conservation, and environmentally conscious agriculture are promoted as religious obligations rather than external regulations. This ethical framing enhances community acceptance and participation, demonstrating how religious narratives can support SDG 13 (Climate Action) at the grassroots level.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the leadership of the kiai acts as a catalyst that connects multiple development outcomes into a coherent system of social transformation. Educational values influence economic behavior, economic empowerment reinforces social solidarity, and social cohesion strengthens institutional sustainability. These interconnected impacts illustrate the presence of multiplier effects, where a single source of moral leadership generates cumulative benefits across sectors.

The discussion underscores that pesantren should not be viewed merely as traditional religious institutions but as dynamic agents of sustainable development. The case of Salafiyah Al-Utsmani highlights the importance of culturally rooted leadership in achieving the SDGs, particularly in contexts

where formal development mechanisms may have limited reach. By aligning Islamic values with universal development goals, kiai leadership provides a model of locally resonant and socially legitimate pathways toward sustainable and inclusive development.

Conclusion

This study concludes that kiai leadership at Salafiyah Al-Utsmani Islamic Boarding School plays a pivotal role in generating multiplier effects that contribute meaningfully to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level. Through moral authority, religious legitimacy, and strong social trust, the kiai is able to translate Islamic values into concrete educational, economic, social, and environmental practices. These practices demonstrate that pesantren are not merely centers of religious instruction but also dynamic institutions capable of fostering sustainable and inclusive community development.

The findings highlight that leadership-driven initiatives in pesantren produce interconnected impacts across multiple sectors. Value-based education strengthens social responsibility, economic empowerment enhances community resilience, social cohesion reinforces institutional stability, and environmental ethics support sustainable resource management. These outcomes collectively illustrate the presence of multiplier effects, where kiai leadership acts as a catalyst for long-term social transformation beyond the pesantren's physical boundaries. Recognizing and integrating pesantren and kiai leadership into development strategies can therefore enrich SDGs implementation with culturally grounded, ethically driven, and socially legitimate approaches, particularly in rural and faith-oriented communities.

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