



Community-Based Empowerment by Muhammadiyah Preachers: Building Social Resilience among Baduy Luar Muslim Convert Communities

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Article Info :

Received:

15-08-2026

Revised:

05-09-2026

Accepted:

19-09-2026

Abstract

Religious conversion among indigenous communities can create a distinctive form of vulnerability when converts lose customary support networks before developing stable relationships within their new religious community. Existing empowerment and social resilience perspectives provide limited explanation of situations in which religious identity reconstruction and community empowerment occur simultaneously. This study examined how community-based empowerment by Muhammadiyah preachers strengthened social resilience among Baduy Luar Muslim converts in Kampung Cepak Buah and Corogol, Lebak, Banten, and developed a conceptual model of the process. A qualitative case study involved 15 informants selected through purposive and snowball sampling, comprising five Muhammadiyah preachers and ten supporting informants, including converts, customary leaders, village officials, religious figures, and institutional representatives. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis, with credibility supported through source, technique, and temporal triangulation. Thematic analysis examined patterns of religious identity reconstruction, cultural legitimacy, economic empowerment, social participation, collective capacity, and resilience. Five interconnected strategies emerged: culturally adaptive da'wah, productive economic empowerment, educational and institutional development, theological and social harmonization, and multi-stakeholder networking. Their interaction strengthened spiritual grounding, social solidarity, economic capacity, and collective agency, while supporting a transition from individual to organizational and community-level empowerment. The study proposes Community-Based Religious Resilience as an emerging model in which spiritual, social, and economic capacities jointly support collective adaptation and religious continuity.

Keywords: *Baduy Luar, Community Empowerment, Indigenous Communities, Religious Conversion, Social Resilience.*



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INTRODUCTION

The Baduy Luar Muslim convert community of Kampung Cepak Buah, Sangkanwangi Village, Leuwidamar Subdistrict, Lebak Regency, Banten, lives at the intersection of two vulnerable positions shaped by religious transition, indigenous identity, and limited access to socioeconomic resources. Across contemporary community development research, social resilience has increasingly been conceptualized as a dynamic capacity through which communities mobilize social relationships, resources, and collective agency to respond to disruption and changing conditions rather than merely return to a previous state of equilibrium (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). Indigenous resilience is particularly dependent on locally embedded social networks because relationships of mutual support can connect cultural knowledge, livelihood resources, and collective responses to external pressures (Delina et al., 2025). The Baduy case presents a distinctive configuration because religious conversion takes place within a social order historically regulated by customary norms, collective obligations, and culturally embedded forms of social organization. According to preliminary data collected by Muhammadiyah's Community Da'wah Institute (Lembaga Dakwah Komunitas, LDK) in 2023, around 84 individuals across 21 households in the area had converted to Islam, while average household income stood at approximately Rp600,000 to Rp800,000 per month and some households still lacked civil registration documents required to access government assistance. Recent research has shown that modernization has already produced significant social changes among the Baduy Luar, indicating that transformations in livelihood, social interaction, and relationships with external institutions are

increasingly intertwined with changes in customary life (Aprianti et al., 2024). This condition places the convert community within a broader process of social transformation in which religious change, economic vulnerability, institutional exclusion, and the preservation or reconstruction of collective relationships occur simultaneously.

Conversion carries a double social cost for this community because converts may experience weakened connections with customary networks of mutual assistance, including gotong royong and the pikukuh, while also remaining incompletely integrated into the wider Muslim community. Historical research on Baduy Muslims demonstrates that religious conversion has developed through a complex process of interaction between Islamic expansion, community transformation, and changing relations between Baduy society and external social environments (Arif et al., 2023). From the perspective of identity, the disruption of established social recognition can create a liminal condition in which individuals must negotiate belonging while adapting to expectations associated with a new identity (Goffman, 1963). Research on Baduy Muslim communities has further indicated that religious life is shaped through processes of everyday negotiation, suggesting that conversion does not automatically eliminate previous cultural orientations or resolve tensions surrounding religious and social belonging (Mulyadi, 2023). The consequences of this transition extend beyond personal belief because access to social support, economic participation, education, community recognition, and collective activities may all be affected by the changing position of converts. Religious communication therefore becomes an important mechanism through which Islamic identity and community belonging can be negotiated within the Baduy social environment. Recent research specifically emphasizes the role of communicative accommodation and legitimacy in religious engagement with Baduy Muslim communities, highlighting that the acceptance of da'wah is connected to the ability of religious actors to engage with local cultural structures (Saragih, 2026).

Muhammadiyah's LDK has responded to this transitional condition by placing preachers within the community who combine religious instruction with economic, educational, and social empowerment, including goat husbandry, fast-yield crops, construction of a prayer hall, and Qur'an classes for children. Recent Muhammadiyah activities among Baduy converts illustrate an approach in which agricultural empowerment is incorporated into da'wah activities, linking religious engagement with livelihood development and practical economic support (Muhammadiyah, 2025). Comparable Muhammadiyah-based empowerment initiatives demonstrate that religious engagement can be connected with community development through activities involving education, economic strengthening, environmental improvement, and mobilization of local participation (Suarni et al., 2025). The approach suggests an integrative form of community intervention in which preachers may function not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as facilitators of social learning, economic activity, collective participation, and access to external resources. Such an approach is consistent with community empowerment perspectives that emphasize participation, local capacity, and the development of people's ability to influence the conditions affecting their lives (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). Yet the implementation of empowerment activities does not automatically demonstrate the emergence of social resilience, because programs may generate different outcomes depending on their cultural legitimacy, continuity, community participation, and capacity to become embedded in everyday social relationships. The research puzzle consequently concerns how empowerment activities conducted by Muhammadiyah preachers interact with religious identity reconstruction and cultural negotiation in shaping the resilience of a community undergoing simultaneous social and religious transition.

Previous studies provide important foundations for understanding the separate dimensions of this problem, but their findings remain distributed across historical, religious, empowerment, and resilience perspectives. Research concerning Baduy Muslim communities has examined religious transformation and da'wah, including the transformative dimensions of reislamization and the relationship between religious intervention and local cultural structures (Pambayun et al., 2022). Research on social resilience among Muslim converts has emphasized the importance of social support and religious institutions in helping converts negotiate changes in their social environment, although such work tends to focus more strongly on psychosocial dimensions than on community-level structural processes (Harefa & Zainun, 2024). Studies of community empowerment in the context of modernization have similarly identified empowerment as an important mechanism for strengthening social and legal resilience among vulnerable communities (Cahyani et al., 2024). Muhammadiyah's broader community-strengthening experience demonstrates that institutional networks can connect

religious commitment with empowerment and community development, although the mechanisms through which these practices produce resilience within culturally distinctive Indigenous communities remain insufficiently elaborated (Prihanta et al., 2024). The available literature therefore establishes that religious institutions, social networks, local participation, and empowerment can contribute to community capacity, but it does not yet adequately explain how these elements interact when the beneficiaries are converts whose previous customary identity and social networks are simultaneously being renegotiated. The unresolved issue is not simply the limited number of studies concerning Baduy converts, but the absence of an integrated explanation linking religious identity reconstruction, culturally legitimate empowerment, livelihood capacity, and social resilience within the same analytical framework.

The theoretical limitation becomes more apparent when empowerment and resilience are considered together rather than as independent concepts. Community empowerment emphasizes the expansion of people's capacity to participate, exercise agency, mobilize resources, and influence decisions affecting their collective conditions, while asset-oriented approaches stress the importance of identifying and activating resources already present within communities (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Empowerment can therefore be understood as a process through which individuals and communities develop greater control over social, organizational, and material conditions rather than simply receiving assistance from external institutions (Zimmerman, 2000). Social resilience, meanwhile, concerns the capacities through which communities cope with disruption, adapt to changing circumstances, and potentially transform the relationships and structures that shape vulnerability (Norris et al., 2008). These perspectives become difficult to reconcile when collective identity cannot be assumed to be stable at the beginning of the empowerment process, because religious conversion may itself alter networks of trust, cultural legitimacy, social participation, and perceptions of belonging. Islamic faith-based organizations can provide social capital through religious networks and collective resources, yet their contribution to resilience depends on how those resources become meaningful and accessible within the local community (Nurdin, 2024). This creates an important conceptual and empirical gap in which empowerment theory, social resilience theory, and studies of religious conversion have largely developed along parallel trajectories rather than explaining the reciprocal relationship among material empowerment, religious identity, cultural legitimacy, and collective resilience. Addressing this gap is both scientifically and practically important because interventions for Indigenous convert communities require more than the provision of religious instruction or economic assistance; they require an understanding of how external support can contribute to sustainable community capacity without overlooking the social and cultural processes through which legitimacy and belonging are reconstructed.

This study addresses that gap by examining how community-based empowerment strategies interact with the reconstruction of religious identity and spirituality among Baduy Luar Muslim converts to shape social resilience. The study positions Muhammadiyah's LDK not as the object whose institutional performance is being evaluated, but as the institutional and network context within which community preachers implement empowerment practices. The analytical focus is placed on the relationships among religious instruction, livelihood development, education, social support, cultural legitimacy, collective participation, and the reconstruction of community capacity. The study adopts an empirical qualitative case-study orientation to examine these processes within their real-life social and cultural context and to capture the meanings, experiences, interactions, and practices through which empowerment is experienced by community members. Specifically, the study aims to describe and analyze how Muhammadiyah preachers conduct community-based empowerment among Baduy Luar Muslim converts and to explain how these practices contribute to the formation of social resilience during a period of religious and social transition. Its theoretical contribution lies in developing an empowerment–resilience model that treats collective identity, cultural legitimacy, spirituality, social networks, and material capacity as interacting dimensions of resilience rather than as isolated outcomes. Its methodological contribution lies in providing an empirically grounded account of how faith-based community empowerment operates within an Indigenous community undergoing simultaneous economic, social, and religious change, thereby offering an analytical basis for understanding similar community interventions in other culturally distinctive and socially vulnerable settings.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an empirical qualitative research design grounded in a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, treating social reality as constructed through participants' experiences, interactions, and meanings within their specific social and cultural contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A qualitative case-study strategy was selected to examine how community-based empowerment by Muhammadiyah preachers operates within the distinctive religious, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions of Baduy Luar Muslim convert communities, with the case bounded by its social setting and real-life context (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted in Kampung Cepak Buah and Kampung Corogol, Sangkanwangi Village, Leuwidamar Subdistrict, Lebak Regency, Banten, where Baduy Luar Muslim converts who had left the customary Kanekes area established residential communities. Fifteen informants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, comprising five Muhammadiyah LDK preachers with at least one year of direct field experience and ten supporting informants consisting of Muslim converts, customary leaders, village officials, local religious figures, and LDK representatives. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and documentary examination covering religious activities, empowerment programs, livelihood practices, community participation, social relationships, and experiences of religious identity reconstruction. The use of multiple qualitative sources and techniques was intended to capture the complexity of lived experience and the interaction between individual meanings, collective practices, institutional interventions, and local cultural conditions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Data credibility was established through source, technique, and temporal triangulation by systematically comparing information obtained from preachers, Muslim converts, customary leaders, village officials, religious figures, and institutional representatives. Interview transcripts, observation records, focus group discussions, and documentary materials were compared to identify convergent evidence as well as contradictory or negative cases that could challenge preliminary interpretations. Data analysis followed an interactive process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, allowing the researchers to move iteratively between empirical materials and emerging analytical interpretations (Miles et al., 2014). Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to religious identity reconstruction, cultural legitimacy, economic empowerment, social support, community participation, collective agency, and social resilience. The analytical process was further informed by the principles of participatory and transformative community development, particularly the importance of developing community agency and enabling marginalized groups to become active subjects in processes affecting their social conditions (Freire, 1970). The final synthesis integrated convergent and divergent findings to explain how religious instruction, livelihood initiatives, social networks, and culturally negotiated forms of empowerment interact in strengthening or constraining social resilience among Baduy Luar Muslim converts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Baseline Conditions and Changes in Community Resilience

Before the empowerment program, the socioeconomic position of the Baduy Luar Muslim convert community in Kampung Cepak Buah was characterized by simultaneous economic, educational, social, and religious constraints. Average household income was irregular at approximately Rp300,000–500,000 per month and was mainly derived from subsistence farming, plantation labor, and informal employment. Limited household resources were compounded by restricted access to education, as children frequently experienced non-attendance or school dropout because the nearest primary school required a four- to six-kilometer journey along hilly footpaths. Social interaction within the community was also relatively limited, while connections with institutions and residents beyond the hamlet remained weak. This configuration corresponds with the broader finding that modernization has altered the social conditions of Baduy Luar communities while simultaneously creating new forms of socioeconomic adaptation and vulnerability (Aprianti et al., 2024). The initial condition can consequently be interpreted not as a single dimension of poverty, but as an accumulation of restricted capabilities that affected the community's ability to mobilize internal and external resources.

The economic dimension became particularly important because livelihood insecurity was connected to the community's broader capacity to maintain social participation and sustain religious transition. Interviews indicated that households depended heavily on low-return agricultural activities

and irregular labor, leaving limited room for investment in children's education, productive assets, or collective initiatives. The distance to educational facilities intensified this vulnerability because educational participation required not only financial resources but also parental capacity to support children's mobility and continuity in schooling. Social relationships were similarly affected by the community's relative isolation, with limited interaction beyond the hamlet reducing opportunities to access information, institutional assistance, and alternative livelihood networks. Such conditions are significant from a social resilience perspective because resilience depends on the capacity to mobilize relationships and resources rather than merely on the possession of material assets (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). The baseline therefore indicates that the community entered the empowerment process with weaknesses in several mutually reinforcing capacities rather than with an isolated economic deficit.

Field interviews, observation, and focus group discussions identified changes across several dimensions after sustained engagement by Muhammadiyah preachers. Informants consistently described a rise in household income, greater continuity in children's education, more frequent collective activities, stronger relationships with religious mentors, and broader interaction with actors outside the hamlet. The observed economic change was particularly visible in households participating in livestock and agricultural activities, while educational change appeared through greater parental encouragement and the emergence of both formal and non-formal learning activities. Changes in social capital were reflected in the formation of study groups, informal deliberation, and more regular interaction among residents who previously had limited collective activities. Table 1 presents the comparison of conditions identified through the qualitative evidence and clarifies that the observed changes were not confined to material welfare but extended to relational and institutional dimensions. This multidimensional pattern is relevant to research showing that social networks can connect livelihood resources, collective knowledge, and adaptive capacity within Indigenous communities (Delina et al., 2025).

Table 1. Socioeconomic Condition of the Convert Community Before and After the Empowerment Program

Dimension	Indicator	Before	After
Income	Average monthly household income	Irregular, approx. Rp300,000–500,000	More stable, approx. Rp800,000–1,000,000
Education	Children's school participation	Frequent non-attendance or dropout	Regular attendance, formal and non-formal
Education	Access to school facilities	4–6 km on foot	Supported by parental encouragement and mentoring
Social Capital	Internal trust	Low, limited interaction	Strengthened through study groups and deliberation
Social Capital	Participation in collective activity	Minimal, unorganized	Recurring study and deliberation groups formed
Social Relations	Ties beyond the hamlet	Isolated	Working relationships with preachers and neighboring residents
Religious Mentoring	Frequency of religious instruction	Irregular	Regular and scheduled

Source: In-depth interviews, field observation, and focus group discussions with the Cepak Buah convert community

The pattern presented in Table 1 suggests that empowerment operated through interconnected changes rather than through a single intervention producing an isolated outcome. The increase in reported household income from approximately Rp300,000–500,000 to Rp800,000–1,000,000 represents a substantial perceived improvement in livelihood stability, although the qualitative design

does not permit the difference to be treated as a statistically verified income effect. More importantly, the economic shift occurred alongside changes in educational participation and collective interaction, indicating that material improvement was accompanied by expansion of social and human capacities. The emergence of recurring study and deliberation groups is particularly important because it marks a movement from individually experienced vulnerability toward more organized forms of interaction. Community empowerment literature conceptualizes this movement as an expansion of people's capacity to participate, organize resources, and influence conditions affecting their collective lives (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). In the Baduy Luar case, the evidence suggests that livelihood assistance became more consequential when it was accompanied by opportunities for social participation and regular interpersonal contact.

Changes in religious mentoring also appear to have contributed to the reconstruction of social connectedness among converts who had experienced disruption in their previous customary networks. Regular religious instruction created a recurring social space in which converts could interact with preachers and with one another beyond occasional religious events. The importance of this process is consistent with research on Baduy Muslim communities that identifies religious communication as part of the process through which Islamic identity is negotiated and socially constructed (Fauzi, 2024). At the same time, the findings indicate that religious mentoring should not be interpreted solely as doctrinal transmission because its practical significance emerged through relationships, routines, and opportunities for collective participation. Informants' accounts indicate that contact with preachers gradually expanded beyond religious instruction into educational guidance, livelihood assistance, and community deliberation. This convergence between religious engagement and social support provides a plausible mechanism through which a fragmented social position could begin to develop new forms of collective attachment.

The observed trajectory nevertheless requires a cautious interpretation because the evidence represents qualitative perceptions and observed patterns rather than a controlled before-and-after measurement. Not every household experienced the same economic improvement, and participation in empowerment activities varied according to land access, household labor availability, distance, personal circumstances, and willingness to join collective programs. Some converts remained less active in mentoring activities and communal forums, while certain programs were affected by changes in funding or the availability of particular facilitators. These variations indicate that resilience should be understood as an uneven and evolving capacity rather than a uniform condition achieved simultaneously by every community member. This interpretation corresponds with resilience scholarship that views community resilience as a set of capacities involving adaptation, access to resources, social networks, and collective action rather than as a fixed state (Norris et al., 2008). The baseline-to-change comparison consequently provides evidence of a positive trajectory in several domains while leaving open the question of how durable those capacities would remain when external support becomes less intensive.

Culturally Adaptive Da'wah and the Reconstruction of Religious Identity

The field findings indicate that Muhammadiyah preachers did not introduce religious instruction as an isolated doctrinal intervention, but developed interpersonal access through activities that were already familiar within everyday community life. One preacher explained that sport, particularly the construction and use of a volleyball court, became an initial point of interaction before formal religious conversations were introduced. Other practices included providing haircuts, sharing food, and using familiar expressions in informal health-related interactions, creating forms of proximity that reduced the social distance between preachers and residents. These practices allowed religious engagement to develop through repeated encounters rather than through immediate demands for behavioral or doctrinal change. Such an approach corresponds with research on Baduy Muslim communities showing that religious communication and Islamic identity formation are closely connected to the manner in which external religious actors negotiate local social and cultural conditions (Fauzi, 2024). The finding suggests that the first stage of empowerment was relational, because trust had to emerge before religious mentoring and collective intervention could acquire sufficient legitimacy.

The importance of this relational entry strategy was reinforced by the preachers' attention to existing local authority structures. In Kampung Corogol, one preacher first introduced himself to the Jaro and local RT officials before initiating community activities, positioning his presence within

recognized social arrangements rather than presenting the intervention as an external program operating independently of local authority. Another preacher drew on a family connection to a respected local elder, which provided an additional layer of familiarity and recognition among residents. These strategies indicate that cultural adaptation operated not merely through the choice of program activities but also through recognition of how legitimacy was socially produced within the community. The finding is consistent with the broader community-development principle that interventions become more sustainable when they are grounded in local relationships, participation, and existing forms of community organization rather than imposed through externally defined priorities (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). In this setting, institutional recognition by local leaders and interpersonal familiarity functioned as complementary sources of legitimacy.

The empirical evidence further shows that everyday service became a mechanism for transforming perceptions of the preacher from an external religious actor into a socially accessible community participant. Activities such as sport, food sharing, haircuts, and assistance with practical needs created repeated opportunities for interaction in which residents could assess the intentions and conduct of the preachers through direct experience. One local leader contrasted this approach with previous encounters involving another Islamic organization whose members had approached Baduy residents through a more explicitly doctrinal posture, which reportedly generated resistance. The contrast is analytically important because it demonstrates that resistance was not necessarily directed toward religious engagement itself, but could emerge from the perceived manner in which engagement challenged existing cultural boundaries. The approach adopted by the Muhammadiyah preachers instead created what can be understood as a gradual process of legitimacy construction through reciprocity and social familiarity. This finding parallels recent research emphasizing communicative accommodation as an important mechanism for constructing legitimacy in interactions with Baduy Muslim communities (Saragih, 2026).

Table 2. Forms of Culturally Adaptive Da'wah and Their Observed Functions

Adaptive Practice	Empirical Form	Observed Function	Identity-Related Effect
Relational Entry	Volleyball, sport, informal visits	Establishing interpersonal proximity	Reduced perceived social distance
Practical Service	Haircuts, food sharing, basic assistance	Building reciprocity and familiarity	Increased interpersonal trust
Cultural Accommodation	Use of familiar local expressions and practices	Reducing cultural unfamiliarity	Lowered resistance to interaction
Local Legitimacy	Introduction to Jaro and RT officials	Securing recognized social standing	Increased acceptance of preacher presence
Kinship Connection	Reference to respected family lineage	Activating existing relational recognition	Strengthened social legitimacy
Religious Mentoring	Regular Qur'anic and Islamic instruction	Developing religious knowledge and practice	Supporting reconstruction of Muslim identity

Source: In-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions with community members and Muhammadiyah preachers

Table 2 shows that the culturally adaptive approach consisted of several mutually reinforcing practices rather than a single communication technique. The movement from informal interaction toward religious mentoring created a gradual transition in which social acceptance preceded more explicit forms of religious instruction. This sequence is significant because the reconstruction of religious identity among converts involved more than the acquisition of Islamic knowledge; it required the development of a social environment in which the new identity could be practiced without producing continuous interpersonal conflict. Research on Baduy religious conversion similarly indicates that conversion has developed through historical interaction between religious change and transformations in the community's relationship with its surrounding social environment (Arif et al., 2023). The present

findings add an empowerment dimension by showing how preachers used everyday social interaction to establish the relational conditions under which identity reconstruction could occur. The adaptive approach consequently positioned cultural familiarity as an enabling resource rather than an obstacle that had to be eliminated.

The reconstruction of identity also involved managing the tension between the converts' new religious affiliation and their continuing relationships with non-convert relatives and members of the customary community. Field observations indicated that converts did not simply replace previous social relationships with new Muslim networks, because agricultural cooperation, family relationships, and participation in selected community activities continued across religious boundaries. A customary elder described the relationship through shared land use, agricultural cycles, and mutual assistance, suggesting that social cooperation could persist even when religious observance became differentiated. This pattern corresponds with the finding that religious moderation among Baduy Muslim communities can be expressed through everyday coexistence and the negotiation of religious practice within a culturally distinctive social environment (Mulyadi, 2023). The evidence points toward a selective form of identity reconstruction in which religious affiliation changes while selected relational and cultural ties remain operative. Such a configuration is particularly relevant to resilience because the preservation of social bridges can reduce the risk that religious conversion produces complete social fragmentation.

The theological strategy employed by the preachers further supported this process by presenting Islam and Baduy customary identity through a shared-root narrative rather than constructing an absolute opposition between the old and new identities. The distinction articulated by informants between an "Islam of Prophet Adam" and an "Islam of Prophet Muhammad" functioned as a theological bridge through which the transition could be interpreted without requiring converts to conceptualize their previous cultural world as wholly illegitimate. This narrative was accompanied by practical differentiation in religious observance, while social cooperation remained possible in agriculture, family events, and other community interactions. Earlier research on transformative da'wah among Baduy communities demonstrates that religious change can involve prolonged negotiation with existing cultural structures rather than a simple replacement of one identity by another (Pambayun et al., 2022). From the perspective of empowerment, the significance of this strategy lies in reducing the social threat associated with identity transition while enabling converts to develop confidence in their new religious position. The resulting pattern can be interpreted as culturally negotiated identity reconstruction, in which religious commitment is strengthened through a process that preserves selected social continuities and creates new forms of Muslim belonging.

Economic and Institutional Empowerment as Foundations of Resilience

Economic empowerment emerged as a central component of the intervention because livelihood insecurity was closely connected to the community's vulnerability during religious transition. Interviews with preachers and converts indicated that the initial pattern of assistance relied heavily on basic necessities, including staple food and sacrificial meat distributed during periods of immediate need. Over time, the intervention shifted toward productive assets, particularly goats, agricultural inputs, and access to farming land, with the intention of generating recurring household income rather than repeated short-term assistance. A preacher explained that economic strengthening was considered important because households with more secure livelihoods were less exposed to material pressures that could influence decisions concerning religious affiliation. This orientation corresponds with contemporary community empowerment approaches that connect financial capacity, skills, and religious engagement as mutually reinforcing components of community development (Daryanto et al., 2026). The field evidence indicates that livelihood support was consequently understood not simply as economic assistance, but as a mechanism for increasing household agency and reducing forms of dependency that could constrain religious and social autonomy.

The transition from charitable assistance to productive empowerment was not without internal debate, and this tension provides an important analytical dimension of the findings. A local elder questioned the repeated distribution of rice because such assistance could meet immediate consumption needs without increasing the recipient's capacity to generate future income. The preference expressed by the elder for livestock, agricultural inputs, or repayable working capital indicates that community members themselves recognized the distinction between receiving resources and developing control over resources. Land scarcity, however, constrained the implementation of this productive model

because many converts had limited access to agricultural land after leaving the customary area. Preachers therefore relied on external partnerships to secure productive resources, while attempting to match assistance with household labor capacity and existing livelihood practices. This pattern reflects the argument that empowerment requires expansion of people's capacity to act rather than the simple provision of resources from outside actors (Ife, 2013). Economic empowerment in the case therefore depended on the conversion of external resources into locally manageable productive capacity, making access, participation, and continuity more important than the nominal value of assistance.

The economic interventions also interacted with educational and institutional initiatives, creating a broader infrastructure for community capacity. Field evidence showed that empowerment was extended beyond household livelihoods through the development of educational facilities ranging from kindergarten to vocational secondary education, together with religious learning activities for children and adults. The construction of these facilities addressed a structural constraint identified in the baseline condition, where distance and limited educational access had contributed to irregular school participation. Informants described parental encouragement and mentoring as important changes accompanying the expansion of educational opportunities, suggesting that infrastructure alone did not produce the observed change in participation. The combination of education, religious literacy, and economic capacity is consistent with Muhammadiyah-based empowerment practices that position community engagement as a multidimensional process involving knowledge, discipline, financial capability, and participation (Daryanto et al., 2026). Education consequently operated as both a human-capital intervention and an institutional mechanism through which the community could reproduce knowledge, aspirations, and leadership beyond the immediate presence of individual preachers.

Table 3. Empirical Matrix Linking Empowerment Strategies, Observed Mechanisms, Resilience Outcomes, and Theoretical Interpretation

Empowerment Strategy	Observed Mechanism	Resilience Outcome	Theoretical Interpretation
Productive economic empowerment	Provision of goats, farming inputs, land access, and livelihood mentoring	Greater income stability and reduced dependence on short-term assistance	Empowerment through increased material capacity and agency
Transition from charity to productive assets	Replacement of repeated consumption assistance with income-generating resources	Greater potential for household self-reliance	Asset mobilization and capacity-oriented community development
Educational institutionalization	Development of schools, mentoring, and children's learning activities	Increased educational participation and intergenerational capacity	Organizational empowerment through durable institutions
Religious institutionalization	Construction of a permanent mosque and regular religious learning	More stable religious practice and community attachment	Institutional support for collective identity and social capital
Settlement development	Formation of permanent residential clusters and community facilities	Greater residential stability and access to collective activities	Structural conditions supporting community organization
External resource mobilization	Partnerships with Muhammadiyah organizations, universities, government agencies, and donors	Expanded access to resources unavailable locally	Bridging networks and opportunity structures
Cadre development	Sending selected young converts to external pesantren for training	Emergence of potential future community leaders	Reproduction of community capacity and collective agency

Source: In-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, and documentary evidence from the study sites

As summarized in Table 3, the empirical findings show that economic and institutional empowerment operated through distinct mechanisms but converged on the development of community capacity. Productive assets addressed immediate material vulnerability, whereas schools, the mosque, and settlement infrastructure created settings in which knowledge, religious practice, and collective interaction could be reproduced over time. The distinction is important because material assistance may increase short-term welfare without necessarily generating organizational capacity, while institutional development can remain fragile when households lack sufficient economic resources to participate consistently. The field evidence instead points to an interaction in which livelihood capacity supported participation, while institutional settings provided spaces for that capacity to be organized and reproduced. This pattern corresponds with research identifying community empowerment as an important route toward strengthening social and legal resilience under conditions of modernization and structural vulnerability (Cahyani et al., 2024). The relationship between the different interventions can therefore be interpreted as cumulative capacity formation rather than a collection of unrelated development activities.

The mosque and settlement initiatives had an additional significance because they provided a stable spatial basis for a community whose social position had previously been relatively fragmented. Informants associated the permanent mosque not only with regular worship but also with the existence of a visible and legitimate Muslim community space. The settlement cluster developed for Baduy residents who had converted similarly provided a physical environment in which households could maintain proximity to one another while developing relationships with surrounding institutions. From an empowerment perspective, these structures reduced dependence on temporary gatherings and individual facilitators by establishing places where collective activities could continue through locally organized routines. Muhammadiyah's experience in other community settings likewise demonstrates that religious institutions can function as platforms for community strengthening when they facilitate participation, social organization, and practical empowerment rather than limiting their role to ritual activities (Prihanta et al., 2024). The institutional dimension of the Baduy case therefore reveals that resilience was partly produced through the creation of durable social infrastructure capable of carrying collective practices across changes in personnel and program cycles.

The institutional gains, however, did not eliminate structural vulnerability, and their resilience value depended on whether community members could eventually assume greater responsibility for maintaining them. Some economic programs remained dependent on donor resources, while several activities weakened when particular funding streams or individual preachers were no longer available. The educational infrastructure also required continuing human and financial resources, meaning that physical facilities alone could not guarantee sustained institutional functioning. This limitation is consistent with research on community resilience that emphasizes the importance of organizational capacity, social networks, resource access, and adaptive capabilities rather than infrastructure as an isolated indicator of resilience (Rifa'i, 2026). The findings suggest that economic and institutional empowerment become more resilient when external resources are transformed into locally controlled assets, skills, leadership, and routines. In the Baduy Luar context, the central challenge is consequently not the establishment of institutions alone, but the gradual transfer of their operational capacity from external supporters toward community members.

Networking, Collective Capacity, and the Emerging Community-Based Religious Resilience Model

The limited local resource base of Baduy Luar Muslim convert communities makes networking a central component of the empowerment process rather than a supplementary activity. Field findings indicate that Muhammadiyah preachers functioned as social brokers who connected the community with universities, Muhammadiyah autonomous organizations, government agencies, philanthropic institutions, and external educational institutions. This brokerage role enabled resources that were unavailable within the hamlets to be redirected toward schools, mosques, productive livelihoods, and human-resource development. The process corresponds with asset-based community development, in which community capacity is strengthened by identifying and mobilizing relationships, institutions, and

resources beyond the immediate locality (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Faith-based organizations can also generate social capital by connecting vulnerable communities to institutional resources and networks that extend beyond their immediate social environment (Nurdin, 2024). The significance of networking in this case lies not simply in obtaining material assistance, but in expanding the community's range of social connections and opportunities for collective action.

The bridging function of the preachers became particularly visible in the development of educational infrastructure and productive programs. One preacher described obtaining access to school land through cooperation involving a university, a local foundation, a national donor, and Muhammadiyah networks, while another reported securing approximately Rp1.1 billion in support through Aisyiyah and USAID for school construction. These accounts indicate that external resources were accessed through relational credibility and the ability of local actors to translate community needs into institutional proposals. The preacher's adaptation of an existing proposal template also illustrates how local actors learned to operate within the administrative requirements of external funding systems. Similar patterns can be observed in Muhammadiyah community empowerment initiatives in which organizational networks are used to connect local communities with broader institutional resources and capacity-building opportunities (Wahjusaputri et al., 2025). Mosque-based empowerment initiatives likewise demonstrate how religious institutions can become organizational nodes through which economic, educational, and social activities are coordinated (Suarni et al., 2025). In the Baduy Luar context, networking consequently operated as a mechanism for overcoming structural resource scarcity while simultaneously increasing the community's exposure to wider institutional environments.

Network expansion was also directed toward the reproduction of collective capacity through the development of potential community cadres. Selected young converts were reportedly encouraged to pursue religious education in pesantren outside the region, creating a pathway through which religious knowledge and organizational skills could eventually return to the community. The strategy resembles the formation of small learning circles that transform individuals from recipients of guidance into potential actors capable of sustaining collective processes. From a transformative perspective, empowerment becomes more durable when marginalized community members acquire the capacity to interpret their circumstances and participate actively in shaping their own social conditions (Freire, 1970). Zimmerman (2000) similarly conceptualizes community empowerment as involving not only individual competence but also the development of organizational and collective capacity. The comparison made by a preacher with the early educational circle of Dar al-Arqam reflects this understanding of cadre formation as a mechanism for reproducing religious and social capacity rather than merely increasing the number of religiously knowledgeable individuals. The emerging cadre pathway is particularly important because dependence on external preachers would otherwise leave community resilience vulnerable to changes in personnel and institutional priorities.

The empirical findings can be synthesized into five interconnected strategic pillars that explain how networking contributes to the broader empowerment process. Rather than functioning as isolated interventions, the pillars form a sequence in which relational entry creates trust, productive assistance strengthens material capacity, institutions stabilize collective practices, theological accommodation manages identity boundaries, and networking expands the community's access to external opportunities. The integrated structure is presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Empirical Matrix Linking Empowerment Strategies, Observed Mechanisms, Resilience Outcomes, and Theoretical Interpretation

Strategic Pillar	Field Evidence	Collective Capacity Mechanism	Resilience Implication
Cultural infiltration and humanist approach	Entry through service, sport, informal interaction, local kinship, and recognition of Jaro and RT structures	Builds trust, relational legitimacy, and willingness to engage	Reduces social distance and creates an initial basis for collective participation
Productive economic empowerment	Livestock, farming capital, land access, zakat, and	Strengthens household productive	Reduces economic vulnerability and

Educational and social institutionalization	sacrificial-meat distribution Schools, Qur'anic learning, mosque, and permanent settlement clusters	capacity and mutual economic support Creates durable organizational spaces and intergenerational capacity	exposure to material inducements Supports continuity of religious practice, education, and community organization
Theological moderation and social harmonization	Shared-root theological narrative, ritual differentiation, intercropping, shared land use, weddings, and grave visits	Enables religious differentiation without complete social separation	Supports coexistence, identity negotiation, and communal cohesion

Source: interviews, participant observation, FGD, and documentary evidence

Table 4 indicates that collective capacity emerged through the interaction of relational, economic, organizational, theological, and network dimensions rather than through a single empowerment intervention. The first pillar provides relational access, while the second converts that access into greater productive capacity at the household level. The third pillar gives empowerment a more durable organizational form through schools, mosques, and settlement facilities. The fourth pillar addresses the distinctive identity problem of converts by allowing religious differentiation without requiring complete withdrawal from social relations with the wider Baduy community. The fifth pillar extends the community's opportunity structure by connecting local actors with institutions and resources beyond the hamlets, consistent with empowerment theory's emphasis on access to resources, participation, and collective control (Zimmerman, 2000). The five pillars can consequently be interpreted as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a community-based process rather than as a fixed program package.

The development of these capacities was not uniform across households or across time. Some families remained less engaged because of work demands, limited access to land, distance from activity centers, personal preferences, or discomfort with larger collective forums. Economic improvements were also uneven, and some productive programs remained dependent on external funding, donor continuity, or the continued presence of particular preachers. Such conditions indicate that access to resources does not automatically translate into equal participation or sustained collective capacity. Social resilience is similarly understood as a dynamic capacity that varies according to the resources, networks, and institutional arrangements available to different actors (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). The experience of other community empowerment settings also suggests that resilience can remain constrained when institutional support and resource flows are difficult to sustain (Rifa'i, 2026). The Baduy Luar case consequently reveals both the potential and the fragility of network-based empowerment when local institutional capacity has not yet become sufficiently autonomous.

The interaction of these findings supports an emerging concept of Community-Based Religious Resilience, defined here as the capacity of a religiously transitioning indigenous community to maintain collective cohesion, adapt to external pressures, and sustain its emerging religious identity through the combined development of spiritual grounding, social solidarity, and economic capacity. Spiritual grounding provides meaning, religious knowledge, and psychological stability; social solidarity reconstructs relational capital through study groups, deliberation, mutual assistance, and continued interaction with surrounding communities; economic capacity provides a material foundation that reduces vulnerability to short-term external inducements. The three dimensions operate through the institutional and network structures identified in the five-pillar model, making resilience a collective process rather than an exclusively individual religious outcome. This interpretation is consistent with community resilience perspectives that conceptualize resilience as a set of capacities involving social connectedness, resources, collective action, and adaptive processes (Norris et al., 2008). In the field data, converts who experienced sustained religious mentoring alongside organized collective activities and productive livelihood support were described as more capable of maintaining communal engagement when confronted with competing forms of external assistance. The emerging model can be represented as a developmental sequence of relational entry → trust and identity negotiation →

productive and organizational empowerment → collective capacity → community-based religious resilience → increasing self-reliance. Because the model is derived from a single case involving two Baduy Luar convert settlements, its value at this stage is primarily explanatory and context-grounded, while its applicability to other indigenous Muslim-convert communities requires examination through comparative research.

CONCLUSION

Community-based empowerment among Baduy Luar Muslim converts in Kampung Cepak Buah and Corogol developed through five interconnected strategies: culturally adaptive da'wah, productive economic empowerment, educational and institutional development, theological and social harmonization, and multi-stakeholder networking. The culturally adaptive approach established trust and social acceptance before deeper religious engagement, while productive livelihood support strengthened economic security and reduced vulnerability to external material pressures. Educational facilities, mosques, settlement development, and regular religious activities provided durable spaces for learning, worship, interaction, and collective organization. Theological and social harmonization enabled converts to develop their Muslim identity while maintaining practical relationships with their Baduy community of origin. External networks further expanded access to land, education, funding, institutional support, and opportunities for cadre development that could not be generated from local resources alone. These interconnected strategies moved empowerment beyond individual religious guidance toward stronger organizational capacity, collective participation, and emerging community self-reliance. The findings indicate that resilience was strengthened when religious, social, economic, institutional, and network capacities developed together rather than through isolated interventions.

The study proposes Community-Based Religious Resilience as an emerging conceptual model for understanding resilience in indigenous communities experiencing religious identity transformation. The model positions spiritual grounding, social solidarity, and economic capacity as mutually dependent foundations of resilience rather than separate outcomes of empowerment. Spiritual grounding supports religious commitment and meaning, social solidarity reconstructs relationships and collective participation, while economic capacity reduces material vulnerability that can undermine religious continuity. The model extends conventional community resilience perspectives by recognizing religious identity as an active dimension of collective adaptation in communities undergoing simultaneous cultural and religious change. The Baduy Luar case also demonstrates that empowerment is more sustainable when charitable assistance is progressively transformed into productive resources, durable institutions, and community networks. Its practical significance lies in showing that culturally respectful engagement, livelihood strengthening, institutional development, and network mobilization can operate as complementary pathways toward greater collective resilience. Although the model emerges from a context-specific qualitative case, it provides an analytical basis for examining similar empowerment and religious identity transitions among indigenous Muslim-convert communities in other settings.

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