



## PEACE VILLAGE IN CANDIRENGGO: WOMEN'S ROLE IN BUILDING RELIGIOUS MODERATION

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### Abstract

*Previous studies on religious moderation and peacebuilding in Indonesia have primarily focused on social resilience, community harmony, and conflict prevention, while limited attention has been given to women's agency as grassroots actors in constructing religious moderation within multicultural communities. This study aims to analyze the role of women in the Wahid Foundation's Peace Village program and examine how the program empowers women as agents of peace and religious moderation. Employing a qualitative field research approach, the study was conducted in Candirenggo Village, Malang Regency, one of the Peace Village sites. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that women play strategic roles in strengthening religious moderation through three interconnected dimensions: enhancing social inclusion through economic empowerment, participating in early detection and response mechanisms for potential social conflicts, and contributing to conflict resolution and community peacebuilding. Through training, intergroup dialogue, and participation in local decision-making processes, women actively promote tolerance, social cohesion, and inclusive community relations. The findings also demonstrate that women's roles extend beyond traditional domestic responsibilities toward broader participation in social advocacy and local governance. The study supports the applicability of Role Theory in explaining how women negotiate social expectations and assume strategic roles as grassroots peace actors in multicultural settings. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of gender-inclusive community-based initiatives in strengthening social cohesion and preventing intolerance and violent extremism.*

**Keywords:** Grassroots Agency; Peacebuilding ; Peace Village; Religious Moderation; Women

### Abstrak

Penelitian tentang moderasi beragama dan pembangunan perdamaian di Indonesia selama ini lebih banyak berfokus pada ketahanan sosial, harmoni masyarakat, dan pencegahan konflik, sementara kajian mengenai agensi perempuan sebagai aktor akar rumput dalam membangun moderasi beragama di masyarakat multikultural masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran perempuan dalam Program Desa Damai Wahid Foundation serta mengkaji bagaimana program tersebut memberdayakan perempuan sebagai agen perdamaian dan moderasi beragama. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian lapangan yang dilakukan di Desa Candirenggo, Kabupaten Malang, sebagai salah satu lokasi Program Desa Damai. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang meliputi kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perempuan memiliki peran strategis dalam memperkuat moderasi beragama melalui tiga dimensi yang saling berkaitan, yaitu penguatan inklusi sosial melalui pemberdayaan ekonomi, keterlibatan dalam mekanisme deteksi dini dan respons terhadap potensi konflik sosial, serta partisipasi dalam resolusi konflik dan pembangunan perdamaian di tingkat komunitas. Melalui pelatihan, dialog antarkelompok, dan keterlibatan dalam proses pengambilan keputusan lokal, perempuan secara aktif mendorong tumbuhnya toleransi, kohesi sosial, dan relasi sosial yang inklusif. Temuan penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa peran perempuan tidak lagi terbatas pada ranah domestik, tetapi meluas ke bidang advokasi sosial dan tata kelola masyarakat. Penelitian ini memperkuat relevansi Teori Peran dalam menjelaskan bagaimana perempuan menegosiasikan ekspektasi sosial dan mengambil peran strategis sebagai agen perdamaian di masyarakat multikultural. Secara praktis, temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya inisiatif perdamaian berbasis komunitas yang inklusif gender dalam memperkuat kohesi sosial serta mencegah intoleransi dan ekstremisme berbasis kekerasan.

**Kata kunci:** Desa Damai; Moderasi Beragama Perempuan; Pembangunan Perdamaian; Agensi Akar Rumput.

## INTRODUCTION

Greater Malang represents a multicultural region characterized by the coexistence of diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural communities. While such diversity constitutes an important social asset, it also creates challenges for maintaining social cohesion and religious harmony, particularly amid the growing influence of radical narratives disseminated through digital platforms. The role of women as peacekeepers of religious moderation within such a plural context represents a significant area of study, both academically and practically. The importance of this research lies in the increasing penetration of radical propaganda leading to violent extremism through digital technology, which has contributed to the erosion of religious moderation values-the very foundation of social harmony in a diverse society. Recent studies emphasize that strengthening social resilience and social cohesion through community-based peace programs is essential in preventing intolerance and radicalism within multicultural societies (Faizin, N., Mustofa, B., & Rosyidah, 2021). In this context, women at the grassroots level play a strategic role in strengthening social cohesion, preventing religious conflict, and sustaining peaceful coexistence within diverse communities (Smeer, Z. B., Rosyidah, I., 2024).

In multicultural societies, women hold a central role in promoting the values of moderation-tolerance, justice, and respect for diversity-through education, family, and social interactions. Grele (1979) asserts that women tend to create peaceful environments rather than provoke conflict and are generally more inclined toward cooperation than domination. This perspective remains relevant in contemporary discussions on gender and peacebuilding, particularly regarding women's participation in community-based religious moderation movements in Indonesian plural societies (Smeer, Z. B., Rosyidah, I., 2024). Therefore, understanding the potential and contributions of women as peacekeepers of religious moderation in the multicultural society of Greater Malang becomes increasingly important.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of religious moderation and women's positions in peacebuilding. Siantari (2013) examined women's power in interreligious peacebuilding but did not specifically address their role in fostering religious moderation. Meanwhile, Luh and Putu (2020) explored women's potential in achieving religious moderation in Indonesia but focused more on women's character traits conducive to tolerance rather than on their practical contributions in community-based peacebuilding. Several studies have also discussed the Desa Damai program as a strategy for strengthening social resilience and preventing intolerance and radicalism in Malang Raya (Faizin, N., Mustofa, B., & Rosyidah, 2021). However, these studies mainly emphasize community resilience and social harmony without specifically analyzing women's agency as grassroots actors in constructing religious moderation within multicultural village communities. Furthermore, previous research in Candirenggo Village focused on multicultural harmonization through Gus Dur's values and social integration (Mustofa, B., & Fitrotulloh, 2022), but it did not specifically examine women's practical involvement in peacebuilding and religious moderation initiatives.

Although previous studies have examined women's participation in peacebuilding, religious moderation, and community resilience, limited attention has been paid to how women exercise agency as grassroots actors in constructing religious moderation within everyday multicultural settings. Furthermore, empirical evidence explaining the mechanisms through which community-based peace programs empower women to become agents of religious moderation remains scarce. This gap becomes particularly evident in the context of Peace Villages, where women are expected to play strategic roles in conflict prevention and social cohesion.

Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on women's practical roles within the Desa Damai (Peace Village) program in Candirenggo as grassroots agents of religious moderation. Unlike previous studies, this research specifically examines how women

actively construct peace, prevent conflict, and strengthen interreligious harmony through everyday social interactions in a multicultural society.

This study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it extends discussions on religious moderation by highlighting women's agency at the grassroots level rather than treating women merely as beneficiaries of peace programs. Second, it applies Role Theory to explain how women negotiate social expectations and transform their social positions into active roles in peacebuilding and religious moderation within multicultural communities.

Based on the background above, the research problems of this study are formulated as follows: (1) How do women in the Desa Damai program contribute to building religious moderation in the multicultural society of Candirenggo? (2) How does the Desa Damai program empower women as agents of peace and religious moderation?

The objectives of this study are: (1) To analyze the roles of women in the Desa Damai program in promoting religious moderation within the multicultural society of Candirenggo. (2) To examine the empowerment process of women as peace agents through the Desa Damai program in fostering social harmony and conflict prevention.

The study argues that integrating theoretical perspectives from social psychology and the sociology of religion offers deeper insights into the grassroots dynamics of religious moderation, particularly the role of women as peace agents in multicultural settings. Combining these perspectives provides a holistic understanding of how women influence the construction of religious moderation in heterogeneous societies. This interdisciplinary approach becomes important for explaining the relationship between women's social roles, community interaction patterns, social cohesion, and the strengthening of peaceful coexistence in plural societies (Faizin, N., Mustofa, B., & Rosyidah, 2021). Moreover, multicultural harmonization in Candirenggo Village has previously been associated with local cultural and religious values inspired by Gus Dur's principles of tolerance and inclusiveness (Mustofa, B., & Fitrotulloh, 2022).

Role Theory, as proposed by Santosa (2003), provides a lens for examining the multidimensional nature of social roles and interactions. Additionally, Muryono's (2021) concept of religious moderation offers valuable insight into Indonesia's parameters of moderation, which include national commitment, high tolerance toward diversity, rejection of radicalism and violence, and religious expression aligned with local culture. Through this scholarly inquiry, the paper aims to encourage readers to recognize and appreciate the contributions of women in promoting religious moderation within the context of Indonesia's religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Role Theory

Role Theory serves as the primary analytical framework in this study for understanding women's participation in grassroots peacebuilding and religious moderation. According to Soekanto (2009), a role represents the dynamic aspect of social status, reflected through the rights, obligations, and behavioral expectations attached to a particular social position. Social roles are continuously shaped through social interaction, cultural values, and institutional expectations, making them dynamic rather than fixed (Soekanto, 2009).

Suyanto (2007) explains that social roles may appear in various forms, including expected roles, actual roles, ascribed roles, achieved roles, key roles, and supplementary roles (Suyanto, B., & Narwoko, 2007). These categories illustrate that individuals often negotiate between normative expectations and social realities. In plural societies, such negotiation becomes particularly visible when women move beyond traditional domestic roles toward broader public engagement.

Santosa (2003) further argues that roles function not only as social positions but also as instruments of communication, participation, strategy, and conflict resolution (Santosa, A. H., 2003). Through these functions, individuals influence collective interaction and community decision-making processes. Within the Peace Village program, women's

roles extend from domestic responsibilities toward participation in peacebuilding, mediation, social advocacy, and community governance. Role Theory is therefore relevant to this study because it explains how women negotiate changing social expectations within patriarchal and multicultural social structures. The theory helps analyze how women in Peace Villages construct their identities as peace agents while navigating local cultural norms, gender relations, and community power dynamics (Soekanto, 2009).

### **Religious Moderation**

The concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) refers to a balanced and non-extreme religious attitude that promotes justice, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Ibn 'Ashur defines *wasathiyah* linguistically as a middle position between two extremes and terminologically as balanced religious values reflected through fair reasoning and ethical conduct (Asyur, 1984).

In Indonesia, religious moderation functions as an important framework for maintaining harmony within a plural society characterized by ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Muryono (2021) identifies four main indicators of religious moderation in the Indonesian context: national commitment, tolerance, anti-radicalism and non-violence, and accommodation toward local culture (Muryono, A., 2021). These indicators demonstrate that religious moderation is not limited to theological understanding, but also concerns social interaction, civic engagement, and peaceful coexistence in diverse communities.

The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs also emphasizes that religious moderation is reflected through balanced religious practice, respect for diversity, social responsibility, and civic commitment (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Accordingly, religious moderation can be understood not only as a religious principle but also as a social mechanism for preventing intolerance, radicalism, and identity-based conflict. Within this study, religious moderation is viewed as a social practice constructed through everyday interaction, dialogue, and community cooperation. This perspective is relevant for examining how women in the Peace Village program contribute to strengthening tolerance, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence at the grassroots level.

### **Women and Peace**

Studies on women and peacebuilding demonstrate that women possess significant social potential in strengthening social cohesion, mediation, and community resilience. Koentjaraningrat and Geertz observed that women in Indonesian society often occupy important positions within family and community networks, enabling them to influence social interaction and collective decision-making processes (Susilawati, 2018). Rogers similarly argued that women frequently exercise practical social influence in everyday community life, even when their authority is not formally institutionalized.

Research on women and peace further highlights women's relational and cooperative approaches in managing social conflict. Maimanah (2013) identifies several characteristics associated with women's peacebuilding roles, including altruism, empathy, affection, and active social engagement (Maimanah, 2013). These characteristics contribute to nurturing social environments and strengthening communal solidarity. Grele (1979) argues that women tend to prioritize cooperation and peaceful coexistence over domination and confrontation (Grele, 1979). Likewise, Prawitasari emphasizes that women possess important social capacities such as self-confidence, openness, adaptability, and assertiveness, which support their participation in social transformation and conflict resolution (Rahayu, L. R., & Lesmana, 2020).

Previous studies also demonstrate women's strategic contributions to peacebuilding and religious moderation. Siantari (2013) found that women actively contribute to interreligious peacebuilding despite facing structural and cultural barriers (Rihartono, 2013). Similarly, Rahayu and Lesmana (2020) argue that women possess strong potential in strengthening religious moderation and social harmony in Indonesia (Rahayu, L. R., & Lesmana, 2020).

Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study examines how women in the Peace Village program negotiate their social roles as grassroots peace agents in promoting religious moderation within plural communities.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach combined with field research to explore women's roles in building religious moderation through the Desa Damai (Peace Village) program in Candirenggo Village, Malang Regency. Qualitative research is understood as a series of procedures aimed at interpreting social phenomena within their natural setting and applying relevant theoretical perspectives to understand social realities comprehensively (Creswell, 1998). This approach was chosen because the study seeks to understand the experiences, roles, and social interactions of women as grassroots peace agents in a multicultural society.

The research was conducted in Candirenggo Village, Malang Regency, an area that has declared itself part of the Peace Village Program initiated by the Wahid Foundation. The village was selected purposively due to its multicultural social composition and its active involvement in promoting religious moderation and community-based peacebuilding. The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving women activists, community leaders, religious leaders, and members of the Desa Damai program. Secondary data were gathered from books, journal articles, official archives, program reports, and other relevant documents related to religious moderation, women's empowerment, and peacebuilding initiatives. Data collection techniques included participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to understand social interactions and community activities related to the implementation of religious moderation values. Interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, perspectives, and roles in maintaining peace and social harmony within the multicultural community.

For data analysis, this study applies the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes three stages: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing and verification (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014). Data condensation was conducted by selecting, simplifying, and categorizing data relevant to women's roles in promoting religious moderation. Data display was carried out through narrative descriptions and thematic organization to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying findings continuously throughout the research process to ensure consistency and validity.

In addition to the technical analysis process, this study also applies theoretical analysis using Role Theory proposed by Santosa (2003) and the concept of religious moderation formulated by Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia (2019) (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Role Theory is used to analyze women's social roles, interactions, and responsibilities as peace agents within the multicultural community. Meanwhile, the concept of religious moderation is employed to examine how values such as tolerance, anti-violence, national commitment, and accommodation toward local culture are practiced through the Desa Damai program. Through these theoretical perspectives, the study interprets how women construct social cohesion and contribute to sustaining peaceful coexistence in Candirenggo Village.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. This process was conducted to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Wahid Foundation's Peace Village Program

The Peace Village program (*Desa/Kelurahan Damai*) was initiated by the Wahid Foundation in 2017 as part of the Women's Participation for Inclusive Society (WISE) initiative. The program was designed as a community-based strategy to strengthen peace, tolerance, and social inclusion through the empowerment of grassroots communities, particularly women (Tim Penulis Wahid Foundation, 2019). Its implementation reflects a broader effort to address the increasing vulnerability of multicultural societies to intolerance, radicalism, and social fragmentation. The initiative also received recognition from UN Women for its contribution to strengthening women's participation in peacebuilding, social cohesion, and inclusive community development (UN Women Asia-Pacific, 2022).

By 2022, the Peace Village program had expanded into various regions in Indonesia, including West Java, Central Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, and South Kalimantan. The program also developed women-led collective economic initiatives aimed at strengthening social resilience and community participation through grassroots empowerment mechanisms (Wahid Foundation, 2018). In addition, the establishment of safe spaces and protection mechanisms for women and children further demonstrates that the Peace Village program functions not merely as a peace campaign, but as a community-based social empowerment model integrating gender participation, economic inclusion, and grassroots peacebuilding (Wahid Foundation, 2018).

The Peace Village framework is built upon nine core indicators introduced by Yenny Wahid in 2019, including promotion of tolerance and human rights, ethics of care, local wisdom, early detection systems, women's participation, accountable governance, and conflict response mechanisms based on positive peace principles (Tim Penulis Wahid Foundation, 2019). Conceptually, these indicators reflect the practical implementation of religious moderation values proposed by Muryono (2021), particularly tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation toward local culture. The inclusion of women in conflict prevention and decision-making processes also demonstrates the program's alignment with participatory peacebuilding approaches that emphasize community involvement in maintaining social harmony.

From the perspective of Role Theory, the Peace Village initiative creates new social spaces for women to perform broader public roles beyond domestic responsibilities. Women are not only positioned as beneficiaries of empowerment programs but also as active social actors involved in mediation, conflict prevention, social advocacy, and peace campaigns within village communities. This transformation illustrates Soekanto's (2009) concept that social roles are dynamic and shaped by changing social expectations and community needs. In this context, women's participation in Peace Villages represents a shift from traditional ascribed roles toward achieved and strategic roles in grassroots peacebuilding.

This finding complements previous studies that emphasized the role of Peace Villages in strengthening social resilience against intolerance and radicalism (Faizin, N., Mustofa, B., & Rosyidah, 2021). However, this study extends earlier research by demonstrating that the Peace Village program also functions as a gender-inclusive mechanism that institutionalizes women's participation within local peace governance. The program therefore contributes not only to conflict prevention but also to the reconstruction of women's social positions in multicultural societies.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the Peace Village program also reveals several challenges. Although women are formally included in local working groups and response teams, their participation is not always accompanied by equal authority in strategic decision-making processes. In several contexts, patriarchal social structures continue to influence the distribution of power within village governance, limiting women's substantive participation. This indicates that gender inclusion within peacebuilding programs still faces structural constraints despite progressive institutional frameworks.

Candirenggo Sub-district in Singosari District, Malang Regency, became the first Peace Village in Greater Malang in 2017. As a multicultural area characterized by religious and social diversity, Candirenggo represents an important setting for examining how women negotiate social roles, construct religious moderation, and participate in grassroots peacebuilding within everyday community life.

### **Strengthening Women's Resilience as Peacekeepers of Religious Moderation**

The Peace Village initiative reflects the humanitarian vision of Abdurrahman Wahid, which emphasizes multiculturalism, social justice, democracy, and respect for human rights as essential foundations for peaceful coexistence in Indonesia's plural society. Within this framework, religious moderation is understood not merely as a theological concept, but as a social practice aimed at maintaining harmony amid religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. The Peace Village program therefore represents a community-based strategy for strengthening inclusive citizenship and preventing intolerance at the grassroots level. This orientation is consistent with Indonesia's national policy on religious moderation as articulated in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024, which positions religious moderation as a strategic prerequisite for national development (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019).

The findings of this study indicate that women occupy a central position in strengthening religious moderation within multicultural communities. Women are not only perceived as recipients of empowerment programs but also as active agents who construct social harmony through daily interactions, community participation, and peace-oriented initiatives. This finding supports Role Theory proposed by Soekanto (2009), which argues that social roles are dynamic and continuously shaped by changing social expectations. In the context of the Peace Village program, women experience a transformation from primarily domestic actors into strategic social actors involved in mediation, conflict prevention, and grassroots peacebuilding.

The active involvement of women in Peace Villages also reflects the practical implementation of religious moderation indicators proposed by Muryono (2021), particularly tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation toward local culture. Women contribute to strengthening moderation not through formal ideological discourse alone, but through social practices that encourage empathy, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence among diverse community groups. In multicultural settings such as Candirenggo and Sidomulyo, women function as connectors between families, local communities, and village institutions, thereby reinforcing social cohesion and minimizing the potential for communal conflict.

This finding reinforces Grele's (1979) argument that women tend to prioritize cooperation and peaceful interaction over domination and confrontation. Women involved in the Peace Village program demonstrate these tendencies through persuasive communication, community assistance, and social solidarity activities. Their approaches to peacebuilding are characterized by emotional engagement and collective care, which strengthen trust and social resilience within diverse communities. In this regard, women's participation reflects what Maimanah (2013) identifies as maternal values of peace, including altruism, compassion, gentleness, and social responsibility.

The Wahid Foundation strengthens women's resilience through several interconnected strategies, including economic empowerment, leadership training, conflict resolution education, and early detection mechanisms for potential violence. These programs aim to build women's social capacity while increasing their participation in local governance and community decision-making processes. The findings demonstrate that economic empowerment is not merely intended to improve household welfare, but also functions as a mechanism for increasing women's bargaining positions and public participation within village structures. This finding complements previous studies by Faizin, Mustofa, and Rosyidah (2021), which highlighted the role of Peace Villages in strengthening social resilience against intolerance and radicalism. However, the present study extends

earlier research by specifically demonstrating how women's empowerment contributes to the construction of religious moderation through grassroots social practices.

Furthermore, the Peace Village program institutionalizes women's participation in community-based peace mechanisms through training programs focused on conflict prevention, early warning systems, and violence response. Women involved in local Peace Village Working Groups (Pokja) actively participate in identifying social tensions, facilitating communication among community members, and promoting inclusive peace narratives. This finding confirms previous research by Siantari (2013), which emphasized women's strategic role in interreligious peacebuilding. Nevertheless, this study offers a broader contribution by showing that women's roles extend beyond symbolic participation into practical involvement in community-level peace governance and social mediation.

At the same time, the findings also reveal several structural challenges in strengthening women's resilience as peacekeepers of religious moderation. Although women are formally encouraged to participate in local peace initiatives, patriarchal cultural structures continue to shape the boundaries of women's authority within village governance. In several cases, women's participation remains concentrated in social and humanitarian activities, while strategic decision-making processes are still largely dominated by men. This indicates that women's inclusion in peacebuilding programs does not automatically guarantee substantive equality in local power relations.

Another challenge concerns the sustainability of women-led peace initiatives. Many community empowerment activities remain dependent on external facilitation from organizations such as the Wahid Foundation. Although women's groups have developed strong community networks and social initiatives, maintaining these programs independently after external assistance decreases remains a significant challenge. This finding suggests that strengthening women's resilience requires not only participatory access but also long-term institutional support and structural transformation within local governance systems.

Despite these limitations, the findings demonstrate that women possess significant social potential in promoting religious moderation and sustaining multicultural harmony. Women's involvement in the Peace Village program illustrates that religious moderation is socially constructed through continuous interaction, grassroots participation, and inclusive community engagement. Their roles as peace agents therefore become essential in strengthening social cohesion, preventing intolerance, and fostering sustainable peace within Indonesia's plural society.

### **Women's Contribution as Peacekeepers of Religious Moderation**

#### **Women's Participation in Grassroots Peacebuilding and Religious Moderation**

The findings of this study demonstrate that women in the Peace Village program play strategic roles as grassroots actors in strengthening religious moderation and maintaining social harmony within multicultural communities. Their participation extends beyond symbolic involvement, as women actively engage in conflict prevention, community mediation, tolerance campaigns, and local peace initiatives through the *Rencana Aksi Desa (RADes) Damai dan Setara*. This involvement reflects Soekanto's (2009) concept of dynamic social roles, in which women's positions evolve from predominantly domestic roles into active participation in public peacebuilding and community governance.

Women's participation in Peace Villages also represents the practical implementation of religious moderation values proposed by Muryono (2021), particularly tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation toward local culture. In Candirenggo and other multicultural communities, religious moderation is not merely articulated through formal discourse but practiced through everyday social interactions facilitated by women. Women strengthen social cohesion by encouraging inclusive communication, maintaining interreligious relations, and fostering collective awareness regarding peaceful coexistence amid diversity.

The findings support previous studies emphasizing women's strategic role in peacebuilding and social harmony (Siantari, 2013; Luh & Putu, 2020). However, this study extends earlier research by demonstrating that women's participation in Peace Villages is institutionalized through community-based mechanisms such as local action plans, working groups, and early detection systems. Women therefore function not only as moral supporters of peace narratives but also as operational actors in grassroots conflict prevention and social mediation.

In addition, women actively participate in early warning and conflict prevention systems organized through Peace Village Working Groups (*Pokja Desa Damai*). They are involved in identifying social tensions, facilitating dialogue, and assisting vulnerable groups affected by violence and social conflict. This finding complements previous research by Faizin, Mustofa, and Rosyidah (2021), which highlighted the role of Peace Villages in strengthening social resilience against intolerance and radicalism. The present study further demonstrates that women's involvement in these mechanisms contributes significantly to strengthening community-based peace governance and local social resilience.

Nevertheless, the findings reveal that women's participation in grassroots peacebuilding remains shaped by patriarchal social structures. Although women are formally included in peace initiatives and village forums, strategic decision-making processes are still often dominated by male actors. In several cases, women's participation remains concentrated in social and humanitarian activities rather than broader policy formulation. This indicates that institutional inclusion does not automatically guarantee substantive gender equality within local governance practices.

### **Women's Role in Conflict Resolution and Protection Mechanisms**

The findings further indicate that women play important roles in conflict resolution and community protection mechanisms within Peace Villages. Women collaborate with village authorities, religious leaders, and community groups to mediate disputes, strengthen tolerance, and promote peaceful dialogue. Their approaches to conflict resolution are characterized by persuasive communication, emotional engagement, and social solidarity, reflecting Grele's (1979) argument that women tend to prioritize cooperation and peaceful interaction over confrontation and domination.

Women's involvement in conflict resolution contributes to strengthening local ownership of peacebuilding processes. Their participation enables broader community representation and encourages more inclusive approaches to understanding conflict roots and identifying sustainable solutions. In this regard, women function not only as mediators but also as social actors who reinforce trust and cooperation among diverse groups within multicultural communities.

Another important contribution involves the prevention of gender-based violence and the protection of women and children through community-based support systems such as Women Crisis Centers. Women participating in Peace Villages are trained in mediation, violence prevention, and gender justice approaches, enabling them to assist vulnerable groups and strengthen public awareness regarding social violence and discrimination. These initiatives demonstrate that religious moderation within Peace Villages is closely connected to broader efforts to promote social justice, human rights, and inclusive community relations.

This finding confirms previous studies regarding the importance of women's participation in sustaining peace and social harmony. However, the present study highlights that women's peacebuilding roles are not limited to moral or emotional capacities, but are also strengthened through institutional participation, leadership training, and grassroots organizational experience facilitated by the Peace Village program.

Despite these positive contributions, several challenges remain evident. Women's participation in local peace governance occasionally risks becoming symbolic representation rather than substantive influence, particularly when strategic authority remains concentrated among male village elites. Furthermore, many community-based protection

initiatives still depend heavily on external facilitation from organizations such as the Wahid Foundation, raising questions regarding long-term sustainability after external assistance decreases.

Overall, the findings indicate that women's contribution within the Peace Village program extends beyond symbolic participation in peace narratives. Women actively construct religious moderation through social interaction, conflict mediation, community advocacy, and protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups. Their involvement demonstrates that strengthening women's agency is essential for fostering sustainable peace, preventing intolerance, and reinforcing social cohesion within Indonesia's plural and multicultural society.

### **Structural Challenges and Limitations**

Although the Peace Village program has strengthened women's participation in grassroots peacebuilding and religious moderation, the findings reveal several structural challenges that affect the sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives. One of the main challenges concerns the persistence of patriarchal social structures within local communities. Despite women's increasing involvement in Peace Village activities, strategic decision-making processes in village governance are still frequently dominated by male actors. As a result, women's participation often remains procedural rather than fully substantive.

From the perspective of Role Theory, this condition reflects the tension between changing social expectations and entrenched cultural norms. According to Soekanto (2009), social roles are dynamic and continuously shaped through social interaction and cultural expectations. In the context of the Peace Village program, women are encouraged to adopt broader public roles as peace agents, mediators, and community facilitators. However, patriarchal cultural values in local communities continue to position women primarily within domestic and supportive roles, thereby limiting their authority in strategic policymaking and local governance processes.

This finding confirms previous studies on women and peacebuilding. Siantari (2013) argues that women's participation in interreligious peacebuilding often encounters structural barriers despite their formal inclusion in community programs. Similarly, Rahayu and Lesmana (2020) emphasize that women possess strong social potential in promoting tolerance and religious moderation, yet their participation frequently remains underutilized within public leadership and governance structures. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that women's inclusion in Peace Villages may still risk becoming symbolic participation when institutional authority remains concentrated among male village elites. This condition indicates a gap between normative gender-inclusive policies and the realities of local power relations.

Another challenge relates to the sustainability of community-based peace initiatives. Many women-led empowerment and protection programs remain dependent on external facilitation from the Wahid Foundation. Although women's groups in Peace Villages have demonstrated strong social engagement and organizational capacity, limited financial resources and institutional infrastructure create difficulties in maintaining programs independently over the long term. This finding suggests that grassroots peacebuilding requires not only participatory inclusion but also sustainable institutional support from local governments and public institutions.

The findings also reveal that religious moderation at the grassroots level is continuously negotiated through everyday social interactions shaped by political, economic, and cultural dynamics. Multicultural harmony within Peace Villages therefore should not be understood as a fixed social achievement, but rather as an ongoing social process vulnerable to social tensions and identity-based conflicts. In this regard, women's peacebuilding roles require continuous negotiation within complex social environments that are not always supportive of gender equality and inclusive participation.

In addition, the implementation of gender-inclusive peace policies occasionally risks becoming symbolic representation rather than substantive inclusion. Haryani and Saputro (2024) argue that women in peacebuilding initiatives are often formally acknowledged as agents of peace, yet their actual influence in strategic decision-making processes remains limited by structural and institutional barriers (Haryani, E., & Saputro, 2025). This tendency is also visible in several Peace Village activities, where women are actively involved in mediation, humanitarian activities, and social assistance, but possess limited authority in determining broader village policies related to conflict management and governance.

Despite these limitations, the Peace Village program has created important social spaces for strengthening women's agency in multicultural communities. The program contributes to expanding women's participation in peacebuilding, social advocacy, and religious moderation at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, sustainable peacebuilding requires continuous efforts to address structural inequalities, strengthen institutional support systems, and transform patriarchal social relations that continue to shape women's participation in local governance and community peace processes.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the Wahid Foundation's Peace Village program strengthens women's roles as grassroots actors in promoting religious moderation within multicultural communities. Women contribute to conflict prevention, social mediation, community advocacy, and the protection of vulnerable groups, thereby strengthening tolerance, dialogue, and social cohesion at the local level. The findings indicate a transformation of women's social roles from primarily domestic responsibilities toward broader participation in peacebuilding and local governance. Theoretically, this study contributes to Role Theory by demonstrating how women negotiate dynamic social roles within patriarchal and multicultural social structures. Practically, the study highlights the importance of women's involvement in community-based peace governance and conflict prevention mechanisms to strengthen resilience against intolerance and violent extremism.

However, the study also identifies structural challenges, including patriarchal norms, unequal power relations, and the dependence of local initiatives on external institutional support. Therefore, strengthening women's participation in peacebuilding requires not only formal inclusion but also broader structural support and institutional transformation. Future research is recommended to examine the sustainability of women-led peace initiatives and the role of young women in digital-based peacebuilding and religious moderation movements.

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