

MUHAMMADIYAH AS AN EMPOWERMENT AGENT: A PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *This study analyzes Muhammadiyah's role as an empowerment agent in developing women's potential in Indonesia. The issues examined include strategies for empowering women through organizational programs, supporting and inhibiting factors, and their impact on improving women's quality of life in the social, economic, and educational spheres. The research method used a qualitative approach with case studies. Data collection was carried out in libraries using journals and books as sources. The results show that Muhammadiyah, through Aisyiyah, implements empowerment programs covering education, health, economics, and da'wah, such as entrepreneurship training, skills education, and maternal and child health services. Supporting factors for success include a broad organizational network, a commitment to progressive Islamic ideology, and charitable support. Obstacles include limited access in remote areas and gender stereotypes. The conclusion of the study confirms that Muhammadiyah plays a significant role in women's empowerment with a holistic approach that integrates modern Islamic values with the practical needs of women, encouraging social transformation towards gender equality within the framework of Islamic values.*

Keywords: *Muhammadiyah, Women's Empowerment, Aisyiyah, Potential Development, Qualitative Research*

Introduction

Women's empowerment is one of the important indicators in measuring the progress of a nation (Program, 2020). In the Indonesian context, women's empowerment efforts are not only the responsibility of the government, but also involve various elements of civil society, including religious organizations (Child, 2019). Muhammadiyah as one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia has shown a strong commitment to the issue of women's empowerment since its inception (Nashir, 2010). Through the autonomous organization Aisyiyah which was established in 1917, Muhammadiyah has developed various strategic programs aimed at improving the quality of life of women in the fields of education, health, economy, and socio-religion (Sholihah, 2018).

The presence of Muhammadiyah as an empowerment agent is important considering that this organization has a wide network to remote areas and a solid mass base (Mu'ti & Burhani, 2019). The empowerment approach carried out by Muhammadiyah has its own uniqueness because it integrates modernist Islamic values with the practical needs of women in society (Syamsiyatun, 2007). Programs such as entrepreneurship training, skills education, maternal and child health services, and strengthening religious literacy have made a real contribution to

increasing the capacity and independence of Indonesian women (Rahmawati, 2020); (Wulandari & Hidayat, 2021)

However, in its implementation, women's empowerment by Muhammadiyah faces various challenges, both structural and cultural (Marcoes, 2012). Gender stereotypes that are still strong in society, limited access in remote areas, and internal organizational dynamics are factors that affect the effectiveness of empowerment programs (Nurmila, 2015) On the other hand, the support of resources from Muhammadiyah's charity, progressive ideological commitment based on Islamic teachings, and a structured network of organizations become strong social capital in encouraging the success of empowerment (Burhani, 2016); (Fuad, 2019)).

This article aims to analyze the role of Muhammadiyah as an empowerment agent in the perspective of developing women's potential. The discussion will focus on three main aspects: the empowerment strategies and programs developed by Muhammadiyah, the factors that support and hinder the implementation of the program, and the impact of empowerment on improving the quality of life and women's participation in society. Through this in-depth analysis of the role of Muhammadiyah, it is hoped that it can provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of women's empowerment in the context of Islamic religious organizations in Indonesia, as well as provide recommendations for the development of more effective and sustainable empowerment strategies in the future (Robinson, 2009)

Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive-analytical methods to understand the phenomenon of women's empowerment by Muhammadiyah in a social and organizational context (Creswell, 2014) The research data is sourced from secondary literature in the form of accredited academic journals and relevant books published in the last 10 years, with the possibility of using classical literature as a fundamental reference (Zed, 2014) The data collection technique uses library research through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Garuda Portal, with the keywords "Muhammadiyah", "women's empowerment", "Aisyiyah", and "Islamic organization" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)). The data collection process includes literature search, selection and classification based on relevance, in-depth reading, and systematic documentation.

Data analysis uses qualitative content analysis techniques with data reduction stages, presentation of data in the form of descriptive narratives, interpretation by relating findings from various sources, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014)). Data validity is ensured through source triangulation by comparing information from various literature and checking the credibility of sources (Patton, 2015).

Results and Discussion

a. Implementation of the Women's Empowerment Program by Muhammadiyah

Muhammadiyah through its women's autonomous organization, Aisyiyah, has implemented various empowerment programs that are comprehensive and touch on various dimensions of women's lives. These programs are systematically designed to increase women's capacity, independence, and participation in community development (Sholihah, 2018)). The implementation of this empowerment program includes four main areas that are integrated with each other: education, health, economy, and da'wah (Inayati et al., 2024).

b. Skills Education and Training Programs

The field of education has been the main focus of Muhammadiyah in empowering women since the beginning of the establishment of this organization. Aisyiyah has established

various educational institutions ranging from elementary to tertiary levels that specifically pay attention to women's education (Nashir, 2010). The educational program not only focuses on formal education, but also includes non-formal education through a variety of skills training that is relevant to the needs of women in the contemporary era. The skills training held covers various aspects such as sewing skills, cooking, handicrafts, information technology, and digital literacy (Aditya & Br, 2025). These programs are designed with the needs of the job market and the entrepreneurial potential that women can develop (Rahmawati, 2020). Through this education and training, women not only acquire theoretical knowledge, but also practical skills that can be directly applied in daily life and generate economic value.

In addition, Muhammadiyah also develops a religious literacy education program that provides a moderate and progressive understanding of Islam to women. This program is important to form women's critical awareness of the often gender-biased interpretation of religious teachings, so that women have a strong theological foundation to actively participate in various areas of life (Syamsiyatun, 2007).

c. Maternal and Child Health Program

The health program is one of Muhammadiyah's most significant contributions to women's empowerment. Aisiyiah has established various health facilities such as hospitals, maternity clinics, posyandu, and health centers spread across various regions of Indonesia (Wulandari & Hidayat, 2021). This health service not only focuses on curative aspects, but also preventive and promotive through health education programs. Maternal and child health services are a top priority, considering the high maternal and child mortality rate in Indonesia in the early period of the organization's development (Fatimah et al., 2025). Programs such as routine pregnancy check-ups, safe childbirth, immunization, child growth and development monitoring, and nutrition education have had a significant impact on reducing maternal and infant mortality rates in areas that are accessible by Muhammadiyah services (Sholihah, 2018). In addition to physical health services, Aisiyiah also develops reproductive health and family planning programs that educate women about their reproductive rights. These programs are important in the context of empowerment because they give women control over their own bodies and reproductive lives, which is a fundamental aspect of women's empowerment ((Nurmila, 2015)).

d. Economic Empowerment Program

Women's economic empowerment is the strategic focus of Muhammadiyah to increase women's financial independence. The entrepreneurship training program organized by Aisiyiah is designed to equip women with knowledge and skills in managing businesses, ranging from business opportunity identification, financial management, marketing, to business development ((Rahmawati, 2020)). Muhammadiyah also facilitates women's access to business capital through cooperatives and Islamic microfinance institutions managed by the organization. Access to this capital is very important because limited capital is often a major obstacle for women to start or grow their businesses (Izdihar & Widiastuti, 2019). In addition, Aisiyiah also builds a marketing network for products produced by women through various bazaar events, exhibitions, and digital platforms ((Wulandari & Hidayat, 2021)). This economic empowerment program not only has an impact on increasing family income, but also improves women's bargaining and decision-making positions in families and communities. Women who have their own income tend to be more confident and have greater opportunities to participate in various social and political activities ((Marcoes, 2012)).

e. Da'wah and Leadership Development Program

The da'wah program developed by Aisyiyah not only focuses on the spread of Islamic teachings, but also on the development of women's leadership in organizations and society. Through various activities such as recitations, seminars, religious discussions, and leadership training, women are empowered to become agents of change in their environment ((Syamsiyatun, 2007)). This program provides space for women to develop public speaking, organizational management, and leadership skills that have often been limited due to patriarchal gender constructions (Nasution et al., 2025). Women who are active in Muhammadiyah da'wah activities show increased confidence and ability to influence policies and decisions in organizations and society ((Nashir, 2010)).

f. Supporting Factors for the Success of Empowerment Programs

The success of Muhammadiyah in implementing women's empowerment programs is supported by several strategic factors that are the strength of the organization (Lubis et al., 2024). These factors interact with each other and strengthen the effectiveness of the empowerment program carried out.

g. Extensive and Structured Organizational Network

Muhammadiyah has a very wide network of organizations, spread throughout Indonesia to the level of branches and branches at the sub-district and village levels ((Mu'ti & Burhani, 2019)). A hierarchical but flexible organizational structure allows the implementation of empowerment programs to be carried out massively and coordinated. The existence of Central Leaders, Regional Leaders, Regional Leaders, and Branch and Branch Leaders ensures that empowerment programs can reach women at various levels of society (Siregar & Nurhakim, 2022). The network also facilitates the mobilization of resources, both human and financial, to support various empowerment programs. Aisyiyah cadres spread across different regions are the driving force behind empowerment programs at the grassroots level, who understand the local context and the specific needs of women in their regions ((Sholihah, 2018)).

h. Progressive Islam-Based Ideological Commitment

Muhammadiyah has a strong ideological foundation based on a moderate and progressive understanding of Islam. Since its inception, the founder of Muhammadiyah, KH Ahmad Dahlan, has shown his commitment to women's education and empowerment by establishing Aisyiyah as an autonomous women's organization ((Nashir, 2010)). Muhammadiyah's theological view that supports gender equality within the framework of Islamic teachings is a strong legitimacy for women's empowerment programs (Woodward, 2021). This ideological commitment is reflected in the various fatwas and decisions of the Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council that are progressive on gender issues, such as support for women's leadership, women's reproductive rights, and rejection of practices that are detrimental to women such as child marriage and domestic violence ((Burhani, 2016)). This strong theological foundation helped overcome resistance from conservative groups and gave women the confidence to actively participate in empowerment programs.

i. Muhammadiyah Charity Support

Muhammadiyah has various charitable businesses which include educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages, and various other economic enterprises. This charity is not only a source of funding for organizational programs, but also a forum for the implementation of women's empowerment programs ((Fuad, 2019)). Muhammadiyah hospitals and clinics became health

services as well as health education centers for women. Muhammadiyah schools and universities are places where women can access quality education. The financial support from this charity allows Muhammadiyah to carry out various empowerment programs in a sustainable manner without relying too much on external funding sources (Nurhidayah et al., 2025). This financial independence provides flexibility and flexibility for organizations to design and implement programs in accordance with the organization's vision and mission (Mu'ti & Burhani, 2019)).

j. Obstacles in the Implementation of Empowerment Programs

Despite its various strengths, the implementation of women's empowerment programs by Muhammadiyah also faces various obstacles that affect the effectiveness and reach of the program.

k. Restricted Access in Remote Areas

Although Muhammadiyah has a wide network, there are still limitations in reaching remote areas, especially in Eastern Indonesia and inland areas. Limited infrastructure, lack of adequate cadres, and lack of resources are obstacles in expanding the reach of empowerment programs ((Marcoes, 2012)). In remote areas, women often do not have access to education, health, and training facilities provided by Muhammadiyah. This limited access is also related to the geographical condition of Indonesia, which is an archipelagic country with a high level of population dispersion (Nasution et al., 2025). The operational costs of organizing programs in remote areas are often very high, while the number of participants that can be reached is relatively limited. This is a challenge in designing an efficient but inclusive empowerment strategy ((Nurmila, 2015)).

l. Gender Stereotypes That Are Still Strong

A significant cultural obstacle is the still strong gender stereotypes in society that limit women's space for movement. Although Muhammadiyah has a progressive view of the role of women, not all members of society, not even all members of Muhammadiyah itself, have the same understanding ((Syamsiyatun, 2007)). There is still a view that limits women's roles only to the domestic sphere and considers women's participation in public spaces as a deviation from religious and cultural norms. These gender stereotypes become psychological and social barriers for women to participate in empowerment programs. Many women face resistance from their families, especially husbands or parents, to attend training or engage in organizational activities. Social norms that require women to prioritize domestic roles also limit women's time and energy to engage in empowerment programs ((Marcoes, 2012)). In addition, gender stereotypes also affect the types of empowerment programs and approaches that are acceptable to society. Programs that are considered too "feminist" or challenge the patriarchal structure often receive resistance, so Muhammadiyah has to be careful in designing and communicating its programs so that they can be accepted by various segments of society ((Nurmila, 2015)).

Conclusion

Muhammadiyah through Aisyiyah has shown a significant role as an agent of women's empowerment in Indonesia by implementing comprehensive programs covering the fields of education, health, economy, and da'wah that integrate modernist Islamic values with the practical needs of women. The success of the program is supported by a wide network of organizations up to the grassroots level, progressive Islamic-based ideological commitments, and resource support from Muhammadiyah charities, despite the obstacles of limited access in remote areas and strong

gender stereotypes. Muhammadiyah's experience in promoting social transformation towards gender equality within the framework of Islamic values can serve as a model for other religious organizations, with recommendations to develop digital technology-based strategies, intensification of gender education programs, and follow-up research to evaluate the long-term impact of empowerment programs.

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