



Grassroots Initiative for Religious Moderation: Overcoming Radicalism in Rural

Isnaini*, Ana Aniati

Institut Agama Islam Ibrahimy, Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia

*naynee442@gmail.com

Received: February 2024; April 2024; June 2024

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.33852/jurnalnu.v8i1.554>

Abstract:

This research analyzes grassroots initiatives for religious moderation in overcoming radicalism in rural areas. This research uses a qualitative case study approach. Data collection techniques use interview observation and documentation. Data analysis techniques use data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The research results show that grassroots initiatives through moderate religious education, strengthening local wisdom, cooperation and collaboration, and cultural and social approaches have successfully built collective awareness about the importance of religious moderation. These programs encourage active community involvement in maintaining harmony and preventing the spread of radical ideology. The success of this initiative was also marked by increased tolerance and solidarity among village residents, as well as a significant reduction in incidents of religious-based violence. This research confirms that a bottom-up approach to religious moderation has great potential in building community resilience against radicalism, especially in rural areas, vulnerable to external influences.

Key Words: *Grassroots Initiatives, Religious Moderation, Radicalism in Rural Areas*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tentang inisiatif akar rumput untuk moderasi beragama dalam mengatasi radikalisme di pedesaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif Studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan observasi wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data menggunakan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa inisiatif akar rumput melalui pendidikan agama yang moderat, penguatan kearifan lokal, kerjasama dan kolaborasi, pendekatan kultural dan sosial telah berhasil membangun kesadaran kolektif tentang pentingnya moderasi beragama. Program-program ini mendorong keterlibatan aktif masyarakat dalam menjaga kerukunan dan mencegah penyebaran ideologi radikal. Keberhasilan inisiatif ini juga ditandai dengan peningkatan toleransi dan solidaritas antarwarga desa, serta penurunan signifikan dalam insiden kekerasan berbasis agama. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pendekatan dari bawah ke atas (bottom-up) dalam moderasi beragama memiliki potensi besar dalam membangun ketahanan masyarakat terhadap radikalisme, terutama di daerah pedesaan yang rentan terhadap pengaruh eksternal.

Kata Kunci: *Inisiatif Akar Rumput, Moderasi Agama, Radikalisme di Daerah Pedesaan*

INTRODUCTION

Grassroots initiatives are critical in promoting religious moderation and tackling radicalism in rural areas. This involves local communities and utilizes local wisdom to build awareness and tolerance. This is because local people better understand their area's social and cultural dynamics. Direct involvement of village residents also ensures that the moderation program is more acceptable and sustainable. Grassroots initiatives succeeded in reducing tensions and preventing the spread of radical ideology. Religious education and interfaith dialogue programs initiated by local community leaders can build a sense of mutual respect among village residents. Grassroots initiatives are an effective strategy for dealing with radicalism in rural areas. Religious moderation can be strengthened by empowering local communities and utilizing local wisdom, creating a more peaceful and harmonious environment (Muhaemin et al., 2023).

Radicalism in rural areas is an essential concern in grassroots initiatives for religious moderation because rural areas often have limited access to diverse and critical information. This condition makes rural communities vulnerable to radical narratives that can spread quickly through informal channels such as local Islamic studies or social media (Lesch et al., 2023). Grassroots initiatives involving communities directly and sustainably are highly effective in spreading the values of moderation and tolerance (Xie et al., 2023). By educating religious leaders, youth, and local communities, this initiative can instill a more inclusive understanding of religion and prevent the development of extreme ideologies (Tadros & Shutt, 2024). This step ensures that change comes from within the community, making it easier to accept and sustain, creating a safer and more peaceful environment in the countryside.

Several previous studies related to this research theme are divided into at least four categories, namely first, (Laksana, 2024) emphasizing that "The diversity of business charity units in the social and economic fields, which houses orphan/poor care institutions, zakat collection units (UPZ) or bait mal al-mukmin (BMA), and Islamic boarding school cooperatives reflects the moderation of diversity in overcoming radicalism from an early age." Second, (Siswadi, 2022) stated, "Radicalism movements emerged as a result of humanity and an attitude of tolerance that had faded as well as religious fanaticism that was too high." Third, (Safiri, 2021) said, "Strengthening the government's role in efforts to deradicalize Islam through Islamic boarding schools by strengthening Islamic educational institutions by supporting community empowerment programs to break the chain of movements. "This approach is considered more effective in the long term because it will minimize the space for the seeding of radical thinking while strengthening the social role of Islamic boarding schools in society". Moreover (Haq et al., 2023) state, "National insight includes a deep understanding of national identity, history, culture, and shared values, which can form the nation's foundation. The importance of strengthening national insight lies in strengthening the sense of belonging to the country and reducing

the potential for radicalization."

From these research findings, the novelty of this research lies in exploring the effectiveness of new strategies in grassroots initiatives for religious moderation, especially in rural contexts that are vulnerable to radicalization. The focus is on how local communities, drawing on existing resources and their local knowledge, can design and implement effective programs to promote religious tolerance and pluralism (Botelho et al., 2022). This research offers a new approach to understanding socio-religious dynamics in rural contexts by highlighting the active role of communities in shaping peace and social stability through bottom-up initiatives.

This research analyzes how grassroots initiatives for religious moderation overcome community radicalism in Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, and Banyuwangi Regency. The main focus of the research is understanding how these activities can reduce levels of radicalism by supporting interfaith dialogue, strengthening religious tolerance, and building a better understanding of religious plurality at the local level. In addition, this research also identifies factors that support this initiative's success and potential obstacles or challenges that may be faced in its implementation. Hopefully, this research can significantly contribute to our understanding of how community initiatives can play a role in reducing radicalism through religious moderation. By digging deeper into the local community's experiences and perceptions of this initiative, valuable lessons can be discovered that can be applied in Sumbersewu Village and in various other local contexts that face similar challenges. This research argues that efforts to overcome radicalism in rural areas must start from the grassroots by strengthening local communities and supporting initiatives encouraging tolerance and interfaith understanding. This can be done through approaches to religious education, local economic development, and promoting open and inclusive interfaith dialogue. In this way, it is hoped that rural communities can become more resistant to the influence of radicalism, maintain diversity in harmony, and become the front guard in tackling extremism, which can threaten their security and welfare.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to analyse how grassroots initiatives for religious moderation address radicalism in the Sumbersewu village community of Muncar, Banyuwangi district. This methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of the perspectives and subjective experiences of the involved parties. Sumbersewu Village was explicitly selected for its cultural and religious diversity, making it an ideal setting to study the social and spiritual dynamics at play. Moreover, the potential for radicalism in this area necessitates careful attention and appropriate strategies to combat the spread of extremist ideologies. The grassroots initiatives

within the village offer promising avenues for promoting religious moderation and fostering tolerance among various faith communities. By concentrating research efforts in Sumbersewu Village, this study aims to identify practical models for combating radicalism that could be replicated in similar regions, thereby contributing to developing community-based strategies for radicalism prevention in Indonesia.

Participants in this research were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which ensured that individuals with specific knowledge and expertise related to the research theme were included. The study involved eight participants, including the Village Head, Village Secretary, Head of Community Welfare, Head of Government, and leaders from Muslim and Hindu communities. This diverse selection was crucial for gathering accurate information on religious moderation and its effectiveness against radicalism. Participants were chosen based on criteria that ensured familiarity with the topic and representation from various stakeholder groups. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the dynamics surrounding grassroots initiatives for religious moderation in a rural context.

The interview technique utilized in this research was semi-structured, allowing for flexibility while adhering to a prepared guide. At the beginning of each session, the researchers introduced themselves and outlined the interview's focus. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded to enhance accuracy and thorough documentation. The recorded sessions and their transcriptions became valuable resources for analysis and interpretation. The questions posed were designed to elicit insights into how grassroots initiatives for religious moderation address radicalism within the Sumbersewu community. Following the interviews, participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, which was vital for building trust and facilitating open discussions.

Data analysis followed the qualitative framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), involving four key steps. The first step entailed establishing clear research objectives to understand the role of grassroots initiatives in mitigating radicalism within the Sumbersewu village community—initial data analysis involved collecting information through observations, interviews, and documentation. The second step consisted of data reduction. Key elements were summarized and aligned with the research theme, providing a clear view of radicalism in the context studied. The third step presented the data in a narrative format, while the final step focused on drawing conclusions based on the synthesized data. Validity was maintained through data triangulation and careful cross-referencing with existing theories and studies on radicalism, ensuring the consistency and accuracy of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that grassroots initiatives for religious moderation in overcoming radicalism in rural areas are as follows:

Moderate Religious Education

Moderate religious education is an indicator of overcoming radicalism in rural areas. This was conveyed by Wastono, Village Head, stating that;

"The condition of religious diversity in Sumbersewu village has quite high religious diversity. Here, there are followers of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and several other religions. Despite our diversity, we coexist peacefully. However, of course, there are challenges to maintaining this harmony. The biggest challenge is the emergence of radical ideas that can divide harmony. Some time ago, there were indications that the spread of teachings tends to be extreme, which is very worrying for us. Therefore, we feel it is important to strengthen moderate religious education."

Atok Suprpto, Village Secretary, added, "The efforts that the village has made to promote moderate religious education are that we collaborate with various parties, including schools, madrasas, and religious leaders. The programs we carry out include holding outreach/seminars on religious tolerance and moderation. We also hold interfaith activities such as discussions between people and joint social activities."

According to a Muslim community leader, Agus Hanif, "The community's response to the programs is very positive. Society is starting to understand the importance of tolerance and moderation better. Young people are also very enthusiastic about participating in these activities. We saw a significant shift in how they view diversity. However, there are challenges in ensuring program consistency and sustainability. There are sometimes obstacles to funding and participation, especially from more conservative groups. However, we continue striving to bridge these differences and find solutions. Moderate religious education can continue strengthening and becoming part of the village culture. We want all citizens, especially the younger generation, to understand the importance of peacefully living in diversity with mutual respect."

The informant's statement above shows that in Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency, efforts to overcome radicalism are highly prioritized by strengthening moderate religious education. Religious diversity is high but remains peaceful, but recognizes the challenges of radical ideology, which can disrupt harmony. With cooperation from various parties such as schools, madrasas, and religious leaders, they hold counseling, seminars, and interfaith activities to promote tolerance and moderation. The community's response was very positive, especially from the younger generation, who increasingly understand the importance of peacefully living in diversity with

mutual respect. However, the challenges of funding and participation from conservative groups are still a focus to be overcome for the consistency and sustainability of this program in village culture.

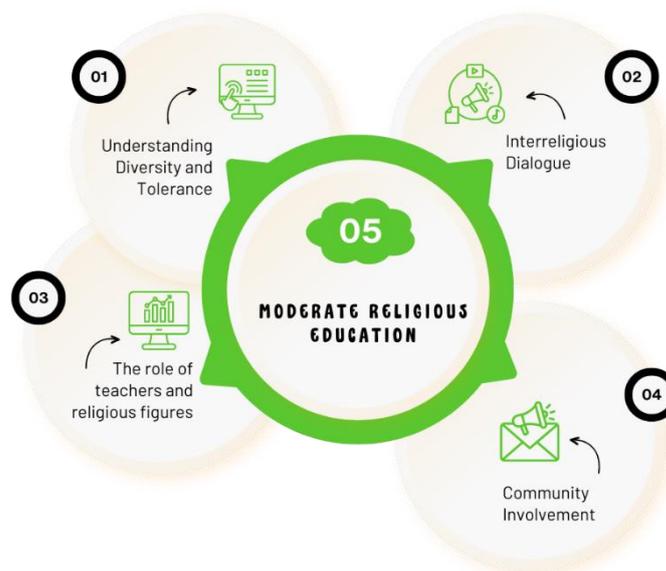


Figure 1. Moderate Religious Education

Figure 1. illustrates how Moderate Religious Education in Sumbersewu Village is developed through an understanding of diversity and tolerance, interfaith dialogue, the role of teachers and religious leaders, and community involvement (Jogezai et al., 2021; Hanafi et al., 2021; Oguro et al., 2023; Ademe, 2023; Gede Agung et al., 2024). This approach fosters harmony, reduces tensions, and promotes mutual understanding in a multicultural society (Zhai et al., 2024). Teachers and religious figures act as role models, promoting moderation and tolerance (Roy et al., 2020). while community participation in seminars and interfaith activities further strengthens inclusive values. These efforts aim to prevent radicalism and enhance social cohesion by teaching respect for differences, creating an inclusive environment, and developing a curriculum that emphasizes peace and tolerance (Mugo et al., 2024). Through these programs, Sumbersewu Village exemplifies the potential of moderate religious education in building resistance to radical ideologies and maintaining social harmony (Öcal & Gökarıksel, 2022; Krskova et al., 2024).

Strengthening Local Wisdom

Strengthening local wisdom is one form of overcoming radicalism in rural areas; as Ulfatun Ni'mah, Head of Community Welfare, explains,

"In Sumbersewu Village, radicalism is a serious challenge that can disturb the peace of our community. Even though it is not as big as in big cities, concerns about its spread cannot be ignored. One of the efforts made by the community or local government to overcome radicalism in

Sumbersewu Village is to actively promote the strengthening of local wisdom through various activities, such as group recitations that emphasize tolerance and moderate religious values. The village government has also established an interfaith dialogue forum to increase understanding between religious communities."

Miftahul Arifin, Head of Government Affairs, added, "Local wisdom in Sumbersewu Village, which can help in fighting radicalism, such as customs and religious traditions that prioritize harmony, is a strong basis for warding off radicalism. We teach that diversity is a gift and differences of opinion must be resolved peacefully." Meseri, as a Hindu community leader, expressed, "We as a people hope to continue to strengthen solidarity between residents and maintain harmony and peace in our village. We want our young generation to grow up with moderate religious values and high tolerance. Concern and active participation of all parties are needed in overcoming radicalism."

The informant's statement above shows that overcoming radicalism in Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, Banyangi Regency is the main focus for maintaining community peace and emphasizing the importance of strengthening local wisdom through joint recitations prioritizing tolerance and moderate religious values. The interfaith dialogue forum formed by the village government also increases understanding between religious communities. Supporting this view, the customs and religious traditions in Sumbersewu Village are a strong foundation for countering radicalism by teaching that diversity is a gift that must be maintained peacefully. The importance of solidarity and harmony in villages, as well as teaching the values of tolerance to the younger generation to prevent radicalism. Thus, active collaboration from all parties is the key to efforts to overcome radicalism in Sumbersewu Village.

Table 1. Strengthening Local Wisdom

Aspect	Description
Preserving Local Culture	Level of community participation in local cultural activities
Education and Extension	Implementation of multicultural education programs that respect cultural and religious diversity
Economic activity	Development of micro, small, and medium enterprises involving various community groups.

The Table 1 shows that strengthening local wisdom is built by preserving local culture, education, counseling, and economic activities. Local culture involves preserving the traditions, language, and cultural values unique to local communities (Bello-Bravo, 2023). By promoting local cultural heritage and history education, communities can understand and appreciate their cultural roots more deeply (Polkinghorne et al., 2024). Additionally, counseling is an essential means of spreading knowledge about local wisdom to the younger

generation and the broader community so that they can be actively involved in maintaining and developing this cultural heritage (Asprooth et al., 2023). In addition, economic activities based on local culture can strengthen identity and provide economic support for local communities. For example, developing local culture-based creative industries such as traditional handicrafts or culture-based tourism can generate sustainable income for local communities. Thus, integrating cultural preservation, education, counseling, and economic activities can create an environment that supports the sustainability of local wisdom and improves the welfare of society as a whole.

Local wisdom is essential in overcoming radicalism in Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, and Banyuwangi Regency. Local wisdom, such as traditions, cultural values, and social norms passed down from generation to generation, has great potential in building community resilience against the influence of radicalism. In Sumbersewu Village, local wisdom can be strengthened by preserving traditional culture, such as dance, music, and traditional rituals that teach the values of togetherness, tolerance, and mutual respect. Apart from that, community figures, such as elders and religious leaders, are crucial in spreading messages of peace and moderation. Through inclusive religious activities and education based on local culture, society can be equipped with a strong understanding of the importance of harmony and harmony (Hamidah & Duncik, 2024). This strengthening can also be supported by government programs and non-government organizations focusing on developing local capacity and community empowerment (Gede Agung et al., 2024). In this way, local wisdom is a tool for maintaining cultural identity and a solid fortress to ward off radical ideologies and maintain social stability in Sumbersewu Village.

Cooperation and Collaboration

Cooperation and Collaboration not only builds relationships between individuals but is also able to overcome radicalism as the results of an interview in Sumbersewu village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency, by Wastono as the Village Head said that

"In Sumbersewu village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency, cooperation between various elements of society is prioritized. We realize that radicalism is a serious threat, and only by working together can we face it. We hold various programs involving religious leaders, youth, and community organizations. We regularly hold inter-religious dialogue. Here, religious figures from various faiths discuss the importance of tolerance and mutual respect. We also hold training and seminars for youth about the dangers of radicalism and ways to prevent it. We involve many parties, including the police and local government."

Mifathul Arifin, Head of Government Affairs, stated, "The community's response to the programs in Sumbersewu village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency is very positive. The community realizes the importance of

maintaining village harmony and security. Community participation is relatively high in every activity we hold. The public is also increasingly understanding that radicalism can destroy the unity and peace that we have built so far. Moreover, it changes the mindset of a small portion of society influenced by radical ideology. It takes time and the right approach to educate them. Apart from that, increasingly easy access to information via the internet is also a challenge because much radical content can be accessed easily. With that in mind, we are designing a more comprehensive long-term program.

"This program includes character education in schools, community economic development to reduce poverty, and increasing the capacity of village officials in detecting and dealing with potential radicalism."

The informant's statement above shows that overcoming radicalism in Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency emphasized the importance of cooperation between various elements of society in overcoming radicalism. In this village, radicalism is considered a severe threat that can only be faced through cooperation. Various programs were held involving religious leaders, youth, and community organizations. One of the main activities is inter-religious dialogue, where religious leaders from various beliefs gather to discuss the importance of tolerance and mutual respect. Apart from that, training and seminars for youth about the dangers of radicalism and how to prevent it are also routinely carried out, involving the police and local government. The community response to these programs has been positive, with high participation in each activity. The community is increasingly aware of the importance of maintaining village harmony and security and understands that radicalism can destroy the unity and peace built. However, he also noted the challenges in changing the mindset of people influenced by radical ideology and the easy access to radical information via the internet. Therefore, Sumbersewu village is designing a comprehensive long-term program, including character education in schools, community economic development to reduce poverty, and increasing the capacity of village officials to detect and deal with potential radicalism.

Cooperation and collaboration in overcoming radicalism in Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, and Banyuwangi Regency involve various parties such as village government, community leaders, educational institutions, and youth organizations. The village government is leading in formulating policies and programs to prevent radicalism, such as holding outreach and workshops about the dangers of radicalism and the importance of tolerance (Markham, 2024). Community figures, including ulama and traditional leaders, provide a correct understanding of local religious and cultural teachings that uphold the values of peace and harmony (Yani et al., 2022). Educational institutions participate by including anti-radicalism material in the curriculum and holding extracurricular activities that support student character development. Youth organizations and

local communities are also active in holding discussions, skills training, and social activities that can build togetherness and reduce the potential for the emergence of radical ideas (Kranthi et al., 2024). Through this synergy, Sumbersewu Village is expected to create a conducive, safe, and harmonious environment free from the influence of radicalism.

Cultural and Social Approach

Interview results about Cultural and Social Affairs in Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency, as explained by Atok Suprpto Village Secretary, said that

"Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency is a fairly calm village, but like many other places, we have also faced issues of radicalism. Several years ago, several groups tried to spread radical ideas here. Initially, people were quite worried and anxious. We are seeing increased suspicious activity, and some residents show different *attitudes*. The village government immediately coordinated with the police and community leaders to handle this problem."

Ulfatun Ni'mah, Head of Community Welfare, added, "The approach used to overcome radicalism in Sumbersewu village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency is a cultural and social approach. First, we strengthen local cultural values that teach tolerance and *togetherness*. We hold various cultural activities such as village festivals, art performances, and cooperation activities that involve all levels of society."

According to Agus Hanif, a Muslim community leader, he stated that "The role of religious leaders and youth in overcoming radicalism is vital. We invite ulama and religious leaders to give lectures that emphasize the importance of tolerance and unity. We also involve youth in various positive activities such as sports, skills training, and group discussions. Youth are the front guard in maintaining peace in the village."

Wastono, as Village Head, stated, "Special efforts are being made to educate the public about the dangers of radicalism through various educational programs, such as seminars and workshops inviting security experts and sociologists. We also utilize social media and local media to disseminate correct information and prevent the spread of hoax news that could trigger radicalism. The results of the cultural and social approach are quite successful. Sumbersewu Village is now more conducive and safe. Society has become more alert and responsive to all forms of threats of radicalism. We also see an increase in harmony and togetherness between residents."

The informant's statement above shows that Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency, faced the issue of radicalism several years ago with a group trying to spread radical ideas there. This has caused concern and

anxiety among the public due to increased suspicious activity and changes in the attitudes of some residents. To deal with this problem, the village government immediately coordinated with the police and community leaders. The approach is cultural and social by strengthening local cultural values that teach tolerance and togetherness. Various cultural activities such as village festivals, art performances, and cooperation are held to involve all levels of society. Religious and youth leaders also play an important role by giving lectures emphasizing the importance of tolerance and unity and holding various positive activities such as sports, skills training, and group discussions. Public education about the dangers of radicalism is carried out through seminars and workshops, and information is disseminated through social media and local media to prevent hoax news. This cultural and social approach has proven successful because now Sumbersewu Village is more conducive and safe, with increased harmony and togetherness between residents and higher awareness of the threat of radicalism.



Figure 2. Cultural and Social Approach

Picture the above shows that cultural and social approaches are built through preserving local culture, positive social interactions, proactive community leaders and figures, multicultural education, and social entrepreneurship. Preserving local culture is critical in maintaining community identity and heritage by preserving traditions, language, arts, and customs (Hasan et al., 2022). Positive social interactions between community members strengthen social bonds and build a sense of togetherness, which ultimately encourages social solidarity and harmony (Fajri et al., 2021). Proactive leaders and community figures facilitate dialogue, advocate for common interests, and move society towards positive change. Multicultural education increases intercultural awareness and understanding, reduces prejudice, and promotes inclusivity (Basarkod et al., 2024). Meanwhile, social entrepreneurship provides innovative solutions to social and economic challenges, empowers communities,

and creates new, sustainable jobs and opportunities. These interrelated elements build a strong, harmonious, and sustainable society.

The cultural and social approach to overcoming radicalism in Sumbersewu Village, Muncar, Banyuwangi Regency, requires a deep understanding of the local community's cultural dynamics and social structure. A cultural approach can start by identifying and promoting local values that encourage tolerance and harmony, such as the traditions of cooperation and deliberation, which are still strong in the village (Baharun & Hasanah, 2023). Organizing cultural activities, such as festivals or arts events, that involve all levels of society can effectively strengthen social ties and foster a sense of togetherness (Hasanah et al., 2024). Meanwhile, a social approach can involve community empowerment through education and skills training. Holding discussions or seminars involving religious leaders, youth, and women's groups can open up space for dialogue and increase awareness about the dangers of radicalism. Apart from that, strengthening the role of the Family as the smallest social unit is also essential by providing moderate religious education and building good communication between family members (Elsayed, 2024). Through an integrated approach between cultural and social aspects, it is hoped that the Sumbersewu Village community can become more resilient to the influence of radicalism.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that grassroots initiatives for religious moderation in Sumbersewu Village have successfully reduced radicalism by strengthening moderate religious education, leveraging local wisdom, and employing social and cultural approaches. The key lesson learned is that a bottom-up approach involving all community elements proves effective in creating collective awareness of the importance of tolerance and harmony. These efforts have enhanced solidarity among villagers and significantly decreased incidents of religion-based violence. The contribution of this study lies in its renewal of perspectives on the role of local communities in addressing radicalism, demonstrating that cross-religious and cultural collaboration can be a powerful tool for maintaining social harmony.

However, this study has limitations that must be acknowledged. It is confined to a single village, which may not fully generalize to other areas with different social and cultural conditions. Additionally, the research primarily employs a qualitative case study approach, thus lacking consideration of gender, age, and other demographic variations. Therefore, further comprehensive research is necessary, such as employing broader survey methods that encompass various age groups and genders. This extended research could provide a more thorough and in-depth understanding, serving as a foundation for more effective and targeted policies in countering radicalism and enhancing religious moderation.

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