COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES THROUGH THE ROLE OF FEMALE PREACHERS IN KOAS COMMUNITIES IN THE AIR JOMAN DISTRICT

Eriza Ricki Rahmayani Lubis [a*)], Salamuddin[a)]

[a)] *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia*

[*)]*Corresponding Author: eriza0103193080@uinsu.ac.id*

Abstract. KOAS (Community of Akhwat Sholihah) is a Taklim assembly that functions as a community founded to nurture and propagate Islamic teachings. This empowerment initiative aims to not only develop the economic potential of the community but also enhance dignity, boost self-confidence, preserve local cultural values, and promote a return to divine values based on Islamic principles, referred to as divine values. The research conducted is descriptive in nature and employs qualitative techniques, utilizing data sources from interviews, photographs, and observations. The research findings are closely tied to the community empowerment strategy implemented by KOAS. This strategy involves providing intensive coaching within the community, cultivating a belief within the community that Islam offers solutions for life, and delivering sermons within the community.

Keywords: strategy; community empowerment; Islam

I. INTRODUCTION

In Latin, "strategia" or strategy is defined as the art used for planning to achieve goals. Initially, strategy was a method employed to facilitate and assist in problem-solving. Additionally, strategy represents concrete steps that can resolve problems **[1]**. According to Arianto **[2]**, Henry Mintzberg defines strategy with 5Ps as follows: strategy as a perspective, strategy as a position, strategy as a plan, strategy as a pattern of activities, and finally, strategy as "trickery" or secret tricks. Strategy as a perspective means that it shapes a mission, and this mission portrays a perspective on all activities. As a position, this strategy seeks choices for competition. Strategy as a plan involves determining learning performance objectives. Strategy as a pattern of activities forms a pattern, involving adjustments and feedback. Empowerment is a personal and social process carried out to liberate personal capabilities, creativity, freedom of action, and competence. Meanwhile, a community is a group of people living together in the same place with common goals and interests. Therefore, community empowerment is defined as an effort to enhance the well-being of a group or an individual to improve their dignity and quality of life by enhancing the community's capabilities, supporting sustainable development, and enhancing the quality of life of the community to be empowered **[3]**. It is hoped that community empowerment can help improve human resources' capabilities. Community empowerment aims to shape individuals and communities to become more independent. Independence can manifest as the ability to act, think, and the capability to solve problems and control their actions using their skills.

A. The Position of Women in Islam

Before the rise of Islam, the status of women was primarily seen as fulfilling the desires of men. Women were often considered incapable, and men were the sole protectors and providers. In the pre-Islamic Arab civilization, during a time when Islam had not yet emerged, female infants were sometimes buried alive due to the belief that they brought bad luck and misfortune. Women were consistently undervalued and demeaned. Then, Islam emerged, bringing the "Nur" or light to humanity, including women. In the perspective of Islam, women inherently hold a respected position. In Islam, men and women share equal qualities and are equal in status **[4]**.

Religious knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim, whether male or female. Therefore, religious knowledge holds a high position in the Quran, and it is no wonder that many scholars are highly esteemed in Islamic culture. The reverence for knowledge and the scholars who possess it is clearly stated in the Quran as follows. Allah SWT says:

$$\text{يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُواْ فِى ٱلْمَجَٰلِسِ فَٱفْسَحُواْ يَفْسَحِ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ ٱنشُزُواْ فَٱنشُزُواْ يَرْفَعِ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مِنكُمْ وَٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلْعِلْمَ دَرَجَٰتٍ وَٱللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ (١١)}$$

It Means: *"O you who have believed, when it is said to you, 'Make space [for others] in gatherings,' then make space; Allah will make space for you. And when it is said, 'Arise,' then arise; Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given*

knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do." (Quran, Al-Mujadila: 11).

Empowerment means giving power and strength to weaker groups who do not have enough strength to live independently, especially to meet their basic daily needs. The main goal of empowerment is to strengthen the community, especially those who are still weak. The success of community empowerment is not only determined by those who carry out the empowerment, but also by those who are willing to be empowered to change the situation and conditions for the better than before [5]. Empowerment is the translation of the word "pemberdayaan," and "empower" is the translation of "memberdayakan." In the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "empower" has two meanings: 1) to give power or authority, which means transferring rights or authority to others, and 2) to give ability or empowerment and capability.

In development, the primary responsibility is to make the community more self-reliant or strong. The true direction of development is to empower the community, focusing on true self-reliance. Strength is seen in terms of physical, economic, material, cooperation, institutions, shared commitment to applying empowerment principles, and intellectual strength. Community empowerment can be achieved through community involvement facilitated by empowerment actors. In community empowerment, the main target is the weak and those who do not have the strength or access to productive resources or who are marginalized in the development process. The ultimate goal of community empowerment is to empower the community to improve their family's standard of living and maximize the resources they have. There are three important aspects of community empowerment: 1) Enabling, creating an environment that allows the potential of the community to develop. 2) Empowering, strengthening the community's potential through concrete efforts related to providing various inputs and opening up opportunities to make the community more self-reliant and empowered. 3) Protecting, defending, and protecting the interests of the weak community [6].

Empowerment in the perspective of Islamic da'wah is called "tamkiin al-Dakwah," specifically the activities of calling, mobilizing, facilitating, reconciling, and caring for the community, both the rich (aghniya) and the poor (fuqoro wa al-masakiin), and strengthening each other with values of honesty, responsibility, justice, care, and compassion as taught by Islam to enhance the unity of the ummah (wahdat al-ummah) in social status differences and income poverty. In reality, in the process of community empowerment, it is not just about developing the economic potential of the community but also about developing their dignity and honor, increasing self-confidence, preserving local cultural values, and even in countries that adhere to theism, returning to divine values based on Islamic concepts called divine values [7]. Empowerment da'wah can be defined as follows: a) it is a form of da'wah movement that involves concrete actions aimed at bringing about change, particularly improving religious quality and social quality; b) the da'wah movement

is carried out in a professional manner within a healthy environment in a da'wah organization, employing modern management functions; c) the da'wah movement can take the form of mentoring and involve various parties in the community; d) Da'is in the empowerment da'wah movement act as facilitators and motivators; e) the primary target of empowerment da'wah is communities with vulnerable conditions; and f) the da'wah material related to community empowerment covers various aspects that are relevant to improving human life quality [8].

In Islam, community empowerment is not a foreign concept. In history, it was done by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when he ruled over a community with a weak economy. The concept of community empowerment encompasses three aspects: enhancing potential, development, and self-reliance. In the context of development, disadvantaged community groups can be developed in accordance with their cultural lifestyles. If they live in an agricultural culture, development should prioritize the agricultural sector, and so on for other sectors. Community empowerment will be more targeted when it is carried out in accordance with the cultural conditions of the empowered community. Enhancing potential is also an equally important aspect of community empowerment. In strengthening this potential, communities that are still powerless are given motivation regarding life skills. This can create a high level of optimism, which is an important factor for responsible communities. By maximizing the potential, they possess, communities become aware of the essential aspects they have, such as self-confidence, the ability to work to the fullest, and others. If this potential is maximized, then communities that were previously powerless can transform into more empowered communities.

Community empowerment is certainly inseparable from the aspect of self-reliance. This aspect is crucial for governments and any community aiming to achieve empowerment. Therefore, community empowerment should not only address the short-term issues faced by disadvantaged communities but also be implemented for the long term. After empowerment, disadvantaged groups or communities should not only transform into empowered ones, but we also need to ensure that they can become self-reliant by developing the strengths and abilities they already possess. Community self-reliance is a condition experienced by a community characterized by the ability to think, decide, and take appropriate actions in seeking solutions to the problems they face by utilizing their potential or abilities. This concept of empowerment is in line with Islam. Besides teaching obedience to God, Islam also instructs humans to care for one another and show compassion to fellow beings. In other words, community empowerment is an expression of the humanitarian values found in Islamic teachings. Empowerment is an ongoing process of change. Through empowerment, a transformation of the community towards a better life can be achieved [9]. The purpose of this research is to determine the community empowerment strategies carried out through the role of Female Da'is in KOAS (Community of Akhwat Sholihah).

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This article employs a field research approach using qualitative descriptive methods. The aim of this research is to elucidate and empirically analyze the empowerment strategies employed by Female Da'is in KOAS (Community of Akhwat Sholihah). The research method utilized is qualitative, with a multisite (field research) approach. In the qualitative descriptive research method, data sources include interviews, photographs, observations, and other relevant materials. Interviews serve as a data collection technique involving one-way verbal question-and-answer sessions, where questions are posed by the interviewer. The theoretical foundation for this qualitative research is normative. Interviews are a data collection technique used by researchers to conduct preliminary studies and gather information. Besides interviews, observation is also a widely used method in research.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Taklim assembly is a community-based Islamic study group known to play a significant role in community empowerment. These community-based Islamic study groups have a crucial role in community empowerment. The strategies for community empowerment through taklim assemblies vary, including spiritual, intellectual, social, and political empowerment [10]. Taklim assemblies also play a crucial role in shaping the community's personality [11]. According to Ife in 1995, there are three strategies for community empowerment, namely through planning, policy, politics, social action, and community development [12]. Taklim assemblies can also serve as a means to preserve Islamic educational values in society. Meanwhile, taklim assemblies can also be a tool for economic empowerment within the community [13]. KOAS (Community of Akhwat Sholihah) is a taklim assembly in the form of a community founded as a place to nurture and develop Islamic teachings. KOAS has been established in three regions: Tanjung Balai, Air Joman, and Kisaran. This was articulated by the founder and chairperson of the Community of Akhwat Sholihah, who stated: "The Community of Akhwat Sholihah was born when a group of thoughtful women felt concerned about the current condition of women, encompassing their social interactions, thoughts, religious understanding, customs, and more. Thus, this group of thoughtful women formed a women's community with the hope of educating or nurturing Muslim women to have a deep understanding of their religion and to adhere to Islamic law. The goal is for them to live in accordance with Islamic faith" [14].

A. Community Empowerment Strategies

There are three empowerment strategies in the practice of social change, namely traditional strategy, direct action, and transformation. First, the traditional strategy emphasizes the freedom to choose what is best in various situations. The freedom discussed in the traditional strategy is too general, making it too ambitious, but actual action will come from a powerful group of people (tending to be oligarchic). Second, direct action is the emergence of significant interests for change. This condition is triggered by the collective basic needs of the community, such as the need for reform to overcome multidimensional crises. Third, the transformation strategy in this strategy, empowerment is an educational process that emphasizes critical awareness to prioritize the values of mutualistic relationship solidarity. These three empowerment strategies in the dialectical philosophy approach occur as a recurring cycle, starting from thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The empowerment process is often carried out collectively. However, in field practice, empowerment strategies can also be implemented individually, although in essence, this strategy always involves collective elements.

There are three approaches to empowerment strategies: micro, mezzo, and macro. With these three strategies, they can serve as a reference for solving problems tailored to the community's capabilities. The following explains in more detail about the three approaches to empowerment strategies:
a) Micro-level empowerment involves working with individuals in the community through counseling, guidance, stress management, and crisis intervention. The primary goal is to guide and train individuals in addressing the tasks in their lives, making this level often referred to as the task-centered approach.
b) Mezzo-level empowerment involves working with a group of individuals within the community. Empowerment is conducted through group interventions, where training, education, and group dynamics are frequently used strategies to enhance the awareness, skills, and knowledge of the community group, enabling them to address the issues they face effectively.
c) Macro-level empowerment, also known as large-scale systemic strategy, is aimed at broader environmental systems, social planning, policy formulation, social action, campaigns, community organization, lobbying, and political management. Various strategies are employed in this form of empowerment. The systemic large-scale strategy views the community (clients) as individuals capable of understanding their own situations and choosing the appropriate action strategies [7].

The programs conducted in the KOAS taklim assembly are quite similar to those in other assemblies, which include:
1) Weekly regular study sessions.
2) Monthly study sessions, taklim assemblies, large-scale preaching events, discussions with prominent figures, and youth programs.

B. Obstacles in Implementing Community Empowerment Strategies by Female Da'is in KOAS

In community empowerment activities, achieving success and making an impact on empowerment are often hindered by various inhibiting factors. These inhibiting factors can act as barriers, preventing the planned strategies for community empowerment from being implemented effectively. As stated by the KOAS chairperson, regarding the

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hindering factors encountered when applying strategies for community empowerment, solutions are also provided for addressing them. "When we, the Da'is, implement strategies for community empowerment, there are inevitably several obstacles or challenges in realizing these strategies. Some of the inhibiting factors include: a) The community is accustomed to traditions and customs that contradict Islamic principles. The solution is to explain Sharia law to the community. b) The community has been exposed to non-Islamic ideologies, such as secularism (separation of religion from daily life). The solution is to promote Islamic thought and ideologies. c) The community tends to be intellectually lazy. The solution is to encourage critical thinking. d) The community perceives Islam merely as a religion, not a way of life. The solution is to clarify to the community that Islam encompasses both faith and Sharia, functioning as a problem-solving framework" **[14]**.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research are related to community empowerment strategies through the role of Da'is within KOAS. The strategies employed are as follows: First, conducting intensive community development through regular activities within the community. This includes organizing routine weekly and monthly studies for both teenagers and mothers. Second, shaping public opinion that Islam offers solutions for life. Third, engaging with the community by directly conveying comprehensive Islamic teachings, also known as engaging in direct outreach or missionary work. The programs conducted within KOAS (Komunitas Akhwat Sholihah) are quite similar to other Islamic gatherings or communities, involving regular weekly and monthly sessions such as study circles, large-scale religious gatherings, discussions with prominent figures, and youth retreats.

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