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  Fuad Thohari

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PESANTREN-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MOVEMENT:
A Case Study of BPPM Pesantren Maslakul Huda Kajen

Zubaedi
State College of Islamic Studies (STAIN), Bengkulu

Introduction

Pesantren has for a long time been known as a private Islamic institution able to carry out its educational mandate. Focused on ethic-religious matters, *pesantren* education is aimed at improving students' personality based on religious training (*diniyya tahdhibiyya*) with physical, intellectual as well as spiritual exercises (*khalqiyyah*).[1] Mostly established by local communities, *pesantren* can be considered as community-centred educational institution. It aims to provide young Muslims with better education and to enable them to understand better and commit to Islamic teachings. Its collective ways of life reflect communal spirit and rural community culture in which it finds its roots.[2] Its long establishment is inseparable from religious values, such as brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), co-operation (*ta'awun*), struggle (*jihad*), obedience, simplicity, independence, sincerity, it has perpetuated.

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[1] Muslih Usa dan Aden Wijdan, *Pendidikan Islam dalam Peradaban Industrial* (Yogyakarta: Aditya Media, 1997), p.12.

[2] M. Dawam Rahardjo, *Pesantren dan Pembaharuan* (Jakarta, LP3ES, 1988, Cet. IV), p. 9.

Pesantrens are community-based learning centres. It has carried out a style of self-management which is currently known as mass-based education management. In the course of time, *pesantrens* have been centres for Muslim community activities, ranging from learning religious matters, traditional self-defence arts, traditional medicine, and agricultural consultation. These make *pesantren* a unique institution, not only because of its long history, but also on account of its unique culture, learning methods and networks. The social network of a *pesantren* extends to its community as well as to other *pesantrens*. Most *pesantren* leaders are bound together by the ideas, religious ideology, and close kinship relation they share.[3]

With industrial modernisation, *pesantren* is compelled to respond to the prevailing social changes; these responses could have been moderate and extreme, exclusive and inclusive. Regardless of the fact that some consider the present era as an age of modern *jahiliyya*, many people endeavour to transform Islamic teachings into a culture which keeps doctrines and social norms contextual. In addition, *pesantren* should self-adjust and readjust to new changes and challenges which can be achieved through various programmes, such as the contextual study of *kitab kuning* ('yellow books', i.e. classical books), and the application of modern managements.[4]

In dealing with such changes, *pesantren* is compelled to contextualise without nullifying its basic characteristics as an educational, religious and social institution. It should overcome its weaknesses by applying people-based education management. To meet modern demands, all education institutions including *pesantren* should take into consideration their social basis.

Pesantren renewal should be undertaken to reaffirm its role as the agent of community development to the extent that its concrete contribution can be discerned. In this regard, *pesantren* should become a dynamic agent and a catalyst for rural community development not only in religious, but also in other social matters. *Pesantren*'s increasing interest in developing social programmes can generally be categorised into two: those programmes

[3] Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai* (Jakarta, LP3ES, 1982), p. 60.

[4] Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam, Tradisi dan Modernisasi Menuju Millenium Baru* (Jakarta: Logos Wcana Ilmu, 1999), p. 108.

organised and developed by internal members of *pesantren* and those developed in cooperation with other institutions.[5] In the process of developing social programmes for community, *pesantren* should be able to play its role as the centre of health consultation, appropriate technological development for villagers and social empowerment.

Pesantren-Based Community Empowerment Movement

Encouraged by the necessity to modernise the professionalism of *pesantren*, KH Muhammad Ahmad Sahal Mahfudh (Kiai Sahal), together with other members of Pesantren Maslakul Huda, has organised community empowering movements. These movements have been implemented in Kajen, Margoyoso, Pati and its surroundings. Kajen, where Kiai Sahal applied his ideas on social *fiqh*, is a small village in the northern parts of Central Java. It is about 66.660 ha (0, 65 km2), 4.710 ha of which are dry fields, the rest consisting of yard fields and settlement areas. The Western parts border with Dukuh Petakon and Desa Ngempak, the Southern parts with Desa Ngemplak Kidul, the Eastern parts with Desa Sekar Jalak and the Northern parts with Desa Waturoyo.

In the 1980s, Kajen suffered from poverty. The number of unemployed increased as result of lack of work opportunities, lack of capital for small industry, and uncertain income of low paid workers. Environmentally, Kajen suffered from water pollutants, the result of waste water disposal which contaminated water flowing along the Ngemplak River. Consequently, clean water was difficult to find. In addition, mosquito breeding threatened the population's health. Poverty also hampered the education of children, for example, the number of 10-15 years old school children who no longer went to schools increased significantly in RT VII Kajen, reaching 13 students (Tim Fasilitator, 1985: 5). The surrounding villages of Bulumanis Kidul, Cebolek, Semerak, Ngemplak Kidul, Soneyan, Waturoyo, Purwodadi, Purworejo, Pohijo, Ngawen, Pancur and Lengenharjo suffered from similar problems. People of Bulumanis Kidul, for instance, suffered from inadequate irrigation, low income, environment pollution caused by water waste disposal of tapioca, and low level of education.

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[5] Manfred Open dan Wolfgang Karcher, *Dinamika Pesantren* (Jakarta: P3M, 1988), pp. 92-93.

In short, Social and economic conditions of Kajen and of the surrounding villages at the time were still underdeveloped. Kyai Sahal was concerned about these conditions when he formulated his *fikih sosial*. He then endeavoured to implement it through community developments. In the eyes of Kiai Sahal and his colleagues, these conditions where to become the social focus of the *pesantren* in its attempts to establish programmes of community developments addressing the needs of the poor local population. Empowering agendas are part of the religious duties Muslims should conduct as part of the *amar makruf nahy munkar*, as is implied in Q. 2: 110.

Kiai Sahal is confident that *pesantren*, as a religious education institution, can play a significant role in the development of villages by implementing his *fikih sosial* ideas and keeping them relevant to particular concrete social programmes. *Pesantren* should be not only able to colour, but also to shape community better.[6] To put into practice his ideas, Kiai Sahal has carried out community development programmes through Badan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (Institute for Pesantren and Community Development, or BPPM). This endeavour has resulted in some changes in the values within the Pesantren Maslakul Huda. One of the manifestations of these changes is the increase in the understanding of and positive concern with Muslims' physical development as the actualisation of the role of *khalifat Allah*, something that has been ignored so far.

I assume that religious experiments have been undertaken to solve real problems of society or that a dialog has been initiated between religious texts (i.e., those of Islamic law or *fiqh*) and social contexts in which members of Pesantren Maslakul Huda live. This represents the extent to which *fiqh* was always implemented with a view to solve social problems, thus highlighting the relation between religious ideas and social praxis, between religious theories and concrete action. The dialogue between religious norms and social reality has contributed to changes in religious values the members of Pesantren Maslakul Huda hold. Gradual changes occur when the importance of the continuity of long rooted traditions is emphasized. Old positive values are kept, while new ones are creatively adopted. The new values have encouraged members of Pesantren Maslakul Huda to extend their scope of activities. The *pesantren* has not only conducted religious proselytising and education but also become a social institution which is able to respond to the pragmatic needs of the community.

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[6] Sahal Mahfudh, "Membangun Harus dari Bawah," *Prisma* 3 (Maret 1979), p. 46.

Community empowerment conducted by BPPM, Pesantren Maslakul Huda plays three important roles. Firstly, the *pesantren* seeks to emancipate people from underdevelopment and poverty. This is a subjective role aimed at helping poor people (*du'afa'*) to increase their awareness of the problems they face. Secondly, the *pesantren* encourages people to participate in the development process and to improve their self-empowerment motivation. In this regard, the *pesantren* needs to create conditions and opportunities which can enable them to identify their own problems and to formulate their own solutions. By doing so, they will become main actors in the development. Thirdly, the *pesantren* provides them with better education and thus creates knowledge. It is hoped that they will be able to integrate into their lives and community the results of their research and take the appropriate actions.

As a matter of fact, the *pesantren* has a high capability of developing its community. This is because *pesantren* exists between two worlds (rural and urban) and thus enables it to be a cultural broker. It can understand the real problems of the community more easily. With adequate scientific tools, the *pesantren* can formulate updated and fresh ideas on development and transfer them to its rural community. This capability is intensified by its contacts with the outside world as well as its intense interaction with the rural community. Thus, the *pesantren* becomes an institution where the local population can find ways to solve their problems.

In response to the needs of modernisation, the *pesantren* has to produce innovative activities consisting of at least four things.[7] Firstly, the *pesantren* needs to renew the educational curriculum by including general and vocational subjects. Secondly, it needs to renew its education methods, including its classical systems. Thirdly, it needs to renew its leadership and diversify its educational institution. Last but not least, it should intensify not only its educational but also its social and economic activities.

The *pesantren* has the ability to contribute to self-improvement and to the development of the communities in which it is located. In this regard, there are at least three strengths of the *pesantren*. Firstly, it can, with activities running 24 hours a day, play its roles, either as a religious, social or developmental institution in the most optimal and integrated way. Secondly, it has a strong social basis within rural communities that allows it to meet

[7] Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam, Tradisi dan Modernisasi*, p. 105.

the needs of the local population. Thus, it and its community partake in a mutual and symbiotic relationship and, as such, it is able to provide people-based education. This can be seen in its routine religious teaching (*pengajian*) programmes in which people surrounding the *pesantren* attend voluntarily. There is no doubt that this is a manifestation of people-based education implemented by the *pesantren*. Thirdly, the local population trusts it. Most parents send their children to it as they believe that it can provide better guidance for their children because it prioritizes religious education.[8]

So far, the *pesantren* has proven to be able to develop its own effectiveness at utilising available resources. It is an educational and teaching institution, social service provider and *amar makruf nahi munkar* institution. A great number of strengths of the *pesantren*, such as organising education, proselytising and providing social services,[9] are main 'capitals' which can be used to run community development programmes. Along with the demands of development, the renewal of the *pesantren* should be aimed at revitalizing its role as one of the major centres of community developments. It is hoped that the *pesantren* will provide an alternative for people-centred development and value oriented development.[10]

There are three factors that stimulate Pesantren Maslakul Huda to change and to extend its orientation and scope from being a merely a religious education institution to becoming also a social institution. The first factor is the leadership of its kyai, the support he gets from his colleagues, and the willingness of the members of the *pesantren* to participate in these changes. This is in line with the principle that there is no society that remains truly stagnant at any given point in times.[11] These changes caused by the conscious self-adjustment of individuals can be considered social change, cultural change, and socio-cultural adaptation and adjustment.[12] Theoretically, a number of determinant factors, such as internal tensions, modernisation demands, cultural contacts, scientific

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[8] Aziz Mashuri, *Kontribusi Pesantren terhadap perubahan sosial budaya masyarakat Indonesia*. Article accesed 29 Mei 2002 from Http://www. pesantrenonline.com /artikel / detailartikel.php3?artikel = 124.

[9] Manfred Open dan Wolfgang Karcher, *Dinamika Pesantren,* pp. 92-93.

[10] Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam, Tradisi dan Modernisasi,* p. 105.

[11] Soeryono Soekanto, *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar* (Jakarta: Rajagrafindo, 1999), p. 333.

[12] Astrid S Susanto-Sunarto, *Masyarakat Indonesia Memasuki Abad XXI* (Jakarta: Dirjen Dikti Depdikbud, 1998), p. 35. This is different from *ethnocide* which is a change caused by external factors such as government instruction.

development, and increasing inclusiveness and tolerance, have contributed to transforming values in developing communities.[13]

Changing processes within a particular social community may take place through three different phases. The first phase corresponds to the creation of new concepts and ideas which stem from ideals or needs of the community. The second phase begins when these concepts and ideas become widely shared among people. The third phase consists of the results or consequences within the social system on account of the community's acceptance or rejection of innovations. Social changes are manifested in attitudes, experiences, and perceptions, as well as in social structure.[14]Marx Weber and Ferdinand Tonnies considered change as a non linear evolutive process. Weber claims that social change is engendered not only by economic factors, but also by values and ideas.[15] Joachim Wach suggests that there is an integrated and mutually constitutive relation between religion and society. For Wach, religion has three aspects: the theoretical aspect which includes belief systems, the practical one which covers systems of norms, and the sociological one which concerns religiosity that shapes and maintains social relation.[16]

Sociologically, religion influences, in a positive way, cohesive social integration. It can also have destructive, dividing and negative aspects. Joachim Wach claims that sound cohesion intertwining social groups is greatly influenced by natural bound.[17] Every social function conducted in various ways to integrate social groups might be considered as an expression of loyalty to ultimate values and the function, therefore, takes its semi-religious meaning. Thus, calling upon individuals to be more devotional is an effective way to strengthen existing social bounds.

Kiai, santri, *pesantren* and Islamic teaching have formed, influenced and changed social structures, traditional institutions and environments. Clifford Geertz's thesis that kyai merely served as cultural brokers who had no political experiences and ability to lead modern society has been criticised by many scholars. Hirokoshi (1976), for example, stated that kyai

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[13] Soerjono Soekanto, *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar*, pp. 363-4.

[14] Sugihen, *Psikologi Pedesaan* (Jakarta: Rajagrafindo, 1997), p. 55.

[15] Eva Efzioni Halevy, *Social Change, The Advent and Maturation of Modern Society* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 22.

[16] Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 19-27.

[17] Ibid, p. 107.

often becomes decision makers who are able to mobilise villagers to put into place his initiatives.[18] The kyai plays a significant role in social changes, as he implements the religious principle: "maintaining the best of old traditions and adopting new and better ones". With this principle, *pesantren* tries to preserve social order and social continuity. Members of *pesantren* also feel the necessity to respect and maintain local traditions.[19] A *kyai* possesses two characteristics: he has a highly developed social sense and bases each of his decisions on the general consensus.

Based on the above assumptions, it is not exaggerated to say that *kiais*, such as Kiai Sahal, become important figures in the process of value changes within their own communities. They are able to produce new and fresh ideas that are widely influential on local, as well as national levels. These figures are popular, because they deal directly with concrete social and religious problems. This is in line with the theory that every changing process in history is, amongst other things, influenced by great individuals.[20] In social changes, two main groups are crucial: leaders and supporters. With his intellectual capability, a skilful *kiai* is able to deconstruct the conservative *pesantren* tradition. His ability lies in his critical thought which is often reflected in his partaking in *Bahtsul Masa'il*,[21] scholarly seminars, discussion forums, newspapers interviews and articles, his books and so on. He often proposes new ideas to respond to modern needs and challenges, of which we can mention professional *zakat* (religious taxes) management, sex industries and prostitution, ecological crises, and state and religion relation.[22] He may be regarded as an innovative and transformative *kiai*, if he is highly sensitive to these problems.

Kiai Sahal is one example of such individuals. He is highly sensitive to the aforementioned social problems. He has transformed the traditional individual oriented *fiqh* into a socio-religious oriented *fiqh*. Kiai Sahal has endeavoured to revitalise the *maslaha* (public interest) principles underlying

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[18] Hiroko Horikoshi, *Kiai dan Perubahan Sosial* (Jakarta: P3M, 1987), p. 242.

[19] Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1982), p. 44.

[20] Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Rekayasa Sosial* (Bandung: Rosdakarya, 1999), p. 48.

[21] *Bahtsul Masa'il* is a special division of the Nahdlatul Ulama which deals with the discussion of actual religious matters.

[22] Sumanto Al Qurthuby, *KHMA Sahal Mahfudh, Era Baru Fiqih Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Cermin, 1999), p. 15.

the production of legal fatwas.[23] He has also implemented *fiqh* values in response to concrete social problems, such as poverty, underdevelopment, lack of skills and capitals, and bad environment. In materialising his ideas, he has organised institutions of community development activities to realise the principle of public interests.

In John Dewey's terms, community development conducted by *pesantren* can be seen as part of real social actions for social reconstruction.[24] Dewey maintains that education plays a dual role: as individual and social developments, just like every one plays his or her role as an individual and as a member of a social group. Furthermore, for Dewey, the institution of education is the agent of social change. He suggests that the organisation of education should be based on needed experiences, education democracy, continual experience developments, and interaction between theory and practice. He views the school as a miniature model of social life. He also tries to interlink theories and the real practical needs of community.[25] From this perspective, community development programmes designed by *pesantren* can be seen as a significant factor that can influence the transformation of processes within communities.

Kiai Sahal' sensitivity in solving social problems seems inspired by al-Ghazali (d. 1111). This can be discerned from the fact that he frequently mentions characteristics of ulamas that al-Gazali has formulated. According to al-Ghazali, a ulama should have a social sensitivity and be able to comprehend the 'spirit of the era' for the sake of the *umma*'s interests in the world.[26] In this regard, a ulama should behave and make decisions based on *maslaha* (public interest). As *maslaha* changes over time, our treatment and policy are temporal and flexible .

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[23] In dealing with religious matters in his various publications, Kiai Sahal implicitly produced at least seventy two universal principles which are formulated based on the *maslaha*, through individual as well as social approaches. Among them are: in essence *fiqh* does not make difficulties; the need to focus on social devotion (*ibadah social*); *fiqh* fills social gaps; *fiqh* is committed to gender equality; dispensation to human endeavour; and prioritising public interests. Aziz Hakim Saerozy, "Mencermati Jalan Baru Fiqh: Perlunya Pembacaan Tradisi untuk Pembaharuan," dalam KH MA Sahal Mahfudh, *Wajah Baru Fiqh Pesantren* (Jakarta: Citra Pustaka, 2004), pp. xiii-xix.

[24] John de Santo, "Filsafat Pendidikan Dewey," *Basis*, Vol. xliv, No. 8 (August, 1995), p. 291.

[25] Frederick A. Olafson, "The School and Society: Reflection on John Dewey's Philosophy of Education" *New Studies in the Philosophy of John Dewey* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1981), pp.178-9.

[26] Sahal Mahfudh, "Aktualisasi Islam (Aswaja) dalam Pembangunan Masyarakat," a paper presented in a seminar on the development of human resources of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), held on January 16, 1986 in Palembang.

Fiqih Sosial as Spirit for Community Development

The rise of a community development movement does not exist in a vacuum. It has always gone hand in hand with the religious intellectual dynamics of Pesantren Maslakul Huda. This means that members of Pesantren Maslakul Huda based their actions on the pre-understanding of *fiqh* in social context or 'social *fiqh*'. *Fiqih sosial* proposed by Kiai Sahal Mahfudh in the context of the rise of community development in Pesantren Maslakul Hudal has become the axiological, epistemological and ontological basis for solving the real problems the community faced. Empowering community programmes as implementation of *fiqh sosial* become vehicle for socialisation of new values which have correlations with social and economic development of the community. The implementation of *fikih sosial* in the community empowerment initiated by Kiai Sahal and his colleagues extend to poor community to help then solve their problems. He believes that community empowerment activities covering agriculture, environment, farming, cooperative, and others are part and parcel of religious devotion (*'ibada*). Kiai Sahal and other members of the *pesantren* are fully aware that attempts to realise *fiqh* values within community development activities, as held by Badan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (BPPM) Pesantren Maslakul Huda, are very significant in solving the problems of poverty.

This community development movement based on *fikih sosial* adopts praxiological approaches: the integration of the dialectic between reflection and action, theory and practice, and *iman* (faith) and *amal* (deed). A praxiological approach is a three pronged process: action creating theory, theory creating action and action processed in education. It results in a theory which grows through the learning process, itself based on theory. The community development movements based on these three stages are based on problem analysis, hypothetic answering and action.

The social basis for the realisation, in praxis, of Sahal's ideas and programmes is BPPM of Pesantren Maslakul Huda. This local non-government organisation (NGO) gives greater priority to concrete socio-economic actions than to advocacy as generally referred to in conventional social theories.

In summary, programmes of community developments initiated by BPPM Pesantren Maslakul Huda have two main objectives. Firstly, they aim at generating quantitative and material changes within targeted communities. Such changes include the increase in the quality of life that

results of the development of pragmatic projects, including sanitation, increasing incomes, save-loan cooperatives and other micro-economy. Secondly, there have been qualitative, non-physical and mental changes of the targeted individuals. Such changes can be seen in these individuals' new ways of thinking, their increasing independence, transparency, innovation, entrepreneurship, and other creative skills.

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