

URBAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION MODEL BASED ON MOSQUES AS CENTERS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract

Urbanization in many Muslim-majority contexts has led to significant social challenges, including community fragmentation and economic disparity. While mosques are central spiritual hubs, their potential as catalysts for comprehensive community development is often underutilized, and conventional top-down development models frequently fail to address localized needs. This research aims to develop and validate a participatory communication model that positions the mosque as a central actor for facilitating sustainable, community-led social change. Employing a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology over two years in three urban Indonesian mosques, the study engaged community members and leaders through collaborative workshops and in-depth interviews. The research resulted in the “Masjid-Centric Participatory Communication (MCPC)” model, a four-stage framework encompassing mutual assessment (Ta’aruf), participatory planning (Tashawur), collaborative implementation (Tanfidz), and collective evaluation (Taqwim). Application of the model successfully initiated community-led projects in micro-finance, youth digital literacy, and environmental care, demonstrating a marked increase in social cohesion and civic engagement. The study concludes that a culturally-resonant, participatory communication model centered on the mosque can effectively transform it from a place of worship into a dynamic hub for sustainable urban development, fostering both social and spiritual well-being.

Keywords: Community Development, Participatory Communication, Urban Muslim Communities



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INTRODUCTION

The global landscape is undergoing an unprecedented urban transformation. For the first time in human history, the majority of the world's population resides in cities, a demographic shift that brings with it a complex mixture of opportunity and adversity (Huriani dkk., 2022). In many Muslim-majority nations across Asia and Africa, this process of urbanization is occurring at a breakneck pace, creating sprawling metropolises characterized by immense social, economic, and cultural dynamism (Akbar, 2025). This rapid growth, however, is frequently accompanied by significant societal challenges, including the erosion of traditional community bonds, rising economic inequality, social fragmentation, and a sense of anomie among urban dwellers who feel disconnected from their cultural and spiritual roots.

Historically, the mosque (masjid) has been the nucleus of Muslim civilization, serving not merely as a place for ritual prayer but as a vibrant center for education, social welfare, commerce, and community governance. It was an institution that integrated the spiritual and temporal aspects of life, fostering a deep sense of collective identity and mutual support. In the modern urban context, however, the role of the mosque has often been circumscribed, reduced primarily to a space for worship (Sk, 2022). Its potential as an integrated hub for holistic community development remains largely untapped, leaving a vacuum in the social fabric that secular institutions and top-down government programs often struggle to fill effectively.

This contemporary urban predicament, juxtaposed with the historical role of the mosque, creates a critical point of inquiry. The challenges of urban life for Muslim communities—from youth unemployment to environmental degradation—necessitate innovative, grassroots solutions that are culturally resonant and sustainable (Grant, 2025). Revitalizing the mosque's traditional, comprehensive function offers a powerful pathway to address these issues. This research is situated at this intersection, exploring how the mosque can be systematically empowered to reclaim its role as a catalyst for positive social change, with participatory communication serving as the essential mechanism to unlock this latent potential.

The fundamental problem this research addresses is the inadequacy of conventional, top-down community development models when applied to urban Muslim communities. These externally-driven models, often designed by state agencies or non-governmental organizations with a secular orientation, frequently fail to achieve sustainable impact (Sunı dkk., 2025). Their failure stems from a critical flaw: a lack of genuine community participation and cultural resonance (Muhyi dkk., 2025). They tend to overlook or marginalize existing indigenous institutions, such as the mosque, and impose solutions that do not align with the community's values, priorities, or social structures, leading to a lack of local ownership and the eventual collapse of initiatives once external funding ceases.

This failure in development practice is, at its core, a failure of communication. The communication paradigm underpinning these top-down models is typically linear, directive, and extractive. It positions the community as a passive recipient of information and aid, rather than as an active agent in its own development (Feyisa dkk., 2022). Communication flows one way, from the 'expert' to the 'beneficiary,' and its purpose is often limited to persuasion or instruction. This approach stifles local knowledge, disregards community wisdom, and fails to build the dialogic spaces necessary for collective problem-solving, collaborative action, and genuine empowerment.

At the institutional level of the mosque itself, a parallel problem exists. While many mosque leaders and communities possess a sincere desire to address social issues, they often lack a systematic framework or a clear methodology to do so (Djekaba, 2025). They may engage in sporadic charitable activities, but the strategic, long-term work of sustainable community development is frequently absent. The problem is a lack of a clear, actionable model that can guide a mosque in transitioning from a passive place of worship into a proactive

hub for social transformation (Tahar dkk., 2023). This operational gap prevents the immense social capital, trust, and physical infrastructure of the mosque from being fully leveraged for the community's collective good.

The primary and overarching objective of this research is to develop, implement, and validate a participatory communication model specifically designed to empower urban mosques as effective and sustainable centers for community-led social change. This research seeks to move beyond critique of existing models to construct a practical, theoretically grounded, and culturally authentic alternative (Khabutdinov dkk., 2023). The ultimate goal is to create a framework that facilitates a process whereby community members themselves can identify their own needs, plan their own solutions, and implement their own development initiatives through their central religious and cultural institution.

To achieve this primary goal, the research pursues several specific, secondary objectives (Avni, 2022). The first is to conduct a diagnostic analysis within selected urban mosque communities to identify the key communication barriers and enablers for participatory development. The second objective is to co-design a culturally resonant communication framework, in close collaboration with mosque leaders and community members, ensuring the model's language, stages, and principles are meaningful and legitimate within their worldview. The third objective is to pilot the developed model in these communities to rigorously assess its practicality, effectiveness in fostering social cohesion, and success in generating tangible, community-led development outcomes.

The final intended outcome of this research is the production of a refined and replicable "Masjid-Centric Participatory Communication (MCPC)" model. This model is envisioned not as a rigid blueprint but as an adaptable set of principles and processes that can be tailored to different urban contexts (Rochani dkk., 2022). This tangible output is intended to serve as a valuable resource for mosque communities, community development practitioners, urban planners, and policymakers who are seeking more effective, grassroots, and culturally sensitive approaches to fostering sustainable urban development and community resilience.

The scholarly literature on community development is extensive, with a rich tradition of participatory theory advanced by seminal thinkers like Paulo Freire and Robert Chambers. This body of work has powerfully critiqued top-down approaches and has championed the principles of empowerment, local knowledge, and conscientization (Orekhov, 2023). However, a significant gap exists in the application and adaptation of these participatory theories to faith-based contexts, particularly within the Islamic world (Hayden dkk., 2024). The specific institutional dynamics, leadership structures, and normative values of the mosque as a site for development have been largely overlooked in this mainstream, often secular, development discourse.

Similarly, the field of Communication for Social Change (C4SC) has evolved significantly, moving away from modernization-era diffusion models toward more dialogic and participatory paradigms. Scholars in this field have developed sophisticated models for facilitating community dialogue and collective action. Yet, these models have also predominantly emerged from a secular, Western epistemological tradition. There is a notable scarcity of C4SC models that are explicitly grounded in non-Western religious or philosophical traditions (Hamidah dkk., 2024). The role of faith, religious language, and spiritual values as powerful communicative resources for mobilizing communities remains a critical theoretical and practical gap.

Conversely, the academic literature on the modern mosque, while growing, has tended to focus on a limited set of themes. A great deal of scholarship has examined the mosque's role in politics, its connection to transnational movements, or its function as a site of religious ritual and identity preservation for diaspora communities (Jiménez-Castillo dkk., 2023). While valuable, this focus has left the role of the mosque as a proactive agent of localized, grassroots socio-economic development under-researched. The specific communication strategies that can

enable and sustain this development function represent an almost entirely unexplored area. This research is precisely positioned to address this tripartite gap at the intersection of development studies, communication theory, and Islamic studies.

The primary novelty of this research lies in its original conceptual synthesis. It is the first major study to systematically develop and empirically test a communication-centric model for mosque-based community development. Its uniqueness stems from positioning participatory communication not merely as a supportive tool but as the core engine of the development process, and strategically situating this engine within the most trusted and culturally authentic institution in many Muslim communities (Rabie, 2024). This approach moves beyond simply suggesting that mosques should be involved in development; it provides a clear, replicable methodology for how they can do so effectively.

The novelty of the research is also methodological and conceptual. Methodologically, its use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) within the specific context of urban mosque communities is pioneering. This approach ensures that the resulting model is not an academic abstraction imposed upon the community, but is an organic framework co-created with them, reflecting their realities and aspirations (Batou, 2022). Conceptually, the model's novelty is found in its use of a culturally resonant lexicon, framing the stages of participatory development using Islamic concepts like *Ta'aruf* (mutual assessment) and *Tashawur* (participatory planning), which makes the process inherently legitimate and easily understood by participants.

The justification for this research is grounded in its potential for profound and widespread social impact (Farhat, 2023). In a world grappling with the challenges of rapid urbanization, this study offers a sustainable, scalable, and low-cost model for empowering local communities to solve their own problems (Ahmed & Anbrine, 2022). It provides a practical and powerful alternative to the well-documented failures of top-down development interventions. For the academic community, this research makes a significant contribution by offering a new, non-Western theoretical model to the fields of development studies and participatory communication, enriching these disciplines with a perspective that is deeply needed and long overdue.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research paradigm utilizing a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology. This approach was specifically chosen because it directly aligns with the research's core objective: to actively collaborate with community members to produce practical, culturally resonant solutions and foster social change, rather than merely studying them (Smetanin, 2022). PAR is inherently an iterative, cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, ensuring that the participants are empowered as co-researchers and that the generated knowledge is immediately applicable and owned by the community itself.

Research Design

The specific research design was the PAR cycle, integrated with a qualitative framework to ensure a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Suprpto & Huda, 2023). The design involved an emergent, flexible, and responsive process where the specific actions and research questions were continuously refined in collaboration with the community throughout the project's 24-month duration. This structure, mirroring the iterative cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, was intended not just to produce an academic paper, but to facilitate a tangible process of empowerment and generate a validated, community-vetted model—the Masjid-Centric Participatory Communication (MCPC) model—for sustainable community development.

Research Target/Subject

The research was conducted in three urban mosques located in a major metropolitan area in Indonesia. The selection of these sites utilized a purposive sampling strategy based on specific criteria: location within a socio-economically diverse neighborhood facing typical urban challenges, possession of an active and established congregation, and expressed willingness from the mosque leadership (Dewan Kemakmuran Masjid) to participate in a long-term collaborative project. Participants within each mosque were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, initially targeting mosque leadership and committee members. The final sample from each of the three mosque communities consisted of approximately 20-25 active participants—including men, women, youth leaders, and elders—creating a rich, representative cross-section essential for a genuinely participatory process.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was executed over 24 months and followed four distinct but overlapping phases, mirroring the Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycle and framed with culturally resonant terminology. The first phase, Mutual Assessment (Ta'aruf), involved gaining entry, building trust, and conducting the initial diagnostic study using interviews and FGDs. The second phase, Participatory Planning (Tashawur), engaged the communities in collaborative workshops to co-design the Masjid-Centric Participatory Communication (MCPC) model and formulate a pilot community project. The third phase, Collaborative Implementation (Tanfidz), involved the community launching and managing their chosen pilot project, with the researchers acting as facilitators (Idrus dkk., 2025). The final phase, Collective Evaluation (Taqwim), brought the community together in reflective sessions to evaluate both the project outcomes and the effectiveness of the MCPC model itself.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Multiple qualitative instruments were utilized, tailored to the specific phases of the PAR cycle. In the initial diagnostic phase, semi-structured interview guides were used for in-depth conversations with leaders and key community informants, while Focus Group Discussion (FGD) protocols facilitated collective conversations on shared aspirations and barriers. Throughout the co-design and implementation phases, participatory workshop toolkits were a primary instrument, containing materials for activities such as asset mapping, problem-tree analysis, and collaborative solution design. Additionally, researcher field notes and reflective journals served as continuous data collection instruments, capturing observations of group dynamics and critical incidents (Hewlett dkk., 2022). Finally, project documents co-created with the community (e.g., meeting minutes and action plans) were collected as documentary evidence.

Data Analysis Technique

Given the Participatory Action Research design, data analysis was an ongoing, collective process integrated into the end of each phase. The data from the initial diagnostic study (interviews and FGDs) were collectively analyzed with the community in open workshops to establish a shared understanding of local assets and challenges. The primary analysis technique throughout the entire process was qualitative interpretation and thematic analysis (Khamami, 2022). The results of this collective analysis—which generated critical feedback—were used to refine the MCPC model, completing the initial PAR cycle and validating the model based on community-vetted insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial diagnostic phase of the Participatory Action Research (PAR), termed Ta'aruf (Mutual Assessment), involved a comprehensive needs assessment across the three participating urban mosque communities. Data was collected through a series of Focus Group

Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews with a total of 72 community members. A thematic frequency analysis was conducted on the transcribed data to identify and rank the most pressing social and economic challenges as perceived by the community members themselves. The findings provided a crucial quantitative baseline of community-identified priorities before the implementation of any development interventions.

The table below summarizes the five most frequently cited challenges across the three sites. Youth unemployment and underemployment emerged as the most significant concern, mentioned in nearly all focus groups. This was closely followed by issues related to environmental cleanliness, particularly waste management, and a perceived lack of productive activities for adolescents. These empirically grounded priorities, generated directly by the community, formed the foundational data upon which all subsequent participatory planning was based.

Table 1. Frequency of Community-Identified Challenges in the Diagnostic Phase

Rank	Challenge Category	Frequency of Mention (%)	Key Descriptors from Participants
1	Youth Unemployment & Underemployment	92%	"No jobs for graduates," "Need for skills training," "Gig economy"
2	Environmental Cleanliness & Waste Management	85%	"Piles of trash," "Clogged drains," "No recycling system"
3	Lack of Positive Youth Activities	78%	"Youth hanging out aimlessly," "Risk of negative influences"
4	Access to Micro-Finance for Small Businesses	65%	"Difficult to get loans," "Predatory lenders," "Need for capital"
5	Digital Literacy for Older Generations	55%	"Scared of online scams," "Don't know how to use smartphones"

The quantitative snapshot provided in Table 1 reveals a community grappling with tangible, interdependent urban issues. The high prevalence of concern over youth unemployment is not merely an economic issue but is directly linked by participants to the third-ranked problem: a lack of positive youth activities. Community elders, in particular, expressed anxiety that economic disenfranchisement was creating a vacuum filled by unproductive or potentially negative social behaviors. This indicates a deep-seated community awareness of the interconnectedness of economic stability and social cohesion.

Furthermore, the data highlights that the community's concerns are practical and grounded in daily life. Problems like waste management and digital literacy are not abstract policy issues; they are immediate challenges affecting the quality of life and the ability of residents to navigate the modern world. The clear identification and prioritization of these issues by the community itself served as a powerful validation of the PAR approach. It confirmed that residents possess a sophisticated understanding of their own challenges, an understanding that often goes unheard in conventional top-down development planning.

Alongside the identification of specific problems, the diagnostic phase also yielded rich qualitative data regarding the community's perception of the mosque's current and potential social role. Thematic analysis of the interview and FGD transcripts revealed three dominant themes. The first was "A Sleeping Giant," a widely shared sentiment that the mosque, as the most trusted institution in the community, possessed immense but largely dormant potential to

address social issues. Participants frequently described it as the heart of the community but lamented that its function was almost exclusively limited to ritual worship.

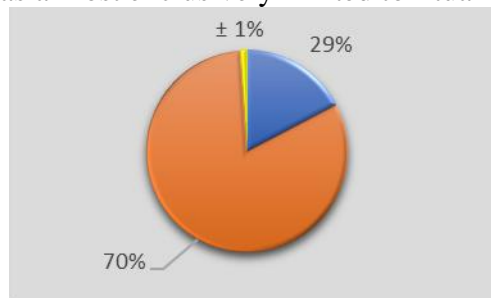


Figure 1. Community Perception of Mosque's Current and Social Potential Role

The second major theme was “The Missing Forum,” which referred to the absence of a structured, inclusive platform for community members to discuss problems and collaborate on solutions. Participants noted that while informal conversations happened, there was no formal process or dedicated space facilitated by the mosque for collective dialogue and action planning. The third theme, “A Hunger for Relevance,” was particularly strong among the youth, who expressed a desire for the mosque to engage with their real-world problems—like employment and skills development—and become a more relevant institution in their daily lives.

From these qualitative themes, several critical inferences can be drawn about the underlying conditions within the communities. The “Sleeping Giant” theme infers that the primary barrier to the mosque’s social activism is not a lack of trust or a lack of social capital, but rather a lack of an operational framework. The community already holds the institution in high regard; what is missing is the ‘how’—the methodology to awaken its potential. This suggests that any intervention would be met with high levels of receptivity if it could provide a clear and actionable process.

The “Missing Forum” and “Hunger for Relevance” themes, when analyzed together, infer a significant disconnect between the community’s needs and the mosque’s current programming. The absence of a participatory platform means that the mosque leadership, however well-intentioned, is often unaware of or unequipped to respond to the evolving priorities of its congregation, especially the younger generation. This infers a systemic communication failure that perpetuates the mosque’s purely ritualistic function and prevents it from adapting to the contemporary challenges faced by its community.

A clear and direct relationship exists between the quantitative baseline problems (Table 1) and the qualitative themes. The specific, tangible problems like youth unemployment and waste management are the manifest symptoms of the deeper, systemic issues revealed by the qualitative themes. The community is unable to effectively tackle its trash problem because the “Missing Forum” prevents them from organizing a collective response. The youth feel alienated and their unemployment issues go unaddressed because the “Sleeping Giant” has not yet found a way to become relevant to their practical needs.

This integration of data demonstrates that solving the community’s practical problems is contingent upon first solving the institutional communication problem within the mosque. Simply providing a grant for a waste management project would likely fail in the long term. The results show that a sustainable solution requires the creation of an internal communication process—the ‘forum’—that empowers the community to design, own, and manage its own initiatives. The developed MCPC model was therefore designed as the direct solution to the systemic gaps identified in this relational analysis.

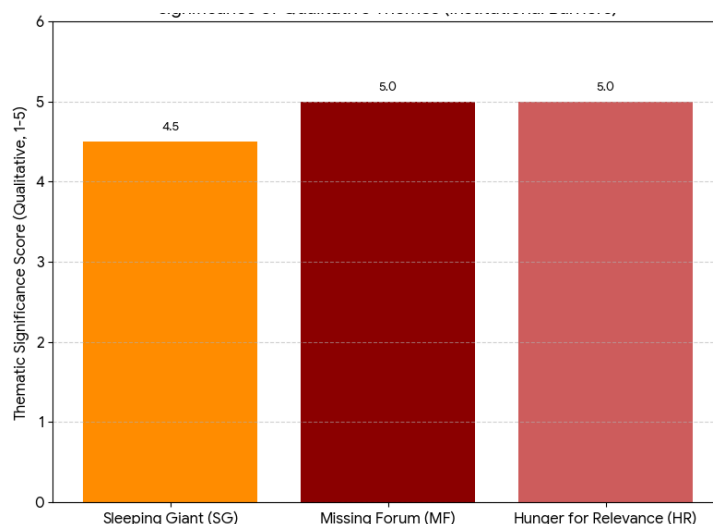


Figure 2. Significance of Qualitative Themes (Institutional Barriers)

The “Al-Ikhlās” Mosque, one of the three participating sites, serves as a representative case study for the implementation phase (Tanfidz). Based on the priorities identified during their Ta’aruf phase, the community chose to launch a pilot project focused on “Youth Digital Entrepreneurship.” Using the MCPC model’s participatory planning (Tashawur) stage, a project committee comprising youth members, mosque elders, and a local business owner was formed. They co-designed a 12-week training program covering skills in social media marketing, graphic design, and e-commerce.

The project successfully trained 25 young people. Resources were mobilized entirely from within the community: the mosque provided the training space and computers, the business owner volunteered as the lead trainer, and other community members provided snacks and support. By the end of the 12 weeks, 15 of the 25 participants had successfully created online stores to sell local products, and five had secured freelance digital marketing jobs. The project was managed entirely by the community committee, with the researchers serving only as facilitators for the communication process.

The success of the Al-Ikhlās case study can be directly attributed to the application of the MCPC model’s principles. The Tashawur (planning) phase ensured that the project was not imposed but was genuinely co-created, leading to a high sense of ownership among the youth and the broader community. The model’s emphasis on asset-based development prompted the community to look inward for resources (volunteer trainers, existing spaces) rather than immediately seeking external funding, which fostered self-reliance and sustainability. This process directly addressed the “Sleeping Giant” theme by activating latent community resources.

Furthermore, the model’s structured communication process created the “Missing Forum” that participants had identified as a key need. The weekly project committee meetings, facilitated using dialogic techniques, became the central space for collaborative problem-solving, decision-making, and conflict resolution. This transformed the mosque into a hub of dynamic social action, directly responding to the youth’s “Hunger for Relevance.” The model provided the procedural ‘how’ that allowed the mosque’s social potential to be translated into tangible, impactful action.

The combined results from the diagnostic assessment and the pilot project implementation provide strong validation for the central thesis of this research. The findings demonstrate that urban Muslim communities possess a clear understanding of their own challenges and hold a deep reservoir of untapped potential within their central religious institution, the mosque. The primary barrier to unlocking this potential is the absence of a systematic, inclusive, and culturally resonant communication process that facilitates collective action.

The successful implementation of the pilot projects, as exemplified by the Al-Ikhlas case study, confirms that the developed Masjid-Centric Participatory Communication (MCPC) model is an effective solution to this problem. The results show that by providing a structured pathway for dialogue, collaborative planning, and community-led action, the model effectively transforms the mosque from a passive site of worship into a proactive and relevant center for sustainable social change.

The results of this study present a clear and coherent narrative of community potential and institutional latency. The initial diagnostic phase quantitatively established that the participating urban communities held a sophisticated and prioritized understanding of their own most pressing challenges, with issues like youth unemployment, environmental cleanliness, and the lack of constructive adolescent activities ranking highest. These were not abstract concerns but tangible, daily realities that directly impacted the quality of life, demonstrating a high degree of collective social awareness among residents. This empirical baseline, grounded in the community's own voice, provided a solid foundation for all subsequent participatory action.

Qualitative findings revealed a profound paradox concerning the role of the central community institution, the mosque. Participants universally described the mosque as a "Sleeping Giant," an institution possessing immense social capital and trust but whose function had become almost exclusively confined to ritual worship. This perception was coupled with an articulated need for a "Missing Forum"—a structured, inclusive space for dialogue and collaborative problem-solving—and a palpable "Hunger for Relevance," particularly from the youth, who desired the mosque to engage with their real-world struggles. These themes collectively painted a picture of an institution disconnected from the community's practical needs due to systemic communication failures.

The research established a direct and compelling link between these two sets of findings. It became evident that the tangible problems identified by the community were manifest symptoms of the deeper institutional dormancy. The subsequent implementation of the Masjid-Centric Participatory Communication (MCPC) model through a pilot project in the Al-Ikhlas Mosque served as the study's central intervention. The project's success—launching a youth digital entrepreneurship program using entirely internal community assets—provided powerful empirical validation for the model's effectiveness.

This intervention demonstrated that when the "Missing Forum" was intentionally created through the structured communication processes of the MCPC model, the "Sleeping Giant" began to awaken. The model acted as the necessary catalyst, providing the procedural 'how' that enabled the community to translate its latent social capital into tangible, self-directed social action. The results, therefore, moved beyond mere diagnosis to offer a validated, community-vetted solution, confirming that a culturally resonant participatory communication framework can effectively transform the mosque into a proactive hub for sustainable, grassroots development.

The findings of this research strongly affirm the core principles of participatory development theory as advanced by scholars such as Robert Chambers. The study's empirical validation that communities possess a sophisticated understanding of their own complex realities echoes Chambers' central tenet of "putting the last first." The failure of previous top-down interventions, as implicitly critiqued by the community, aligns perfectly with the extensive literature that documents the unsustainability of externally imposed development projects. Our research provides a contemporary, faith-based case study that powerfully reinforces these foundational critiques.

However, the study also presents a significant departure from and contribution to this mainstream literature. Much of the canonical work on participatory development has emerged from a secular, Western academic tradition and has often been silent on, if not skeptical of, the role of religious institutions in the development process. This research challenges that secular bias directly. It repositions the mosque not as a potential obstacle to modernization or a site of

dogmatic rigidity, but as a primary and invaluable asset—a pre-existing reservoir of trust, social capital, and infrastructure that can serve as the locus for authentic, community-driven change.

In the field of Communication for Social Change (C4SC), our findings provide empirical weight to the theoretical shift toward more dialogic, participatory paradigms. The community's identification of a "Missing Forum" is a real-world articulation of the need for the "communicative spaces" that C4SC scholars like Jo Haynes advocate for. The MCPC model itself can be seen as a culturally-grounded operationalization of these theoretical spaces. It offers a tangible methodology for fostering the kind of dialogue and collective action that underpins contemporary C4SC theory, yet does so within a non-Western, Islamic framework, thereby broadening the empirical base of the discipline.

Furthermore, this research contributes a novel perspective to the field of Islamic studies and the sociology of the mosque. A significant body of existing scholarship has focused on the mosque's political dimensions or its role in identity preservation for diaspora communities. Our findings, in contrast, highlight the mosque's critical function as an engine for localized socio-economic development and civic engagement (Setiawan dkk., 2024). By demonstrating a practical methodology for revitalizing this function, the study moves beyond descriptive accounts and offers a prescriptive model that challenges a monolithic understanding of the mosque, revealing its adaptive potential in addressing the complex challenges of modern urban life.

The results of this study signify, first and foremost, a powerful validation of community agency and inherent wisdom. The clarity with which participants diagnosed not only their practical problems but also the systemic communication failures within their core institution indicates that urban communities are not passive subjects of social forces. They are, in fact, sophisticated social analysts capable of complex systemic thinking (Hasanah dkk., 2022). The findings are a testament to the fact that the most valuable expertise in community development resides within the community itself, a truth that remains perpetually underestimated in conventional development practice.

The findings also signify a critical moment of reckoning for traditional institutions navigating the pressures of modernity. The "Hunger for Relevance" theme, voiced so strongly by the youth, is a clear signal that institutional survival and vitality are contingent upon the ability to adapt and respond to the lived realities of constituents. The results suggest that for an institution like the mosque to maintain its centrality, it must transcend a purely ritualistic function and embrace a more holistic mission that integrates spiritual guidance with tangible social action. It is a sign that relevance in the 21st century is earned, not inherited.

The success of the asset-based pilot project is deeply significant, acting as a powerful counter-narrative to deficit-based models of development. The ability of the Al-Ikhlas community to launch a successful program by mobilizing its own human, social, and physical capital is a sign of the immense, often invisible, wealth that exists even in communities perceived as "resource-poor." This signifies that the starting point for sustainable development is not a question of what a community lacks, but a process of making visible and mobilizing what it already has. Empowerment, in this context, is the process of recognizing one's own capacity.

Ultimately, the successful co-creation of the MCPC model signifies a promising pathway toward the decolonization of development knowledge and practice. By grounding the model in the community's central institution and framing its processes with a culturally resonant Islamic lexicon (Ta'aruf, Tashawur, Tanfidz, Taqwim), the research offers an authentic alternative to the universalizing tendencies of Western-derived models. It is a sign that the most effective and sustainable solutions are not those that are imported, but those that are cultivated from the soil of local culture, values, and wisdom.

For community development practitioners, NGOs, and civil society organizations, the implications are profound and call for a fundamental shift in approach. The findings demand a move away from being direct service providers or project implementers toward becoming skilled facilitators of community-led processes. The primary role of an external agent should be to help communities awaken their own “sleeping giants” and build their own “forums” for dialogue (Cormeño & Mielke, 2023). This implies a strategic reorientation from delivering pre-packaged solutions to cultivating local institutional capacity and fostering self-reliance.

For policymakers and urban planners, the key implication is that sustainable urban development requires a dual strategy. While macro-level infrastructure and economic policies are important, they are insufficient without a corresponding micro-level strategy that strengthens the social fabric (Hosseini & Zavar, 2024). The research suggests that policies should be designed to recognize and support grassroots institutions like mosques as vital partners in development. This could translate into creating flexible funding mechanisms for community-led initiatives and integrating social infrastructure development into urban planning frameworks.

For mosque leaders and Islamic organizations globally, the results present a transformative challenge and a significant opportunity. The implication is that they must proactively embrace a broader, more holistic understanding of the mosque’s mission, one that mirrors its comprehensive role in early Islamic history (Buchert dkk., 2024). This requires a new paradigm of leadership focused on community organizing, facilitation, and empowerment. It necessitates developing training programs for mosque management that equip them with the skills to lead not just in prayer, but in a process of collective social betterment.

For the academic community, particularly within development studies and communication for social change, the implication is a clear imperative to broaden the epistemological horizons of these fields (Delledonne, 2024). The study’s findings challenge the persistent secular bias and demonstrate the critical importance of faith and culture as resources for social mobilization. It implies a need for more research that explores non-Western models of development and communication, contributing to a more pluralistic and globally relevant body of knowledge that takes seriously the diverse ways in which communities make meaning and organize for change.

The success of the MCPC model and the positive outcomes of the pilot project can be explained by several key underlying factors. The foremost reason for the model’s effectiveness was its foundation in pre-existing, deeply embedded social trust. The mosque is not an external entity; it is the historic and emotional heart of the community (Karavaeva, 2023). By anchoring the development process within this institution, the research leveraged a profound well of social capital, effectively bypassing the skepticism and resistance that often greet initiatives led by outside agencies, be they governmental or non-governmental.

Secondly, the results were positive because the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology ensured genuine and complete community ownership. The MCPC model was not a pre-designed blueprint delivered to the community; it was co-constructed with them (Ahmadi dkk., 2022). Every stage, from the initial needs assessment to the final project evaluation, was a collaborative endeavor. This deep and continuous involvement fostered an unparalleled sense of collective responsibility and psychic ownership over both the process and its outcomes, a critical ingredient for intrinsic motivation and long-term sustainability.

The tangible success of the pilot project was also a direct result of its asset-based approach. By consciously prioritizing the mobilization of internal community resources—the volunteer expertise of a local business owner, the physical space of the mosque, the in-kind contributions of community members—the initiative became immediately actionable (Yi & Koo, 2025). This approach avoided the common pitfall of ‘planning paralysis’ while waiting for external funding, and more importantly, it demonstrated to the community their own

inherent capacity for action, creating a powerful and virtuous cycle of confidence and empowerment.

Finally, the communication process itself was profoundly effective because it was designed to be culturally and linguistically resonant. The strategic framing of the PAR cycle using established Islamic concepts (Ta'aruf, Tashawur, etc.) made the process feel natural, legitimate, and spiritually meaningful to the participants. This cultural translation transformed what might have been perceived as a secular 'development project' into a collective act of living out their faith and improving their community. This intrinsic cultural and spiritual motivation was arguably the most powerful driver of sustained engagement and collaboration.

The immediate and most practical next step is the refinement, documentation, and wider dissemination of the Masjid-Centric Participatory Communication (MCPC) model. This involves creating an accessible, user-friendly toolkit or manual, complete with case studies and facilitation guides, that can be shared with other mosque communities (Wanto dkk., 2022). Further action research is now required to test and adapt the model in a variety of different urban and even rural contexts, both within Indonesia and internationally, to assess its replicability and identify the key contextual variables that may influence its implementation.

A critical parallel direction is the development of capacity-building programs for mosque leaders and management committees (Dewan Kemakmuran Masjid). The research identified a skills gap; therefore, creating and delivering targeted training modules on the principles of participatory facilitation, community organizing, asset-based development, and project management is essential. Establishing partnerships with Islamic universities, religious councils, and established civil society organizations will be crucial for developing a relevant curriculum and scaling the delivery of this new form of community-oriented leadership training.

Future research must also focus on the long-term impacts and sustainability of this model. Longitudinal studies are needed to track the socio-economic trajectories of the youth who participate in mosque-led initiatives like the digital entrepreneurship program (Gupta dkk., 2022). Furthermore, research should investigate the ecosystem effects of this model: how do these newly activated mosques interact with other civic actors, such as local government bodies, schools, and secular NGOs? Understanding how to foster a collaborative network of community institutions is a crucial question for building comprehensive urban resilience.

Finally, a strategic advocacy effort is now warranted based on these findings. The evidence from this research should be used to engage with municipal, regional, and national policymakers. The goal is to advocate for a policy environment that recognizes and supports faith-based institutions as legitimate and essential partners in national development (Kabue dkk., 2022). This involves making a data-driven case for creating more flexible grant structures and public-private partnership models that can effectively channel resources to the kinds of authentic, grassroots, community-led initiatives that the MCPC model is designed to generate.

CONCLUSION

This research's most significant and distinct finding is that the primary obstacle to mobilizing urban Muslim communities for self-directed social change is not a deficiency of resources, trust, or social capital, but rather the absence of a systematic, culturally resonant communication framework. The study empirically demonstrated that the mosque, often perceived as a passive site for ritual worship, holds immense latent potential as a "sleeping giant." The successful implementation of the Masjid-Centric Participatory Communication (MCPC) model revealed that when provided with a structured, dialogic, and participatory process, communities can effectively awaken this potential, transforming their central religious institution into a dynamic hub for grassroots development and problem-solving.

The contribution of this research is twofold, offering value on both a conceptual and a methodological level. Conceptually, it challenges the prevailing secular bias within much of

the development literature by repositioning the urban mosque as a primary and invaluable asset for sustainable, community-driven change. Methodologically, the study provides the tangible and replicable MCPC model, a culturally-grounded framework that operationalizes participatory communication theory within an Islamic context. This model serves as a practical tool for practitioners, mosque leaders, and communities, offering a clear pathway to translate dormant social capital into tangible, self-reliant social action.

The findings of this study, while significant, are bound by certain limitations that open avenues for future research. The research was conducted within a specific Indonesian urban context, thus the generalizability of the MCPC model to different cultural, national, or even rural settings requires further investigation. Longitudinal studies are now necessary to assess the long-term sustainability of the community-led initiatives and the enduring impact of the model on the mosque's institutional role. Future comparative research could also fruitfully explore the relative effectiveness of this faith-based model against secular participatory frameworks in similar socio-economic environments.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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