

Strengthening Tolerance and Social Integration in Susuru Hamlet, Kertajaya Village (Preserving Harmony in Diversity)

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ABSTRACT

Susuru Hamlet in Kertajaya Village is a multireligious community comprising Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, and adherents of Sunda Wiwitan. This religious plurality calls for the contextual strengthening of tolerance and social integration based on community participation. This study aims to describe and analyze the implementation of interfaith collaboration programs using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. The method was conducted in three stages: problem identification, collaborative program implementation, and participatory reflection and evaluation. Two main programs were carried out: a joint interfaith clean-up at the public cemetery (TPU) and economic skills training for PKK (Family Welfare Empowerment) members from different religious backgrounds. The findings reveal that these activities increased community members' capacity to engage in inclusive interactions, fostered mutual understanding, and strengthened social cohesion. Local values such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), silih asih (compassion), and tumarima (acceptance) emerged as key drivers of harmony. These values facilitated interfaith solidarity without undermining individual beliefs. The study concludes that participatory and local wisdom-based approaches are effective in fostering grassroots tolerance and can serve as a replicable model for other diverse communities. The implications suggest the need for policy frameworks that support bottom-up peacebuilding and the institutional strengthening of community initiatives in multifaith settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized for its diversity in ethnicity, religion, and culture. Amidst this rich social fabric, Susuru Hamlet in Ciamis Regency stands out as a rural community where Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, and Sunda Wiwitan followers coexist in harmony. According to 2023 data, of 884 residents, 749 are Muslim, 85 Catholic, 7 Protestant, and 43 adhere to Sunda Wiwitan (Kertajaya, 2023). These communities engage in mutual respect through everyday practices such as gotong royong and shared religious celebrations, demonstrating that tolerance can emerge naturally through local values (Risna, 2024).

While such harmony is evident, it has received limited academic attention. Rural-based tolerance practices like those in Susuru often go undocumented and lack structured reinforcement. Amid national tensions related to ethnicity and religion (SARA), Susuru demonstrates that peaceful coexistence can emerge naturally from grassroots community dynamics, guided by shared norms and trust. Given the significance of Susuru's social dynamics, this study asks: How are tolerance and social integration promoted to sustain harmony in diversity within the Susuru community? The focus of this research is directed toward illustrating the dynamics of interfaith relations at the community level, while also contributing to the development of strategies that strengthen tolerance based on local values and active community participation.

To understand the dynamics of tolerance in Susuru, this study adopts two theoretical frameworks: multiculturalism and social integration. Multiculturalism views diversity as a source of strength, emphasizing mutual respect and the appreciation of differences in identity as pillars of coexistence (Minhaji et al., 2020; Nugroho, 2014). Meanwhile, Durkheim's theory highlights the importance of shared norms and collective participation practices like gotong royong, silaturahmi, and musyawarah as essential to building organic solidarity in diverse communities (Fadel, 2024; Zalukhu, 2025).

Research on tolerance and diversity has been conducted in various contexts; however, studies that specifically examine its practice in rural communities remain limited. One study highlights the importance of implementing multicultural education in shaping students' attitudes toward diversity in inclusive elementary schools (Zamroni et al., 2024). Another study explores the efforts of religious leaders in fostering interfaith tolerance, emphasizing their crucial role in promoting social harmony (Setiawan et al., 2023). Additionally, research on the impact of intercultural communication on social integration among Javanese-Chinese communities in Sudiroprajan Village found that effective communication can significantly enhance social cohesion (Sihwanti, 2019). These studies, however, predominantly focus on urban areas or formal institutions. This reveals a research gap that can be addressed by examining remote communities such as Dusun Susuru, where cultural approaches are utilized as strategies to strengthen social tolerance.

This study complements prior research on tolerance and pluralism. While earlier studies focused on multicultural education (Zamroni et al., 2024), interfaith leadership (Setiawan et al., 2023) or urban intercultural communication (Sihwanti, 2019), they often neglected rural dynamics. In contrast, this study highlights organic, community-based tolerance practices in a multifaith village that includes indigenous beliefs like Sunda Wiwitan. It contributes to the discourse on grassroots peacebuilding and provides policy insights grounded in local cultural values (Al Qutuby et al., 2020).

This study aims to describe and analyze programs that strengthen tolerance and social integration in Dusun Susuru. It focuses on local values and community participation in fostering inclusive interfaith interactions. Theoretically, it enriches discourse in sociology, anthropology, and religious studies; practically, it provides a replicable model for policymakers, educators, and social activists designing multicultural community programs (Mu'adib, 2018).

This community service project is based on the argument that true tolerance is not solely nurtured by formal systems but by the values alive within the community. In Dusun Susuru, values like mutual cooperation, respect, and togetherness form a strong foundation for social integration. The research hypothesis is that local communities have their own mechanisms for resolving differences and maintaining harmony. By exploring these practices, we aim to identify a more contextual and sustainable model of tolerance, also assessing how these values endure amidst social change and modernization. To explore these dynamics, this study applies a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that centers community engagement in identifying and sustaining tolerance practices.

METHOD

This community service project employs the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which emphasizes active engagement between researchers and the local community, particularly the residents of Dusun Susuru, Desa Kertajaya, Kecamatan Panumbangan, Kabupaten Ciamis. This approach is chosen because it aligns with the service's goals: to explore, strengthen, and support social tolerance practices among different religious groups through direct involvement in daily community life. With a collaborative principle, PAR allows both researchers and the community to jointly identify issues, design solutions, implement programs, and engage in participatory reflection (Haryono et al., 2024; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007).

The community service activities are carried out in three main stages: (1) problem identification and program planning, (2) collaborative program implementation, and (3) reflection and joint evaluation. In the first stage, in-depth discussions with community leaders, religious figures, and residents from different religious backgrounds identify issues related to tolerance and diversity. These results form the basis for designing a locally relevant program (Mustofa et al., 2024). The second stage involves collaborative activities such as interfaith dialogues, tolerance workshops, and social-religious events. The final stage includes participatory evaluation and reflection with the community to measure effectiveness and plan for future program sustainability (Zunaidi, 2024).

The community service subjects involve residents of Dusun Susuru from Islamic, Christian, and Sunda Wiwitan backgrounds. Active participation also includes women from local organizations such as the Family Welfare Empowerment (TP PKK) team. Key partners in the program's implementation include community leaders and members. Data collection methods consist of participatory observation during activities, open interviews with community leaders and residents, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to explore participants' perceptions and reflections.

The data collected in this community service project is qualitative, consisting of narratives, activity documentation, and results from discussions and evaluations. Data analysis follows a thematic approach, identifying patterns, issues, and key themes from interviews, observations, and FGDs. To ensure data validity, source triangulation and member checking are employed. All activities adhere to research ethics, including informed consent, confidentiality of informant data, and respect for local cultural values and norms (Basiroen et al., 2025).

To strengthen tolerance values and social integration in the diverse community of Dusun Susuru, an approach that is both theoretical and practical is needed. Participatory Action Research (PAR) was chosen as the main approach because it emphasizes close collaboration between researchers and the local community at every stage. The process is not top-down but positions residents as active subjects in identifying issues, finding solutions, implementing programs, and conducting joint evaluations.

This approach is based on the principle that sustainable social change can only be achieved when the community is directly involved and feels ownership of the process and outcomes of each activity.

Therefore, all stages of the program are systematically and participatively designed to align with the social, cultural, and local values present in Dusun Susuru.

The flow of the community service activities can be seen in the following framework:

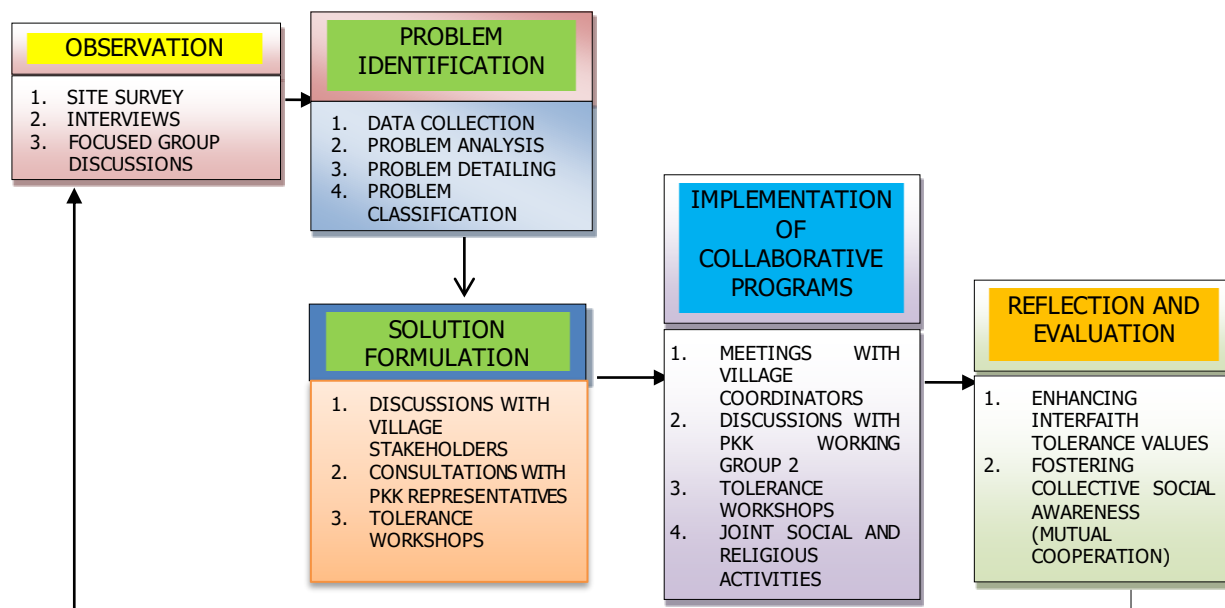


FIGURE 1. Flow of Community Service Activities Using Participatory Action Research Method

RESULTS AND OUTPUTS

The implementation of tolerance and social integration in Dusun Susuru presented a compelling phenomenon observed during the Community Service Program (KKN), conducted from February 19 to March 26, 2025. Within a multireligious community context, interfaith harmony was manifested not merely in discourse but through tangible actions. This was evident in the collective participation of individuals from various religious backgrounds in activities that united them toward shared social goals. These practices demonstrate that, despite differing beliefs, the community successfully cultivates strong social cohesion by upholding local values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and mutual respect. The following are several forms and implementations of programs designed to strengthen tolerance and social integration in Dusun Susuru:

1. Public Cemetery (TPU) Clean-Up Program

The Public Cemetery (TPU) clean-up activity held on Saturday, February 22, 2025, in Dusun Susuru, Panawangan Subdistrict, Ciamis Regency, was attended by approximately 80 participants from various religious groups. The majority were Muslims, numbering around 50 individuals—the largest group contributing to the activity. Participation from the Catholic community totaled 20 individuals, while about 10 participants came from the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous belief community (Ipah, wawancara, 2025).

The diversity among the participants illustrates the strong commitment of the Dusun Susuru community to fostering interfaith harmony and social solidarity. This spirit was manifested through cooperative action in the form of *gotong royong* (communal work). The following table presents the composition of participants by religious affiliation:

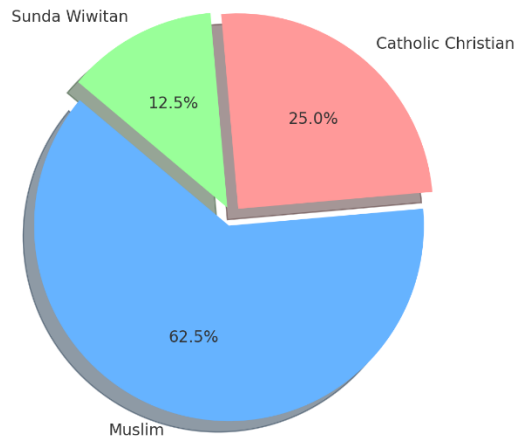


FIGURE 2. Religious Composition of Participants in the Dusun Susuru TPU Clean-Up Program (February 22, 2025)
Source: TPU Clean-Up Activity Data, Village Coordinator of Kertajaya, February 22, 2025.

The dissemination of information regarding this activity was conducted openly through the mosque loudspeaker at DKM Al Ikhlas after the dawn (Subuh) prayer. This communication approach proved effective in reaching all segments of the community, including both Muslim and non-Muslim residents. It reflects how religious spaces, typically considered internal domains, can function as powerful platforms for fostering broader social engagement.

The clean-up activity began at 6:00 AM, with residents bringing cleaning tools such as hoes, sickles, and brooms, along with logistical support in the form of food and beverages for the participants. This communal work not only embodied the value of collective labor but also demonstrated the community's capability to build interfaith solidarity independently—without external intervention from the government or formal religious institutions.



FIGURE 3. Muslim, Catholic, and Sunda Wiwitan community members jointly participating in the public cemetery clean-up on February 22, 2025. This illustrates interfaith cooperation rooted in local values like gotong royong.

This activity illustrates how the value of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) serves as an effective social bridge. According to Putnam's theory of social capital, social interactions rooted in trust and cooperation can strengthen social cohesion (Effendi, 2013). From Durkheim's perspective on social integration, this reflects a form of organic solidarity—where individuals from diverse backgrounds collaborate within a complex social system (Gibbs, 2003).

The participation of multiple religious groups in a shared and inclusive space also manifests the principles of multiculturalism, in which differences are respected without erasing individual identities

(Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). Dusun Susuru offers a tangible example of how social norms and local values act as the glue of harmony, where maintaining environmental cleanliness is understood as a shared, interfaith responsibility. Such collective action not only fosters social peace but also reinforces a collective sense of belonging within the community.

Beyond physical participation, this activity embodies the values of interfaith engagement that have naturally evolved within grassroots communities. While many multireligious societies often face tensions and social segregation, the people of Dusun Susuru demonstrate a model of harmonious social coexistence. This phenomenon can be examined through the lens of communitarianism, which emphasizes the importance of community values and social bonds in fostering cohesion among citizens (Amin, 2017). The shared identity as "villagers" transcends religious boundaries, nurturing a sense of loyalty to communal solidarity.

Within the framework of Emile Durkheim's theory of social integration, this condition reflects organic solidarity, where individuals from diverse backgrounds depend on one another and collaborate based on their respective social roles (Gibbs, 2003). As stated by Mrs. Rina, an administrator of the Al Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School in Susuru, "There are no boundaries as long as beliefs are not disturbed, because this is a community program initiated by the village head" (Rina, wawancara, 2025). Her statement underscores that interfaith activities are consciously designed to strengthen religious harmony without compromising individual beliefs. This aligns with the fundamental principles of social solidarity in multicultural societies.

In addition, Mr. Dayat, the secretary of the Sunda Wiwitan community, offered a similar perspective on the event. He emphasized that communal work (*gotong royong*) in Susuru reflects the values of compassion and universal love, without discrimination. "Gotong royong embodies human compassion and unconditional love, regardless of group affiliation. Activities like these serve as unifying forces across ethnic and religious lines," he stated. Although occasional frictions may arise—especially those rooted in religious differences—Mr. Dayat explained, "Harmony should not be forced, because it follows the natural law." This illustrates how the community maintains mutual respect and embraces diversity through the local wisdom of *rumasa* and *tumarima*, which emphasize self-awareness and acceptance. He also expressed hope that the spirit of harmony in Susuru will continue to grow and be preserved over time (Dayat, wawancara, 2025).

Practically, the success of this interfaith initiative was also supported by the presence of key community figures who acted as cultural brokers—bridges between different groups (Solihat, 2012). The roles played by Islamic clerics, Catholic leaders, and traditional Sunda Wiwitan elders in maintaining social communication and community stability in Dusun Susuru exemplify the principle of social solidarity as described by Emile Durkheim. Durkheim defines social solidarity as the state of relationships between individuals or groups that is grounded in shared moral beliefs and collective trust, strengthened through shared emotional experiences (Zulaicha, 2000). In this context, the contributions of religious and customary leaders have strengthened collective consciousness, serving as a foundation for social integration within the community.

Moreover, the multicultural approach is also evident in the daily lives of the Dusun Susuru community. Multiculturalism emphasizes the importance of recognition and appreciation of cultural and religious diversity within a society (Melati & Hamdanah, 2024). The harmonious interfaith relationships in Dusun Susuru illustrate that identity differences are not barriers but rather serve as strengths in fostering an inclusive and tolerant community.

The active participation of the community in these activities serves as a form of resistance to the external narratives of intolerance. Amid growing issues of radicalism and religious discrimination on social media, the people of Dusun Susuru demonstrate that peace can be cultivated and maintained through

collective action. The positive impact is reflected in stronger relationships, enhanced mutual trust, and solidarity, while maintaining social autonomy and resisting sectarian issues that threaten social integration. To continue the spirit of collaboration, local organizations like PKK play a crucial role in strengthening harmony and welfare within the community. One prominent example is the economic skills training program held on Wednesday, February 26, 2025, which aimed at empowering community members economically. This program exemplifies how community-based initiatives contribute to social cohesion and the sustainable well-being of the residents of Dusun Susuru.

2. Family Welfare Empowerment Program (PKK)

The success in fostering harmony is also reinforced by the role of local institutions that act as drivers of interfaith activities. One such example is the training program on economically valuable handicrafts, held on Wednesday, February 26, 2025, for the PKK (Family Welfare Empowerment) team. This event was attended by 31 participants, consisting of women from various religious and belief backgrounds, including Muslims (80%), Christians (10%), and adherents of Sunda Wiwitan (10%) (Ismayanti, wawancara, 2025). The training brought together women from diverse belief systems in a productive and egalitarian atmosphere. Not only did they acquire new skills, but they also strengthened their social ties. This activity demonstrates that creative economic spaces can serve as strategic arenas to bring together different identity groups in a collaborative and inclusive environment.

The resource persons for this activity were Mrs. Enar Sunarsih, the Head of the PKK in Dusun Susuru; Mrs. Iis Ismayanti, a member of Working Group 2 focusing on education and cooperatives; and Mrs. Yuyu Siti, the Treasurer of PKK. Together, they provided technical training and motivation on the importance of community-based family economic independence. The training covered techniques for crafting items from felt fabric, recycling plastic bottle caps into decorative products, and creating ethnic brooches with marketable value. Additionally, participants were equipped with basic household financial management skills and strategies for marketing products via social media to support the sustainability of independent businesses. This training not only provided practical skills but also instilled a spirit of community-based entrepreneurship that is adaptable to changing times.



FIGURE 4. PKK women's training session on February 26, 2025, attended by participants of various religious backgrounds. The session focused on economic empowerment through handicraft-making.

Furthermore, this training also created an inclusive interaction space among women from different religious backgrounds, demonstrating the practical application of multiculturalism in everyday life. Through this shared activity, trust and solidarity were built among interfaith participants, which not only strengthened social bonds but also reduced the divide between groups by respecting existing differences. This interaction fostered empathy and mutual understanding, which, in turn, strengthened social networks and expanded economic opportunities, particularly by sharing practical skills that can improve well-being

without any religious boundaries. This initiative emphasizes that diversity can not only be maintained but also promoted.

This program aligns with the concept of everyday peacebuilding, which emphasizes that peace and tolerance can be built through routine and meaningful social interactions in daily life (Subakir & Dodi, 2020). It also resonates with Durkheim's perspective on the crucial role of informal institutions in maintaining social integration. According to him, social cohesion can be built and sustained through collective practices that are routine and solidaristic (Zulaicha, 2000). In this context, women play a central role as agents of harmony, integrating differences without erasing individual identities. This underscores that social development in pluralistic communities cannot be separated from the active role of citizens, especially women, in creating safe and mutually reinforcing spaces for interaction. After outlining the interfaith activities, it is also essential to explore the local values that support their success.

The role of social institutions such as PKK is also key in strengthening this integration. PKK is not merely a complement to community activities, but serves as a social space that facilitates interpersonal bonding among women across religious boundaries. According to Gittell and Vidal's study, the presence of bridging social capital is essential for bringing different groups together in mutually beneficial relationships (Hadi, 2022). In the handicraft training, it was evident how Muslim, Catholic, and Sunda Wiwitan women gathered in an egalitarian and collaborative atmosphere, showcasing a multicultural practice that reflects respect for diversity while upholding unity (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). They not only exchanged technical experiences but also built trust and empathy, which form a strong foundation for social peace at the local level.

The training activity is also deeply rooted in local values that have become ingrained in the daily life of the community. Values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), compassion (*silih asih*), and empathy (*tepa salira*) form the ethical foundation that drives the success of these collaborative programs. During the training, participants assisted one another in crafting activities without any religious group boundaries. This approach reflects the principle of inclusive participation, where all community members have equal access to social activities, free from discrimination (Renie, 2020). building a socially just and sustainable society.

Moreover, this interfaith activity demonstrates the practical dimension of interfaith dialogue, rather than a theoretical one. Participants did not sit down to discuss doctrinal differences, but engaged in concrete work that strengthened solidarity. Charles Taylor's concept of living together differently is highly relevant here, as the community was able to live together with their differences without imposing uniformity (Anirwan & others, 2022). The shared activities became a meeting point between faith and social action, forming what is called everyday tolerance—tolerance built in daily life, not merely ceremonial (Betu, 2023). Dusun Susuru shows that tolerance is not an elite discourse, but a daily practice born from local values and equal interaction in a shared living space.



FIGURE 5. Crafting process involving Muslim, Catholic, and Sunda Wiwitan women during PKK training. The activity encouraged mutual support and built interfaith solidarity through practical collaboration.

In relation to the research questions, the field data has provided concrete answers that the tolerance program in Dusun Susuru is not just a slogan, but a social reality built from shared awareness and practice. The research objective of examining the role of local values and social programs in promoting interfaith integration has been achieved, as illustrated by the two main activities described. The presence of two interfaith agendas, held at different times but united by the same spirit, demonstrates that tolerance in Dusun Susuru is both sustainable and structured.

Thus, social practices such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) at the public cemetery (TPU) and the economic-value handicraft training program reflect a form of social integration that originates from the grassroots, not merely symbolic. These two activities demonstrate how local values like mutual cooperation, equality, and collective responsibility are naturally reproduced through interidentity interactions. Dusun Susuru proves that harmony does not always depend on formal structures but can grow from everyday practices that combine spiritual, social, and economic aspects within an inclusive shared living space.

The lessons from Dusun Susuru can serve as an important reference in developing community-based social integration models in other regions. The approach used is not top-down, but rather bottom-up, relying on the participatory strength of the community and the existing social capital (H Hermanto Suaib, 2017). In the midst of a discourse on tolerance that often remains at the normative level, the practices carried out by the people of Dusun Susuru offer an alternative model in the form of collaboration rooted in local realities.

Thus, it can be concluded that the success of Dusun Susuru in maintaining harmony is not solely due to its social structure, but because of a shared awareness that differences are not a threat. The activities of cleaning the public cemetery (TPU) and the PKK training serve as tangible symbols that religion and beliefs do not have to be barriers, but can instead become bridges when framed within inclusive social values. The social integration that has emerged from this community can serve as an inspiration for formulating multicultural-based development policies in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the Community Service Program (KKN) conducted from February 19 to March 26, 2025, the community of Dusun Susuru successfully utilized local values such as mutual cooperation, compassion, and respect to strengthen social solidarity, despite the notable religious diversity. Programs such as the cleaning of the Public Cemetery (TPU) and the empowerment of family welfare (PKK) demonstrate that interfaith cooperation can proceed smoothly without disrupting individual beliefs.

In the public cemetery (TPU) cleaning program, the participation of around 80 individuals from various religious backgrounds demonstrated that the community of Dusun Susuru is capable of working together effectively, showcasing strong social solidarity. This activity also highlighted the importance of open communication, such as through the use of loudspeakers at the mosque, as a means of strengthening interfaith relationships. From a social theory perspective, this activity exemplifies organic solidarity, where individuals from different religious backgrounds depend on one another to achieve a common goal.

On the other hand, the family empowerment program, particularly the economic skills training, demonstrated that women from various religious backgrounds could gather, collaborate, and share skills without considering religious differences. This shows that economic activities can also serve as a means to strengthen relationships among community members. From a multicultural perspective, this program emphasizes that religious and cultural diversity is not a barrier, but rather a source of strength for building an inclusive and prosperous community.

Overall, the results of the Community Service Program (KKN) indicate that social integration and interfaith tolerance in Dusun Susuru have been realized through inclusive and collaborative social practices. This success is closely linked to the active involvement of community leaders who act as bridges between different religious groups. Therefore, Dusun Susuru can be considered a successful example of fostering harmony in a multi-religious society through the strengthening of social solidarity based on local values and the role of social institutions such as PKK.

This success serves as a foundation for the development of more structured, sustainable programs aimed at strengthening religious moderation at the grassroots level. It is recommended that future community service programs expand the scope of interfaith activities that are productive and collaborative. Strengthening the capacity of local institutions through peacebuilding management training is also necessary to ensure the sustainability of tolerance values. Additionally, documenting the best practices of tolerance in Dusun Susuru is important to be disseminated as inspiration for other regions in building social harmony based on local wisdom.

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