

God, Goals, and Grassroots: Exploring the Nexus Between Faith-Based Organizations and the Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Indonesia meets great challenges. The minimum knowledge and awareness of most Indonesian people towards SDGs become problem for SDGs to be reached. This normative-conceptual study explores strategic role of Islamic and Christian faith-based organizations (FBOs) in advancing SDGs literacy in Indonesia by aligning religious values with global development agendas. Within Islamic framework, this study draws on literature that emphasizes *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as theological foundation that affirms the SDGs' compatibility with principles of justice, welfare, and protection of fundamental human rights in Islam. Meanwhile, the Christian dimension is examined through an interview with pastor-educator and critical engagement with Christian social teachings, including diaconia, human dignity, and justice, all of which reinforce SDG principles. This study underscores theological convergence between both traditions, framing SDGs as shared moral and spiritual mandate. The study uses theory of norm localization to explain how global development norms are adapted to local situations. This framework shows how religious views change meaning of global norms and how they are applied in specific situations. Concepts such as *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn* in Islam and diaconia in Christianity provide fertile ground for interfaith cooperation in realizing the SDGs' core vision to “leave no one behind.” Accordingly, the study comprises four core components. First, analysis of existing SDG-related programs and FBO initiatives in Indonesia. Second, theological convergence assessment. Third, identification of interfaith collaboration models. Fourth, recommendations for value-based partnerships. This study affirms the potential of religious non-state actors as effective grassroots diplomats in sustainable development.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development Goals, Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah, Christian Social Teachings, Faith-Based Organizations, Non-State Actors*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the global goals under the United Nations adopted by all member states. The goals served primarily as a form of cooperation between all nations to create a better and sustainable world. Indonesia is one of the member states that inputs the SDGs as one of its main national agendas. However, the SDGs face major challenges in its implementation in Indonesia. One of the significant discouraging factors is the low literacy rate regarding the SDGs. According to data, only less than 50% of Indonesians have comprehended the SDGs agenda (Kari, 2017). The limited number of people who actually apprehend the SDGs proves nonlinearity

between the local reality and the 17 goals in the SDGs. This will hinder and obstruct the process of acquiring a more sustainable Indonesia. On that account, an innovative approach is required to address the condition by intensifying the involvement of non-state actors to bridge the gap between the local reality and global agenda.

Indonesia, with its high diversity of faiths, acts as a strategic location to integrate religious values with the SDGs. With a Muslim population of 87,2% and Christian population of 6,9%, religious values have deeply rooted in the society (BPS, 2024). The faith diversity in Indonesia has also been managed by the very existence of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs). The operation of FBOs in Indonesia demonstrates how religious values can root deeper in society through the teachings and shared doctrines. This leads to the high level of social legitimacy of FBOs, in consequence making FBOs as key actors in aligning and integrating religious values with the shared goals of the SDGs in order to bridge the gap that has halted the implementation.

There has not been much research that explores the topic of theological convergence between Islam and Christian in the context of integration according to the SDGs, specifically the ones using the framework of norm localization. Acharya (2004), stated that transnational norms can be adapted and modified. Those norms can be constructed by the local agents to be localized inline with existing local norms. In addition, there has been no comprehensive research that maps the strategic role of Islam and Christian FBOs simultaneously in enhancing the SDGs literacy rate in Indonesia through interfaith collaboration. Instead of applying the concept of norm localization and upholding interfaith collaboration, existing research and studies incline to focus on a single religious tradition or secular approach which includes no prospect of local-transnational norms integration.

Considering the low rate of SDGs literacy in Indonesia and the potential of interfaith collaboration to address the issue, this research will respond to questions regarding the correlation between FBOs involvement and SDGs implementation. Firstly, how Islam and Christian FBOs can collaborate in enhancing SDGs literacy. This collaboration is acquired through interaction between religious values with the principles of SDGs, where SDGs are placed as moral and spiritual mandates simultaneously. Secondly, how the theological convergence of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* in Islam and the concept of diaconia in Christian subsidize SDGs implementation from the religious perspective. Thirdly, how the most effective form of interfaith collaboration can be applied in Indonesia in order to support SDGs implementation. This research focuses on developing a theoretical framework of norms localization that integrates interfaith dimension in global norms adaptation into the local context of Indonesia. In addition, this research aims to compose a model of a value-based partnership between Islam and Christian FBOs in optimizing SDGs literacy and implementing the global goals as a form of effective participation of religious non-state actors that govern a rooted diplomacy in the sustainable development.

METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative-exploratory design founded on two principal components: i) A literature review to delineate academic discourses, policy implementations, and organizational records regarding the involvement of FBOs in the SDGs; and ii) Comprehensive, semi-structured interviews with pivotal figures from Christian FBOs to reveal normative frameworks, operational methodologies, and localization processes at the grassroots level. This approach is selected due to the highly contextual and multilayered nature of the religion-development nexus in Indonesia, which cannot be easily quantified by standard indicators.

The analysis is based on the theory of norm localization, which is the process of adapting global norms to fit local values, practices, and institutions. In this context, the SDGs are perceived as a collection of global standards interpreted through religious expressions, communal ethics, and faith-based organization governance in Indonesia. Two religious lenses are employed complementarily for pattern matching and congruence testing: (i) *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* (Islam) as a conceptual device to assess how the objectives of the sharia, such as the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), life (*al-naḥs*), intellect (*al-ʿaql*), lineage (*al-nasl*), and property (*al-māl*), are operationalized by Islamic FBOs in SDG-aligned programs (e.g., health, education, social protection, governance, and the environment); and (ii) Christian Social Teaching (e.g., human dignity, the common good, the preferential option for the poor, stewardship, subsidiarity, and solidarity) as an evaluative matrix for how Christian FBOs interpret and execute SDG objectives in the praxis of service provision, education, health, and empowerment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Landscape of FBO Programs for the SDGs in Indonesia

Mapping Islamic FBOs and Their Strategic Contribution to the SDGs

This study identifies the transition of Islamic FBOs in Indonesia from a charity-based model to a development-oriented approach as the outcome of the interplay among five principal factors, aligning with the conclusions of Makhrus, Ismail, and Makbul (2025) and Humaidi, Hariyanto, and Azizah (2024). Critiques of the charity model's palliative nature, restricted to direct distribution without capacity building, have catalyzed a transition towards empowerment strategies (“teach a man to fish”) to confront the structural origins of poverty and inequality. Second, pressure from donors and global stakeholders for accountability, openness, and measurable impact has led to the professionalization of Islamic philanthropy through the use of results-based management and international standards. Third, the rise of Green Philanthropy links religious duty with caring for the environment, showing *hikmah* (wisdom) as being aware of and caring for the environment. Fourth, digitalization has changed the way philanthropy works by making people expect quick results, clear communication, and real-time documentation of impact. This has forced organizations to adapt to the fast-paced world of acceleration. Fifth, being a neutral part of the SDGs framework has made

it possible for people from different religions and fields to work together. It has also given the SDGs international legitimacy without losing their religious identity.

The theological basis for this transition is not merely a pragmatic compromise; it represents a sophisticated expression of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) that aligns with the global Sustainable Development Goals agenda (Harahap, Risfandy, & Futri, 2023). Fuad (2024) says that *Hifdh al-Māl* (protecting the wealth) means creating wealth that lasts and is fairly shared by everyone. This can be done by making sure everyone has access to financial services, increasing productive assets (like *waqf* or endowment, and social investment), lowering risks through social protection, and having clear rules against corruption. *Hifdh al-Nafs* (protecting the life) encompasses universal health coverage, food security, safe living conditions (including clean water, sanitation, and adequate housing), and social safety nets for individuals at risk. *Hifdh al-'Aql* (protecting the intellectual) is expanded to include a knowledge economy: high-quality education that encourages critical thinking and creativity, investments in research and technology, digital literacy, and the preservation of culture as a driver of innovation. *Hifdh al-Nasl* (protecting the generations) means justice between generations, which includes things like child welfare, gender equality, protecting the environment, and passing on values and knowledge. Finally, *Hifdh al-Dīn* (protecting the faith) in Indonesia's plural context emphasizes freedom of religion, interfaith harmony, and spiritual development through tolerance, ethical leadership, social cohesion, and spiritual well-being. This mapping demonstrates the competitive advantage of Islamic FBOs, which remain theologically rooted while being fully aligned with the SDGs and the demands of modern development governance (Yasmeen, Yasmeen, & Abri, 2024).

Contributions of Christian FBOs and the Diversification of Development Programs

Christian FBOs in Indonesia that run SDGs programs are very professional, but they are also very religious. They do less than Islamic FBOs, but they are usually better organized and more focused on getting results that can be measured (Lukito, 2024; Tomalin, Haustein, & Kidy, 2019). For instance, some Christian organizations run more than 100 schools with integrated curricula that focus on ethics, scientific literacy, and social concern. The orientation is not limited to academic attainment but aims at forming “holistic learners” capable of contributing to both local and global development (Ismoyo, 2021). Further, as shown in Ismoyo (2021), in the health sector Christian FBOs—through Wahana Visi Indonesia (WVI)—operate integrated village clinics in Alor, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, which have successfully increased immunization coverage in the target areas. Their people-centered development approach, including the establishment of village health committees based on local congregations, secures a sense of ownership and the sustainability of services.

The unique contribution of Christian faith-based organizations is based on two theological principles that work together: hospitality and *diaconia*. Hospitality, rooted in the belief that every individual is a “guest of God,” guides the development of genuinely open-access programs that do not necessitate church membership, thereby

facilitating educational and health services for individuals of all faiths (Henriksson, 2024). This strategic choice rejects proselytization and strengthens the credibility of Christian FBOs as neutral humanitarian entities (Henriksson, 2023; Silitonga & Simatupang, 2023). *Diaconia*—“service in love,” based on the Gospel command (Mark 10:45)—is what makes the change from just giving services to helping people become more powerful. Churches are thus transformed into training centers, volunteer networks, and platforms for inclusive religion–development dialogue, enabling the sustained growth of local capacity (Eriksen & Løvaas, 2022).

This non-proselytizing approach is clearly reflected in WVI’s practice. The study by Marshall, Roy, Seiple, and Slim (2021) shows that faith functions as an instrument of empowerment in which spiritual experience is mobilized as a source of motivation and resilience in the face of welfare vulnerabilities, rather than as a tool for expanding church membership. Studies by Weller (2024) and by Koehrsen & Heuser (2019) underscore the need to institutionalize interfaith dialogue through the formation of multi-faith task forces that bring together religious leaders and civil society to devise contextual solutions in health, education, and the economy. Furthermore, this deliberative process fosters shared ownership of the SDG agenda at the grassroots level. At the same time, WVI joins regional consortia with Islamic FBOs and government agencies to compile good practices and accelerate replication across dozens of remote villages by combining the spiritual capital of FBOs with the technical expertise of international donors and national policy frameworks, thereby strengthening the sustainability and scalability of interventions.

Limitations of Islamic-Christian FBOs Collaboration in the Localization of the SDGs

A review of initiatives by Islamic and Christian FBOs in Indonesia reveals a broad overlap of work sectors, especially in education, health, and poverty alleviation, yet interfaith cooperation remains fragmented and tends to follow the internal priorities of each institution (Sukamto, 2022). In line with Rachmawati, Umniyatun, Rosyidi, and Nurmansyah (2022), Islamic FBOs typically organize their priorities using *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* as a basis for program legitimacy. Interviews with a teaching pastor reveal that Christian FBOs prioritize the principles of *diaconia* and hospitality as the cornerstone of their service. We note that the above structure leads to repeated interventions, like in food assistance or health literacy, with less nor no planning for coordinated initiatives, methods, and evaluations. Hence, rather than building a complementary ecosystem, each organization proceeds in parallel, guided by a narrowly construed mandate logic. This resulted in a less sustainable initiative in enhancing literacy to be in line with the global and national SDGs initiatives.

The claims by both FBOs camps regarding SDG literacy do not translate into commensurate levels of public understanding. Studies by Ismoyo (2021), Prianto et al. (2023), and Syamsuri, Jakiyudin, & Cahyani (2025) reinforce this point: the absence of a shared curriculum, the scarcity of cross-faith facilitator trainings, and weakly localized communication strategies, in language, symbols, and channels, create a perception gap. Consequently, the SDGs continue to be read as a stand-alone “UN agenda”; sermons

and homilies rarely articulate concrete linkages to SDG indicators; and community media have yet to be mobilized as joint literacy vehicles across interfaith networks.

Differences in Theological Frameworks. In Islamic FBOs, the SDGs are frequently regarded as representations of *ḥifẓ al-māl*, *ḥifẓ al-nafs*, and *ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*. However, the conceptual link to the wider discourse on “global sustainability” is still constrained, complicating the development of unified agendas that transcend traditions (Khafagy, 2020). In Christian FBOs, the orientation toward service in love (*diaconia*) and subsidiarity is strong in the socio-humanitarian domain; however, explicit mapping to SDGs targets beyond those sectors is not yet systematic (Dotsey & Kumi, 2019). Moreover, following Koehrsen & Heuser (2019), we argue that the divergence in theological dialectics is not merely an issue of value compatibility but stems from the absence of translation mechanisms that would render the two theological “languages” interoperable for joint program planning. In addition, competition for donor funds and stakeholder attention drives priority-setting based on organizational identity rather than on needs mapped across space and time (Sakai, 2012). A reluctance to share the funding databases and beneficiary lists across organizations weakens integrated needs analysis and hampers effective collaborative planning.

Many Islamic FBOs have quickly adopted results-based management, but the indicators they use still focus on throughput - number of beneficiaries, volume of endowment fund- instead of outcomes like behavior change or long-term literacy. Christian FBOs generally have good monitoring abilities within their own religious groups, but they haven't fully met the accountability and reporting standards that global donors expect. This makes it harder to figure out and compare the effects of interfaith collaboration (Ortega-Rodríguez, Licerán-Gutiérrez, & Moreno-Albarracín, 2020). In some places, people think that FBOs programs are a way to gently convert others. This makes it less likely that people of different faiths will work together and causes cultural resistance. The researcher also points out that historical burdens in places where sectarian conflict is common make people more distrustful of each other, which makes it easier for joint interventions to become political. Rebuilding social trust is still hard without communication design that takes context into account and open accountability systems.

Integrated Theological Collaboration Framework

Based on these findings, we propose an integrated collaboration framework to connect both parties. A unified moral framework ought to be established on a “map of value convergence” that interprets the terminology of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, including the concept of *rahmatan li-l-ʿālamīn*, into the lexicon of solidarity and the common good within Christian social teaching, and conversely (Jameelah & Aiman, 2025; Muthoifin et al., 2024). The initial step is to inventory and align the value domains: the preservation of property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), intellectual (*ḥifẓ al-ʿaql*), and lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), along with the mandate of universal compassion on one side; and solidarity, subsidiarity, and the preferential option for the poor on the other. The outcome of this mapping becomes an explicit ethical point of convergence. In line with Sulthon, Koroglu, & Adeni (2024), these results should be realized through intensive theological dialogue

involving muftis/ulama and pastors/theologians, designed as two-way workshops to formulate a shared moral narrative that places social justice and ecological stewardship as a cross-faith spiritual mandate. The process should culminate in drafting a guiding document, an Interfaith SDGs Values Declaration, that is morally binding and contains ethical principles, sectoral priorities, and scriptural references (the Qur'an and the Bible) as the basis for collective legitimacy.

Interfaith SDG Literacy Curriculum

An integrated curriculum is proposed to bridge the theological and linguistic gaps that often separate programs. This begins with co-creation workshops facilitated jointly by ulama and pastors with two objectives: (i) to present the SDGs through the lenses of *maqāṣid* and *diaconia*; and (ii) to analyze case studies of specific localities that have received *zakāt* and/or diaconal interventions, concluding with simulations to formulate concrete solutions to related issues. For further refinement, and following Muthoifin et al. (2024), the teaching materials should be multilingual (Indonesian and local languages) to ease understanding among communities more frequently exposed to local vernaculars. Materials may take the form of pocketbooks, short videos, and infographics, with scriptural references and community action guides so that normative messages connect directly to practice. Field implementation is supported by sustained mentoring from FBO facilitators together with Ministry of Religious Affairs extension officers across three pilot provinces, ensuring knowledge transfer and context-sensitive adaptation.

Integrated Data Consortium and Monitoring

To end inter-organizational information silos, the researcher, drawing on Bach et al. (2022) and Vazquez-Brust, Piao, De Sousa De Melo, Yaryd, & Carvalho (2020), proposes establishing an FBO SDGs Dashboard as a shared, accountable, and transparent information system. This platform would host inputs on beneficiary data, SDGs literacy participants, and performance indicators, from participation to changes in knowledge and behavior, and display them on achievement maps by district/municipality with religious-demographic layers. Further maturation could include real-time notifications alerting the consortium secretariat to lagging or unmet targets. Management would be led by an appropriate national coordinating authority as policy coordinator, with a university-consortium-based technical secretariat. Tasks include data quality verification, preparation of quarterly reports, and partner access-rights administration, thereby maintaining transparency and accountability without compromising confidentiality.

Professionalizing Collaboration Management

The sustainability and accountability of collaboration rest on standardized governance. Inter-organizational MoU texts should precisely delineate roles and responsibilities, for example, Islamic FBOs optimizing *zakāt*/alms funding channels while Christian FBOs lead capacity building and institutional strengthening, together with proportional funding

and human-resource allocation schemes. A joint evaluation framework should be agreed upon from the outset, with tiered KPIs (output–outcome–impact). For instance, a target to raise SDG literacy scores by at least 20% within 12 months in pilot sites. Human-resource professionalization should be supported by certified trainings: community-based planning, the use of logframes and Theory of Change, reporting aligned with OECD-DAC standards, and risk management plus interfaith conflict mitigation (Vazquez-Brust et al., 2020). In this way, collaboration moves beyond goodwill to an auditable project discipline.

Anti-Stigma Public Communication

Eroding perceptions of “soft proselytism” requires participatory, historically sensitive communication strategies. Based on Walsh & Foster (2021), we recommend an “Interfaith for the SDGs” campaign engaging authoritative religious figures (e.g., representatives of the MUI and the national council of churches) as ambassadors who publicly declare a shared commitment across mainstream and social media. At the local level, the narrative can be reinforced through radio drama series and outdoor documentary screenings that tell real stories of FBO collaborative beneficiaries in border villages. At the village level, interfaith forums can umbrella integrated community health posts (posyandu), SDG literacy classes, and collective environmental actions; interfaith youth groups should be trained as communication volunteers to produce culturally resonant multimedia content (short videos, podcasts). This approach shifts communication from institutional monologue to community dialogue.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study underscores the strategic importance of Islamic and Christian FBOs in improving literacy on SDGs in Indonesia through a norm-localization approach. The results show that theological similarities between *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* and Christian social teaching (*diaconia* and hospitality) can provide a common moral basis for people of different faiths to work together. This can help people at the grassroots level better understand and carry out the SDGs. The proposed integrated collaboration framework includes an Interfaith SDG Values Declaration, a single SDG literacy curriculum, an integrated data consortium, and organized collaboration management. These tools can help with the problems of fragmentation in programs and information. Also, a historically aware, participatory anti-stigma communication strategy should help people be less skeptical of “soft proselytism” and get people in the community talking to each other.

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