



**Engagement:**

**Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat**

Vol. 10, No. 01, February, 2026, pp. 163 – xxx

ISSN: 2579-8375 (Print), ISSN: 2579-8391 (Online)

<https://engagement.fkdp.or.id/index.php/engagement>

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## Revitalization of the Sakinah Family Through Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Based on Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This community engagement program addresses the challenge of strengthening family resilience (sakinah families) by focusing on women's empowerment and child protection within the community. The program takes an asset-based approach, building on existing community strengths rather than focusing solely on deficiencies.

**Purpose of the Study:** The program aims to revitalize the function of sakinah families through the specific objectives of enhancing women's leadership, providing Islamic parenting education, preventing early marriage, and fostering economic empowerment.

**Methods:** The program was implemented using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, structured into five key stages: discovery, dream, design, delivery, and destiny. Activities included educational workshops, establishing a forum, and providing productive economic training.

**Results:** Quantitative results showed a significant increase in participants' legal and religious literacy, with understanding of the legal minimum marriage age rising from 36% to 89%. The program successfully established a sustainable women's forum (20 leaders) that coordinates monthly parenting and adolescent counseling sessions. Furthermore, the formation of a women's business group led to an average 15% increase in household income, demonstrating enhanced economic agency. The ABCD approach proved effective in building sustainable community structures for family development.

### Keywords

Sakinah Family, Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, ABCD Approach, Community Service

### Article History:

Received: Sept 18<sup>th</sup> 2025

Revised: Jan 30<sup>th</sup> 2026

Accepted: Feb 28<sup>th</sup> 2026

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## Introduction

Weru Village is located in Paciran District, Lamongan Regency, East Java, and is known as a coastal area with a character of a religious, dynamic, and community-based fishing community. Based on the *2024 Weru Village Profile*, the majority of the population is Muslim (99%), and socio-religious activities are active through study groups, taklim councils, and women's organizations such as the PKK. However, behind this strong religious and social potential, there are still various social challenges that affect family resilience, one of which is the increasing rate of child marriage (Pemerintah Desa Weru, 2024).

Data from the Paciran Religious Affairs Office (KUA) (2024) shows that in the last two years, there have been 18 applications for marriage dispensation for those under 19 years old. Of these, 72% were submitted by fishing families for economic reasons and concerns about promiscuity. This condition shows the weak resilience of the family and the low legal awareness and knowledge of the public about marriage regulations contained in Law Number 16 of 2019 concerning Amendments to Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage, which sets the minimum age of marriage at 19 years for men and women (Murni, 2020).

The phenomenon of child marriage in Indonesia itself is still a serious problem. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023, the child marriage rate in Indonesia reached 9.23%, with East Java included in the province, with a fairly high rate of 8.7% (BPS, 2020). This figure illustrates that almost one in ten women in Indonesia marries before the age of 18. This situation not only violates children's rights, but also has a long-term impact on education, health, and the family's economy.

The impact of child marriage is complex. In terms of health, women who get married at an early age are at high risk of experiencing complications during childbirth, having premature babies, and high rates of stunting (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, 2023). From the social aspect, girls who marry early tend to lose access to education, thus narrowing employment opportunities and potentially strengthening the cycle of intergenerational poverty (UNICEF Indonesia, 2022). Meanwhile, from a psychological perspective, they are vulnerable to domestic violence because they are not emotionally mature to carry out the role of wives and mothers (WHO, 2020).

On the other hand, this phenomenon also reveals changes in values and challenges in realizing a *sakinah* family in society. The concept of the *sakinah* family in Islam emphasizes not only the formal aspects of marriage, but also the balance between spiritual, emotional, and social responsibilities between husbands, wives, and children (Departemen Agama RI, 2019). In the modern social context, the *sakinah* family is the main basis in realizing a just and civilized civil society. Therefore, the revitalization of the *sakinah* family function is important in the face of rapid social change and the risk of family dysfunction.

Efforts to build a *sakinah* family cannot be separated from the role of women. In Naila Kabeer's (1999) theory of empowerment, women are considered as agents of change (*agency*) who can transform social conditions through the use of *resources* and social achievements (*achievements*) (Kabeer, 1999). In the context of Weru Village, women's potential is seen in their active role in PKK organizations, study groups, and madrasas. However, this potential has not been fully mobilized to strengthen family functions and protect children from social risks.

Based on the results of the initial observation of the service team, most of the women in Weru Village have a high concern for children's education, but do not have a strategic space in decision-making at the community level. Many important decisions, including child marriage, are still dominated by patriarchal views. Therefore, strengthening women's capacity is key to fostering social transformation grounded in Islamic values.

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach was chosen in this service activity because it is oriented towards the strengths and potentials of the community, not on its shortcomings (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This approach identifies human, social, spiritual, and institutional assets as capital for sustainable social development. In the context of Weru Village, social assets such as the PKK, the taklim assembly, and women leaders are the main foundation in building collective awareness towards a child- and family-friendly village.

Furthermore, the ABCD method is relevant to the Capability Approach theory of Amartya Sen (1999), which emphasizes the importance of expanding the ability of individuals and communities to make valuable life choices (Sen, 1999). This approach directs empowerment not only to economic improvement, but also to the expansion of moral, spiritual, and social opportunities. In the context of this service, strengthening the value of the sakinah family is a means of developing the community's capacity to live with dignity in accordance with Islamic teachings.

In addition, the use of an asset-based approach also reinforces the idea of participatory community development, as stated by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann (1993), who assert that local communities have great potential to solve their own problems when properly facilitated (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This approach avoids the mentality of dependence on external assistance and encourages social independence through collaboration.

Thus, this devotion departs from the urgent need to revitalize the sakinah family's function through women's empowerment and child protection, grounded in the social, spiritual, and institutional strength of the Weru Village community. This program not only aims to overcome the problem of child marriage, but also to build a more just, equal, and harmonious social system.

Finally, the ABCD approach in this service is expected to serve as a model for replication in other coastal communities in Indonesia. The revitalization of the sakinah family through women's empowerment has been proven not only to strengthen family resilience, but also to improve the quality of social and spiritual life of the village community.

## Method

This service program uses an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach that focuses on the community's assets and social potential, not on its problems or shortcomings. The ABCD approach was developed by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight as a method of community development that departs from the belief that every community has resources that can be mobilized to create sustainable social change (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This approach was chosen because it is in line with Islamic values about empowerment and participation of the ummah (deliberations and ta'awun), and is relevant to the social context of the people of Weru Village which has strong social, religious, and cultural potential.

The activity was implemented for one month (September 25–October 25, 2025) and involved various community stakeholders, including the Weru Village Government, KUA Paciran, PKK, Taklim Council, madrasah teachers, and local women leaders. This activity was attended by around 80 active participants consisting of housewives, young women, ustadzah, and village officials. The ABCD approach is implemented through five main stages: Discovery, Dream, Design, Delivery, and Destiny, as described by Kretzmann and McKnight in the community empowerment cycle model (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).



Figure 1. Stage of ABCD

The first stage, Discovery of Assets, aims to identify the social, spiritual, human, and institutional assets owned by the people of Weru Village. This process was carried out through in-depth interviews and participatory observations of religious leaders, women PKK members, and madrasah teachers. The data collected include human resources, social networks, religious facilities, and the potential of local marine product-based economies. The results of this stage show the presence of significant social assets, including active PKK groups, five women's taklim councils, and influential women figures in village social activities.

The second stage, Dream (Formulation of Shared Ideals), was conducted through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with participants from various sectors of society. Participants were encouraged to dream about the ideal future of their village through the "Tree of Hope of the Sakinah Family" activity. Through a participatory dialogue process, the community agreed on a common vision, namely "The Realization of Child-Friendly Weru Village and Sakinah Families." This stage is important for building collective awareness and a sense of ownership of the desired social change.

The third stage, Design, aims to develop a plan of priority activities that can be realized based on the assets and shared vision that have been agreed. From this stage, three main programs were born: (1) Islamic Parenting Training, (2) Child Marriage Prevention Education, and (3) Productive Economic Skills Training based on marine products. The planning process is carried out collaboratively by utilizing local assets such as madrasah facilities, village halls, and women's groups. This participatory approach is in line with the principle of agency in the theory of women's empowerment by Naila Kabeer that women must be actively involved in every process of social change so that the results are sustainable (Kabeer, 1999).

The fourth stage, Delivery (Program Implementation), is the implementation process of the action plan. Activities are carried out through seminars, training, village campaigns, and the formation of sakinah family study groups. Each activity was facilitated by expert resource persons from UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, local religious leaders, and community companions. The interim evaluation used participatory, reflective techniques, in which participants were asked to write down their experiences and changes in attitude after participating in the activity. This method is relevant to the principle of participatory action learning which emphasizes community involvement in the collective learning process (Greenwood & Levin, 2016).

The final stage, Destiny (Sustainability and Transformation), emphasizes the importance of the service program's social sustainability. At this stage, the Women's Forum for Family and Children (FPPKA) was formed which functions as the driving force for the post-service program. This forum consists of PKK representatives, PAUD teachers. In addition, a draft of the Village Regulation on Sakinah Family and Child Protection was prepared to promote institutional sustainability. This approach adopts the view of Amartya Sen in the Capability Approach, where effective empowerment must be oriented towards expanding people's ability to manage their lives and make meaningful choices (Sen, 1999).

The data collection technique in this activity uses in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Data validation is carried out through triangulation of sources (between religious leaders, village officials, and program participants) and member checking to ensure the accuracy of the results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach that emphasized the processes, impacts, and social changes that occurred during the service. Through this ABCD approach, devotion not only results in changes in individuals, but also strengthens social, religious, and institutional networks at the village level.

## Result

### ***Mapping of Social and Religious Assets of Communities***

The initial phase of the program began by mapping the community's social, religious, and economic assets. This process was carried out through field observations, interviews with religious leaders, women community members, and local educators, as well as a preliminary Focus Group Discussion (FGD) designed to capture community perceptions on family resilience and child protection.

Based on interviews with women participants, the team identified strong social capital centred around existing women's groups. One PKK member stated, *"So far, we have often gathered for routine activities, but we have never been invited to discuss the prevention of child marriage or how to become a sakinah family"* (Interview, Participant W-07). This statement highlights the presence of active social networks that had not yet been mobilized for family education or child protection initiatives.

Religious assets also emerged as a dominant strength in the community. Almost every hamlet has a mosque or mushalla that functions not only as a worship space but also as a centre for social learning. A local ustadzah explained, *"The Majelis Ta'lim here is very lively. Mothers are always present. Just direct materials that can strengthen the family"* (Interview, Participant U-03). This finding affirms that religious spaces serve as channels for value-based transformation and can be directly leveraged for strengthening sakinah family education.

During the initial FGD, community members described the challenges they face, particularly the cultural acceptance of early marriage. One participant expressed, *"Many parents still think that girls are safer to marry quickly"* (FGD Transcript, Participant F-12). This illustrates the normative pressures influencing family decisions. However, the same FGD also revealed a high level of readiness for change. A young mother noted, *"We want the children to go to school first. But often don't know how to refuse when the family urges"* (FGD Transcript, Participant F-05), showing both awareness and the need for empowerment-based support.

In addition to social and religious assets, the community also possesses economic strengths from marine resources. Several women stated that they routinely process fish into crackers and other shredded products, although the process remains simple. As one participant reported, *"We can make fish crackers, but we have never participated in training to develop a business"* (Interview, Participant E-02). This indicates an existing but underutilized economic potential that can enhance family welfare.

Overall, the discovery process demonstrates that the community has substantial human, social, and spiritual assets. The presence of established women's groups, vibrant religious forums, and underdeveloped economic activities offers a strong foundation for the subsequent empowerment stages of the ABCD approach. The primary data collected through interviews and FGD confirm that local women are willing to participate and take leadership roles when properly facilitated.

### ***Formulation of the Joint Vision of "Weru Village for Child and Sakinah Family"***

The Dream stage revealed the community's collective aspirations to build a child-friendly environment and strengthen sakinah family values. The FGD conducted with 50 participants, consisting of women leaders, religious figures, youth representatives, and village officials, showed strong consensus about the need for structured family education. When asked about their expectations, 82% of participants expressed the desire for a continuous parenting program, while 76% emphasized the need for preventing child marriage as a priority issue.

Participants were invited to share positive experiences in building a harmonious family and to write down their ideals for an ideal sakinah family. As a result, the community agreed on a common vision: "The realization of Weru Village as a child- and family-friendly community based on Islamic values and local wisdom."

This activity aroused great enthusiasm, especially among PKK women, who felt it was the first time they had been directly involved in formulating the village social agenda. They emphasized the importance of religious education and family example in building children's character.

In addition to formulating the vision, this FGD also identified the main obstacles in realizing the sakinah family, including: low family literacy regarding children's education, the still-strong culture of marrying children at an early age, and the lack of space for family discussion in the community. From these results, the community realized the need for a joint program that could integrate educational, economic, and spiritual aspects simultaneously.

Several participants articulated this need during the FGD. One mother stated, "*We don't want children to get married quickly, but we need guidance on how to explain to extended family*" (FGD, Participant D-17). Another youth participant expressed, "*Edukasi soal masa depan dan kesehatan reproduksi harus rutin, bukan hanya sekali*" (FGD, Participant Y-04). These statements indicate a rising awareness and openness toward transformative family practices.

Through this process, the ABCD approach has proven able to create a space for horizontal dialogue among the community, the village government, and religious leaders. Each element is given the same opportunity to express their opinions, so that an authentic mutual agreement is born. The results are presented in a shared vision document and a visual hope tree, which will later serve as a reference for planning the next stage of the program.

Table 1. Community Priorities Selected During Dream & Design Stage

Program Priority	Percentage of Participants	Key Insights from FGD
<b>Islamic Parenting Program</b>	65%	Parents want structured guidance on communication, discipline, and moral education
<b>Child Marriage Prevention</b>	25%	Strong concern about early marriage; need for legal & religious literacy
<b>Economic Empowerment</b>	10%	Women request skills for processing marine products to support family economy

### ***Preparation of Action Plan and Program Implementation***

The third and fourth stages of the ABCD approach are Design (Action Planning) and Delivery (Program Implementation). Based on the results of the previous FGD, three priority programs were agreed to be implemented: (1) Islamic Parenting Education, (2) Child Marriage Prevention Campaign, and (3) Women-led Productive Economic Empowerment.

During the planning workshop, 65% of participants selected family education as the most urgent program, while 25% prioritized child marriage prevention, and the remaining 10% chose economic skills development. This distribution shows that the community views family resilience as interconnected with education, economic stability, and cultural transformation

The Delivery stage involved implementing three major programs with active community participation. A total of 50 participants were involved across various activities, indicating greater community engagement than in the initial mapping phase.

The first program, Islamic Parenting: Educating Children with Love and Example, was attended by 50 participants, including young mothers, young women, and several fathers. This activity was facilitated by lecturers of UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya and local religious leaders. Pre-test and post-test showed notable improvements in understanding: knowledge of Islamic parenting principles increased from 41% (pre-test) to 88% (post-test). Participants reporting “high confidence” in communicating with their children increased from 32% to 79%. A participant shared, *“Now I am calmer and more patient when dealing with children. I also started implementing two-way communication”* (Interview, Participant IP-09). The results showed an increase in participants' understanding of the concept of the *sakinah* family as outlined in Islamic teachings, as well as greater awareness of how to build harmonious communication in the household.

The second program is the Child Marriage Prevention Seminar & Village-wide Campaign, which involves 50 participants, including teachers, adolescents, and parents. This activity highlights reproductive health risks, socio-economic impacts, and legal aspects of marriage. After the activity, participants made a joint declaration entitled “Children Learn, Not Get Married First.” This campaign also produced educational media in including posters and booklets, distributed in schools and village madrasas. Key findings are: Understanding of the legal minimum age of marriage increased from 36% to 89%, 92% of adolescents stated that they “strongly agree” that early marriage affects education and health. A village-wide declaration titled *“Children Learn, Not Marry Early”* was signed by 50 participants. Adolescent participant testimony *“I just understood that early marriage can have an impact on health, not just the economy”* (Interview, Y-12).

The third program is Economic Skills Training (Marine Product Processing). This training succeeded in forming a small business group, “*Sakinah Sejahtera*,” consisting of 10 housewives. They get training in packaging, digital marketing, and simple management. As a result, participants reported an average 15% increase in household income two months after the training, and 70% began selling processed products such as fish crackers and shredded fish through WhatsApp groups and local stalls. One woman noted, *“In the past, we only made crackers for home consumption. Now we can sell and earn additional income”* (Interview, E-04).

The program's implementation follows a participatory and reflective approach. Evaluation is carried out at the end of each activity through open discussions and participant feedback forms. 87% of participants stated that this activity was relevant and beneficial for their families. This process shows that an asset-based approach not only increases individual capacity but also fosters social solidarity between citizens.

Table 2. Summary of Delivery Stage Outcomes

Program Component	Participants	Before	After	Indicator of Change
<b>Islamic Parenting Training</b>	50	41% understanding	88% understanding	+47% knowledge increase
<b>Child Marriage Prevention Campaign</b>	50	36% legal awareness	89% legal awareness	+53% awareness increase

<b>Adolescent Awareness</b>	65 (subset)	28% health risk awareness	92% awareness	+64% increase
<b>Economic Empowerment</b>	10	No structured business	1 business group formed	Income +15%

### ***Establishment of Women's Forum and Draft Village Regulations***

The sustainability phase of the program resulted in significant social, institutional, and behavioral changes within the community. The establishment of the Women's Forum for Family and Children (FPPKA) marked a major shift in women's involvement in public decision-making processes. Prior to the intervention, women's participation was predominantly limited to domestic and routine social activities. Following the empowerment process, women assumed strategic roles in organizing parenting classes, leading adolescent counseling sessions, and coordinating child protection advocacy initiatives. As one forum member noted, *"In the past, we only participated in activities; now we are the ones who prepare the agenda and lead activities for teenagers and families"* (Interview, Participant FPPKA-04).

Another important outcome was the initiation of a draft Village Regulation on Sakinah Family and Child Protection. This draft emerged from collective discussions involving the village government, KUA, PAUD teachers, and FPPKA members. A village official confirmed the institutional shift by stating, *"We see the need for village rules so that this family assistance does not stop only in the PKM program"* (Interview, Village Officer VO-02). The Village Government's commitment to allocate IDR 10,000,000 from the 2026 village fund to continue family resilience programs signifies a formal integration of the initiative into the village development structure.

In addition to institutional changes, the mentoring process also generated concrete behavioral and community-level outcomes. Parents reported more open discussions about education and marriage decisions. Adolescents also indicated a growing awareness of the risks of early marriage, as reflected in their feedback during counseling sessions. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the ABCD-based approach produced changes not only at the individual level but also at the structural and community governance levels.

*Table 3.* Summarizes the key changes before and after the mentoring process

<b>Domain of Change</b>	<b>Condition Before Program</b>	<b>Condition After Program</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
<b>Women's Leadership</b>	Women involved only in routine PKK activities; no leadership roles in family or child protection issues	Formation of FPPKA with 20 active female leaders; women lead monthly parenting sessions and adolescent counseling	Interview FPPKA-04; FGD Notes
<b>Child Marriage Awareness</b>	Limited knowledge of legal marriage age; strong cultural acceptance of early marriage	Understanding of legal marriage age increased from 36% to 89% (post-program survey)	Survey Results (2025)
<b>Institutional Support</b>	No formal village policy on family resilience or child	Draft of Village Regulation on Sakinah	Interview VO-02;

	protection	Family and Child Protection completed; village fund of IDR 10.000.000 allocated for 2026	Village Document
<b>Religious and Social Engagement</b>	Majelis Ta'lim is active but without a structured family education agenda	Collaborative religious-based parenting classes conducted monthly with local religious teacher	Interview U-03
<b>Economic Empowerment</b>	Women's economic activities are informal and unstructured	Formation of the "Sakinah Sejahtera" business group; average income increased by 15% after training	Interview E-02; Monitoring Report

These synthesized results confirm that the Destiny stage produced measurable changes across multiple dimensions leadership, awareness, institutional policy, religious engagement, and economic empowerment. The integration of FPPKA and the draft Village Regulation demonstrates that the community has moved toward self-sustaining social transformation, ensuring the continuity of sakinah family development beyond the program's duration.

## Discussion

### *Strengthening Social and Religious Assets as the Foundation of Empowerment*

Strengthening Social and Religious Assets as the Foundation of Empowerment  
The findings indicate that the community possesses significant social and religious assets that provide a strong foundation for empowerment efforts. Networks such as PKK groups, Majelis Ta'lim, and influential female religious figures serve as accessible entry points for strengthening sakinah family values. However, a more critical reflection reveals that the utilization of these assets is not without limitations and challenges. While these networks facilitated community mobilization, their longstanding structures also carry embedded norms that at times reinforce hierarchical or patriarchal decision-making patterns (Kandiyoti, 1988). For instance, during initial consultations, some male religious leaders expressed hesitation about expanding women's leadership roles beyond traditional domestic spheres. Although this resistance did not hinder program implementation, it reflects an underlying cultural barrier that may affect the long-term transformation of gender relations (Cornwall, 2016).

In Naila Kabeer's empowerment framework, social and religious assets in this community can be understood as "resources" the preconditions that enable women's participation. However, the presence of resources alone does not guarantee empowerment unless accompanied by enhanced "agency" (Kabeer, 1999). The hesitation of male leaders and the persistence of conservative norms indicate that women's agency remains constrained by prevailing gender ideologies. Similarly, from Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, empowerment should be assessed not only by available opportunities but also by individuals' real freedoms to pursue valued choices (Sen, 1999). In many cases, women in the forum have the formal opportunity to participate, but their "capabilities" practical freedom to act are limited by time burdens, household responsibilities, and social expectations.

The creation of the Women's Forum for Family and Children (FPPKA) stands out as an

important achievement; however, its sustainability remains uncertain. The forum's activities have so far relied heavily on the momentum generated by the program and the enthusiasm of its pioneering members (Laverack, 2007; Wiggins & Keats, 2017). Several women leaders acknowledged that maintaining consistent participation may be challenging once external facilitation ends. Moreover, some members reported constraints related to time, domestic responsibilities, and limited digital literacy, which could affect the forum's durability as an independent institution. Using Kabeer's lens, the forum has successfully expanded resources, yet structural factors still limit the expansion of women's agency, thereby affecting the likelihood of achieving long-term empowerment outcomes. These reflections show that while social assets are present, their effective mobilization requires continuous support, capability expansion, and structural reinforcement (Cornwall, 2016).

Religious assets also served as an enabling factor, especially through Majelis Ta'lim that already holds moral authority within the community. Nevertheless, these same religious spaces can also reproduce conservative interpretations that indirectly justify early marriage or restrict women's public engagement (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Mahmood, 2005). This tension surfaced in discussions in which some participants argued that delaying marriage contradicted local customs grounded in religious reasoning. Such perspectives highlight that religious capital, while valuable, is not monolithic and demands ongoing interpretive negotiation to align it with child protection and gender-equitable principles. From Sen's capability perspective, restrictive religious narratives can limit women's substantive freedoms, constraining their ability to make informed decisions about family life and leadership roles.

Despite these limitations, the program successfully initiated community-based awareness building. Still, the process revealed the fragility of relying solely on community assets without addressing deeper structural issues, such as gender norms, access to resources, and long-term institutional support (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). These reflections suggest that future interventions should incorporate mechanisms for strengthening organizational governance, fostering broader male engagement, and building collaborations with local institutions (King, 2017), such as KUA and the village government, to ensure continuity. Both Sen and Kabeer emphasize that empowerment requires not only the availability of resources but also systemic change that expands people's capabilities and agency in meaningful, sustained ways.

In summary, while social and religious assets provide an essential foundation for empowerment, their mobilization requires a critical awareness of the cultural constraints embedded within those same structures. Empowerment in this context is not merely about activating existing resources but also transforming underlying norms and power relations that shape community responses. The integration of Sen's and Kabeer's frameworks underscores that true empowerment involves expanding women's real freedoms, strengthening agency, and achieving valued outcomes, not only improving participation rates. Acknowledging these complexities deepens the program's analytical depth and enhances its practical applicability to similar community development initiatives.

### ***Transforming Community Awareness on Child Marriage Prevention***

The intervention contributed to a significant shift in community awareness regarding the risks of child marriage and the legal age of marriage. However, a deeper analysis reveals that this transformation is not linear and is influenced by several structural and cultural constraints. Although quantitative data show improvements in community understanding, such as increases in correct knowledge of the legal marriage age, awareness alone does not automatically translate into behavioral change, an issue well documented in the literature on gendered social norms (Mackie et al., 2015). Some community members, particularly older male figures, expressed doubt about discouraging early marriage, arguing that economic insecurity and fears of premarital relationships

justify earlier unions. This reflects the complex interplay between economic pressures, moral anxieties, and cultural expectations that often reinforce early marriage practices (Walker, 2012).

From the perspective of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, these findings indicate that while awareness-building expands informational opportunities, it does not automatically enhance individuals' capabilities or their substantive freedom to choose alternatives they value (Sen, 1999). Community members may know the legal age of marriage, but their practical ability to delay marriage remains constrained by poverty, gender norms, and social expectations. Thus, the intervention has increased *knowledge*, but social structures continue to limit *freedom to act*, which is central to Sen's understanding of development.

Furthermore, the program's messaging, while effective, encountered subtle resistance from groups who perceived discussions about delaying marriage as contradictory to long-standing religious or adat norms. Similar forms of normative resistance have been observed in other community-based gender interventions, where participants accept new information but continue to rely on established moral frameworks for decision-making (Heise & Manji, 2016). These findings underline the importance of adopting a norm-shifting rather than purely educational approach. Without addressing underlying gender ideologies such as beliefs about girls' purity, obedience, and familial honor the sustainability of awareness change may remain fragile.

Another key challenge relates to the limited engagement of men. Although the program effectively targeted mothers and young women, the relative absence of fathers and male community leaders limits the potential for broader normative transformation. Evidence shows that gendered household decision-making often remains under male authority in many rural Indonesian contexts (Bennett, 2005). Thus, the uneven engagement of stakeholders risks placing the burden of transformation solely on women, even though marriage decisions typically involve both sides of the family. In Kabeer's terms, men possess greater *resources* and *agency* in household decision-making, which means that excluding them can limit the achievement of deeper empowerment outcomes (Kabeer, 1999).

The FGD activities also showed a shift in women's roles from passive participants to emerging decision-makers. Some PKK women leaders even proposed further activities such as parenting classes and family economics training. This phenomenon reflects what Kabeer calls transformative agency the ability not only to make choices, but to pursue goals that challenge existing social norms (Kabeer, 2005). The fact that women began initiating programs suggests that the intervention has contributed to expanding both their agency and their social legitimacy as community actors. Yet, from Sen's viewpoint, the full realization of such agency depends on enabling conditions, economic security, social acceptance, and supportive institutional environments that allow women to convert awareness and aspirations into actual choices (Sen, 1999).

Taken together, these insights show that transforming community awareness requires more than providing information. It necessitates expanding individual and collective capabilities, addressing gendered power structures, and fostering inclusive decision-making spaces that engage both women and men. Sen's and Kabeer's frameworks illuminate why awareness gains must be followed by structural and normative changes to produce sustainable transformation in child marriage prevention.

### ***Strengthening Women's Leadership and Institutional Capacity***

The program successfully expanded women's leadership capacity by establishing the Women's Forum for Family and Child Protection (FPPKA). Nevertheless, strengthening leadership in patriarchal community settings requires more than forming new structures. Many women reported increased confidence and improved public-speaking skills, yet they also identified

persistent challenges, such as limited mobility, restricted decision-making power at the household level, and social scrutiny when taking on leadership roles. These constraints are consistent with findings from feminist leadership studies, which suggest that women's empowerment is often hindered not by a lack of capacity, but by sociocultural environments that restrict women's public participation (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

From Naila Kabeer's perspective, these findings reveal that the women involved in FPPKA have begun to accumulate important resources (skills, networks, confidence), yet their agency remains constrained by household power dynamics and community norms (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment, in this sense, requires not only increasing women's competencies but also expanding their ability to make decisions and act upon them. While the program created a platform for leadership, the sociocultural context continues to limit the translation of these resources into meaningful achievements the third component of Kabeer's empowerment framework.

Institutionally, the forum still relies heavily on a small number of highly motivated leaders, which makes its long-term sustainability vulnerable. This type of "founder dependency" is commonly observed in emerging grassroots organizations (Clever, 2012). Moreover, the forum lacks formalized governance mechanisms, such as structured decision-making processes, documentation systems, and financial management plans. Without such institutional planning, the forum risks becoming dormant after the withdrawal of external facilitation. Laverack highlights that for community organizations to remain sustainable, they must transition from enthusiasm-based participation to structured institutional governance (Laverack, 2007). This aligns with Amartya Sen's argument that real empowerment requires the creation of institutional conditions that expand people's substantive freedoms not merely momentary opportunities (Sen, 1999).

Another limitation concerns the forum's ability to influence broader village-level policy. While the FPPKA has conducted discussions with religious and youth groups, its formal involvement in policymaking such as Musrenbangdes or village regulation drafting remains limited. Studies show that grassroots women's groups often struggle to influence policy spaces dominated by established male elites unless supported by multi-stakeholder coalitions (Cornwall & Edwards, 2014). In Kabeer's terms, the forum's influence remains restricted because women's agency has not yet gained full institutional recognition. Without integrating women's groups into formal decision-making arenas, their capacity to pursue transformative change will be limited.

Productive economic programs, namely training in processed seafood, also show a meaningful contribution to family welfare. Women participants reported an increase in income and the formation of the "Sakinah Sejahtera" business group. Sociologically, this activity changed economic relations within the family: women now contribute to the household economy without abandoning domestic roles. This shift reflects Amartya Sen's conception of empowerment through capability expansion, in which women gain new economic choices and the ability to pursue valued functioning whether contributing to household income, gaining recognition, or strengthening their autonomy (Sen, 1999). Likewise, Kabeer notes that economic participation is often a pathway for women to renegotiate their social roles and expand their agency in both private and public spheres (Kabeer, 2005).

Overall, while the program has successfully initiated capacity-building and leadership strengthening, the theoretical insights from Sen and Kabeer highlight that sustainable empowerment requires structural and institutional transformation. Women's leadership will become genuinely transformative only when resources translate into expanded agency, and when institutional environments are improved to support women's continued participation and influence.

### ***Program Limitations, Structural Barriers, and Sustainability Challenges***

While the program generated meaningful progress in community awareness, women's leadership, and support structures, several limitations must be acknowledged to present a balanced and scholarly analysis. First, the intervention was implemented over a relatively short period, limiting its ability to address entrenched cultural norms. Norm change, especially concerning gender roles and marriage practices, typically requires long-term, multi-level interventions that operate across household, community, and institutional domains (Marcus & Page, 2014). From the perspective of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, short-term interventions may increase *opportunities* or knowledge, but they do not necessarily expand individuals' *capabilities* that is, their actual freedom to pursue alternative life paths (Sen, 1999). Thus, the improvements observed in this study should be viewed as early indicators rather than evidence of lasting transformation.

Second, power dynamics within the community present enduring barriers. Local elites both religious and secular hold significant influence over decisions related to marriage, religious interpretation, and social norms. Their partial resistance to aspects of the program reveals that while communities possess valuable assets, these assets also contain embedded power structures that can constrain change. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, social capital can be both enabling and exclusionary (Bourdieu, 1986). Similarly, Naila Kabeer's framework emphasizes that empowerment requires not only access to resources but also the ability to convert those resources into meaningful agency and achievements (Kabeer, 1999). When local elites control access to information, authority, and religious legitimacy, women's agency remains limited even when programs have expanded their knowledge or confidence. Without addressing these power asymmetries, interventions risk reproducing rather than transforming inequitable social relations.

Third, structural economic constraints continue to shape marriage decisions. Some families still view early marriage as a strategy to reduce financial burden or protect social reputation. These economic drivers align with global findings that poverty often reinforces early marriage practices (UNICEF Indonesia, 2022). In Sen's terms, poverty restricts capabilities, narrowing families' perceived choices and making early marriage appear as a rational coping strategy. Similarly, Kabeer notes that economic deprivation constrains women's ability to exercise agency, as decisions are often shaped by survival needs rather than long-term aspirations (Kabeer, 2005). Without parallel livelihood or economic empowerment initiatives, changes in awareness may not fully translate into behavior because families lack the material flexibility to act differently.

Finally, scaling and sustaining the intervention require stronger collaboration with formal institutions, including village government, KUA, Puskesmas, and educational stakeholders. Community-driven programs tend to have limited institutionalization unless integrated into existing governance structures (Cleaver, 2012). Sustainability in Sen's framework depends on creating supportive institutional environments that expand individuals' long-term freedoms, not just short-term choices. Likewise, Kabeer's framework suggests that empowerment becomes durable only when institutional structures reinforce women's agency rather than relying solely on temporary external support (Kabeer, 1999). Therefore, embedding the program's components into long-term village policies and ensuring continued support from local authorities is essential for achieving lasting impact.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that strengthening social and religious assets, enhancing women's leadership, and improving community awareness are critical entry points for preventing child marriage and supporting the realization of *sakinah* family values. The findings affirm that while communities possess substantial internal resources, these assets operate within socio-cultural structures marked by gender hierarchies, religious interpretations, and economic pressures that

shape family decision-making. The program's outcomes, such as increased knowledge, expanded women's participation, and emerging community forums, represent meaningful progress but also highlight the need for long-term, multi-level interventions that address both norms and institutional environments. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader discussions on gender, family resilience, and community-driven change by demonstrating that empowerment requires both asset activation and transformation of underlying social dynamics.

## Policy Implication

1. **Integration into Village Governance**  
The program's successes, including the Women's Forum and awareness initiatives, need institutional anchoring. Village governments should incorporate child-marriage prevention and women's empowerment into the *RPJMDes*, annual work plans, and village regulations to ensure continuity beyond project cycles.
2. **Strengthening Multi-stakeholder Collaboration**  
Sustainable norm change requires coordinated action among KUA, Puskesmas, schools, religious councils, and women's organizations. Cross-sectoral partnerships can expand the program's reach and reinforce messages on family well-being and the legal marriage age.
3. **Formal Support for Women's Leadership Structures**  
Women's groups such as the FPPKA need government recognition, administrative support, and access to funding schemes (e.g., *Dana Desa* or local gender mainstreaming programs). Institutional legitimacy enhances their ability to engage in policy advocacy.
4. **Gender-Responsive Religious Guidance**  
Religious leaders play a decisive role in shaping community norms. Training modules on gender justice, family resilience, and Islamic perspectives on child protection should be developed to support progressive religious narratives.
5. **Economic Support as a Preventive Strategy**  
Because financial insecurity remains a driver of early marriage, local policies should integrate economic empowerment, such as vocational programs for youth and social protection schemes for vulnerable families, into child-marriage prevention strategies.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to all parties who have contributed to the successful implementation of the community service program entitled "Revitalization of the Function of Sakinah Family through Women Empowerment and Child Protection Based on Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) in Weru Village, Paciran, Lamongan."

This program was financially supported by the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education (DIKTIS), Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, through the Litapdimas Community Service Grant Program (Fiscal Year 2025). The authors sincerely appreciate this institutional support, which enabled the program's implementation and research-based community development.

Sincere appreciation is also extended to the Head of Weru Village, Head of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) Paciran, Village Consultative Body (BPD), and Women's Empowerment Groups (PKK) who have provided assistance, facilities, and collaborative spirit during the field activities. Their openness and active participation greatly supported the integration of community assets and the development of the *Sakinah Family* and Child-Friendly Village initiatives.

The authors are also indebted to the *Majelis Taklim* leaders, female community figures, and teachers of local Islamic schools who have shared their experiences, insights, and exemplary

practices in building harmonious family values and in protecting children from early marriage practices.

Special thanks are addressed to all community participants, especially the women, adolescents, and religious leaders, who have shown remarkable enthusiasm and commitment throughout the Discovery, Dream, Design, Delivery, and Destiny stages of the ABCD approach. Their willingness to collaborate and reflect critically on family well-being has turned this program into a genuine participatory learning process.

The authors express their gratitude to the Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, particularly the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM), for its academic and administrative guidance throughout the preparation, implementation, and reporting stages of this program. May the results of this initiative contribute meaningfully to advancing gender-sensitive, child-friendly, and spiritually grounded community development in Indonesia.

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